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Mind Sets and IFL: Texts and Tasks

A theoretical model acting as a link between
Italian language acquisition, cultural categories and literary
texts

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ABSTRACT

The present research was carried out at UCL and may be considered an 'action-research', being the result of theoretical reflections and didactic applications. It originated in the observation that learning the Italian language was not perceived by *ab initio* students as connected to their personal and academic experiences.

An initial hypothesis was formulated that an early introduction to literary texts accompanied by tasks could favour the interlanguage development in *ab initio* University students. Furthermore, this development, mainly as far as written production is concerned, might be facilitated in learners who are specifically guided and trained to elaborate a written input, which might be recognized by them as 'meaningful', thanks to noticing and attention management tasks, and to production tasks, which have a relevant influence on the re-organization of forms and meaning.

In other words, this action-research aimed at verifying how written performance in *ab initio* students was activated by the Task Based Approach and reflected the integration of language and content through the acquisition of written skills in Italian.

The method of the three year study (2002-05) can be described as a qualitative approach in any stage: pre-actional, i.e. selection of literary texts and of appropriate tasks; actional, i.e. organization of texts and

tasks into modules and collection of data; post-actional, i.e . systematic analysis of students' productions and feedbacks.

In order to carry out this action-research, a course was devised and was called Text and Task Course (TTC), in which literary texts were the starting point and the model necessary to process language through specific tasks. So linguistically easy literary extracts of about 300 words each have been selected to represent different written text types such as letters and dialogues, poems and ballads, narratives and descriptions, each of them dealing with topics familiar to the learners. Each text was accompanied and enhanced by pre-, while- and production tasks. Production tasks in particular favoured the re-elaboration of texts and combined representational structures with controlled attention.

Measures for the assessment of written production during TTC were: Holistic Rating, which included fluency and creativity; Accuracy Ratios, which included intelligibility index and error index; Complexity Ratios, which included dependent and coordinate clauses per t-units ratio and re-elaboration of a model or text type. Each of these parameters have been analytically described and applied.

In the light of these considerations, it seems consistent to claim that the positive results in written production, after a relatively short time of instruction, were influenced by the training Texts and Tasks learners (TTL) received in the TTC and their interlanguage development was favoured by the constant re-elaboration of written input.

In conclusion, the initial hypotheses were confirmed and the Text and Task approach, under given circumstances, was validated.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEF	Common European Framework
CoE	Council of Europe
C.U.P.	Cambridge University Press
FLA	Foreign Language Acquisition
FoF	Focus on Form
GULP	Gruppo Universitario Linguistico Pedagogico
ID	Individual Differences
IFL	Italian as a Foreign Language
IFLA	Italian as a Foreign Language Acquisition
FL	Foreign Language
L2	Second or Foreign Language
LL	Language Learning
LTM	Long Term Memory
NTTL	Non Texts and Tasks Learners
O.U.P.	Oxford University Press
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SRN	Simple Recurrent Net
TBL	Task Based Learning
TT	Texts and Tasks
TTC	Text and Task Course
TTL	Texts and Tasks Learners
WM	Working Memory

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1. INTRODUCTION

1. THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND THE RESEARCH PLAN

1. THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND THE RESEARCH PLAN

1.1 The research hypotheses

Writing is traditionally considered ‘the most important skill that second language students need to develop’ (Hyland, 2003, p.XV). Nevertheless, it is considered too complex to be introduced in early stages, even if universities, colleges and schools often require written competences in their foreign language exams from the very first years. This research addresses this problem by combining theoretical perspectives and practical choices through a task based approach focusing on the re-elaboration of texts. My specific aim is verifying how written performance in *ab initio* learners of Italian as a foreign language (IFL) is favoured by a first-hand contact with appropriately chosen texts and by appropriately designed tasks facilitating comprehension, awareness and written production. Input materials have been selected and tasks created keeping in mind that the final objective of the research is to explore an innovative approach that could speed up the learning process, i.e. an approach that might lead *ab initio* learners of Italian to ‘produce simple connected texts on topics which are familiar or of personal interest’ (CEF, 2001, p.24)¹ in a quite short period of approximately 20 hours of instruction.

My hypothesis is that an early introduction to literary texts accompanied by tasks accelerates the interlanguage development in *ab initio*

¹ Level B1.1, Independent User, Threshold Level. This level is usually reached after a period of instruction of at least 120 hours.

University students, through a procedural and modular acquisition of the writing skill.

In other words, I believe that interlanguage development, mainly as far as written production is concerned, may be favoured in learners who are trained to elaborate an input, which is recognized as ‘meaningful’, through ‘noticing’ and ‘attention management’ tasks (Skehan, 2002), which have a positive influence on the perception of ‘input salience’ (Giora, 2003) and through tasks focusing primarily on production, which have an influence on the re-organization of forms and meaning (Elbers, 2001), in a modular procedure.

It is often argued that not always do learners benefit from an early introduction to the literary world. Therefore, it is important to identify the circumstances under which the proposed model might be effective.

In particular, my research questions are the following:

- What is the link between Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and contexts of learning, i.e. between the acquisition of IFL and the instructional context?
- How can we best conceive a model that integrates Italian language acquisition with the cultural categories that are particularly relevant in adult learners?
- How may one meet the challenge of accelerating the interlanguage development of IFL learners within the University

context and of controlling and speeding up the acquisition of written skills in Italian?

- To what extent does the students' production, as an elaboration of input related to learners' academic experience, show the stages of interlanguage development?

1.2 The action-research methodology

This research is in line with the current debate on the views of linguists with research interests in SLA and educationists who concentrate on the theoretical implications of teaching and learning a foreign language in the classroom, even if it is believed that 'the relationship between the language teaching community and applied linguistics could be described as 'asymmetrical' (Bygate 2005), because of the lack of regular interactions. This study aims at finding a balance between the theoretical debate and the teaching/learning practice, in a continuous interchange between the two perspectives and is therefore an action-research, i.e. a research the consistency of which is found in its classroom application.

In line with the theory of action-research (Ebbutt, 1985; Nunan, 1990; Pozzo, 1993; Wallace, 1998; Brown and Rodgers, 2002), data will not be analysed as for their statistical evidence (t-tests, standard deviations, etc.), but for their empirical evidence and recurrent patterns, in a qualitative perspective. Qualitative data, such as interviews transcripts, observations, diaries and questionnaires, will not be reduced into numbers and statistics, but will be reported and discussed to

confirm/reject the degree to which the adopted approach is meeting its objectives. This combination of quantitative and qualitative data is in line with research on evaluation studies (Brown and Rodgers, 2002) and is considered more as a *continuum* than as an opposition.

1.3 The research plan

I will refer to theories, which have been at the centre of the theoretical debate in recent years. In particular, I will consider the learner-centred approach, the input-elaboration-output theories, the task-based approach and the current discussion on the relationship between literature and language teaching. A specific focus will be on the basic findings on input processing procedures triggered by tasks and on the discussion of a multi-dimensional model, showing the interaction between cultural categories and foreign language acquisition, when tackling texts in Italian at beginner's level.

There will also be a continuous reference to the Common European Framework (CEF, 2001), one of the most comprehensive surveys on teaching/learning a foreign language in Europe. The CEF, which was commissioned in Strasbourg in 1993 and after many drafts was published in 2001, is one of the most systematic attempts to organize the recent theoretical perspectives into a sort of practical guide, aiming at being a complex and articulated reference framework for learning and teaching modern European languages. In fact, 'the Common European Framework provides a common basis for the elaboration of language

syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe.’ (CEF, 2001, Ch.1.1, p.1).

Hence different theories will have to be discussed and reviewed in order to identify a model of reference, which exemplifies the role of input, of its elaboration and of production in the foreign language.

The qualitative data will contribute to consolidate the theoretical paradigms which have been chosen and show their applicability, in given circumstances, not only to Italian as a foreign language and literature, but to other languages and other contents as well. In the final part, with the support of data I will draw some conclusions on the issues, which have proved to be important and I will verify my initial hypotheses.

So I will proceed as follows: a) consider the views of the language learning process involved in the theories; b) introduce the nature and extent of the empirical applications; c) move from general views to didactic applications, over a period of three years with three different groups of learners; d) monitor and evaluate the results; e) find out and confirm the recurrent patterns; f) validate the theoretical perspective.

To sum up, the theoretical paradigms will be reflected in the pedagogical choices leading to the didactic application and at the same time the didactic applications will mirror and imply the methodological perspectives which have been discussed.

2. RATIONALE: THE CURRENT DEBATE

- 1. THE LEARNER-CENTRED APPROACH*
- 2. INPUT-ELABORATION-OUTPUT*
- 3. THE TASK-BASED APPROACH*
- 4. LITERARY TEXTS AND LANGUAGE TEACHING*

1. THE LEARNER-CENTRED APPROACH

1.1 The learner

The humanistic approach (Stevick, 1990) of the 1990s and earlier gave the learner a central position in the process of learning, in his/her emotional, cognitive, procedural aspects and in general as a human being, with his/her own mind sets, i.e. beliefs, ideas and views, which are also related to his/her own learning process.

In line with this view, the learner-centred approach deals with one of the most important variables in the teaching/learning process, i.e. the learner, and opens the debate on how controllable is learning if learners are different. This perspective allows a re-thinking of the SLA process and concentrates on how individual consciousnesses and shared values (cultural, social, political, etc.) meet in the teaching/learning process. Adults indeed do not re-create systems from scratch; they are not a 'tabula rasa'; rather, they constantly integrate new information and knowledge into their mental schemata (Balboni, 2005). So language learning may be considered the site of identity construction, thus leading towards a new identity, where the L2 user is building his/her own view of language which recognizes the L2 learner status (Cook, V, 2002).

The CEF (2001) too, in its synthesis between the research of linguists and the experience of language teachers, students and certification institutions, deals with the role of the learner and not only with what he/she can do, but also with how well he/she can linguistically perform

under specific circumstances. In fact, the ‘action-oriented approach’ followed by the CEF, an all-inclusive and active view of language learning and teaching, embraces and overcomes the communicative approach of the 1980s, in which the key element was almost exclusively the communicative performance and concentrates on the learner as an individual and as the main actor of linguistic interactions.

Mind sets make an individual different from the other. These differences, determined by cognitive and affective factors, have been of specific interest for many scholars (Skehan, 1989, 1998; Cook, 2002; Dörnyei and Skehan, 2003, et al.) over the years. In particular, theoretical studies and empirical observations have confirmed that each learner retrieves information in a different way according to his/her previous experiences and to other factors, such as aptitude (Locke, 1993; Skehan, 1998; Bialystok, 2002), attitude (Holec, 1981; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Boekaerts, Pintrich & Zeidner, 2000), motivation (Atkinson and Raynor, 1974; Deci and Ryan, 1985; Gardner, 1985; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992; Ellis, 1997; Dörnyei, 2001), cultural and personal background (Wenden and Rubin, 1987) and to the instructional context in which teaching/learning takes place.

The awareness of these differentiating factors opens the path to foreign language development (Skehan, 2002), which may result in a differentiated learning speed, thus allowing each learner to follow his/her own path.

1.2 The learning environment

Nowadays, it is commonly accepted that differences in the acquisition and production of a foreign language may be overcome in the classroom by a unifying approach and by applying a set of teaching practices aiming at favouring personalized language experiences and at creating basic motivational conditions, which generate initial motivation, encourage positive retrospective self-evaluation and maintain motivation (Dörnyey, 2001).

So the choice of an appropriate approach and of appropriate teaching materials is a crucial element in the learning process. In fact, using an input relevant to each learner and activities involving his/her own mind sets, personality and knowledge should encourage associations and personal involvement in the learning process as well as retrospective self-evaluation. Under appropriate conditions, i.e. with an appropriate input and with appropriate tasks, learning the language should not be perceived as separated from personal and academic experiences, and the feeling of accomplishing academic goals should promote persistent effort and favourable attitudes towards learning. In this line, the way in which the instructional material is selected and organized, presented and perceived should engage learners actively and should capture their attention and curiosity. Therefore, the selection of teaching materials, activities and

classroom practices are considered the unifying factor in the process of SLA.

According to Robinson (2002), the learning environment as well as the types of activities proposed by the teacher, i.e. the re-active (including re-casts and reproduction of models) or pro-active techniques (including input enhancement and solution of tasks), may favour a learner-centred approach in which the learners' mind sets are respected .

If the learner has to be considered as the centre of the learning process, then teaching a FL cannot concentrate only on the superficial aspects of language and on 'forms', as if language were an entity separated from other variables (i.e. context of use, users, etc.); FL teaching should indeed find a balance among different variables, such as classroom and time constraints, individual differences and mind sets, meaning and linguistic elements. This ideal link among input, output, learners and contexts is favoured by a flexible approach which should enhance the Focus on Form (Laufer, 2005) since 'focus on form (FoF) refers to how attentional resources are allocated, and involves briefly drawing students' attention to linguistic elements (words, collocations, grammatical structures, pragmatic patterns, and so on), in context, as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning, or communication, the temporary shifts in focal attention being triggered by students' comprehension or production problems' (Long, 1997, option 3).

Scholars believe that the FoF perspective is related to the role that attention and memory have in acquisition (Robinson, 2001 and 2003) and also grammaticality judgments are driven by attention (DeKeyser, 2003). This is why the implicit and automatic phase follows the explicit one, through an increasing familiarity with the tasks proposed in the classroom to elaborate FL, so that 'explicitly learned knowledge can become implicit in the sense that learners can lose awareness of its structure over time' (ibid., p. 315) and include the new knowledge in their individual mental structures.

As a matter of facts, the great challenge to the FL teacher is matching learners' profiles to instructional conditions and facilitating SLA processes, i.e. cognitive abilities and acquisition processes (Skehan, 1989). FL users are individual agents whose multiple identities are subject to change over time through interaction, through the interplay between implicit knowledge of the world (non-linguistic information) and explicit knowledge of the linguistic and cultural L2 system (Pavlenko, 2000).

In conclusion, the learner-centred approach recognizes that learning is controllable as far as the teaching/learning process, which is activated in the classroom, respects the individual differences among learners and their own mind sets and is a flexible one.

2. INPUT-ELABORATION-OUTPUT

2.1 The role of input

The concept that in SLA the link between input and performance is a focal element has been discussed and emphasised over the past last 40 years. The situational approaches of the 1970s considered the use of language in specific situations a compulsory and necessary model to be re-employed by the learner. Back in 1973, Corder focused his attention on the process that turns the received input into intake in the learner's mind and leads to the creation of the interlanguage, which becomes the path to L2 production.

One of the most recognized promoters of the input hypothesis has been Krashen in his input + 1 ($i+1$) formula (1982). He noticed that receiving a comprehensible input allowed the learner to understand the message in a comprehension-based instructed context. His hypothesis is that, in a supportive learning environment, noticing the gap between the whole message and what the learner understands of it, activates an interlanguage development that allows the unknown input to be processed, to become intake and then to be acquired. The main criticism to Krashen's hypothesis is that he claims it is applied only if the conditions for spontaneous acquisition are met. So the properties of the input and the conditions in which SLA takes place are more important than the cognitive processes in the mind of the learner. Nevertheless, he does not state clearly what a comprehensible input is, as McLaughlin

(1987) points out, and his theory 'lacks an explicit independent specification of the linguistic forms used in comprehensible input and of the types of situational help' (Cook, 1993, p.60). In his discussion, Krashen does not clearly state how the process takes place and what specific variables help it (Spolsky, 1985; Skehan, 1998). Moreover, the automatic transfer from comprehension to production has never been tested (Swain, 1985). In conclusion, his views seemed a little too simplistic to later analysts, since they leaned excessively on the incidental learning factor ('acquisition'), with almost no consideration of the role played by attention and memory, and intentional learning in general ('learning') even in the early stages of the teaching/learning process .

Moving on from Krashen's model, some other scholars' attention (Long, 1985; McLaughlin, 1987; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) concentrated mainly on the elaboration of input in oral interaction, stressing the importance of the functional processing of language and of the negotiation of meaning, which allows learners to overcome problems in understanding unknown linguistic elements and to concentrate on the content of the message.

In the 'competition model' (Bates and MacWhinney, 1981, 1987, MacWhinney, 2001) different elements of language, such as word order, morphology, intonation, lexicon, and in general linguistic input, 'compete' in the learner's mind mainly as far as single sentences are

concerned, so that the L2 speaker 'weights' these elements in order to produce sentences, which are appropriate to the context of use.

In particular, comprehension of the input and its interpretations compete in the minds of the L2 learners, who face a competition also in the production phase, among the different linguistic choices they can take. An interesting aspect of the competition model is connected with the evidence that the processing of sentences in L2 is ruled by the principle of 'transfer' in word order, phonology and meaning (MacWhinney and Bates, 1989) and by an emergent modularity L2 learners rely on. In other words, experience-related modules facilitate a self-organizing development of lexicon and sentences (Hernandez et al., 2005). Adult learners are believed to rely heavily on L1 and their 'non parasitic integrity' in FL is slowly acquired when they are starting to think in the new language' (ibid., p. 222). Even though the competition model paradigm has been applied to several languages, the results are mainly related to the process underlying the formation of single sentences and the transfer of linguistic cues, and not so much to the general acquisition of FL use.

In the early 1980s oral interaction was also the focus of Long's research. He observed that students' conversation skills were developed through negotiated interaction, which gave rise to SLA opportunities through what he termed interactional modification (1983). Eventually his research culminated in his Interaction Hypothesis (1983; 1996). The process

occurring during interaction is now generally known as ‘negotiated interaction’ or ‘negotiation of meaning’, and has been defined by Pica (1994, p. 418), amongst others, as ‘the modification and restructuring of interaction that occurs when learners and their interlocutors anticipate, perceive, or experience difficulties in message comprehensibility’. It is believed that negotiation facilitates the processing of input for acquisition (Pica, 1994) through a continuous development of the conversation skills. In fact many empirical studies found a strong link between interaction and comprehension and interaction and acquisition (Loschky, 1994). So the negotiated interaction can take place in the classroom only if appropriate communicative tasks are set by the teacher, with information gap activities such as telephone conversations, face-to-face meetings, three-way discussions between a pair of students and the teacher, debates and so on. In these cases, the input is provided by reciprocal feedbacks and reactions. It has been argued that, since not every aspect of the input is equally valuable to the learners, the teacher should provide ways of leading learners to ‘notice’ (Schmidt, 1990) the relevant elements, which should be ‘channelled’ to bring into awareness. Also VanPattern’s studies on input processing (VanPattern, 1996) stress the importance of individual re-elaboration and show how FoF requires an individual processing capacity, not so necessarily strictly linked to interaction. A common element emerging in the different SLA perspectives is the range of processes involved in language learning when elaborating input,

at an interactional, neurological and physiological level. The individual and his/her mental growth as a whole are the core of these processes. Although foreign language acquisition and communication involve the accomplishment of language tasks, as far as these tasks are not a mechanical reaction, they represent mental processes that are identified in strategies, linking input to output.

A further attempt to analyse the role of 'input' in the language process may be found in the output-as-input model, in which Elbers (2001) considers 'intake' as any linguistic input provoking an active involvement in the receiver. He relates specifically to an inductive perspective of language acquisition in which the input received becomes intake through a confrontation with already possessed cognitive structures and schemata. He represents the inductive process of language acquisition as follows (Elbers, 2001, p.248):

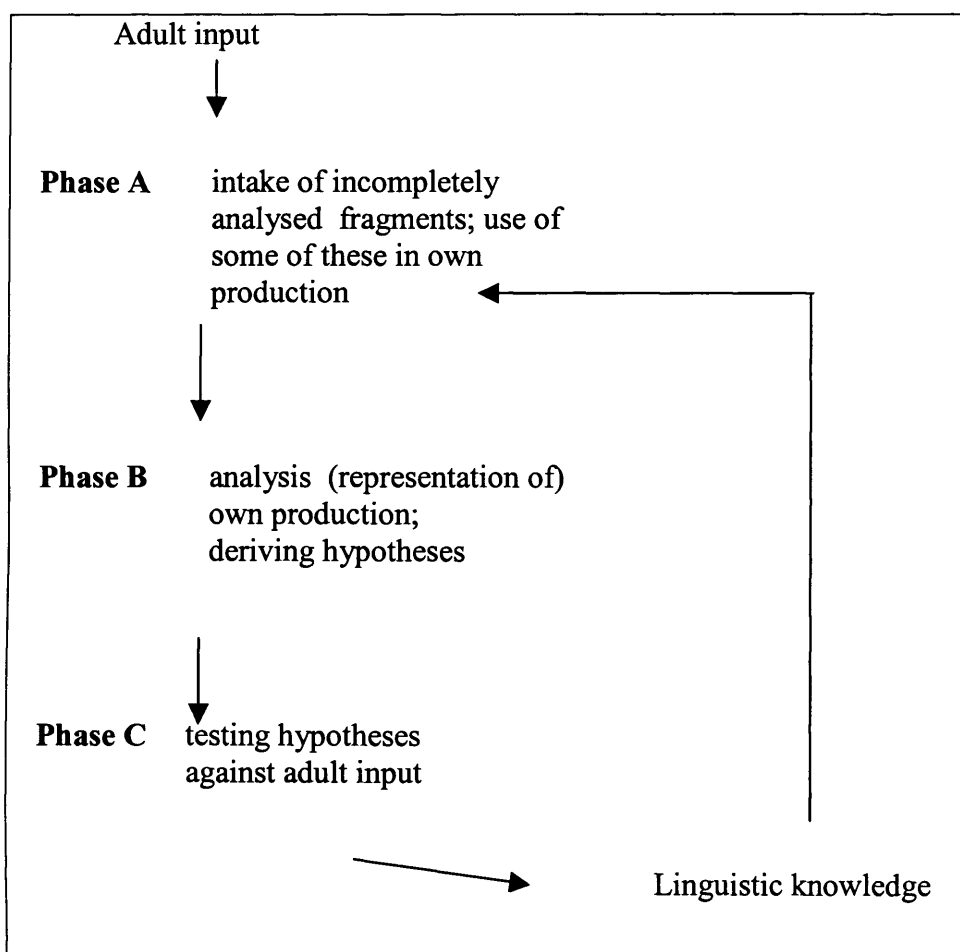


Fig 1 – Elbers' model

What is particularly interesting in this model, is the emphasis given to the self-organizing element and to the possible confluence of performance, constructivist and connectionist notions. In fact, the input is fragmented, elaborated and used to lead to learner production, which is not seen as a refined result, but as a way to derive hypotheses on one's own learning and achievements. These hypotheses are constantly tested since they help to construct the linguistic knowledge by linking one hypothesis to the other, one element to the other. Even if the model does not really consider feedback from other sources, Elbers's crucial argument is

against comprehension as a source of input analysis, but for production as the focal element in the acquisition process. He argues that

formulating involves developing an appropriate linguistic form for the conceptualized meaning [...] in production the intended meaning does not have to be guessed at (as is often the case in comprehension) but is given. Speakers generally know what they intend to convey [...]. Production rather than comprehension may be expected to compel a child to pay attention to meaning/form relationship.

(Elbers, 2001, p. 245-246)

And it is indeed the meaning/form relationship that his study concentrates on. From the above observations, it is clear that input is of primary importance only as far as it generates hypotheses on language and content and on promoting the necessary steps leading to the production of a meaningful and accurate linguistic output, i.e. only as far as it activates the learning process. This view gives a theoretical support to the idea that input has to be not only comprehensible, but also meaningful to the learner, even if it does not consider in depth the function that individual differences and instructional contexts have in the learning process and/or in the acceleration of the interlanguage development.

In particular, Elbers stresses the naturalistic aspect of input processing, without differentiating and discussing the factors contributing to the elaboration, which is viewed as a mere result of implicit and incidental learning.

On the other hand, Elbers's model highlights the importance of the increasing learner awareness about what to retrieve and why, and it

identifies production more than comprehension as the confluence of linguistic form and content, given a meaningful input.

Also in the CEF input is considered the starting point of our 'creation' and the pathway to the 'reception' of reality is the text itself , performed by any medium, spoken, written or audio-visual (ibid., Ch.2.1). The reception and production of a text and the performance of utterances are determined by the context of learning, external to the learner, and by his/her own mental context.

The reception and the production of a text determine both the decoding and the performance of utterances (linguistic level) and the reception and re-elaboration of the cultural, emotional and psychological elements communicated through the text (socio-cultural level), within a given context. Therefore, to interpret or create a text, a language learner needs both general and language competences as well as cognitive, linguistic, semantic, phonetic, strategic, cultural, manual and visual skills, at the very least. It is agreed that written texts, if carefully selected, are actually an important pathway to content and culture, thus allowing a content and language integrated approach from the very early stages.

To sum up, many studies show that input is linked to complex knowledge, which may be used when performing complex tasks, even if explicit explanations about input are not always necessary even in instructed contexts (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Robinson, 2001).

2.2 The role of output

Slowly, the focus shifted onto the crucial role of output as an indicator of acquisition (Swain, 1985; Rivers, 1994; Swain and Lapkin, 1995) since it implies a syntactical re-organization of both input and message. It seemed clear that the link and correlation between input and output, i.e. the cognitive elaboration underpinning the production in the foreign language, was indeed the crucial element activating acquisition.

The output in terms of performance in the foreign language was widely discussed in the CEF (*ibid.*, Ch. 4.1), in which language is considered an important tool to be handled, and not simply the end of the learning process. This confirms that nowadays a theory of language acquisition has to take into account many different factors, it being impossible to single out only one element of language learning, as was the case in the past. In fact, learning/teaching a foreign language is now widely recognized as being a multifaceted process, which includes a consideration of the link among learners' factors (personal background, beliefs, culture, attitudes, motivation, etc.), contexts, input and output. Nevertheless, this multiplicity cannot be taken for granted, and the multidimensional perspective may lead to a general confusion, if it is not adequately elaborated.

In the CEF, therefore, the input-output relationship is shown as deeply connected with two crucial variables: the learners and the context.

The circumstances, experiences and learners' age and interests, the instructional contexts and beliefs, texts, tasks, motivation and content have to be considered essential components in FLA, and are strongly intertwined with one another. The interlocutors' mental context (CEF, Ch. 4.1.5) is particularly emphasized since it influences and may even modify the external context and the cultural communication.

The CEF multidimensional perspective takes into account not only language competences (linguistic, socio-linguistic and pragmatic), but also general and transversal competences (*savoir-être*, *savoir*, *savoir-faire*, ability to learn in general and to relate to otherness).

An interesting discussion in line with the above-mentioned perspectives, and with a particular emphasis on the role of implicit learning, has been elaborated in the Simple Recurrent Net (SRN) model (Cleeremans, 1993), which has recently been illustrated and discussed by Sharkey N., Sharkey A., Jackson, S., in 2001. In their presentation of the results of their study, the authors claim that 'in order to ensure reliable language acquisition, the linguistic samples that the learner must be exposed to must be known a priori' (Sharkey N., Sharkey A. Jackson, S., 2001, p.52), meaning that the 'linguistic samples' should always include some elements familiar to the learner, on which the learner can build on his/her new knowledge. This may appear a paradox to the general practitioner of FLA, but it is actually in line with the great emphasis nowadays given to the knowledge already possessed by the learner, which has to be elicited

to develop connectionist representations of cognition and to implement the organizing principles. Cognition in fact, is not seen as an isolated system but as a multiple one in which many subsystems co-exist, i.e. 'language is convergent with the rest of cognition [...], language proficiency is the reflection of cognitive processes that extract regularities from the environment and record those generalities as knowledge' (Bialystock, 2002, p.149).

The following model has been simplified by Sharkey N., Sharkey A. and Jackson, S. and represents a simple recurrent net (SRN) showing recurrent links from the hidden units to the output (ibid., p. 34).

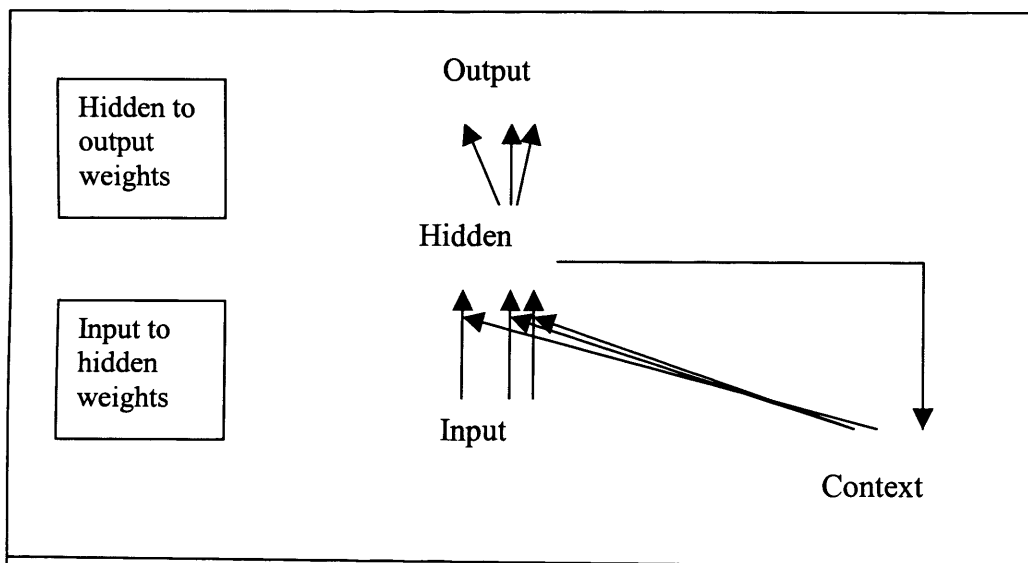


Fig 2 – SRN model

This model includes and elaborates the previous ones presented in the linguistic debate. In fact, the linguistic knowledge is produced not only by the processing of input, but also by the processing of what in the model is defined as 'context', i.e. all the external and internal factors

influencing cognition. The different items (input and the multidimensional context) converge in the hidden weights where the processing takes place. Therefore, what the model shows is that the path to output weights is open not only by a naturalistic, implicit re-elaboration implying an analysis and a control in line with a sort of 'template' expectancy, but it is activated also by the contextual elements. In fact, what is called the 'hidden' *locus*, that is the mind of the learner, becomes active and productive thanks to the convergence of 'input' and 'contexts'.

Therefore, 'context' becomes an open concept and may correspond to the sum of background factors and learner's philosophy, previous personal and academic experiences, motivation, environmental and instructional factors. As a general definition, we can accept the views put forward by Kramsch that 'Contexts are alignments of reality along five different axes: linguistic, situational, interactional, cultural and inter-textual'. (Kramsch, 1993, p.46). In this sense, the context is emphasized as an essential learning factor together with the input. In this model, 'input' appears to be also an all-inclusive concept implying all the elements connected with a linguistic source and the information conveyed through the language.

The SRN hidden elements include the elements related to cognition, attention, memory, affective and emotional features, etc. In a few words, the learner's deep beliefs and mind-sets are included in the 'hidden'

element representing the knot, which allows the re-elaboration of the intaken information. In the 'hidden' area, learners activate both general and specific competences, balancing cognitive demands and interactive conditions, thus filtering their own re-elaboration of language and content through their own mental processes and strategies.

In their presentation of the SRN model, the authors stress the fact that the model has previously been applied to investigate different aspects of language acquisition. For instance, in some of the studies 'hierarchical cluster analysis of the hidden unit activations showed that the net had developed representations for the input patterns and reflected information about the possible sequential ordering of the inputs' (Sharkey, Sharkey & Jackson, 2001, p. 34). The SRN model has also been applied to predict lexical use in studies focusing on the elaboration of lexical items under specific instructional circumstances. Therefore, the SRN may be seen as a model (ibid., p.37) to explore different aspects of language acquisition. The focus varies depending on the connotation we give to the items reported in the model, considering as an unchangeable element the dynamics of the interaction among variables, i.e. the acquisitional network itself.

Since the Sharkey, Sharkey & Jackson model is synthetic but noticeably more complex than Elber's one and amplifies its view, it may be applied to different learning circumstances, depending on the object of

investigation. This feature has been identified as *adaptive generalization* of the model.

In fact, it has been claimed that processing factors do not necessarily influence performance in themselves (Skehan, 1998) and constraints are not necessarily overcome by the application of a multidimensional approach (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991), if language input is not accompanied by tasks, which have to be meaningful, not fictitious but problem solving (Nunan, 1989). This leads to the view that tasks should not be oriented towards language practice, but towards life experiences, both personal and cultural (Willis, 1996). When reading and writing attention is constantly balancing linguistic code features and meaning (FoF) and particularly in L2 reading, 'learners do unintentionally attend to, notice, and learn many vocabulary or grammatical and pragmatic features of the L2 (incidental learning)' (Robinson, 2003, p.641), while during the encoding of a written text a learner 'selects, develops, arranges and expresses ideas in units of discourse' (Hyland, 2003, p.28).

To sum up, the general tendency is not to see language learning as an isolated subject matter, focusing on comprehension or interaction or production of correct forms, but as a means to an end, i.e. entering in a world of contents with the help of the different tools offered by the FL. It is evident that the relationship between language and meaning, language and perception, language and elaboration of reality is extremely complex and the relationship between input and output in FL passes through

individuals, mind sets and cultures. So what has to be ascertained, in order to be taught and learnt, is the relationship between the linguistic and non-linguistic systems –cultural, cognitive and affective-, keeping in mind the educational purpose of teaching a foreign language, i.e. correlating multiple variables.

3. THE TASK-BASED APPROACH

3.1 Input enhancement

Input elaboration has always been the object of applied linguists. Communicative approaches to language teaching from the 1970s onwards have been accompanied by a strong emphasis on the organization of classroom activities, which were supposed to lead learners not so much to be accurate, as to 'use' (Widdowson, 1978) the foreign language effectively in the appropriate contexts (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979). These activities aimed at promoting an authentic interaction among the members of the L2 classroom, seen mainly as a community of learners (Little & Sanders, 1989; Sheils, 1993; Sharan & Shlomo, 1995). The great advantage of these approaches is organizational, as they help students to systematize the in-taken information and teachers to sub-divide their teaching objectives, from raising motivation, to training, to production (pre-, while- and after-exercises). This range of classroom techniques and activities has progressively been identified as 'tasks', emphasizing the role of interaction and of contextualized production (Long & Crooks, 1991, Nunan, 1989), more than the ability to create correct utterances in the FL. This means that communicative activities oriented towards real world situations should trigger a complex process leading to a native-like language production. So, over the years, inferring, predicting and generalizing have become essential strategies to attain an effective

performance in the foreign language (Rea-Dickins, 1985, Prahbu, 1987, Beretta, 1990) and essential tools to attain a conceptual objective (Willis, 1996) and to promote development.

Nevertheless, today's debate and post-communicative approaches show that, even if embedded in language and helping re-elaborate language, communicative activities alone do not engage learners in 'naturalistic acquisitional mechanisms' (Skehan, 1998) since they are perceived as un-real by the learners' minds. The cognitive approach to language learning is based on the idea that language and cognition constantly interact and 'language proficiency is the reflection of cognitive processes' (Cook, 2002, p.149). In order to activate these mental operations and associations, the information needs to be processed through conceptualisation, i.e. a process based on a general knowledge store (Bygate et al., 2000), that combines elements like words and sentences stored in one's memory with specific needs, acts and situations (Foster, 2001). In order to use the foreign language, learners have to link it with concepts and apply it to meaningful and real interactive actions and real world situations.

In contrast to the communicative approach, which underlines the importance of the adaptation to situations through a mainly sub-conscious process (Krashen, 1989), the task-oriented approach considers the SLA process as an information processing which is consciously developed.

So tasks are no longer identified exclusively with communicative activities, to be carried out in a so-called communicative situation, nor with solely language activities, aiming at reinforcing single structures or specific communicative functions or notions (Wilkins, 1976). As a matter of fact, they are activities that require a negotiation, which is not necessarily interactional in the traditional meaning, i.e. interaction between learners. Here interaction may be considered any interplay between the learner and the different contexts of learning, such as the text, the instructional context, previous knowledge, the teacher, etc.. In particular, they call for an active participation of the learners, who are led to process input within their mental context, as proposed in the SRN model (Sharkey, N., Sharkey, A. & Jackson S 2001).

This is why a task-based approach does not consider only the type of tasks to be performed, but also other variables such as the input source, which has to be challenging, the content, which has to be linked to learners' experiences and to the context of learning, not only situational and interactional, but also linguistic, cultural and intercultural, i.e. including the students' mind sets in their cultural and personal perspectives and *Weltanschauungen*.

3.2 From input to output

These considerations imply a redefinition of 'tasks' as activities engaging learners in a *negotiation* of meaning (Pica et al, 1996, 59-84) and as *catalysers* of the acquisitional processes (Willis, 1996; Bygate,

Skehan, Swain, 2001). So 'tasks' are seen as the link between the input and the mental re-elaboration occurring in the learner's mind, leading to individualized productions. The mental process involved has to be meaningful and conscious, and the outcome corresponds to an objective attained, with the use of a foreign language. This redefinition of tasks leads researchers to focus their attention on learners' *production*, which indicates their response to the input and the rate of their interlanguage change; if 'the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome' (Skehan, 1998, p.95), then the pedagogical perspective should concentrate on facilitating production in the foreign language. As already pointed out, the outcome varies depending on the characteristics of tasks and on the context of learning, 'in each of its five dimensions: linguistic, situational, interactional, as well as cultural and intertextual' (Kramsh, 1993, p. 67). Production, therefore, is a crucial element to force syntactic processing, to develop automaticity, discourse skills and a personal voice (Skehan, 1998, pp.16-19), and to show what process took place in the learners' minds.

Therefore, we can say that any task based approach should meet learners' needs and lead to satisfying them. Moreover, mental processing and task solution contribute to reaching a balance between the attainment of cognitive re-elaborations and a complex, accurate and fluent language performance. The claim is that a demanding mental activity favours a rapid inter-language development.

The question addressed in many studies on the use of tasks in SLA (Robinson, 1997; William, 1999) is about the extent to which input enhancement alone could generate internal learning effects, as it should do if we accept the essential role of the 'hidden' process discussed by Sharkey, Sharkey and Jackson (2001). The claim of these studies was that output tasks lead not only to noticing, but also to integrating language use into learners' inter-language, up to the creation of a newly available form of expression in the target language. In fact, output 'constitutes not only the product of acquisition or the means to practice one's language for greater fluency, but also a potential causal factor in the acquisition process' (Izumi, 2002, p.545).

Output therefore was considered as a device not only to induce noticing in the language learner (Swain, 1995), but also to lead to a creative, although rule-based and appropriate, version of inter-language and, later, of target language. In addition to this, output tasks present themselves as problem-solving activities, since the learner has to overcome any difficulty in expressing his/her own thoughts and intentions through a meaningful and appropriate linguistic form. Nevertheless, it has to be pointed out that, at least with beginners, this output process may be activated mainly as a re-elaboration and text reconstruction of a previously 'exploited' and enhanced input.

According to Skehan (1998), tasks predispose the input to be processed since they represent a re-elaboration of input and combine

representational structures with controlled attention. They accelerate the process of learning through the activation of cognitive strategies such as analysis, control and selective attention (inhibition of misleading cues). Through the use of tasks input becomes intake, in the process of an internal re-organization which favours the passage from the use of Short Term Memory (STM), being a system of limited capacity, to the use of Long Term Memory (LTM), being a system of large capacity (Atkinson and Schriffin, 1968). In the learning process, Working Memory (WM) has a 'central executive' role (Skehan, 1998, p.44) in activating the procedures necessary to carry out tasks and to store the acquired information (Anderson, 1983 and 1995).

In order to activate the FL processing, Skehan (2002, p. 88) identified various cognitive stages underlying language abilities:

SLA Processing Stage	Nature of Stage
1. Noticing	Learner directs attention to some aspects of the language system, or is led to direct attention in this way.
2. Pattern identification	On the basis of the focal attention, the learner makes hypothesis or generalization, implicitly or explicitly, about the target language, based on a perceived pattern of regularity.
3. Extending	The learner extends the domain of the hypothesis, without changing it fundamentally in kind.
4. Complexifying	The learner apprehends the limitations of the identified pattern, and restructures it, as new aspects of the target language are noticed.

5. Integrating	The learner takes the output of this process of complexification and integrates the new sub-area of interlanguage into a larger structure.
6. Becoming accurate	The learner becomes able to use the interlanguage area without making errors, although this use may be slow and effortful.
7. Creating a repertoire	Not only can error be avoided, but the interlanguage form can be assessed at appropriate places – it becomes part of a salient (not latent) language repertoire.
8. Automatising rule-based language	The domain is now used not simply without error, but with reasonable speed, and the role has become, to some degree, proceduralised.
9. Lexicalising/dual coding	The learner at this stage, is also able to produce the interlanguage form in question as a lexicalised element. In other words, language which may be analyzable, (and has been produced on the basis of analysis) is now also available as a lexical element. In addition, the learner is able to choose freely, and as appropriate, between lexicalised representation of an interlanguage form, and its rule-based creative version.

Fig. 3 – Skehan's processing stages

The different stages in Fig. 3 show a progress from inductive processes, through grammatical sensitivity and reconstructive capacity, to automatization and retrieval processes implying the use of the LTM. So, the SLA process develops from noticing to dual coding, through a deeper and deeper awareness and automatization, which acknowledges the way language is structured and used, with a FoF perspective. In terms of macro-categories the stages may be synthesized in Noticing (stage1), Patterning (stages 2-5), Controlling (Stages 6-8) and Lexicalising (Stages

8,9) (ibid., p. 90) and may correspond to tasks favouring the language learning process and the production in FL.

Hence, in the task based approach the assumption is that input-output treatment allows learners to activate the internal acquisitional process, through selected noticing tasks, leading to more and more automatised rule-based language and to salient pattern identification and lexicalization. This way, hypotheses about the target language are extended and integrated with previously acquired schemata and existing mind sets so that production tasks become more and more meaningful and therefore more lexicalised. Moreover, the need to produce the target language induces the learner into a cognitive process of comparison between interlanguage and target language forms and eventually of identifying mismatches (Izumi, 2002).

Thanks to the 'experience' acquired through the input and the tasks, learners are able to build their own repertoire that allows them to lexicalise meaning in a continuous process.

Therefore, when accomplishing a task the L2 learners rely on general organizational principles, leading them to re-organise information, and on their familiarity with the cognitive categories, indicating their general and their specific knowledge i.e. the correspondence between information structures in general and L2 specific knowledge and mind sets.

Ellis (2001) sub-divided tasks into reciprocal and non-reciprocal ones, the latter having been investigated only recently.

Reciprocal tasks, used in interactional contexts, imply an exchange among learners, through problem solving or information gap reactions. Non-reciprocal tasks are those which do not imply an open interaction among learners, and are often geared to individual re-elaborations (both receptive and productive), which may stem from written reception. These types of tasks, concentrating on content, imply a response to a question and produce different types of performance. So, they better pertain a text and task course (TTC), mainly in the production phase, even if both reciprocal and non-reciprocal tasks respond to the need of balancing output theories (Skehan, 1996, 1998) and input theories (Krashen, 1989; Long, 1999).

In conclusion, studies in the task based approach and on input-output relationship in the last decades, have proved that accomplishing meaningful tasks allows a performance that, if on the one hand includes a communicative use of language (although at early stages mainly as a sort of interlanguage), on the other it concentrates on the content (Snow, M.A & Brinton D.M., 1997 and Pica, T., 2002), thus raising motivation (Dörnyey, 2001). Content approaches and tasks, in fact, are related not only to language needs, but also to real world needs (Long, M. & Crookes, G.1991).

4. LITERARY TEXTS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

4.1 Literary texts as content and language instruction

It is well known that authentic texts are central in the foreign language learning process since they include language examples, cultural clues, referential information, cultural experiences and represent a bridge with the instructional context.

If we agree with Elbers (2001) and with Sharkey, Sharkey and Jackson (2001) that the role of 'input' in the language acquisition process is pivotal, then we have to ensure that input is challenging both linguistically and as regards its significance and content. To be significant, interesting and stimulating, the materials proposed should build on the knowledge already possessed by the learners, be integrated and re-organized in their *schemata*, be processed and lead to production.

In line with this view, input should indeed be meaningful and related to the context in order to activate the FLA process, and texts and text production should be central to the learning process; so in the case of learners who are involved in humanities a first-hand, guided contact with literature as 'authentic' material should activate associations to literary, historical, artistic, sociological studies. As a matter of facts, learners' initial motivation may be maintained and increased, and beliefs and attitudes may be positively modified by an appropriate instructional intervention.

The importance of the correlation between language and content has been singled out as a problematic area in many countries and for many foreign languages. Research in this direction has led to different approaches trying to solve the dichotomy and aiming at bridging the gap that separates the two areas of content and language. Since 1979, Cummins has maintained that cognitive and academic language proficiency (CALP) is necessary to understand texts on arts or literature, science or physics, geography or history, and only a content perspective allows language learners to communicate effectively. Among the others, the American approach known as CALLA, Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach, (Snow, Met, Genesee, 1993) has offered a valid model to tackle the dichotomy in instructional environments. More recently, the European approach known as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) has offered a new perspective on the importance of bilingual education and on the importance of using language to learn different subjects.

In a content and language perspective, literature may be considered as one of the content areas enhancing language competences, with a particular emphasis on written production.

Under specific conditions, according to Lazar (1993), literary texts should be used by students not only because literature is found in many syllabi, but also because it is a motivating authentic material with a value which is not only academic, but also generally educational, being

potentially part of a life-long learning experience. An early contact with literary extracts, if accompanied by serious inter-cultural work, may lead to understanding another culture, but it can also encourage language students to talk about their opinions and feelings, imaginations and experiences. It can be, therefore, a strong stimulus for language acquisition and for the development of learners' interpretative abilities, if carefully selected and accompanied by appropriate tasks.

The claims of some language teachers and practitioners that literary texts can be used only with advanced foreign language students and should not be used with beginners as source for language training, do not apply in our case. Even if it is still believed that 'teaching literary texts in a language course [...] can take place only when the language proficiency allows a real access to the literary text'¹ (Balboni, 1994, p. 119), if we consider our specific learners' academic choices, literary texts should indeed represent an important way to activate their learning process. In fact, one of the main variables in motivation is an integrative orientation and relevance in the learning tasks.

'Literature is strange and mysterious and an object of reverence, also [...] it is a use of language [...] it is one of the strange and mysterious ways in which human beings manage to communicate with each other' (Widdowson, 1975, p. 124). Here Widdowson considers literary texts not only as instances of language *usage*, i.e. in line with the language system,

¹l'insegnamento di testi letterari nel corso di lingua [...] avvenga quando la padronanza della lingua è tale da consentire un reale accesso al testo letterario

but mainly instances of language *use*, i.e. effectively expressing thoughts and behaviours (Widdowson, 1978, p. 3).

In Widdowson's definition literary texts are both an object of reverence, being a product of human artistry, and an original and powerful way to communicate through a flexible and at the same time ambiguous organization of language and content, of signified and signifier. It is a form of language in use, authentic, meaningful, elaborate and at the same time accessible, since it is recognizable by the reader as an ontological condition to be shared and adapted to his/her circumstances. Even when language structures and lexicon in a literary text may easily be understood by the reader-learner at a surface level, their power and depth appear only when conceptual associations are activated so that a pathway is open to lead the reader not only to reflection on language and content, but also to a confrontation with his/her own reality, culture, beliefs and experiences.

Therefore, the reception and production of a language may be fully accomplished only if surface linguistic structures are linked to deep mind operations and associations. In conclusion, a further step towards a careful use of literary extracts in FL teaching is the view that literature is a cultural representation since the link between language and culture is so strong that language is an intrinsic part of individual and social views, contexts and perceptions, i.e. it is culture itself.

This confrontation represents what we may call intercultural awareness.

4.2 Literary texts and intercultural awareness

The link between language and culture and language and mind sets has been investigated for a long time. When studying the Hopi language in the 1950s, Benjamin Lee Whorf realized that it reflected the beliefs and visions of that population and it could be understood only if the philosophical perspective of the Hopi was understood. But he went further in his speculations, by saying that the influence between language and mind-sets is a reciprocal one and 'the background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas' (Lee Whorf, 1956). Before him, in 1836, Wilhelm von Humboldt claimed that language was the exterior manifestation of the spirits of peoples². Languages refer to reality differently, and this difference is due to the different attitudes of the speakers towards reality. Nevertheless, what is in common is that 'language orders and articulates the infinity of concrete things, and spiritual reality as well' (Baldinger, 1980, p. 93).

Language communities associate words and ideas in a similar way because they share a common context in a cultural value system (Swales, 1990) and the relationship between the acoustic images used to express a concept reflects the binomial relationship between form and content. This relationship between *signifier* and *signified* depends indeed on the type of associations an individual makes between elements of visuo-spatial

² *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues*, Berlin, 1836, p.37

experience and elements of phonological form. In a thorough study on the relationship between language and mind, Aitchison maintains that 'to casual onlookers, word recognition may seem straightforward [...]. On investigation, however, this is a considerable oversimplification. Word recognition turns out to be a complex procedure which requires more skill than one might think' (2003, p. 227)

In a traditional approach to cultural studies, the association of culture and language is an existing, but rather vague concept. No clear vision of how this connection should be handled from the didactic point of view and what should be taught as culture is shared in instructional institutions, and the debate of how to teach culture, the nature of culture and its connection with language learning has been going on for years both in the academic and in the school context. In formal and mechanistic approaches, language teaching has been associated with the teaching of sets of rules and teaching culture has often been reduced to the teaching of notions and factual information about the target country.

An intercultural approach to foreign language teaching by means of literary extracts should allow for cultural and intercultural learning experience, which should have an impact on the learner in terms of awareness of specific features of his/her own culture and of understanding of values, attitudes and outlooks of the people speaking the foreign language. Kramsch's notion (1993) of the 'third place', a space where a new intercultural awareness is constructed including

aspects of one's own culture and of foreign culture, gives a visual conceptualisation of this intercultural context created by the close encounter between the mother culture/tongue and the foreign culture/language.

Finding new ways of raising awareness of the 'otherness' and of the self is an important issue, keeping the emphasis on learners' own experiences as the starting point for their work and as a basis for comparison with their studies of other cultures.

Learning culture, through language and literature, leads to an active attitude towards the learning process, since it implies an active involvement of each individual, whose language proficiency and intercultural competence are challenged.

Byram et al. (1994) found the following transformations in the learners' personality after non-instructed contact with target culture:

- A first stage, the reduction of the other to one's own code: an ethno-centric – or, better, culture-centric – position
- Decentring in relationship to cultural codes, one's own and that of the other; awareness of their culturally relative character;
- The search of, or the creation of, mediations, of unifying symbols which will permit the learner to move into one code and into the other and, on the basis of the establishment of an intermediate space which becomes an anchor point, to situate him/herself in relationship to these codes

(Byram et al., 1994, p.66)

The stages of 'trans-formation' described by Byram et al. can also be attained in instructed contexts, and not only through full immersion, as it happens for instance in the year abroad, when learners study and live in

the FL community, but with an appropriate input accompanied by tasks eliciting re-elaboration, self-analysis, reflection and production.

‘When learners acquire an understanding of the connotations of lexical items in the foreign language and contrast them with connotations of an apparently equivalent item in their own, they begin to gain insight into the schemata and perspectives of the foreign culture’ (Byram et al., *ibid.*).

As far as SLA is concerned, we have to bear in mind a fundamental distinction between the way a child associates language and knowledge of the world when learning his/her mother tongue and the way an adult does it when learning a second or foreign language. In a child the conceptual system is developed simultaneously with the language system, while in an adult the conceptual system pre-exists the foreign language acquisition, i.e. ‘in child language acquisition, knowledge of the world and knowledge of language are developing simultaneously whereas adult SLA builds upon pre-existing conceptual knowledge’ (Nick Ellis, 2003). So, an adult learner constructs meaning according to his/her own experience, and these experiences and beliefs cannot at all be ignored in a language class focusing on literary extracts, not least because they contribute to the attitude and understanding of the learner.

4.3 Reception and production of literary texts

In line with the intercultural perspective, Roland Barthes (1977) considered literary texts not so much the product of an author writing in a specific historical period and expressing and representing a social,

political and ideological environment, but rather as an autonomous element to be re-constructed by the reader. From the 1960s (Eco, 1962) onwards, through the 1970s and 1980s, the reader acquired a greater and greater dignity and value in literary theory. Along this path, we may consider our specific readers, the foreign language learners, as a key element in literary and linguistic interpretation. In fact, learners' personal experiences, feelings, interests and ideas are reflected in the way the literary text is perceived and concepts are associated. At the same time confrontation takes place between the readers' *Weltanschauungen* and the set of circumstances and meanings which generated the text itself, belonging mainly to the writer's world. Reading is a complex intercultural interpretative act implying linguistic, affective, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. 'The reader [...] brings to the blue-print of a text a set of expectations and conventions which might differ from those of the producer, and so the construction of meaning will always be an individual matter' (Corbett, 2003, p.170). It is clear how cultural assumptions determine both production and interpretation. A model exemplifying this view has been elaborated by Corbett (ibid., p.171), as an expansion of a diagram used by a media commentator in 1980. The bottom arrows of the model are the innovative element introduced by Corbett and show that decoders are necessarily also encoders who in real time process, adapt and respond to a text:

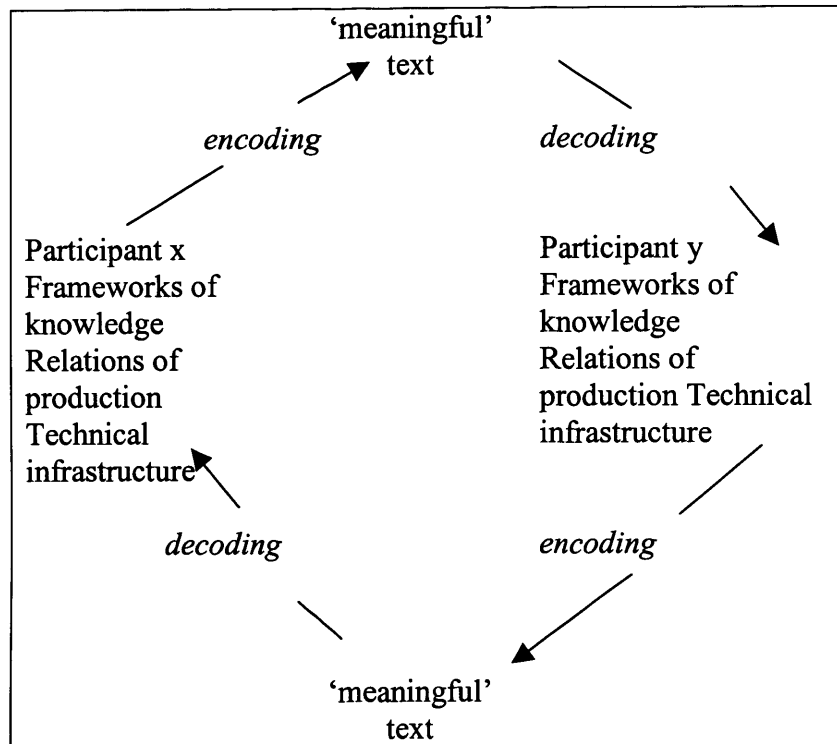


Fig. 4 – Corbett's model

Corbett's model might be called a model of processability of a text, where both encoding and decoding imply a simultaneous process of deconstruction and construction and where the reader is a 'text-processor' (ibid., p.169). He believes that a text is the result of a set of assumptions, internal and external to the producer, but it is also the simultaneous creative interpretation of a reader who processes that text according to his/her own set of assumptions and re-creates it. So, different fruitions originate different texts which are nothing more than an aspect of the original text that becomes more and more multifaceted.

The model shows how cultural assumptions, as well as technical usage of language and of other communicative elements and exposure to other texts reflecting the same generic conventions, guide participant x (the

writer) to encode a text which is decoded by participant y (the reader) according to his/her assumptions. According to the impact on participant y's cognitive system (i.e. impact on the reader) the text is re-encoded, in an 'encoding-decoding cycle', which, through the exploration of the linguistic system, generates continuously revised meanings. The bottom arrows are relevant since they are based on the assumption that 'people encode texts according to generic conventions formed in part by exposure to other texts' (ibid., p. 170). Corbett's model is helpful to visualize the genesis of and reactions to a text, even if in my view the cycle encoding-decoding-encoding is not a closed one as it appears in the model, but an open one, since the new text which is generated after exposure and decoding is indeed built on the previous one, but it is new and autonomous.

The model in Fig. 4 may be considered a simplified view of the design of a language course based on literary texts, in which the emphasis is not on the writer and on his/her own style and language, but on the reader and his/her elaboration and understanding in order to re-create his/her own text. So, here the literary texts are not considered only as part of Italian native-speakers' education, but also as a means of understanding the mind-sets of both writers and readers and of accessing, exploring and comparing different frames of knowledge in a IFL course. In this perspective, the Italian language is an essential tool towards this more holistic end.

Each text not only implies a straightforward interpretation, but also problematizes universal experiences shared by human beings of any nationality. Lexicon, grammar, syntax, rhythm and discourse, i.e. the linguistic elements, all contribute to building meanings, which are continuously readjusted and re-created. It is only in the production phase, when one is required to convey thoughts, opinions and feelings on other topics, that the surface structure to be applied is acquired because it is personalized in its use and because it is rich in meanings and in cultural implications. Only then does the *potential* knowledge of language become a *real* one (Carter, 1998), are the cultural implications perceived and is the intercultural link established. In line with these processes taking place in the learners' minds, as De Mauro (2005, p.44) says, knowledge means choice and differentiation, and choice means selection, among the infinite features of every element, of those items which are perceived to be adequate to build a suitable reproduction of what is to be performed³.

In the majority of IFL courses for beginners this model is not at all applied since the choice of texts to teach/learn is often fictitious and artificial and, if taken from real life situations and not totally invented, it is often not cognitively or emotionally demanding. In fact, this may be said for the textbooks in the majority of languages taught as a foreign or

³ Conoscere vuol dire individuare e differenziare e individuare significa trascogliere tra le infinite caratteristiche di ogni cosa quelle che si assumano come pertinenti al costruire una rappresentazione adeguata ai fini che si vogliono perseguire.

second language, which do not keep an active and learner-centred perspective.

If we accept the language and content integrated approach, even at beginners' level it is possible to work on short, self-contained and fully meaningful extracts. Therefore, reading literary texts implies the construction (Bruner, 1990) of comprehension and knowledge through an interactive process, at many levels, so that skills and strategies are used to foster, monitor and maintain understanding of the referential, individual and shared social meaning through linguistic and non-linguistic cues. At the same time, hypotheses and generalizations on the stylistic, organizational and discourse elements of the text are verified and stored as patterns that slowly create a repertoire. So the engagement of the language learners with the literary texts should be interactive and creative.

In fact, association does play a dominant role in nearly every mental function, and words and linguistic structures themselves are no exception. Every single word and idea has numerous links attaching it to other ideas and concepts. The mind forms associations almost instantaneously, and 'mapping' allows a person to express his/her ideas quicker than using only words or phrases with no link to deeper mental structures. This view implies that the mind-set of each individual reflects a community-shared context and therefore a shared culture, which is not a set of information and knowledge easily to be transferred or simply

described, but it is a process of sharing an ontological dimension within a specific community. Therefore, literature may be seen in its ontological perspective.

It is indeed the use of language that instantiates the concept of culture; in such an approach, language use is not seen as the description of what characterizes the foreign country, but seen in its ethnographic, anthropological and sociological value. Written language, and literature in particular, stems from the transaction of ideas, images and contexts into 'signs', which trigger in the mind of the receivers other images, ideas and contexts: 'the reader generates meaning in response to text by using previous knowledge and a range of textual and situational cues that are often socially and culturally shared. While constructing meaning, the reader uses various processes, skills and strategies to foster, monitor and maintain understanding. These processes and strategies are expected to vary along with the situation and the purpose as readers interact with a variety of continuous and non-continuous texts', (PISA report, 2002).

We can therefore again agree with De Mauro (2005) that one of the main features of language is its boundless extension and that the link between each word and the knowable reality is a multiple and often uncountable one. Therefore, lexical elements may have a great number of meanings,

both when they are singled out and when they are in combination⁴. In literature lexical elements have indeed the highest degree of connotation. This is why it is important to provide in the language classroom not only examples of the *usage* of language, but also of its *use* (Widdowson, *ibid.*) contexts and situations, thus foregrounding the intercultural aspects and dimensions, in the full recognition of individual mind sets.

⁴ ‘Messa a confronto con quella di altri codici semiologici la semantica delle lingue storico-naturali è caratterizzata: (1) dalla illimitatezza del campo noetico (del campo dei sensi dicibili ed esprimibili con le frasi generabili in/con una lingua); [...] La illimitatezza del campo noetico comporta conseguenze sulla numerosità e sui significati dei morfi lessicali e di quei morfi semplici o aggregati di morfi che diciamo comunemente *parole*.’ (De Mauro, 2005, p.43)

3. THE ACTION-RESEARCH PARAMETRES

- 1. THE INSTRUCTIONAL CONTEXT*
- 2. THE SCOPE OF THE ACTION-RESEARCH*
- 3. THE RESEARCH METHOD*

1. THE INSTRUCTIONAL CONTEXT

1.1 The instructional conditions

This three-year action-research has been carried out at University College London, Department of Italian and its starting point has been the observation that within the course for an undergraduate degree in Italian (both combined honours and single honours), Italian language classes were perceived as isolated and totally independent from content courses. In fact, learners of IFL attend University courses either as students of single honours Italian, or as combined honours (Italian and other languages, Italian and Design, Italian and Business studies, etc.) and good achievements in content courses are often not matched by a similarly good mastery in the language.

The focus of this specific action-research is the enhancement of Italian as a foreign language, at elementary, *ab initio*, level, in an academic environment. In the first academic year complete beginners are expected to reach level B1 of the CEF in the written production¹, since their final written exams are very demanding. From the year 2003-04, learners attended six hours per week language courses, i.e. 4 hours language competence with a focus on the development of oral/aural skills and grammar, one hour translation into English and one hour Text and Task Course (TTC), which is the new specifically designed course aiming at

¹ Can produce simple connected texts on topics which are familiar or of personal interest (Ch.4.4.1)

developing written skills through a task based teaching on literary extracts.

Language classes are rather small, between 7 and 14 students, while content courses classes tend to be bigger, with an average of 50 students. Content courses are all conducted in English and the texts proposed are all in English. For instance, the novels of Italian authors, from medieval to contemporary writers, are read and discussed in English and the films for the course in Realism and Neo-realism are all subtitled. Therefore, students are required to concentrate on the translated version, and on contextual elements, assigning to the use of Italian no, or a secondary, importance as far as the critical appreciation of the relationship between content and form is concerned. The implication of the choice of English to discuss Italian cultural issues is that learners unconsciously consider the study of the Italian language as unconnected to their academic profile. On the other hand, when they have to undertake written and oral exams, they suddenly realize that talking about family or everyday life in Italian is not enough, and that reading how to cook spaghetti is helpful, but not so useful when they are required to read and discuss a literary text for their final year language exam.

Just to underline this evident gap, here follow the extracts of some group interviews, taken in the academic years 2002/03, 2003/04 and 2004/05. They show how learners see the interaction between language classes and other classes:

Year 2002-03	<p><i>What we do in language courses does not help with other courses [...].</i></p> <p><i>We feel that knowing Italian has nothing to do with discussing Dante or Calvino, in the specific courses. It is interesting when we do it in Text Exploitation (TTC).</i></p>
Year 2003-04	<p><i>Sometimes, we do not even realize we are discussing another culture, since we keep using English, both for reading and for discussing Italian literature.</i></p> <p><i>We do what we used to do at school, when studying English history or literature</i></p>
Year 2004-05	<p><i>Learning about the Renaissance or the Kingdom of Savoy is just learning new cultural elements, no link with learning Italian.</i></p> <p><i>Studying Italian history or Italian literature (in the specific courses) is exciting, but nothing new.</i></p>

Hence language competence and content, language and culture were perceived as being different and two isolated entities. The prevailing feeling was that passing language exams is not at all linked to the study of contemporary Italian literature and history, social studies or arts studies, i.e. content competence. Moreover, the widespread belief was that learning Italian mainly meant to be accurate in the form of written and oral communication (i.e. emphasis in the mere language competence with no grammar errors), thus leading to a discrepancy between content course achievements and language proficiency.

1.2 The challenge

In this perspective, this action-research aimed at solving the divergence between language and content in the light of a theoretical perspective, but with practical solutions. It is clear that matching the students' profile and academic interest with the instructional conditions was a real challenge.

As my review of the history of the problem of academic underachievement in languages illustrates, it is difficult - if not impossible - to alter institutional practices without first providing a plausible alternative and then placing a greater emphasis on understanding the motivational context in which the group is situated. On the one hand students' different mind sets, their cultural and academic heritage, experience and competence had to be recognized as a resource for enrichment, on the other hand students' linguistic competence had to be seen as favouring an overall academic development, with no separation between language proficiency and the language requirements of their content courses.

As already stated, the subjects of my research were all 1st year UCL *ab initio* students in Italian, even if their backgrounds were heterogeneous as for their mother tongues and native cultures and for their previous experiences with other languages; the majority of 1st year *ab initio* students of Italian had already studied, or already spoke, other European languages (mainly French, German and Spanish), some of them being native speakers of a FL, and an average of 20% students of IFL each year

were of mother tongues other than European (Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, Turkish, etc.). Moreover, they also conducted an independent life outside college and during breaks, so their personal choices of how to enhance their contacts and experiences with the Italian culture and language could not be predictable and controllable.

Their personal experiences in other foreign languages created a positive *humus* for the instructional action, and had an influence on their beliefs about the learning processes. They had, of course, different mind sets, personalities and beliefs, which determined, amongst other things, stereotypes and expectations about the learning of Italian and a great number of differences emerged, determining a variety of 'philosophies' about language learning (Abraham and Vann, 1987, p.97). So, on closer inspection, two elements were relevant in defining learners' profile: one was their view of the world and their previous experiences, and another was their idealized link with Italian culture, which was a unifying factor.

All learners had an academic interest in one or various aspects of the target culture and were enrolled on a combined or single honours degree in Italian. This meant that their specific interest was assigned to the artistic, historical and anthropological aspects of Italy and to other aspects of Italian life, such as the way people live, what their values and priorities are. Given that they enrolled for a course with a great emphasis on literature, it is possible to make the hypothesis that the Italian language was considered an essential tool for their studies.

All students showed to be highly motivated in learning Italian and, since it is generally agreed that motivation and pleasure are leading factors for foreign language acquisition (Gardner; 1985; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Dörnyei, 1994, 2001), I had good reasons to believe that, if adequately maintained, first year students' interest would allow them to attain good acquisitional results.

On the other hand, learners had other elements in common, namely they might be considered homogeneous in their native or native-like use of English, and in the age group to which they belonged (18-22), with very few exceptions of mature students..

To sum up, the profile of the learners involved in my action-research may be visualized in the following table:

Constants	Variables
Native or native-like use of English	Mother tongues and native cultures
Age group (18 -22)	Competence in other foreign languages
Academic interests	Mind sets
Enrolment in a combined or single honours degree in Italian	Beliefs about learning a language
Motivation	Experiences outside classroom

Fig. 5 – Constants and variables

Despite the described variables, which did not influence my results, the starting point of this action-research did not consider so much the differences among learners, but the common ground.

2. THE SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

As clearly shown in the previous pages, my view is that, from both theoretical and pedagogical perspectives, language and visions of the world, language and mindsets, language and culture cannot be separated and therefore language and content cannot be taught independently. In other words, learning a foreign language implies a very high awareness not only of the linguistic, but also of the non-linguistic systems both of the mother tongue and of the target language, i.e. awareness of beliefs, views of the world, emotions and feelings, behaviour and cultural implications of the two languages (mother tongue and target language), worlds and cultures which are constantly connected with each other in the acquisition process. In fact, a culture is fully transmitted through its original language and 'the words of a language activate both concepts in non-linguistic domains and production rules that encode syntactic information in the linguistic domain' (Stevenson, 1993, p.306) so that the linguistic and non-linguistic domains are strongly intertwined.

So, the *overall objective* of my research is to bridge the gap between language and cultural, academic and personal experiences, i.e. to re-design and discuss a multi-dimensional model of language teaching and learning where many variables are considered, in order to show the interaction between individual mind sets and SLA.

In order to attain this objective I believe that input has to meet two essential requirements: 1) represent a complex and multi-faceted picture

of the target culture; 2) be recognizable and attractive as far as the learners' individual interests and thoughts are concerned.

Considering the fact that I am dealing with *ab initio* University students, I assume that they are a) curious and interested in cultural matters, b) striving to refine their knowledge and critical abilities, c) interested in building more demanding academic skills, d) willing to gain the power to express their thoughts, opinions and capacities in Italian.

To sum up, given the previously discussed initial conditions, I believe that UCL *ab initio* learners are ready to raise their language competence from a plateau of the everyday, trivial dialogue presented in textbooks, to an academic level of meaningful content, in line with their studies and intellectual demands.

In doing so, they might be encouraged to expand their language awareness by activating learning strategies (Chamot, 1981 ; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990) and by being actively involved in the learning process, through a meaningful content, enhanced by tasks.

Therefore, a key aspect of this action-research is to re-design a language course based on literary extracts and tasks, thus following a procedural syllabus leading 1st year students understand and re-elaborate texts in order to facilitate and accelerate their acquisition of written skills.

Keeping in mind these considerations, this action-research has a twofold purpose.

One purpose is a practical one and leads to a didactic innovation in order to fill this traditional gap between language and content and to integrate students' personal and academic experiences in a unifying approach leading to a B1 competence in writing.

The other purpose is a theoretical one and aims at finding a reference model and at selecting an approach, which allows placing the practical solutions into a more general framework of SLA theory, i.e. to validate the transferability of the chosen model and approach.

3. THE RESEARCH METHOD

In order to achieve the proposed objectives and to carry out the action-research, a course was devised in which short literary texts represented both the starting point and the input, which is necessary to activate a meaningful re-elaboration of language through tasks.

The course was called TTC, i.e. Texts and Task Course, and the group attending the course was called TTL, i.e. Texts and Tasks Learners.

The practical implications of the action-research involved therefore 1) the selection of authentic and interesting literary extracts and the creation of appropriate tasks, 2) the choice of the sequence in which texts and tasks should be presented to the learners, 3) the monitoring of the process, 4) the re-adjustment and the confirmation of the validity of the TTC.

The phases may be exemplified as follows:

Phase 1: Selection	a) selecting literary extracts, representing a meaningful and comprehensible input for <i>ab-initio</i> University students. b) creating tasks, which included sections on linguistic elements (Noticing), meaning and guided production (Patterning), creative production (Controlling and Lexicalising)
Phase 2 Sequencing	organizing texts and tasks into modules
Phase 3 Monitoring	collecting and analysing TTL's feedback and written productions in Italian
Phase 4 Validation	making adjustments to the modules and finding confirmations of the validity of the chosen approach

Fig. 6 – Action-research phases

The TTC didactic innovation for *ab-initio* learners corresponded to a re-designed syllabus, in line with the indications of the CEF², in which literary texts enhanced through tasks represented an open gate to a new world to be experienced in the new language.

The chosen texts were literary extracts, of about 300 words each, which represented models of different text types such as letters, dialogues, poems and ballads, narratives and descriptions, dealing with topics familiar to the learners. All texts could be assigned to an elementary level (A1 and A2) of the Common European Framework (2001) both for their linguistic difficulty and for the domain covered³. The teaching modules were devised around a main theme, ranging from concrete to abstract, from personal to social: the world around us, places and landscapes, children and adults, seduction, war, exile, man and bureaucracy, couples, women, mystery.

TTL were actively involved to elaborate the input through noticing, attention management, patterning, controlling, lexicalising and creative

² Once it is recognised that language learning is a lifelong task, the development of a young person's motivation, skill and confidence in facing new language experience out of school comes to be of central importance (CEF, 1.3, p. 5)

³ 'For general purposes of language learning and teaching it may be useful to distinguish at least the following:

- the *personal* domain, in which the person concerned lives as a private individual, centred on home life with family and friends, and engages in individual practices such as reading for pleasure, keeping a personal diary, pursuing a special interest or hobby, etc.;
- the *public* domain, in which the person concerned acts as a member of the general public, or of some organisation, and is engaged in transactions of various kinds for a variety of purposes; [...]

It should be noted that in many situations more than one domain may be involved'. (CEF, 4.1.1, p. 45)

production tasks, which contributed to the creation of a repertoire in IFL. The tasks aimed at leading TTL to reach a B1 proficiency in written production⁴ at the end of TTC, with only 20 contact hours scattered over the academic year, the frequency of the TTC being one hour per week of contact time.

Monitoring the process through qualitative methods and collecting and analysing learners' production in Italian was a constant practice in the action-research.

Data were gathered along two main perspectives of different relevance to this study: a) a descriptive analysis of learners' productions, discussed through quantitative data collected according to specific parameters; b) a qualitative analysis of learners' perceptions, informally collected through interviews, diaries, feedback forms and field reports. The combination of the two perspectives gave the possibility of identifying a pattern and of evaluating the impact of the approach which was adopted in order to favour a rapid interlanguage development in TTL.

As previously said, the study on TTL groups was carried out over 3 years, in the years 2002/03 to start the research, 2003/04 to make some re-adjustments and in the year 2004/05 to confirm results, with 3

⁴ **B1** - Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his/her field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence. [...] Can write accounts of experiences, describing feelings and reactions in simple connected text. Can write a description of an event, a recent trip – real or imagined. Can narrate a story. (*Creative writing*)
(CEF, 4.4.1, p.61 /62)

generations of *ab initio* students, involving 112 TTL, 34 in the first academic year, 51 in the second year, and 27 in the third year:

Academic Years	Phases	TTL
2002/03	Phase 1 Phase 2 Phase 3	34
2003/04	Phase 3 Phase 4	51
2004/05	Phase 3 Phase 4	27

Fig. 7 – Action-research schedule and participants

In the first two years, the collected and analysed data regarded 85 students, some of whom withdrew or changed courses during the academic year. In the last year, only the written productions of 27 TTL were analysed in order to confirm or reject initial hypotheses through the language development attained. Therefore, this study aimed at validating an approach which lead to an active involvement of the learners in the learning process and resulted in the acceleration of their interlanguage change during each TTC. It cannot be strictly considered a longitudinal study on single TTL, although each of the 112 TTL was assessed according to the chosen measure for written production.

The parameters of the research are controlled, in the sense that TTC texts and tasks have been carefully selected. Nevertheless, there is no control on the other sources of language enhancement students may have independently received outside the TTC, as I consider it non-relevant to the purposes of this research. In any case, no other formal instruction in

IFL written production was received by TTL since, besides TTC, they attended a formal language course which followed textbooks in a traditional way, focusing mainly on oral/aural skills and grammar.

If any other stimulus has been sought outside the academic course, it only shows the positive result that an inducted need to contextualise the learning of Italian has increased the personal interest in language and culture and elaboration strategies. In fact, the aim of this research is not to discuss a 'sterilized' laboratory experiment, but a real academic situation, in which only macro-variables can be kept under control.

4. THE FIELD STUDY METHODOLOGY

1. *CHOICE OF INPUT: LITERARY TEXTS*
2. *CHOICE OF TASKS*
 - I. *PRE-TASKS*
 - II. *WHILE-TASKS*
 - III. *PRODUCTION TASKS*
3. *MONITORING AND EVALUATING*

1. CHOICE OF INPUT: LITERARY TEXTS

As previously discussed, the use of literary texts in this study concerns:

1) the selecting criteria of the literary extracts, which should represent a sample of meaningful and comprehensible input for *ab-initio* University students; 2) the sequencing of the selected extracts and their organization into thematic units and modules.

1.1 Selection criteria

The selection aims at creating a collection of motivating material of major Italian 20th and 21st century authors, representing a variety of linguistic and stylistic elements, content and context and covering a large range of text types, such as letters, dialogues, poems and songs, descriptions, narrations, dramatic texts, which, though accessible, are intellectually and cognitively challenging while displaying different models of language use. The cultural implications and contextual allusions underlying the texts should meet the students' cultural backgrounds and experiences, thus encouraging cognitive processes and interactive attitudes. The exposure to different typologies should allow developing an increasing awareness of the norms of language use (Widdowson, 1975) also in a contrastive perspective with the learners' mother tongues and/or with the other languages studied. Learners should be guided to make hypotheses and to draw conclusions in order to infer and reconstruct meaning, based on the evidence of the text. This way,

they can form their own set of rules to be tested, confirmed, modified and expanded.

So the literary extracts become both the input and the overall context in which the language is processed (Lazar, 1993) and the language acquisition is facilitated through the performance of tasks and of meaningful output in Italian. They are of approximately 300 words each and are all authentic and to any extent have been altered or simplified.

The selection is a combination of different perspectives since the linguistic elements combined with contextual and cultural elements (both linguistic and extra-linguistic) determine the salience of my choice in consideration that 'only contextually appropriate meanings are made available for comprehension' (Giora, 2003, p.11). In fact, 'to understand how a community uses language it is deemed necessary to understand the community; the dynamic system of its beliefs, values and dreams, and how it negotiates and articulates them [...] the home culture, as well as the target culture may well come under scrutiny' (Corbett, 2003, p.19). And indeed, some of the most accepted classifications envisage texts as discourses differing in the focus given to the communicative component. As Jacobson (1969) pointed out, focus on the sender would produce an emotive and expressive text, focus on the receiver a more persuasive type of text, and focus on the message, a more referential and descriptive text. So, selecting literary texts implies considering at least the following elements: a) the formal properties of the text (linguistic and

organizational features) and its communicative purpose, b) its constituent elements (factual information), its social and historical context or contexts of use, and the potential conceptual associations it triggers both in a native and in a non-native speaker. In particular, when we talk of associations we also mean the link to native culture-specific aspects and to the implicit/explicit reference to cultural memory, literary traditions, beliefs, norms and perceptions. Of course, although presented in a sequential order, these elements cannot be separated one from the other, but are deeply intertwined. Let's observe them in detail.

1.1.1 *Linguistic elements* –

The questions to be answered in the linguistic selection process are:

- How long is the text?
- How complex is the text linguistically? (Subordinate clauses, anaphora, deixis, etc.)
- Can the meaning of unknown vocabulary be elicited?
- Are there any marked uses such as archaisms, slang expressions and, in the case of Italian, regionalisms?

From a merely linguistic perspective, the selection involves elements related mainly to the length and lexical, grammatical and syntactical complexity of a text; in fact, 'particularly complex syntax consumes attention and resources that might otherwise be available for dealing with content [...]' (CEF, ch.7.3.2.2 p.165), so that longer texts require more processing. The assumption is that in such a case there is an excessive memory load, with the risk of losing concentration and attention to focal elements in *ab initio* learners. 'Long sentences with number of

subordinate clauses, non-continuous constituents, multiple negation, scope, ambiguity, use of anaphorics and deictics without clear antecedents or reference (ibid., p.165)' may create confusion. A syntactic over-simplification of authentic texts, however, may actually cause difficulty too because of the elimination of redundancies, clues to meaning etc. So texts should be short and not too complex, but not oversimplified. Moreover, it is possible to find literary texts that are linguistically very simple and comprehensible, but conceptually intense. Discourse structure is another element of selection since 'textual coherence and clear organization [...], the explicit rather than implicit nature of information presented [...] contribute to reducing information processing complexity' (ibid., p.166).

In general, the main criterion here is that of providing language use, without taxing students excessively with boring language exercises; language noticing and awareness and interpretative skills are essential.

Therefore length, text type and genre and minimum linguistic complexity may be considered textual criteria of selection.

1.1.2 Organizational elements and text types

The questions to be answered to select the appropriate text type are the following:

- What is the formal category the literary extracts belong to?
- Is the text type easily recognizable?
- Are the salient constituent elements clear?
- Is the text representative of Italian culture and of Italian language use?
- What is its cultural and inter-cultural relevance?

Since Aristotle, many attempts have been made to single out formal elements of discourse (syntax, grammar, lexical choices, rhetorical figures, etc.), and underlying structures and patterns, which by themselves do not often help to identify a given typology. In fact, the community in which the text has been generated is an essential element of classification, although its communicative purpose may transcend time and place, as is the case with literary texts. 'A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale of genre. [...] In addition to purpose, exemplars of a genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience' (Swales, 1990, p.58). Also in the CEF it is confirmed that the learner's familiarity with the organizational elements of a text helps him/her to make hypotheses about its content¹, mainly in the case of *ab initio* learners.

Nevertheless, some confusion is found in literature concerning the distinction between genre and text types (Biber, 1988; Lee, 2001), the

¹ 'Familiarity with the genre and domain (and with assumed background and socio-cultural knowledge) helps the learner in anticipating and comprehending text structure and content; the concrete or abstract nature of the text is also likely to play a role; concrete description, instructions or narratives (particularly with adequate visual supports), for example, are likely to be less demanding than abstract argumentation or explanation' (CEF, ch 7.3.2.2 p.165)

former being in general an umbrella category (poetry, prose, essay etc.), the latter being specifically related to the organization of content (discourse).

In the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)² each text type has a typical format in which it occurs:

1. *Description* is the type of text in which the information refers to physical, spatial properties of objects or characteristics of people. Descriptive texts typically provide an answer to "what" questions.

- *Impressionistic descriptions* present information from the point of view of subjective impressions of relationships, qualities, and spatial directions.
- *Technical descriptions* present information from the point of view of objective spatial observation. Frequently, technical descriptions use non-continuous text formats such as diagrams and illustrations.

1. *Narration* is the type of text in which the information refers to temporal properties of objects. Narration texts typically provide answers to *when*, or *in what sequence* questions.

- *Narratives* present changes from the point of view of subjective selection and emphasis, recording actions and events from the point of view of subjective impressions in time.
- *Reports* present changes from the point of view of an objective situational frame, recording actions and events that can be verified by others.
- *News stories* purport to enable the readers to form their own independent opinion of facts and events without being influenced by the reporter's own views.

2. *Exposition* is the type of text in which the information is presented as composite concepts or mental constructs, or those elements into which concepts or mental constructs can be analysed. The text provides an explanation of how the component elements interrelate in a meaningful whole and often answers *how* questions.

- *Expository essays* provide a simple explanation of concepts, mental constructs, or conceptions from a subjective point of view.

² <http://www.pisa.oecd.org/pisa/read.htm>

- *Definitions* explain how terms or names are interrelated with mental concepts. In showing these interrelations, the definition explains the meaning of "words" or technical terms.
 - *Explications* are a form of analytic exposition used to explain how a mental concept can be linked with words or terms. The concept is treated as a composite whole, which can be understood if decomposed into constituent elements and if the interrelations between these are each given a name.
 - *Summaries* are a form of synthetic exposition used to explain and communicate about "texts" in a shorter form than in the original text.
 - *Minutes* are a more or less official record of the results of meetings or presentations.
 - *Text interpretations* are a form of both analytic and synthetic exposition used to explain the abstract concepts, which are present in a particular (fictional or non-fictional) text or group of texts.
3. *Argumentation* is the type of text that presents propositions as to the relationships between concepts, or other propositions. Argument texts often answer *why* questions. Another important sub-category of argument texts is persuasive texts.
- *Comment* relates the concepts of events, objects, and ideas to a private system of thought, values, and beliefs.
 - *Scientific argumentation* relates concepts of events, objects, and ideas to systems of thought and knowledge so that the resulting propositions can be verified.
4. *Instruction* (sometimes referred to as *injunctive*) is the type of text that provides directions on what to do.
- *Instructions* present directions for certain behaviours in order to complete a task.
 - *Rules, regulations, and statutes* specify requirements for certain behaviours based on impersonal authority, such as public authority.

Despite the detailed OECD analysis of different text types, we cannot adopt it for our research, also because only a part of the recognized types relate to literature. Many other text type classifications have been identified over the years, showing that categories in this field may only

be general, since some of them may overlap and one can be part of another (an argumentation may also be part of a narration). Nevertheless, the OECD and other studies help us understand the linguistic features of a text and its purpose, and allow us to create appropriate tasks in order to help students to become aware of the specific features and implications of a text, its cultural relevance and its use of language.

Since no satisfactory classification has yet emerged, the merging of three different perspectives may help the pedagogic purpose of this study: the *systemic-functional* one, which claims that cultural factors are within the text and constrain text organization (Reynolds, 1998), the *ethnographic-socio-linguistic* perspective which sees genres determined by their social purposes (Swales, 1990) and the new *rhetorical* perspective which stresses how text organization responds to specific rhetorical implications (Hyland, 2000). So, textual features result as a combination of cultural, ethnographic, socio-historical and strictly linguistic elements.

Keeping in mind the sub-divisions proposed by many authors, it is clear that dealing with *ab initio* students, as is my case, requires an easily recognizable exemplification of the texts proposed, both in their form and in their content. Moreover, one of the purposes of the present study is to link the linguistic system (language usage) with the non-linguistic one (intentional, personal, social and cultural elements). Therefore, the following formal categorization has been chosen to give the texts to be presented an organized order. Even if it does not reflect the open

discussion on genres, it reflects a simple and widely accepted text type division, which should be easily recognizable by the learners: *Diary* and *Letters*, which are partially narrative, but not exclusively so, *Description*, *Narration*, *Poetry*, which is not included in PISA and may include the texts of songs, *Drama*, also called ‘oral dialogic’.

The questions to be answered in order to select the appropriate texts are:

1.1.3 Content and factual information

Selection should consider also appropriateness and interest:

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- What does the text present (characters, situations, settings, interactions, events)?- What are the conceptual implications of the text?- Does it stimulate a positive attitude and ‘pleasure’? |
|--|

The other crucial element to be taken into account is the content of the text, i.e. the topic should be recognized as meaningful by the learner, it should somehow relate to the learners’ experience and interests and it should appeal to the emotional and cognitive needs and background knowledge of the learners. ‘High level of motivation to understand due to personal interest in the content will help to sustain the learner’s efforts’. (CEF, ch 7.3.2.2 p.165). Focus on content has traditionally been considered one of the key points in using literature in the language classroom and is ‘a useful tool for encouraging students to draw on their own personal experiences, feelings and opinions [...] to become more

actively involved both intellectually and emotionally' (Lazar, 1993, p.24).

1.1.4 Contextual and inter-textual elements

The questions to be answered are about the contextual and inter-textual elements.

- When and where was the text produced?
- Who is the author?
- How is the context part of the text?
- How is the context represented in the text?
- Does the text refer to particular social attitudes, facts or suppositions?
- Are there inter-textual allusions to other literary productions, texts or media, which are part of the native-speakers' shared knowledge?
- Are contextual elements and allusions relevant to interpret the text?
- Are contextual elements and allusions helping learners to focus on differences and similarities among cultures?

In a content and language integrated approach from early stages, texts (oral, written, visual) are often selected considering them as representative of the target culture, or of specific contents. So, the relevance of the topics discussed and the parallel or contrastive connections with the society in which the text was produced, i.e. the scenario in which the text is embedded, may lead to choose one text instead of another for the classroom, since it is considered more or less representative of the context to be highlighted. In fact, a text 'goes beyond what is said or written: it includes [...] the total environment in which a text unfolds' (Halliday and Hasan, 1989, p.5). So, not only may

the text have been written in another place and stem from another culture, but sometimes it may belong to another time. This literary text offers a vivid insight into the target culture and at the same time, being a play, or a poem, or a narration, or a letter, may involve imagination and reflection on the part of the readers. Contextualized features may on the one hand open a window onto the target culture landscape and on the other encourage the recognition of essential and transferable values to be confronted with, through a directed reflection.

1.1.5 Content and interpretative elements.

The questions to be answered in this perspective are:

- What are the topics dealt with?
- Are they stimulating and poignant?
- Does the text create positive and/or negative images?
- Is the text emotionally involving?
- Does it evoke memories or personal experiences?
- Does it imply knowledge of factors external to the text, in order to be understood?
- Is it ambiguous?

If we focus our selective criteria on the students and agree that interest in the topic and learners' background knowledge are important elements influencing comprehension and re-elaboration (Carrel and Wise, 1998), another selective criterion may be related to the expected integration and interpretation of the text. In fact, even if the message may be controversial, it has to have a certain degree of familiarity in order to raise interest and discussion leading to personal enrichment. Perceptions

of the world differ from those of native speakers and may allow students to re-create 'the meaning according to their life experiences, ethnicity, social and economic background, attitudes and beliefs' (Kramsch, 1998). Texts might have intercultural implications and offer opportunities for intercultural reflection and relate to the reader's background knowledge in a dynamic process of constructing new insights and meanings. If properly enhanced, a text may also help the reader re-assess certain aspects of his/her own views and experiences and throw a new light and open up new perspectives on his/her own culture and beliefs. It is an interactive process and the choice of texts should be guided by how the instructor thinks the texts will work in this process, which is built progressively in the mind of the learners, who interact with the text and with peers.

In conclusion, the chosen literary texts should not only represent a new experience which is understood by comparison with similar experiences held in memory (reader dependent), but should also help breaking down existing schemata, re-organizing information and building new schemata, in what has been called *schema refreshment* (Cook, G., 1994). The literary extracts are a challenging input and represent a combination of world schemata and written, linguistic schemata, but they may also be interpreted by inferring connections with previously possessed structures of knowledge of the world and of the language. In doing so, both the language and the cultural awareness triggered by a text modify, and at the

same time are modified by, the learner's mind sets and "background knowledge" (Wenden & Rubin, 1991; Blackledge and Pavlenko, 2001) and the context of learning.

In line with the above-discussed criteria, the texts which have been selected for TTC are the following and can be found in the Appendix:

1. *Lui e Io*, Natalia Ginzburg - Diary
2. *Berah di Kibawa*, Dacia Maraini – Description of familiar people
3. *Lettere dal Carcere*, Antonio Gramsci – Informal letter
4. *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli*, Carlo Levi - Description of a place
5. *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, Italo Calvino – Third person narration
6. *Io non ho paura*, Nicolò Ammaniti – Third person narration
7. *Cento colpi di spazzola*, Melissa P. - Diary
8. *Attraverso il tuo corpo*, Alberto Bevilacqua - Diary
9. *La Ciociara*, Alberto Moravia – Third person narration
10. *La Guerra di Piero*, Fabrizio De André – Ballad
11. *La Gita a Tindari*, Andrea Camilleri – Dialogue

These literary extracts have been selected not only for their formal aspects, but also mainly as contexts of use of the foreign language (Johns, 1997), since they open windows and paths to Italian culture and are examples of meaning-making in Italian. Building understanding is in fact the first objective of TTC and the literary extracts represent the input and become 'context of culture' and a 'context of situation' (Paltridge, 2001) to be re-elaborated and used for writing. Moreover, an implicit objective of the TTC is enhancing stylistic and literary taste and appreciation.

Learners should be able to read/write an informal letter, describe people and places, narrate simple events in the first or the third person, read/write a diary and, if they are interested, a simple poem.

1.2 Sequence and organization of selected extracts

Once the literary extracts had been selected, it was important to decide in what sequence they should be presented to the learner, and hence what sequencing criterion had to be followed and what tasks could facilitate comprehension.

1.2.1 Simple-complex.

Proposing to *ab initio* students a comprehensible literary extract, offering them an appropriate context for SLA, addresses the question of the definition of what is meant by ‘readable’ for an *ab initio* learner, since the risk of using non-simplified texts is that the uncontrolled elements may cause frustration in the readers. The most common attitude among language teachers is that of grading texts from ‘simple’ to ‘complex’ according to certain categories, such as use of lexicon, morpho-syntactic features and length, sometimes at the expenses of authenticity.

Lexicon is the first issue to be considered. The most complete answer to the issue of readability may be found by considering an extremely accurate corpus study of the Italian language by De Mauro (1980), who has identified the Italian ‘basic lexicon’ (7000 words), which is composed of 2000 fundamental words, 2750 highly used words and 2300 highly available words. The lexical choice in a text determines the

linguistic domain and topic. A text using mainly fundamental words is dealing mainly with everyday topics, while a text using a high percentage of specialised vocabulary is probably dealing mainly with a specialised topic. So, one of the first criteria I followed was choosing literary texts according to the number of basic words used.

Another aspect to be considered is that the *syntax* of a text to be proposed to ab initio learners should also be simple. For example, it should keep the basic order Subject-Verb-Complement in the majority of the clauses, it should be organised in short t-units (topic-units) and paragraphs, with mainly coordinate and simple dependent clauses. It is important that active verb forms are preferred to passive ones, with an overall clear development of topics.

In order to detect the features related to vocabulary, syntax and length in the TTC texts proposed, each of them was scanned by a programme freely available on the internet ([http://www.eulogos.net./](http://www.eulogos.net/)) which has a link with a specific program of the so-called readability index for Italian texts (<http://www.eulogos.it/glossario.htm> - gulpease). This programme was adapted to Italian in 1982 by a research group called GULP - Gruppo Universitario Linguistico Pedagogico, based at the Philosophy Department of the University of Rome «La Sapienza» and includes De Mauro's research (ibid.). The formula they applied to Italian was called the GULPEASE formula (Lucisano and Piemontese,1988) and is the following :

<p style="text-align: center;">EASE = 89 – LP/10 + FR*3</p> <p>LP = number of letters multiplied by 100 and divided per number of words</p> <p>FR= number of clauses multiplied by 100 and divided per number of words</p>

Fig. 8 - GULPEASE formula (Lucisano and Piemontese, 1988)

This formula does not measure single features, such as the kind of vocabulary not belonging to ‘basic lexicon’ or any other morpho-syntactic structure, but it shows the synthetic data related to the use of vocabulary. Very often the use of basic lexicon corresponds to simple syntactic structures, even if this is not an automatic correspondence. Therefore, the measures of the texts scanned through this formula may be considered a very helpful, but only a general guidance. The GULPEASE results have therefore to be considered only one of the variables to decide priorities and each text has to be viewed only a part of a module, which concentrates on reading through pre-tasks and linguistic tasks, and is aimed at writing, following the topic and the model of the text.

The result of the formula corresponds to the readability index and to the comprehensibility of a text, depending on lexicon and structure, in a scale of values, originally meant for Italian readers, who have been divided into literacy groups. Since I am applying the readability index to IFL learners, I have substituted the category ‘not understandable’ in the original table, with ‘needs help to be understood’.

Here is the GULPEASE table, as described:

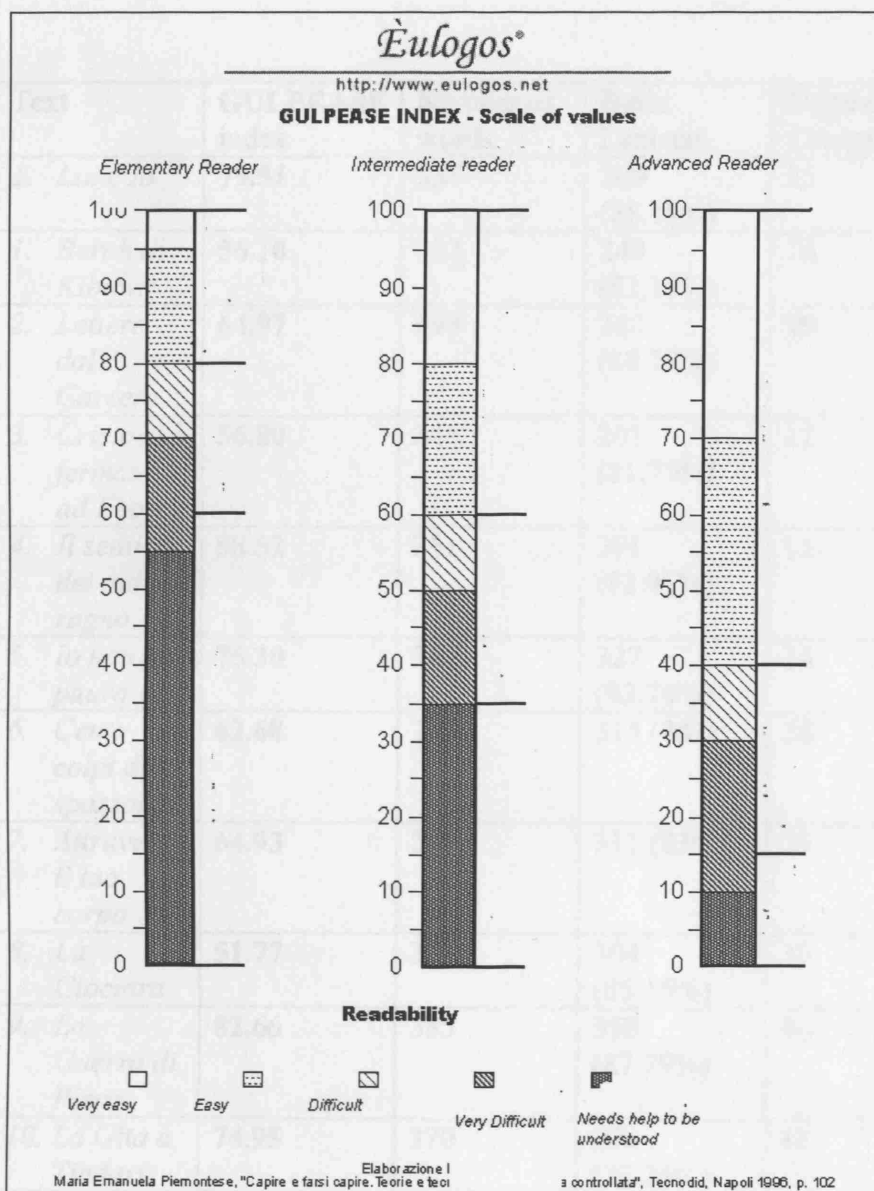


Fig. 9 – Adjusted from GULPEASE Index table

The readability index depends on the type of reader: Elementary, Intermediate or Advanced, with no further specification. In a foreign language context, the dark area shows the highest degree of help needed by the learner to understand a text. From the experience I acquired I believe that the threshold level for TTL is the index of 50.

The TTC texts, which were scanned, gave the following values:

Text	GULPEASE index	Number of words	Basic Lexicon	Number of Clauses
1. <i>Lui e Io</i>	79.51	237	209 (88.19%)	25
1. <i>Berach di Kibawa</i>	56.10	303	249 (82,18%)	14
2. <i>Lettere dal Carcere</i>	64.97	293	260 (88.74%)	19
3. <i>Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli</i>	56.80	246	201 (81.79%)	12
4. <i>Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno</i>	58.52	351	291 (82.91%)	15
5. <i>Io non ho paura</i>	75.30	349	327 (93.70%)	34
6. <i>Cento colpi di spazzola</i>	62.68	375	315 (84%)	24
7. <i>Attraverso il tuo corpo</i>	64.93	378	311 (83%)	29
8. <i>La Ciociara</i>	51.77	357	304 (85.15%)	10
9. <i>La Guerra di Piero</i>	82.66	385	338 (87.79%)	46
10. <i>La Gita a Tindari</i>	74.95	370	271 (73.24%)	42

Fig 10 – List of texts and their GULPEASE index (n. of words, type of lexicon, n. of clauses)

Here follows a diagram, which summarizes the results. The texts, which are closer to the index of 50, are the most difficult ones according to the GULPEASE index, while the ones, which are closer to higher values, are considered the easiest ones:

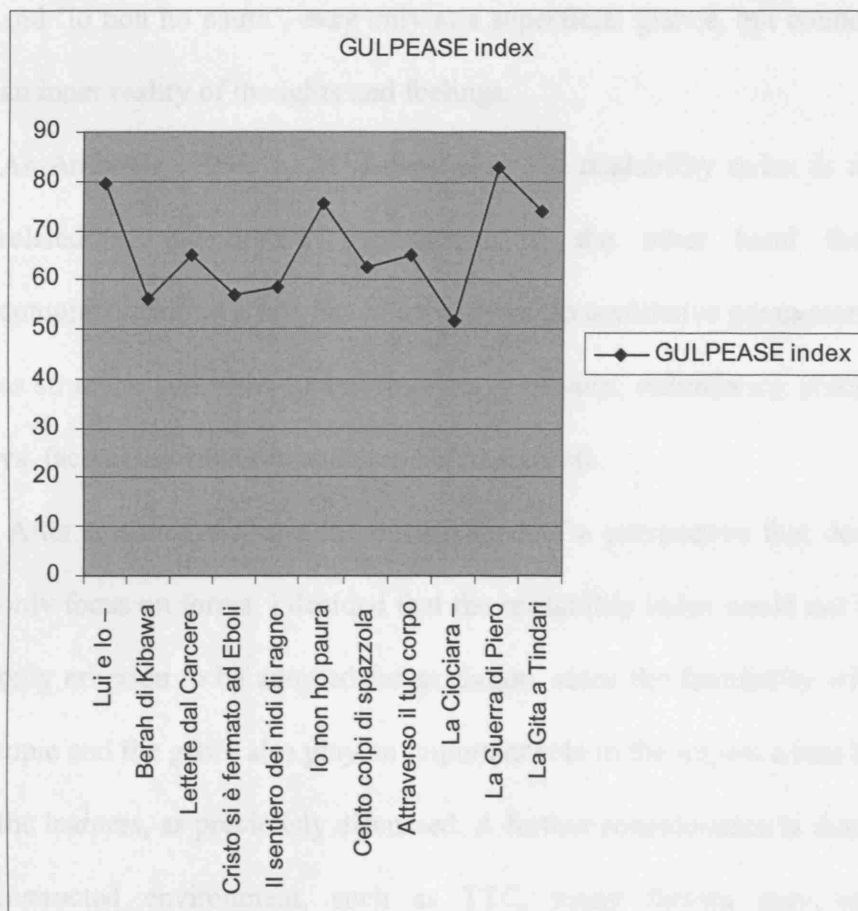


Fig 11 –Average readability index

All the texts are placed in a mean index of 66.11, none of them being extremely ‘difficult’ to understand to a native speaker according to the GULPEASE index.

1.2.2 Text types and topics

From a pedagogic perspective the second problem to solve is how the chosen texts can be sequenced, since the GULPEASE index does not take into consideration the fact that an ‘easy’ vocabulary and syntax may hide connotations, inferences and implications which make a text difficult to be fully understood, as is the case with ‘La Guerra di Piero’

and 'Io non ho paura', easy only at a superficial glance, but connotating an inner reality of thoughts and feelings.

As Ambroso (1998, p. 286) maintains, the readability index is mainly related to quantitative parameters; on the other hand the full comprehension of a text has to be assigned to qualitative parameters such as structure and order of information, text types, redundancy, inferential vs. factual information, anaphoric elements, etc.

After this analysis, and in consideration of a perspective that does not only focus on forms, I decided that the readability index could not be the only criterion to be adopted for gradation, since the familiarity with the topic and the genre also play an important role in the impact a text has on the learners, as previously discussed. A further consideration is that in an instructed environment, such as TTC, many factors may balance 'complexity' through the use of pedagogic tasks.

Therefore the decision was taken of considering a balance among the readability index, the text types and the familiarity with the topic. As a consequence, the texts were grouped according to content categories, or 'domains' as they are called in the CEF (ch 4.1 , see note 2, Ch. 3), meaning the possible areas in which social life is organised, i.e. personal, with a private perspective on personal views, home life and family (My world, My Places, Children and adults), and public, in which the individual is engaged in external interactions of various kind (Seduction,

War, Bureaucracy and duty), scaling from the less to the more social context of use.

Here are the thematic units and the texts included:

THEMATIC UNITS	TEXTS/MODULES	TEXT TYPE
MY WORLD	- <i>Lui e Io</i> , Natalia Ginzburg - <i>Berah di Kibawa</i> , Dacia Maraini - <i>Lettere dal Carcere</i> , Antonio Gramsci	- Diary - Description of familiar people - Informal letter
MY PLACES	- <i>Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli</i> , Carlo Levi	- Description of a place
CHILDREN AND ADULTS	- <i>Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno</i> , Italo Calvino - <i>Io non ho paura</i> , Nicolò Ammaniti	- Third person narration - Third person narration
SEDUCTION	- <i>Cento colpi di spazzola</i> , Melissa P. - <i>Attraverso il tuo corpo</i> , Alberto Bevilacqua	- Diary - Diary
WAR	- <i>La Ciociara</i> , Alberto Moravia - <i>La Guerra di Piero</i> , Fabrizio De André	- Third person narration - Ballad
BUREAUCRACY AND DUTY	- <i>La Gita a Tindari</i> , Andrea Camilleri	- Dialogue

Fig. 12 – Thematic units and Modules

The first text proposed in each TTC was *Lui e Io*, because of its familiar topic and for its readability index, with 88.9 common words used in the text. As for the sequencing of the other texts, given a readability index above 50, the choice was directed mainly by contextual elements, such as extra-curricular links with other content courses or political situations. For instance, during the Iraq war, the two texts dealing with war were

presented before others, despite the lower GULPEASE index of *La Ciociara*.

As it will be shown later, the texts are the core of a module aiming at written production, which is usually introduced by pre-tasks, aiming at focusing the students' attention on the key element/s and on problematic issues (lexicon, setting etc) dealt with in the module, the language of instruction being English in this phase. Then, learners are ready to read the extract silently, so that the first contact with the text is a personal one. In fact, one of the main objectives is to give voice to the different personal views, in respect of a learner-centred approach. Only after this preliminary phase, students will have to solve tasks, mainly in pairs or small groups and therefore to collaborate with each other, exchange views and perceptions, try to make sense and integrate each other's knowledge and perception.

In order to accomplish the assignments, learners are required to read the text over and over again, each time focusing on a different issue. The role of the teacher is that of guiding the activities and monitoring the processes activated.

To sum up, the various readings should enhance not only the linguistic competence, but also the general competences discussed in the CEF (5.1): knowledge of the world (*savoir*), skills and know-how (*savoir-faire*), existential competence (*savoir-etre*), ability to learn (*savoir-apprendre*).

Moreover, even if students are not going to concentrate strictly and exclusively on literature in the following years, the literary texts they will tackle at the beginning of their degree course might help them to open a window onto problems of history, social life, media, cinema, politics and social and personal interactions which they are bound to come into contact with.

2. CHOICE OF TASKS

As previously discussed, the choice of tasks helping learners elaborate the literary extracts and producing a meaningful written text had two phases: 1) the selection of appropriate tasks, which included sections on linguistic elements (Noticing), meaning and guided production (Patterning), creative production (Controlling and Lexicalising); 2) the organization of the selected tasks so that after a re-elaboration of content and form, learners might be able to reproduce their own content in a chosen text-type.

2.1 Selection criteria

From what has been so far discussed, it is clear that the difference between traditional text comprehension activities and TTC tasks lies in the fact that in traditional comprehension tasks, i.e. text followed by questions, the attention is drawn mainly to input enhancement, while here the objective is raising learners' awareness of the relationship between meaning and form (FoF) in order to arouse production processes, where 'output is an internal attention-drawing device' (Izumi, 2002, p.543). In fact, in this sense, output is considered the final outcome of the internal, cognitive and linguistic processes activated by the text and it may be produced only if learners are aware of and have elaborated their input. On the other hand, in text comprehension activities, learners' attention is drawn to the form used in the written input, in order to increase the perception of salient features conveying meaning through a specific use

of language, which in the TTC is carried out through noticing and pattern identification tasks.

As a first step, I had to decide the criteria needed to select, design and organize specific tasks, suitable for *ab initio* students dealing with literary texts from early stages.

As previously noticed, the majority of task-oriented approaches and studies concentrate on oral skill, although some of them (Willis, 1996) include some examples of tasks applicable to written texts. Task Based Learning (TBL) may be used to enhance SLA in any form of communication, oral or written. Of course the features of a task-oriented approach applied to written texts, for beginners, as is our case, differ slightly from what is usually proposed by task-oriented approaches applied to oral skills, for intermediate-advanced learners.

Moreover, the advantage of researching on responses to written production is that in the majority of cases, written productions allow performances to be measured in terms of inter-language achievements.

As far as the choice of tasks was concerned, I tried to create tasks in line with the macro-processing stages of *noticing*, *patterning*, *controlling* and *lexicalising* proposed by Skehan (2002, p. 90).

In my selection, the apparently most unstructured tasks are the pre-tasks, which should help learners to plan their learning and to notice salient elements (*noticing*). They include predicting the content of the text from the title, creating conceptual associations of words, showing a picture or

a video linked to the text and eliciting the lexicon which is going to be found in the text, raising awareness of a specific topic. Through pre-tasks learner's mind sets are valued and previous experiences (academic and personal) and views of the world are activated and become the pathway to acquisition and self-confidence.

Structured tasks demand learners to carry out a series of actions (*patterning*), that prompt TTL to read the text over and over again. The tasks are devised to process input and to make it more and more comprehensible and should lead them to become aware of the ways language may convey meaning. These tasks may be language oriented. Linguistic tasks aim at letting learners detect grammar, syntax, punctuation and vocabulary. The meta-linguistic features appearing in the linguistic tasks are supposed to be already familiar to the students since they meet them in their communicative language courses. In any case, they may be discussed and clarified beforehand, whenever necessary.

Tasks may also be discourse oriented, mainly focusing on the cohesion and coherence of a text, on semantic and pragmatic features and include information-transfer tasks (Widdowson, 1978), since learners are often required to transfer the information contained in the text into diagrams, tables, drawings. Semantic tasks aim at revealing the referential, associative and implied meanings (co-text and context), while the pragmatic tasks lead to interpretation. The tasks focusing on meaning and on language in use emphasize students' mind sets and background

knowledge, i.e. the pre-possessed, a-priori knowledge (Sharkey N., et al., 2001) and implement strategies, such as planning, selecting, directing attention. It has been proved that re-elaborating input and recycling content through different tasks affects accuracy too (Ellis, 1987, Willis, 1996) since *ab initio* learners are required to activate a sort of “rough tuning” (Krashen, 1989) in order to attain their objective (*controlling*).

Productive tasks may be structured or unstructured tasks and allow reflection on content, as well as the processing of language.

Productive tasks are the most important ones since they imply a recycling of the acquired information in order to approach more and more the “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 84); in fact, in order to accomplish their productive tasks learners are engaged to draw on their previous knowledge as well as on the knowledge and information acquired and stored, so that they are able to recycle linguistic and non-linguistic elements (*lexicalising*). Moreover, learners are guided to find a balance between the conceptual content and the meaning they want to communicate, and the linguistic competence they need in order to communicate it effectively. Expansion and re-elaboration in Italian combine language, meaning and content, meeting the form-meaning requirements. Therefore, re-using the input helps to produce an output, related to the processed input and to become aware of the strategies applied and of their own process of learning (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989).

In their production, students may expand their own re-elaboration of meaning and content either by using the same text type as the extract they have been working on, or referring to text types previously studied. For example, the expansion of a poem might be another poem on a similar topic, or a description, or a narration of the events and feelings evoked by the poem, or a letter.

In each task type, the conceptualisation derives from different forms of negotiation, with peers, with the teacher, or with one's own mind set, previous views and beliefs, through decision taking and problem-solving. Moreover, each set of tasks implies the use of integrated skills, receptive, productive and interactive, oral and written. The written options to be chosen while accomplishing tasks, represent a guide in the peer discussion (oral interactive skills), while the negotiation of answers implies a cyclic re-reading of the text.

2.2 Sequence and organization of selected tasks

The design of tasks in TTC was conceived mainly as a work plan in which the sequencing of tasks, from pre-tasks to written production tasks, was not based on a specific scale of language instructional demands, but on facilitating the TTL's cognitive development in general and with a holistic perspective. Task repetition may help create a wider repertoire and engage learners in actively using the language. This view of pre-, while- and production tasks corresponding to acquisitional stages, is in line with Prabhu findings (1987), and implies that TTC in particular, and

foreign language teaching in TBL in general, are not structured around a linguistic syllabus, but around a procedural syllabus centred on texts and tasks. Tasks represent a challenge to cope with, but also a tool helping to face, metabolise and solve linguistic problems. In this sense TTC may be considered an example of a procedural syllabus.

This is why the tasks accompanying each literary extract have been subdivided into Pre-tasks, corresponding to the *noticing* process, While-tasks, corresponding to the *patterning* (linguistic and interpretative) process and Production-tasks, corresponding to the *controlling* and *lexicalising* stage.

To sum up , each module is developed around a literary extract and has a common framework of tasks. The sequence of tasks correspond to the SLA Processing Stages, as identified by Skehan (2002). The italics show the cognitive processes implied in each phase, as assumed by Skehan (ibid), and each task phase in the TTC should activate a linguistic process.

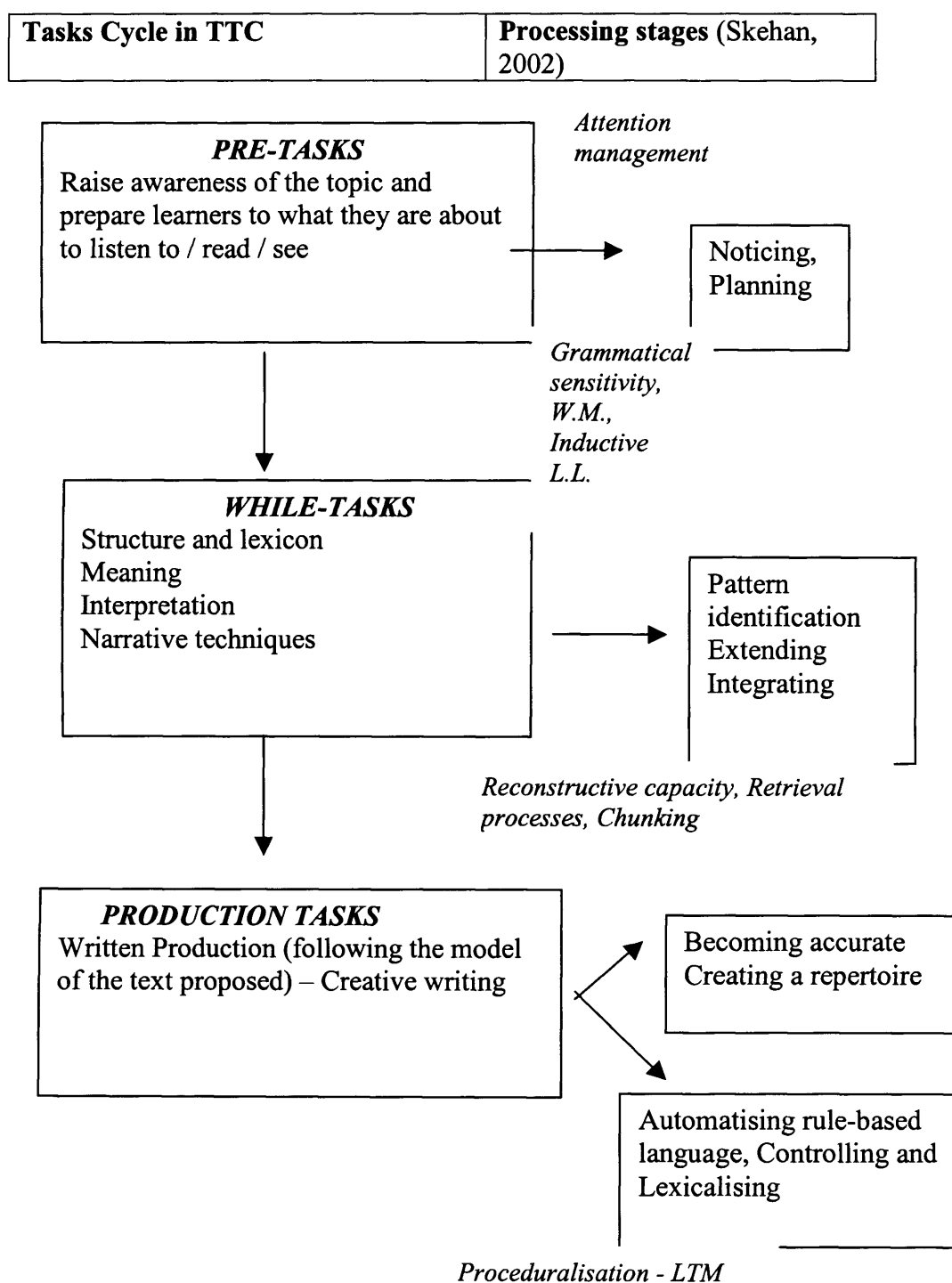


Fig. 13 – Tasks-cycle in TTC and Skehan's processing stages

As in Fig. 13, tasks were broken down to reflect as much as possible the SLA processing stages (Skehan, 2002, 88-89), which represented the sequencing criterion followed in the task design. In each module, before reading the literary extract, a series of **pre-tasks**, aiming at raising awareness of the topic and at preparing learners for what they are about to listen to/read/see, are usually considered a necessary introduction to any task-cycle. They are conducted in English at the beginning and then in Italian, first as peer and then as a collective introductory activity.

While the pre-task phase aims at acquainting students with language and topic, the exposure-to-language, **while-task** phase is the key phase, the necessary support to any other phase. In fact, language exposure accompanied by tasks is aimed not to discourage learners and should not represent an obstacle since it is meant to raise self-confidence and to create a positive attitude to language learning. A real life situation with beginners facing a written text in the foreign language, includes the *ab initio* learners' use of support tools, devices or strategies, helping them to focus on the relationship between form and content, on the way language is structured and why, and on the key words and verbs essential to convey meaning. In fact, differently from the oral type of interactions, the written interaction is accurate and relies exclusively on language use and organization as a pre-requisite for effective communication.

So, the first set of tasks proposed are tasks leading to the perception of morpho-syntactic features and lexicon. They start as receptive activities, leading to the recognition of selected linguistic elements. In this phase, the same elements will be re-used by the students in very simple re-productive tasks, representing a guide towards an autonomous production.

Once structural and lexical items have been internalised, the following step leads to extracting the denotative and descriptive meaning of the text. This set of tasks (meaning) is a necessary step of reading comprehension and is meant to help focus the topic of the passage.

Conceptual associations are brought into the foreground through the interpretation tasks; where controversial views are proposed, group discussion encourages negotiating and sustaining positions.

The questions related to the narrative techniques are meant to make the students aware of how the information is conveyed in the text they have been working on and on how the perspective could be changed:

- 1) Who is the narrator, the person who tells the story? (you may tick more than one)
- 2) The reader's perspective is:
- 3) Re-write the following text from a third person's perspective:

Language exposure is at a very high level in the above-mentioned phases.

In fact, in order to accomplish the required tasks, skimming and scanning through the text will continuously be necessary. Interaction both with the text and with peers allows comparison of results and findings.

At this point **production tasks** are a guided set of activities for planning, reporting, re-writing according to proposed models.

The advantage of the written production tasks is the possibility of selecting, editing and revising as a result of confrontation and interaction, but also of personal reflection. So, it is possible to focus on form (FoF) and to organize an articulated thought at the same time. In fact, writing is recognized as a problem-solving process in three phases: planning and gathering data, finding and putting information together and organizing it, and finally revising to test efficacy (Hayes & Flower, 1980).

The expected outcome is a process leading to a balance among accuracy (FoF), complexity, and the reproduction of the appropriate text type from the early stages. The focus on form was always included and language forms, i.e. morpho-syntactic, lexical, phonological elements etc., were not considered in a dichotomised contrast with content. In fact, during the first set of pre-tasks, leading to noticing and pattern identification, and later during the accomplishment of while-tasks concentrating on specific forms and meanings, learners became aware of different aspects of language.

All tasks allow carrying out activities mainly in the classroom, although the results of the negotiation process may be developed at home. They may be done individually, in pairs or in groups, respecting individual differences when they occur, but also favouring a collaborative attitude. In fact, negotiation of meaning helps comprehension and re-elaboration

(Pica, 1994; Ellis, 1997; Loschky, 1994), aiming at increasing the awareness of language and culture, and at enabling students to produce written texts, in different text types and of increasing language difficulty. As previously stated, focus on form (FoF) is a constant element of the process, although not the only one, being always balanced by the awareness of the way meaning is conveyed.

Here follow the units of the TTC in each year of the action-research. Each year some adjustments have been made and some units have been substituted or integrated with new ones in order to check the general validity of the approach. In 2003-04 instead of the unit on 'Seduction', 'Bureaucracy and duty' was introduced with a module based on a dialogue. In 2005-05 the module in 'Seduction' was substituted with another example of diary ('Cento colpi di spazzola'). Moreover both in 2003-04 and 2004-05 'My world' was expanded with a new text ('Berah di Kibawa').

Here follows the organization of units and modules each academic year and in bold are the units/modules repeated only once or twice:

YEAR 2002-03	YEAR 2003-04	YEAR 2004-05
MY WORLD 1. Lui e Io 2. Lettere dal Carcere MY PLACES 3. Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli CHILDREN AND ADULTS 4. Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno WAR 5. La Ciociara 6. La Guerra di Piero SEDUCTION 7. Attraverso il tuo corpo	MY WORLD 1. Lui e Io 2. Berah di Kibawa . 3. Lettere dal Carcere MY PLACES 4. Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli CHILDREN AND ADULTS 5. Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno WAR 6. La Ciociara 7. La Guerra di Piero BUREAUCRACY AND DUTY 8. La Gita a Tindari	MY WORLD 1. Lui e Io 2. Berah di Kibawa . 3. Lettere dal Carcere MY PLACES 4. Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli CHILDREN AND ADULTS 5. Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno 6. Io non ho paura WAR 7. La Ciociara 8. La Guerra di Piero SEDUCTION 9. Cento colpi di spazzola

Fig 14 – TTC units and modules

Considering that the time spent on pre-tasks and while-tasks might vary due to external and internal variables, each complete module, from the pre-tasks to the production tasks, took about two-three weeks, meeting once a week, over a period of 20 weeks. As in Fig. 14, this meant that an average of 7-9 modules per year could be completed, out of the 11 modules available. Therefore, each year there was a slight flexibility in

the choice of modules, in order to experiment with all of them during the three years field study.

Although the literary extracts varied in each module, task types were repeated over the TTC, in new versions, so that task familiarity might slowly lead learners to internalise the process and to become accustomed to identifying important cues and re-using the language for specific goals, thus adapting acquired elements of language to new communicative and creative purposes. Over the modules, the perception of complexity slowly shifted from the tasks to the cognitive demands to be met by means of the language. As Bygate shows in his study (2001, p. 41), the repetition of tasks ‘suggests an underlying trend [...] of an increase in fluency, accuracy and complexity as a result of task-type practice’. This observation may be applied also to the TTC approach to content and language teaching, in which written input (a literary extract) and a written performance (TTL’s production) enabled learners to extend and complexify their knowledge and their performance in Italian.

The written production of each module might reflect the text types of the literary extract, or use previously acquired information and competence. For instance, in the module ‘La Guerra di Piero’ (a ballad), TTL may be required to write a poem as well as a diary or a letter. Moreover, the written production tasks represent a sort of built-in measure of students’ achievement and of inter-language developed. Responses may be verified, short-term objectives may be adjusted and performance may be

2. I. PRE-TASKS

In line with the previously discussed perspectives, the pre-tasks aimed mainly at favouring the noticing process, and not only the planning process. During this phase, learners were implicitly guided to plan their own learning, but through an emphasis on the identification of key elements and patterns to be 're-used' when needed.

The TTC thematic units moved from personal (my world, my places, children and adults) to interpersonal and social (seduction, war, bureaucracy) topics so that TTL were able to explore different linguistic domains, shifting to personal to interpersonal areas.

Therefore each TTC text, being the central element of a module, was usually introduced by pre-tasks, aiming at focusing the students' attention on the key element/s and on problematic issues (lexicon, setting, content, etc) that they would encounter later on while reading the text. Since one of the main objectives was to give voice to the different personal views, in respect of a learner-centred approach, learners were free to interact and speak up their views, doubts, memories and associations.

Pre-task activities should be emotionally involving and not overtly demanding on written understanding or production (Willis, 1996). So, in the majority of cases the pre-tasks involved activities not straightforwardly linked to language, such as listening to music, looking

at a picture or a painting, or drawing, keeping in mind the ‘noticing’ phase.

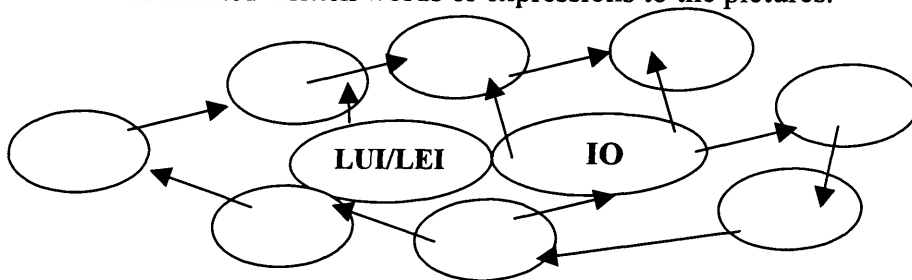
Here follows a table with the types of pre-tasks proposed in each module:

Texts	Types of pre-tasks
1. <i>Lui e Io</i>	visual aid and vocabulary network, listing
2. <i>Berah di Kibawa</i>	associations, listing
3. <i>Lettere dal Carcere</i>	brainstorming, comparing
4. <i>Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli</i>	visualizing, being creative
5. <i>Il sentiero dei nidi di</i>	visual aid and vocabulary network, experience sharing
6. <i>Io non ho paura</i>	visual aid and interpreting, being creative
7. <i>Cento colpi di spazzola</i>	talking about personal experiences, sharing views
8. <i>Attraverso il tuo corpo</i>	Audio-visual aid, experience sharing
9. <i>La Ciociara</i>	visual aid and interpreting
10. <i>La Guerra di Piero</i>	sound of words, ordering, sorting
11. <i>La Gita a Tindari</i>	associations and experience sharing

Fig. 15 – Types of pre-tasks

The specific pre-tasks were the following:

1. *Lui e Io* – Students bring to the classroom a picture of themselves and of a person of the other sex (close friend or relative). They place the two at the centre of a web and link associated written words or expressions to the pictures.



Here, the noticing which was elicited in the learners aimed to focus on the role of personal pronouns and of the lexicon necessary to express likes and dislikes.

2. *Berach di Kibawa* – Students use their picture and draw their genealogic tree around it, naming their relatives by their relationship to them (father, uncle, etc.).

Through the pre-tasks, learners concentrated on family relations and verbs.

3. *Lettere dal Carcere* – Students reply (either orally or with a written list) to the following question: ‘when you are away from home, the first things you remember are...’

Here, letter writing was based on the selection of personal information to be included in the mail.

4. *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli* – Teacher tells students elements of a landscape, and students draw it. At the end, drawings are compared, in English or Italian, and teacher shows the landscape.

Describing places was the focus of this pre-task.

5. *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* – Teacher shows a web and a spider. Students write associations of ideas.

Here learners were invited to explore unusual situations to narrate.

6. *Io non ho paura* - Teacher shows the image of a child with a particular light in his eyes. Students discuss, in English or Italian, about their own interpretation of the image.



Here the attention was drawn on thoughts and personal interpretations of reality.

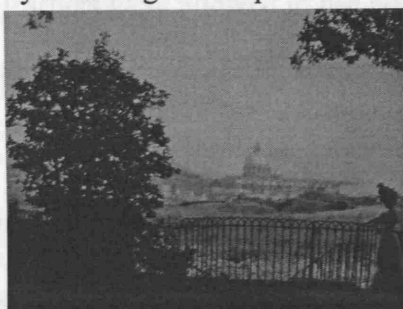
7. *Cento colpi di spazzola* – Teacher opens a discussion on writing diaries with questions such as ‘who writes a diary among you?, are you sincere with your diary? Are you afraid someone might read it?’

Students talked about writing a diary and the risks that someone else might read it.

8. *Attraverso il tuo corpo* – Teacher shows a short video-clip of a birthday party with the song ‘Happy birthday’ in Italian.

Students reacted to the pre-task with a free written association of their memories.

9. *La Ciociara* – Teacher shows the image of a woman looking at the blurred landscape of Rome, which is recognizable only by detecting the shape of St. Peters.



	Adjectives	Nouns
Foreground		
Background		

The focus was on noticing the connotative implications of a description and on the use of nouns and adjectives in Italian, which might turn into narration.

10. *La Guerra di Piero* – Students are given a sheet with scrambled words. They have to link the rhyming couplets and group the couplets they found into given macro-categories (religion, nature, feelings, moods, people, society, etc.)

grano, cuore, ora, fossi, artiglieria, soldati, m
paura, croce frontiera, tulipano, sangue, inferno,
rossi, adesso, argentati, esangue, corrente,
inverno, deve, muore, voce, maggio, peccato,
lamento, primavera, parole, coraggio, valle,
colore, giorno, cortesia

*sole, ritorno, umore, bastato, torrente, momento ,
morire, ancora, neve*
Natural Elements: Mood: War: Religion:

Learners noticed the associations of sounds and feelings.

11. *La Gita a Tindari* – Teacher says the word ‘ufficio’ and students associate words

Learners started a chain of associated words, to be spoken and then written, related to formal interactions to deal with.

In the pre-task phase, the attention was focused on the similarities and differences among learners’ feedbacks emerging during the pre-task phase, which also prepared TTL for the intercultural perspective. Being beginners, learners were allowed to use also English in this phase, mainly to convey personal reactions and emotions, to bring their world into the classroom, while the teacher was a resource driving TTL to notice and allocate attention to useful aspects of language. In particular, English was used to plan and take decisions about how to accomplish the pre-tasks, which were carried out in Italian, with a collaborative effort, balancing orientation and autonomy.

In this phase, learners and their mind sets and backgrounds were placed at the centre of the learning process. The retrieving of all the previously acquired knowledge was essential to carry out the pre-tasks, which determined a relaxed use of Italian. When learners did not know a word or an expression, they did not hesitate to ask their peers or the teacher for help or clarification. From there, pieces of language were re-constructed according to the needs, slowly enhancing a grammatical and

phonological sensitivity. Lexical and morpho-syntactic elements had to be placed in a vocabulary network, to be re-used later, in a sort of cognitive mapping of forms and meaning to be stored and re-used when necessary. This activity positively affected the way in which TTL attended to input data in the next phase and slowly introduced them to the more specifically linguistic discovery of the author's context and of his/her communicative purpose.

2.II. WHILE-TASKS

Only after this preliminary phase, were learners ready to read the literary extracts silently, so that the first contact with the text was a personal one. Then they had to solve while-tasks, mainly in pairs or small groups and therefore to collaborate with each other and integrate each other's knowledge and perceptions. In order to accomplish the assignments, the text was read over and over again, each time focusing on a different issue. The role of the teacher was that of guiding the activities and monitoring the processes activated, i.e. the pattern identification and integration into the learners' mind schemata.

At this point, reading the text was carried out mainly as recognition of the patterns and topics, which had previously emerged in the pre-task phase. In the first instance, TTL usually tended to place their attention to detect content words in order to grasp meaning. The gap, or link, between the learners' world and the writer's world also appeared almost automatically in this phase. In fact, when the task 'highlights an area of meaning in order to create a semantic 'space' which learners' current IL resources may be able to fill only partially [...] it is at this point that a language focus may be introduced' (Samuda, 2001, p. 122). Indeed, the use of tasks helped TTL dealing with the objective linguistic difficulties they encountered. Nevertheless, having the reading of a text been preceded by pre-tasks, when the reading activity was required, a large

number of the unknown words and the topic were recognized as familiar ones.

If a new form was particularly important and needed major emphasis, reinforcement tasks were introduced.

Some other tasks referred to the interpretation of the text and TTL had to choose from a list. For instance if they had to describe the general feelings the text conveys, they might tick more than one word from a list of this type:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nostalgia | <input type="checkbox"/> Speranza |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paura | <input type="checkbox"/> Disperazione |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senso di colpa | <input type="checkbox"/> Angoscia |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disperazione | <input type="checkbox"/> Inesperienza |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Allegria | <input type="checkbox"/> Fragilità |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illusione | <input type="checkbox"/> Rabbia |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tristezza | <input type="checkbox"/> Dolore |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Malinconia | <input type="checkbox"/> Impotenza |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Felicità | <input type="checkbox"/> Altro |

Here are some examples of while-tasks aiming at enhancing comprehension and favouring noticing and pattern identification strategies.

Texts	Types of while-tasks
1. <i>Lui e Io</i>	find how to express likes and dislikes
2. <i>Berah di Kibawa</i>	recognise family relationships
3. <i>Lettere dal Carcere</i>	find what to ask in informal letters to family when away
4. <i>Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli</i>	find the pronouns which refer to the people and verbs used for descriptions
5. <i>Il sentiero dei nidi di</i>	report words in the appropriate category

6. <i>Io non ho paura</i>	find the synonyms/ antonyms of the words in the text (with the use of a dictionary)
7. <i>Cento colpi di spazzola</i>	find how to report a sequence of events in the past and how to express fears and expectations
8. <i>Attraverso il tuo corpo</i>	find verbs in the present tense, imperfect tense and past tense, considering what actions do they refer to and when did these actions take place
9. <i>La Ciociara</i>	find adjectives for a connotative description of a landscape, and then re-use qualitative adjectives to describe and narrate
10. <i>La Guerra di Piero</i>	re-construct the chronological order of events.
11. <i>La Gita a Tindari</i>	report expressions showing moods and attitudes

Fig. 16 – Types of while-tasks

These examples, just to mention a few, helped direct attention to forms and to meanings and were carried out in the classroom.

When the choice fell on texts with a lower GULPEASE index, even if introduced by the pre-tasks, the amount of time devoted to linguistic tasks had to be higher. In fact, while-reading tasks compensated for the difficulty of a passage. They provided not only a clarification on the use of morpho-syntactic structures and lexicon, but they also favoured the use of reading strategies, which may be acquired, transferred and be autonomously re-employed on other occasions.

While-tasks made the text a recognition, more than a discovery and reading did not create great difficulties in comprehension, despite some

morpho-syntactic and discourse difficulties, which were overcome by while-tasks. In the production phase, TTL created rhymes linking them to semantic areas following the same criteria as in the pre-tasks.

So the use of literary extracts offered an enriched context for writing and advocated the interaction between reading and writing processes. In fact, reading alone, as the only type of activity, does not guarantee acquisition.

2.III. PRODUCTION TASKS

After the while-reading phase, the production phase involved a reconstructing capacity, which had to be applied in order to avoid errors. The process activated by production tasks became more and more familiar and progressively enhanced learners' capacity to identify, control and re-use patterns in the target language. So this process, which was activated by tasks and was originated by the elaborated reception of a literary extract, may be seen as an act favouring the transformation of ideas and cultural views into coherent and cohesive texts, which have to meet a specific purpose. In the production phase learners included their mind sets and visions of the world.

The question of cultural influences in restructuring written foreign language texts has variously been discussed over the years. An interesting hypothesis on the reason why cultural factors and L1 may determine the development of writing skills, is the one by Kaplan (1966), even if he dealt mainly with academic texts in his studies. He was among the first ones who noticed the differences in structuring English essays by learners of different cultural backgrounds. At the same level of language competence, he noticed a repeated pattern in choices and preferences of each nationality group, which differed from the linearity of the English written by native speakers. He interpreted his data as a representation of the stylistic characteristics and discourse patterns of each culture and tradition in the different linguistic communities. Today, we would say

that stylistic phenomena, such as ‘digressive patterns of writing in Romance languages [...] (which) permit tangential material to be introduced in the discourse’ (Swales, 1990), are much more than style, they are the reflection of the unspoken element of languages, i.e. the mind sets of its speakers, as discussed in previous chapters.

If this is true, learners couldn’t adapt their meanings to a new language only by encaging them in the forms of that language but they needed to become familiar with the implications and therefore with textual models in the target language.

In the production tasks, TTL were asked to write their own personalised text, following the example of the literary extract proposed in each module, as follows:

Texts	Types of production tasks
1. <i>Lui e Io</i>	Interview your partner/sister/brother/friend/mate on his/her likes and dislikes, decide the questions you ask and report the answers. Then write your diary about the differences and similarities between the two of you. (Text type: diary)
2. <i>Berah di Kibawa</i>	Choose a far-away country and gather information on it. You are a child living there. Write the description of yourself and your family. (Text type: description of people)
3. <i>Lettere dal Carcere</i>	Take the role of a person who had to leave his/her country for various reasons (politics, religion, study, gap year, etc.) and decide whom you would write to, what you would say to re-assure the people at home and get information about life there. Then write your informal letter. (Text type: informal)

	letter)
4. <i>Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli</i>	Choose a picture or a painting of a square, meaningful to you, and list nouns and adjectives you might need. Then write a description of the square. (Text type: description of place)
5. <i>Il sentiero dei nidi di</i>	You are a child and you are experiencing an extra-ordinary event (a tsunami, a war, etc). Imagine context and setting, look around you and list what you think, see, hear, are afraid of, or do not understand. Then write your perceptions as a first or third person narration. (Text type: narration).
6. <i>Io non ho paura</i>	You are in an open field and find a hidden place (a grotto or a hole) where someone is kept (a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, a child), by someone else (criminals, fairies, elves, peasants, terrorists, a political or religious group, etc.), for some reasons (money, ideology, fear, etc.). What can you do? Write your plans to solve the problem, as if reporting your thoughts and actions. (Text type: first or third person narration).
7. <i>Cento colpi di spazzola</i>	Consider 3 days of your life, with 3 main characters: one is your mother, the other two are a friend you know and an acquaintance who has just been introduced to you. An unexpected event happens. Write the short diary of these three days. (Text type: diary).
8. <i>Attraverso il tuo corpo</i>	Who is at your birthday party? Where is it? Write the diary of the party. (Text type: diary).
9. <i>La Ciociara</i>	Look at the following picture: What is the woman thinking, where has she been and why? What is she looking at? Write a narration of her recent story as a third person narration. (Text type: third person narration).
10. <i>La Guerra di Piero</i>	a) it is your last day of a war which you did not want to serve. Write a letter to your girl friend. (Text type: letter). b) Choose a topic (love, friendship, a

	season, hell, heaven, loneliness, etc.). Write associated words, rhyming with each other in couplets. Now link the words in meaningful lines, in order to write your own poem. (Text type: poem).
11. <i>La Gita a Tindari</i>	You are in an office (immigration, registry, tax, visa, police, etc.) and need to ask a not very collaborative employee for something. Write the dialogue between you and the employee. (Text type: dialogue).

Fig 17 – Types of production tasks

Here are some examples of texts produced by students:

1. *Lui e Io -*

Io amo lo sport. A lui invece non.. In realtà lui non fa che lamentarsi quando voglio camminare. [...] Io amo il vino, Lo odia. (Brigitte).

Lui ama riposarsi, invece io amo fare lo shopping (Simone).

Io sono cinese, e lui è italiano. Lui parla sempre di bell amore grande con la passione calda, ma io no parlo molto (Hing-Hsiu).

Being the first module in the TTC, with the written production taking place in the second or third week of instruction in IFL, i.e. after 2-3 hours of TTC classroom contact, the results are extremely positive. Following the input, learners' attention was alerted on pronouns and agreements subject-verb in the first and third person.

2. *Berach di Kibawa –*

Wadi Musa è il paese di Yusuf, questo posto è situato al sud-ovest della Giordania, nel deserto. Yusuf è il padre della famiglia Zaid. Questa famiglia è composta da Yusuf,

dale sue quattro mogli e da dodici figli – nove maschi e tres femine (Benjamin).

Hang è cinese. Abita in Shanghai con sua famiglia. Shanghai è una città molto grande. È situata in Asia. [...] Perchè suoi genitori non hanno molto denaro, Hong deve lavorare in una fabbrica del stoffa (Cecilie).

In Cecilie's text the omission of the subject shows that the learner noticed the use in Italian as it appeared in the extract.

3. *Lettere dal Carcere -*

Ciao, mia cara sorellina!
Finalmente scrivo una lettera per te. Sto lavorando molto qui a Londra. La vita è frenetica qui e il lavoro è molto pesante.[...]Ora ti lascio [...] Ti mando tanti baci (Magdalena)

Here learners mainly reported chunks and formulas of informal letters, adapting them to their own meanings.

4. *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli -*



(Collage created by Maxime).

La piazza non e' che un grande rettangolo, divisa al centro dalla grande statua. Nelle parte bassa ci sono alberi e in fondo c'e' la chiesa. La piazza ha case da una parte e dall'altra il negozio di gelate (Maxime)

Questa piazza è la piazza principale a Verona, nel Nord d'Italia. Si può immaginare Giulietta sul balcone desiderando Romeo d'arrivare (Oliver)

Oliver's text shows the use of the impersonal form, which would not have been found in a beginner who attended traditional instruction only.

5. *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* –

Alessandro si sveglia. Non può vedere niente poichè la stanza è piena di fumo. Comincia di tossire appena può respirare (Mary.)

Anche oggi no ho capito cosa sta succedendo. Ogni volta che esco da casa devo correre perchè c'è la Guerra di civile nella mia paese (Sadaf).

Here the interesting element is the syntactical choice of using short paragraphs as a stylistic representation of the anxiety of the situations learners were asked to report.

6. *Io non ho paura* -

Mentre tornavo a casa, trovai dietro una siepe, una fossa in cui sono tenuta prigioniera una vecchia [...] Piangeva e mi ha detto che gli elfi l'hanno sequestrata [...] (Garielle).

Sto correndo, contento questo buono giorno d'estate, in un bel campo di grano, giocando sono stato il capitano della cabina di pilotaggio. . Il sole sta tramontando e i miei amici mi hanno lasciato [...] (Jacob)

The sequencing of time is usually considered an advanced skill, while here *ab initio* learners show a correct alternation of tenses to express the elapsing of time.

7. *Cento colpi di spazzola* –

Caro Diario!

Ho mal di testa, devo prendere un'aspirina! Ieri, era il notte di San Silvestro. Sono stato ad una festa con Marcello, un ragazzo della mia classe a scuola. (Amina)

Writing a diary, in modules 7 and 8, opened a path towards learners' experiences, thus allowing free productions of personalised texts.

8. *Attraverso il tuo corpo -*

Questa mattina nessuno mi ha celebrato il mio compleanno. È vero che abbiamo già fatto tutto ieri: cena in famiglia, anche un po di champagne [...] (Charlotte)

The diaries were all very lively and corresponding to personal experiences during a birthday.

9. *La Ciociara -*



Salvador Dalí, *Figura a una finestra*, 1925

In lontananza vedo una barca, Mi rendo conto che mi trattengo il fiato; mio petto fai male. Ci siamo, al mare, una lunga striscia blue all'orizzonte, ma perché non sono contenta? (Katie)

The narrations, starting from the connotation of landscapes, were structured re-using and re-adjusting the syntax and the stylistic choices of the input.

10. *La Guerra di Piero -*

*a) Carissima Ninetta,
sto in battaglia. Sento la mancanza di tu, e non posso smettere di pensare a te. È come un incubo (John)*

b) AMORE

Sento molto dolore

Hai fatto un errore

Forse devo essere arrabbiato

Sempre tu ho baciato (Liam)

ESTATE

In estate mi piace molto quando resto sveglio

So che questo giorno sarà meglio

Vado per tutta la giornata lentamente

O guida dov'è splendido con la mia patente (Natalia)

Writing a poem was an extremely successful task and involved learners in discussions about the sounds and the connotative or metaphorical meanings of words.

11. La Gita a Tindari –

- *Buongiorno, vengo riportare un crimine*

- *Buongiorno signora, lei deve andare dal mio collega per identificarvi, poi deve dare prova di residenza e certificato di soggiorno.*

- *Ma no, voglio solo chiarire che c'è stato un furto (Charlotte)*

Here, social interactions were considered and applied to situations which might occur to learners.

The use of tasks helped to contextualise the act of writing since 'tasks are fundamental in learning to write and represent a central aspect of the teacher planning and delivery of a writing course' (Hyland, 2003). In the words of a student:

It has been useful to fill in charts when studying texts or in order to plan our writing

So the objective of the production tasks was that of making the unfamiliar world a familiar context and, for a start, to raise the learners' awareness of such differences and help them to find their own

perspective and position on the way they structure a text in a foreign language, keeping in mind both their views and that of foreign language community.

At the same time the act of composing is the result of a great number of mental events in the minds of the writers in general and of the learners in particular, such as noticing, selecting and reconstructing forms and ideas. This process was repeated over and over again, and was applied to each module.

In this perspective, the written texts produced by students at the end of the modules combined the need to express personal, cultural and experiential perspectives with a rule-based linguistic system, and represented the effort to find a balance between creativity and genres, as a set of communication purposes to be shared with the community of Italian speakers (Swales, 1990). Writing became a situated act in which input became intake (Van Patten, 1996), and linguistic materials were assimilated and integrated.

3. MONITORING AND EVALUATING

In the monitoring phase (Fig 6, Ch. 3), the method used in the action-research has been a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research. Before and during work, at any phase of their development, students were monitored and interviewed in order to detect their reactions to the study of language in general and to the activities they were carrying out in particular. Interviews and diaries were used in varying phases of the research and classroom observations have ensured an analysis of the process of teaching/learning.

The purpose of the observations has been to find out what interesting patterns emerged in the three year action-research and what relevance the results obtained may have to the larger world of SLA research. TTL' attitudes and interactions, processes and productions have been monitored and referred to SLA paradigms in order to find out the impact the TTC approach has on language learning in particular and on cognitive abilities in general. Moreover, the didactic choices have been justified and analysed according to the major debates on SLA and in the light of the most recent findings.

In this perspective, the IFL classroom slowly became a new kind of learning environment, through the reactions and interactions triggered by Italian short literary extracts and tasks, at the beginning with some resistance and difficulty and then more and more smoothly.

TTL' mind sets and personalities were respected and included in the preparatory, interpretative and productive phases; by accomplishing the tasks they became the protagonists of the learning process. Confrontation among peers and with texts and tasks slowly activated a set of inferences and associations, modifications, negotiations and interpretations that allowed learners to identify the salient features both of the message and of the way the message was conveyed, i.e. the use of language and its implications for the reader/listener.

Investigations and feedbacks were motivated by the idea that 'asking participants to delve into their own state of consciousness and verbally report on cognitive, affective or social aspects of that consciousness is the technique used in introspective studies' (Brown & Rodgers, 2002).

As in the majority of introspective investigations, a great deal of information was elicited not only from verbal, but also from non-verbal reactions. This is the case with the think-aloud reactions to tasks, which allowed a reconstruction of the strategies adopted by learners in specific circumstances and of the processes taking place mainly in reading comprehension and written production.

3.1 Monitoring while-tasks

Since tasks in the classroom were mainly carried out in small groups or pairs, participants' talk was monitored through notes and/or recordings.

In order to monitor and analyse the process taking place in TTL while accomplishing the while-tasks, corresponding to what was called phase 3,

learners were also repeatedly asked to write down thoughts and perceptions during the accomplishment of tasks in the form of short, scrambled anonymous diaries. Sometimes they were also interviewed retrospectively.

Here are a few examples collected over the three years of the action-research. In bold is shown how strongly learners perceived at a deeper level the importance of noticing the gap between languages and between cultures.

I learn: new words

grammar

how Italian is different from English

Having studied in France, the grammar is not new to me [...].

*However it is nice to be **reminded of some stuff**. I am not sure I learnt anything but it was interesting*

-

*Useful for learning new grammar & **seeing how it is used properly***

*-[...] **recognizing** different texts and expressions*

The TTL's lexical choices to describe their thoughts while accomplishing tasks, i.e. *how Italian is different*, *reminded*, *seeing how*, *recognizing* among others, show that the mental activity activated is that of integrating the new information into pre-existing schemata, and then adjusting it.

The texts that were accompanied with tasks made TTL aware that reading and writing are complex and integrated skills which require attention and re-elaboration and TTL show how the interaction writer-text-reader was perceived:

[TTC] Instructs you to lots of different authors & styles of writing

*[...] I like these **worlds that we are opening** [...]*

Interacting with the authors

*I am actually enjoying this class where we have explored these texts [...] the **range of texts covered** is also really good because it is wide and varied*

*I did enjoy **learning about the texts** and pictures themselves [...]*

Reading, in its uni-dimensional aspect of dealing only with language forms separated from meaning, appeared very seldom. The majority referred to the reading activities as enhancing their views of the world, in general, and of the literary world in particular.

3.2 Monitoring production tasks

Monitoring written production as a result of tasks to accomplish at the end of each TTC module, implied not only the recognition of TTL's interlanguage development at the end of each phase and the development of the learners' familiarity with the Italian language system in general, but also the cognitive implications of the process of writing and the strategies applied throughout. Being a task-generated written production, the evaluative attention to specific aspects of language in this phase was

combined with the holistic perspective implied in the use of tasks, and the feedback given to TTL did not intrude aggressively in the learners' acquisitional processes (Doughty, 2001); on the contrary, feedback increased TTL awareness by melding experiential learning with instructional guidelines, cognitive processes and linguistic output. TTC modules led to a balance between explicit instruction and personal reconstructions inductively activated through tasks (see ch.4 and section 2 of this chapter) and the written texts generated by students combined what language elements TTL learned (declarative knowledge) and how they organized them and integrated them in their schemata (procedural knowledge).

It was important to find reliable measures to identify different aspects of the written texts produced by TTL. 'In general, there is some consensus that measures are required in the three areas of complexity, accuracy and fluency' (Skehan, 2001, p.170). But in the literature the above identified categories mainly refer to oral performance. Since I was dealing with written production and not with oral production, I slightly modified the macro-categories usually accepted. Therefore, I decided to select the measures proposed by Wolfe-Quintero et al. (1998) and to adapt them to my assessment.

In the macro-category of **complexity**, which implies a rating of the variety of syntactic forms appearing in a text, I considered the number of dependent and co-ordinate clauses used by a learner to develop a topic in

a t-unit (topic-unit), often corresponding to a paragraph. To this micro-category, I added the Re-elaboration of Model (RM) category, which is a specific feature of the TTC instruction and which includes the coherent and cohesive re-use of elements drawn from the text used as a model.

Complexity Ratios

Dependent Coordinate Clauses ³ per t-units	and DCC (number of dependent and coordinate clauses divided by t-units)
Re-elaboration of model	RM (use of formulas, chunks and appropriate register: given in percentage)

In the macro-category of **accuracy** I decided to include what Wolfe-Quintero et al. (ibid) call ‘intelligibility index’. This is a qualitative and holistic index which gives an overview of the level of clear development of a topic in a t-unit. It is quite a subjective index, from 1 to 5, but it is helpful to balance the quantitative account of errors. The ‘error index’ merely reports the number of errors, without giving them a value and include morpho-syntactic and word-order errors. Therefore, the intelligibility index shows how, despite the number of errors, a text may be understood by a reader, since, even if errors are present, they are minor ones and do not prevent comprehension. 1.0 index represents an error-free t-unit.

³ Considering that the learners are ab initio learners, the interesting element is the need of complexifying a basic thought and expand it, either through dependent or through coordinate clauses

Accuracy Ratios

Intelligibility Index	II/T (0=unintelligible; 1=partly intelligible; 2=completely intelligible; 3=completely accurate) (sum of point per t-unit divided by t-units)
Error Index	EI (EFW-E/EFW, number of error-free words minus number of errors divided by number of error-free words)

Considering the fact that I was dealing with written texts and that at this level of language competence length measures were not so important, I decided to assign fluency the value of a micro-category. Length measures were balanced by a qualitative micro-category which I called 'creativity index', rating from 1 to 5. As previously discussed for the intelligibility index, this index is also a subjective one, but it was necessary to offer a more holistic type of assessment. This is why I called this macro-category '**holistic rating**'. Therefore, fluency is considered here mainly as a length measure, i.e. the number of words necessary to develop a topic, and creativity shows the level of individual and original re-elaboration.

Holistic rating

Fluency	FL (number of words divided by t-units)
Creativity	CR (1 to 5, from minimum to maximum creativity)

To sum up the chosen measures are the following:

Holistic rating	Accuracy Ratios	Complexity Ratios
FL (number of words divided by t-units) CR (1 to 5)	II/T (0 to 3, sum of points per t-unit divided by t-units) EI (EFW-E/EFW, number of error-free words minus number of errors divided by number of error-free words)	DDC (number of dependent and coordinate clauses divided by t-units) RM (percentage of re-use of formulas, chunks, appropriate register)

Fig.18 – Measures for written productions

Data on the elaboration of input and on the interlanguage development have been collected from students' written productions and measured following the above-discussed parameters. Nevertheless, a more specific analysis has been carried out in order to check whether specific improvements in the use of language and/or changing attitudes towards language and culture occurred during TTC.

5. THE VALIDATION OF THE RESULTS

- 1. DISCUSSION OF LEARNERS' PRODUCTIONS*
- 2. DISCUSSION OF LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES*
- 3. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS*

1. DISCUSSION OF LEARNERS' PRODUCTION

In the validation phase, besides making adjustments to the modules, my priority was assessing the effects of my innovation and its impact on the TTL's interlanguage development, in order to find confirmations of the validity of the chosen approach.

Therefore, here assessment should not be viewed in terms of achievement, but mainly as a formative evaluation, in consideration of what each learner 'can do' at a specific level of instruction, and aims at gathering 'information which is fed back into the course' (CEF, Ch.9.3.5).

So the TTL written productions of each TTC module were collected and analysed over a period of three academic years (2002-05), with an average of 85 students monitored, 34 in the first year, 51 in the second year and 27 in the last year of study (see fig.7, ch.3). Since the written texts elaborated at home or in the classroom by each student were often the result of a collaborative activity and of negotiations carried out in the classroom, I decided to consider the productions collected each year per TTC module. Therefore the number of written productions analysed is less than the number of students involved over the three year action-research, given that each production implies the involvement of at least two TTL.

In the perspective of this action-research, my discussion of learners' productions is concentrated on the average response to each module since I was interested in finding out a common pattern of reactions to TTC,

more than in an analytical case study of each student's or of each year-group's development.

As stated in the introduction, my objective was not to use data in order to find statistical evidence, but to be supported in describing and evaluating TTL's productions, following the parameters discussed in the previous chapter, i.e holistic rating, accuracy ratios and complexity ratios.

The distribution of the modules per year is in Fig. 14, ch. 4. Each year there were 7 fixed modules and other varying ones (*Attraverso il tuo corpo, Berah di Kibawa, La gita a Tindari, Io non ho paura, Cento colpi di spazzola*). Some modules have been repeated over the three years, some others have been repeated only once or twice.

The first column refers to the literary extracts and to the number of written productions analysed. The other columns refer to the mean of the variables, as they are described in Fig. 18, Ch.4.

Year 2002-2003

Model Text <i>Number of productions</i>	Holistic rating		Accuracy Ratios		Complexity Ratios	
	FL	CR	II/T	EI	DCC	RM
1. <i>Lui ed io</i> 28 productions	48.0	2	1	0.5	3.4	86%
2. <i>Lettere dal Carcere</i> 25 productions	55.0	3	1.5	0.8	1.6	90%
3. <i>Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli</i> 23 productions	47.0	3	2	0.7	1.8	70%
4. <i>Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno</i> 25 productions	27.0	4	1.5	0.6	1.6	30%
5. <i>La Ciociara</i> 28 productions	46.0	3	2	0.8	1.4	75%

6a. <i>La Guerra di Piero</i> 12 productions (letter)	44.0	2	3	0.8	1.5	30%
6b. <i>La Guerra di Piero</i> 18 productions (poem)	n.a	5	4	0.9	n.a	70%
7. <i>Attraverso il tuo corpo</i> 25 productions	30.0	3	3	0.9	1.5	70%

Fig.19 – Mean rating of TTC modules – Year 2002-03

Year 2003-04

Model Text Number of productions	Holistic rating		Accuracy Ratios		Complexity Ratios	
	FL	CR	II/ T	EI	DCC	RM
1. <i>Lui ed io</i> 25 productions	51.0	4	3	0.8	3.3	89%
2. <i>Berah di Kibawa</i> 28 productions	58.0	4	2	0.7	2.4	78%
3. <i>Lettere dal Carcere</i> 23 productions	54.0	5	2	0.9	1.4	88%
4. <i>Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli</i> 21 productions	51.0	6	2	0.9	1.5	89%
5. <i>Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno</i> 23 productions	31.0	4	2	0.9	1.9	38%
6. <i>La Ciociara</i> 25 productions	51.0	3	2	0.9	1.5	84%
7a. <i>La Guerra di Piero</i> 10 productions	46.0	4	2	0.8	1.2	30%
7b. <i>La Guerra di Piero</i> 14 productions	n.a	5	3	0.9	n.a	20%
8. <i>La gita a Tindari</i> 25 productions	n.a	4	2	0.7	n.a	60%

Fig.20 – Mean rating of TTC modules – Year 2003-04

Year 2004-05

Model Text Number of productions	Holistic rating		Accuracy Ratios		Complexity Ratios	
	FL	CR	II/ T	EI	DCC	RM
1. <i>Lui ed io</i> 22 productions	51.0	3	2	0.5	2.9	89%
2. <i>Berah di Kibawa</i> 20 productions	62.0	6	2	0.9	2.6	82%
3. <i>Lettere dal Carcere</i> 20 productions (25+23+20)	59.0	4	2	0.9	1.7	92%
4. <i>Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli</i> 18 productions	52.0	6	2	0.9	1.8	91%
5. <i>Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno</i> 22 productions	32.0	4	2	0.9	1.9	42%
6. <i>Io non ho paura</i> 24 productions	35.0	2	2	0.7	2.0	30%
7. <i>Cento colpi di spazzola</i> 27 productions	55.0	2	2	0.9	3.3	85%
8. <i>La Ciociara</i> 22 productions	53.0	3	2	0.9	1.6	81%
9a. <i>La Guerra di Piero</i> 8 productions (letter)	45.0	3	2	0.8	1.2	30%
10b. <i>La Guerra di Piero</i> 13 productions (poem)	n.a	5	3	0.9	n.a	20%

Fig.21 – Mean rating of TTC modules – Year 2004-05

I was particularly interested in the validation of the impact each module had on learners and on the general progression in their writing skills as a result of a specific module's training, i.e. what learners 'could do' after each module. So the mean attained in each module, for each item of the table, was particularly interesting.

Here is a table summarizing the above discussed results. In bold are the modules, which were substituted or added during the action-research:

Model Text Number of productions	Holistic rating		Accuracy Ratios		Complexity Ratios	
	FL	CR	II/ T	EI	DCC	RM
1. <i>Lui ed io</i> 75 productions (28+25+22)	50.0	3	2	0.6	3.2	88%
2. <i>Berah di Kibawa</i> 48 productions (28+20)	60.0	5	2	0.8	2.5	80%
3. <i>Lettere dal Carcere</i> 68 productions (25+23+20)	56.0	4	2	0.9	1.6	90%
4. <i>Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli</i> 62 productions (23+21+18)	50.0	5	2	0.9	1.7	90%
5. <i>Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno</i> 70 productions (25+23+22)	30.0	4	2	0.9	1.8	40%
6. <i>Io non ho paura</i> 24 productions	35.0	2	2	0.7	2.0	30%
7. <i>Cento colpi di spazzola</i> 27 productions	55.0	2	2	0.9	3.3	85%
8. <i>Attraverso il tuo corpo</i> 25 productions	30.0	3	3	0.9	1.5	70%
9. <i>La Ciociara</i> 75 productions (28+25+22)	50.0	3	2	0.9	1.5	80%
10a. <i>La Guerra di Piero</i> 30 productions (12+10+8)	45.0	3	2	0.8	1.2	30%
10b. <i>La Guerra di Piero</i> 45 productions (18+14+13)	n.a	5	3	0.9	n.a	20%
11. <i>La gita a Tindari</i> 25 productions	n.a	4	2	0.7	n.a	60%

Fig.22 – Mean rating of TTC modules

It is clear that, even in the modules repeated only once or twice, the results were consistent with the other ones. This sustains the hypothesis that it is not the single module or the thematic units that are interesting in this study, but general TTC approach to language teaching and learning, from input selection to the organization, progression and repetition of tasks.

1.1 Holistic rating

1.1.1 Fluency –The fluency rating in written texts is quite controversial, and more so in a production where the Time variable is not considered indeed. In fact, learners are all *ab initio*, therefore they are given an unlimited free time to accomplish their production task, partly in the classroom and partly at home, individually or in pairs. Specifically, the first part of each production task, being a decision-making activity, requires negotiation and discussions, and is usually a classroom activity. The rating chosen to determine fluency has been the number of words used per t-unit.

It is very interesting to notice that fluency and complexity rating in the first modules each year are high for total beginners who have been learning Italian for just a few weeks. In the modules based on *La Guerra di Piero* (b) and *La gita a Tindari*, being respectively a poem and a dialogue, FL and DCC data are missing. This is because the parameters for poems and dialogue would have given scores, which couldn't be directly comparable. For instance, in a poem or in a dialogue the number of words used per t-unit is usually quite low and the dependent or

coordinate clauses are usually very few. For example, in the first prompt of a dialogue - *Buongiorno, vengo riportare un crimine.* (Charlotte) -, or in the lines of a poem - *Esce il sole, nascono i fiori, È il tempo dei nuovi amori* (Tessa and Sal) -, just a few words are used in very simple syntactic forms, even if the texts may be considered intelligible and original.

So, I thought it more appropriate not to include any value for *La Guerra di Piero* (b) and *La gita a Tindari*.

1.1.2 Creativity - The production tasks allow a great deal of negotiation and the use of imagination, which correspond to the visualization of the learners' direct or indirect experiences. The level of creativity attained overall is quite high, with peaks in the poem writing, often being the fruit of collaboration, and in the description of the persons for instance, '*Mi chiamo Nu e io ho dodici anni, Habito sull'isola di Phuket in Thailandia[...]*', (Laura), and of the square of learners' choice (*Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli*), for instance '*Questa piazza è la piazza principale a Verona, nel Nord d'Italia. Si può immaginare Giulietta sul balcone desiderando Romeo d'arrivare*', (Oliver). As for the description of a place, some students drew their ideal squares, some others brought pictures taken during vacations, as in the case of Tanya, *Questa piazza che voglio descriverli ha la sua località nel centro della capitale della provincia della comunità Valenciana, Aliacante[...]*', (Tanya). Written productions show an imaginative effort and the search to communicate one's own experience, i.e. adapting models to personal needs. In the

description of the young person living in a remote country (*Berah di Kibawa*) research and experience contributed to the creativity of the text. In each module, creativity proved to be strongly linked to personal experiences and to the wish to bring personal views and interests into the text.

1.2 Accuracy Ratios

The following diagrams help to detect the trends objectively, resulting from the 3 years of collecting data.

1.2.1 Intelligibility index

The intelligibility index is a general rating to calculate how comprehensible a text is, regardless of accuracy.

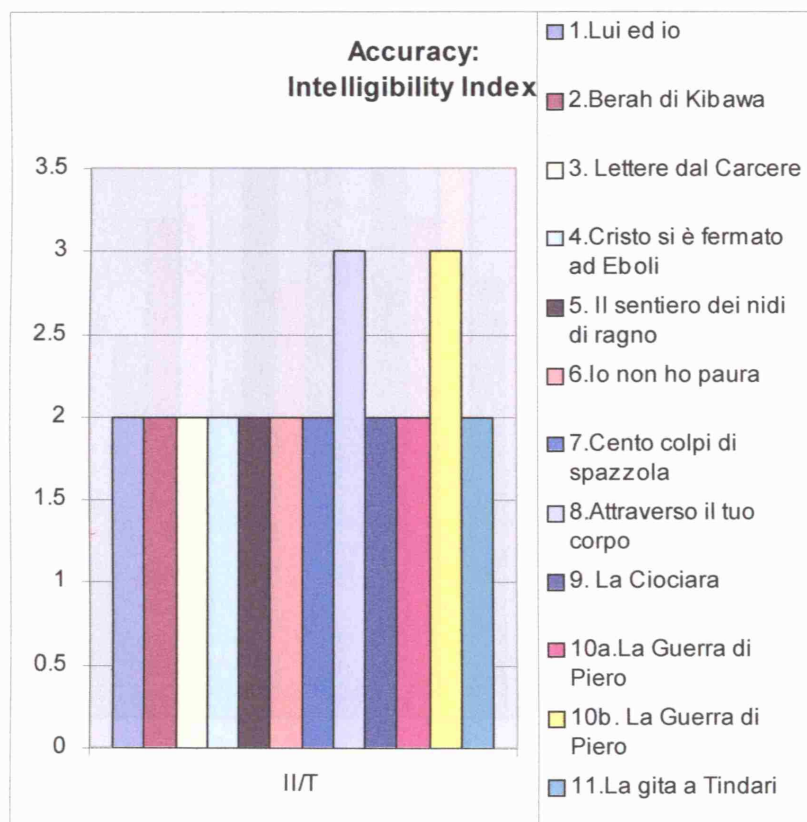


Fig 23. Mean Intelligibility Index

In general in this phase all productions tend to be fairly comprehensible, since t-units are quite simple and to the point. For instance, in a text produced in the module *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, ‘*Durante la Guerra il bambino si è divertito piuttosto. In gli occhi del bambino era un peccato che [...]*’ (Kathryn), there are some errors which do not prevent comprehension.

1.2.2 Error index

The error index is calculated with a shared formula: error free words minus errors divided by error free words (Wolfe-Quintero et al, 1998).

High values, close to 1, show a higher accuracy:

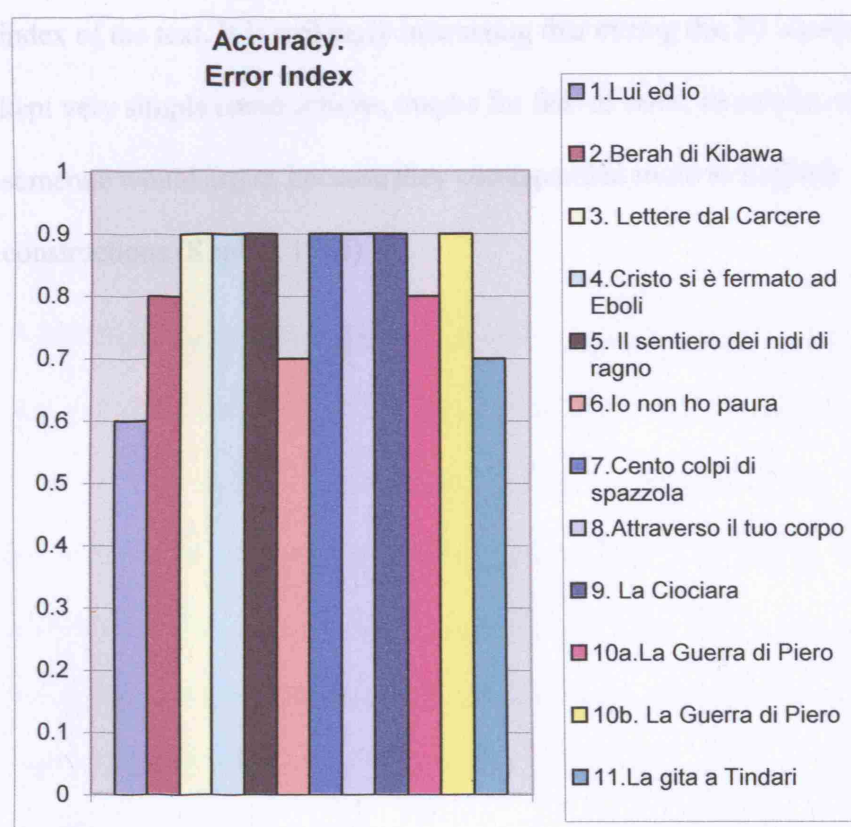


Figure 24 – Mean Error Index

Even if the focus of tasks was not particularly on morpho-syntactic aspects, grammatical sensitivity was enhanced as a result of incidental learning. The higher error index appears in the first module, probably because of the initial impact and the lack of familiarity with the procedures to be activated. For instance, modules 1 to 5 result to have the same level of intelligibility, but different levels of errors.

1.3 Complexity Ratios

1.3.1 Dependent and coordinate clauses

The dependent and coordinate clauses per t-unit show the complexity index of the text. It is strikingly interesting that during the 20 weeks TTL kept very simple constructions, maybe for fear of error, or maybe, as someone would argue, because they corresponded more to English constructions (Kaplan, 1966).

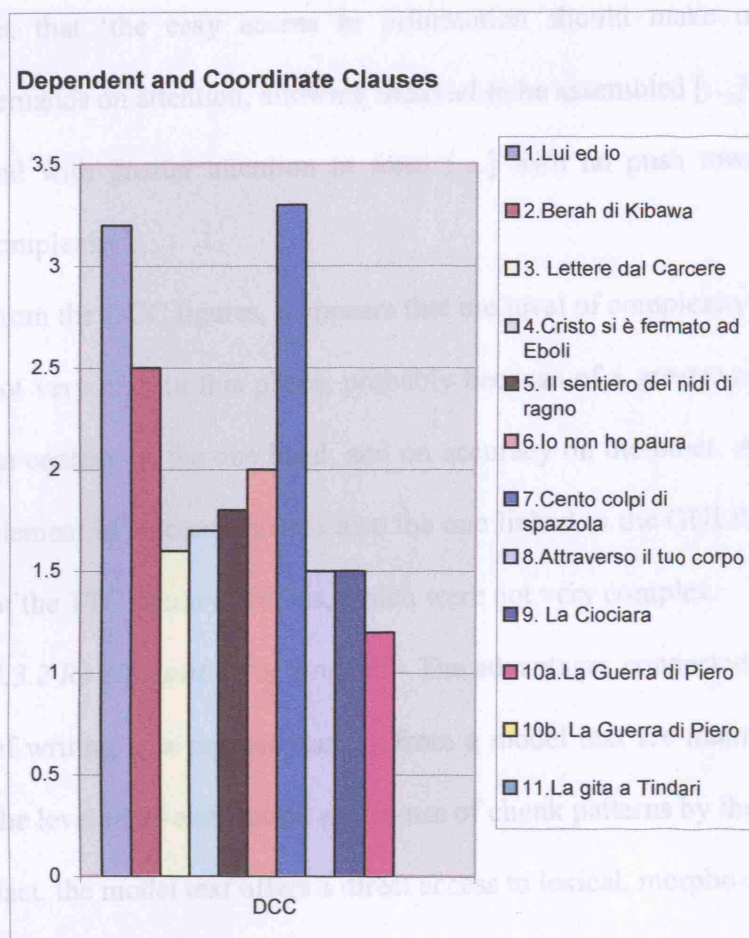


Fig.25 – Mean DCC Index

It is interesting to notice that the complexity level is higher in the first text produced, the diary in the module *Lui ed io*, which is also the least accurate. This probably shows the attempt to conform to the literary extract as much as possible, although accuracy was lost in the re-adaptation and personalization. This is probably due not only to the low initial competence in Italian (the first production was handed in in the fourth week of classes for ab initio learners), but also to the lack of familiarity with tasks.

In fact, the advantage of being familiar with the information to reconstruct is in line with what Skehan (2001) hypothesizes about speech,

i.e. that 'the easy access to information should make only limited demands on attention, allowing material to be assembled [...] more easily and with greater attention to form [...] with no push towards greater complexity'.

From the DCC figures, it appears that the level of complexity is generally not very high in this phase, probably because of a greater concentration on content on the one hand, and on accuracy on the other. An important element to be considered is also the one linked to the GULPEASE index of the TTC literary extracts, which were not very complex.

1.3.2 Re-elaboration of a model - The advantages connected with the act of writing as a process starting from a model text are mainly shown on the level of re-elaboration and re-use of chunk patterns by the students. In fact, the model text offers a direct access to lexical, morpho-syntactic and discourse items, thus facilitating the discourse-based creation of a new personalized text, originated by a template. This implies the recognition of both lexical and semantic salience in the text and the 'creative' application of the items recognized as salient to a new version, thus influencing the entire linguistic act to be re-produced (given cues) and then freely produced (new cues). The pragmatic strength of the operation is kept by the re-use of referential and evocative elements. The new creative versions are built on the materials used in TTC, and, hopefully, progressively stored in memory and continuously re-used when building new texts. In the first stages, the production of a rule-based and accurate discourse requires greater efforts and attention and the interlanguage is

less fluent and accurate. Slowly the attention is not only drawn by the linguistic system, but also by the images and cultural implications to be represented in the text.

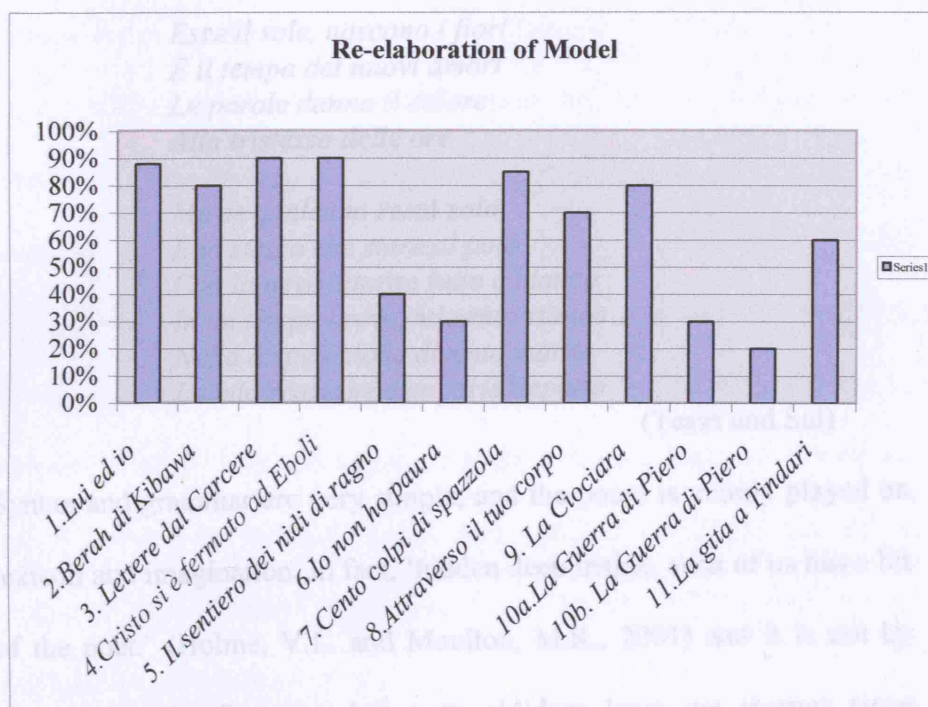


Fig 26 – Mean Re-elaboration Percentage

The diagram shows that learners relied on model texts to a very high degree. It is interesting to note that, according to the parameters used, in the writing of the poem (production 10.b from the module *La guerra di Piero*) the reference to the ballad was determined not by the use of words or of chunk-patterns, but only by stylistic aspects such as the length of stanzas and use of rhymes. The poems written by the students were all built on a 4 stanza pattern, with one longer stanza. Here is an example which was elaborated by *ab initio* learners between their 13th and 16th week of TTC (spring term):

*La solitudine
È la stagione di primavera
E nel mio cuore c'è gioia vera
La mia passione di novità
Lascia il dolore e trova felicità*

*Esce il sole, nascono i fiori
È il tempo dei nuovi amori
Le parole danno il colore
Alla tristezza delle ore*

*Ma se qualcuno resta solo
È lo stesso che stare al polo
Con la neve intorno tutto è bianco
In un tempo breve, mi sento stanco
Nella disperazione divento matto
La mia reazione è un forte impatto*

(Tessa and Sal)

Syntax and grammar are very simple, and the poem is mainly played on lexicon and imagination. In fact, 'hidden deep inside, each of us has a bit of the poet.' (Holme, V.L. and Moulton, M.R., 2001) and it is not by chance that the first complete texts children learn are rhymes since 'poetry takes the structure and beauty of language and provides a personal world to explore' (ibid.) and communicate. While writing the poem, TTL, who were retrospectively interviewed about the creation of the poem, almost unanimously emphasized the idea that they enjoyed 'playing' with the sounds and musicality of Italian words.

From the data discussed until now, there is little evidence that a complete accuracy or a high complexity rate is the only measures of the process of guided-creative writing. In fact, they represent only two of the elements to be considered, and they are not even the most important ones in this phase.

From my point of view, the approximation to a correct, native-like, written performance was determined by the complexity, not so much of units, but of planning and revising, of exploring and reconstructing. Moreover, the approach to the process of writing through tasks allowed a greater respect for individual differences, aptitudes and mind sets. Writing was perceived as an interactive activity requiring negotiation and attention, more than grammar knowledge only. An awareness of the writing process was raised beyond contingent tasks and the repeated reflection about writing contributed to discovering and then building a perspective of the self as a writer. In addition to this, the need to respect text types and to modulate tones and perspectives, gave classroom writing a contextualised status and the awareness of different styles, discourses and registers.

These elements were particularly evident in the RM measures, which showed TTL having a greater familiarity with diary (modules 1, 7 and 8), letter writing (module 3) and descriptive texts (modules 2,4 and 9), while narrative models (modules 5 and 6) seemed to be more difficult to be reproduced. Nevertheless modules 5 and 6 were in the average as for the other measures.

2. DISCUSSION OF LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES

In order to complete the monitoring and validation phases, it seemed important to support the objective assessment of TTL's achievements with the average subjective TTL's reactions to each TTC module. This was in line with the acknowledged importance of qualitative and introspective analysis in action-research. The instruments I systematically used for this purpose were questionnaires, even though TTL were occasionally either asked to write down diaries about what they were doing and how they felt about it, or they were interviewed. Questionnaires and diaries were returned anonymously and on a voluntary basis and served as a further confirmation of the process taking place during TTC.

2.1 Feedback on text-types

In the questionnaire TTL were given on their perceptions of text types, the results were very encouraging. The question was:

Consider the texts as a model of different text types. How would you rate the awareness you have reached on how to write a text from a given text-type model:

Rating:

1) Very Good 2) Good 3) Fair 4) Unsatisfactory 5) I don't know

In order to discuss TTL's feedbacks, TTC modules are ordered as a whole under their thematic units, and not in the sequence they were presented each year.

The questionnaire was given at the end of each module and the answers to each questionnaire were returned by approximately 80% TTL

attending the module. Considering the returned questionnaires in the three academic years of the research, the answers may be summarized as follows:

I. MY WORLD

Lui ed io, Natalia Ginzburg

Berah di Kibawa, Dacia Maraini

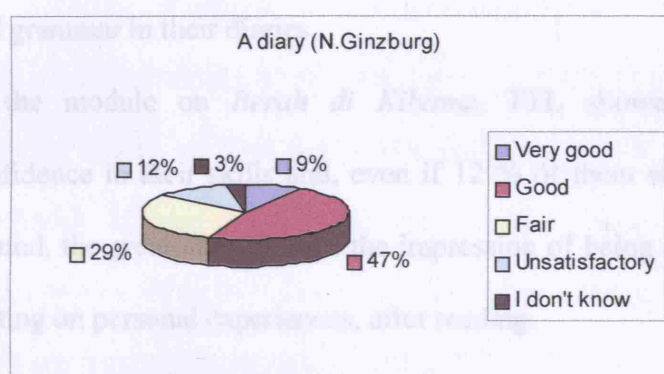


Fig. 27 – Feedback *Lui ed io*

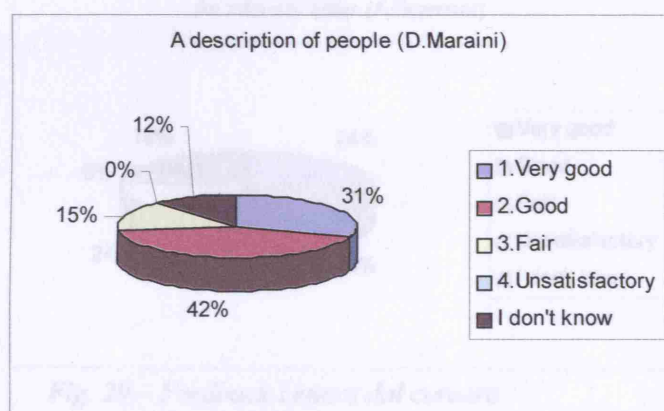


Fig. 28 – Feedback *Berah di Kibawa*

In the feedback given by learners after the first module, a sense of initial frustration appears in 12% of the TTL, who replied that they were not satisfied with the results attained. This is accompanied by a 3% of ‘confused’ reactions, in the ‘I don’t know’ answer. This is because they were *ab initio*, and this module was their first contact with a written text

in Italian, and with tasks. In many cases, during the module, some time was devoted to language tasks and explicit explanations, and when the guided production phase came, some students showed a tendency to risk less than others, and felt inadequate. Not being familiar with the task-based approach, many declared that they missed translations and grammar rules. Despite this, the majority made a correct re-use of lexicon and grammar in their diaries.

In the module on *Berah di Kibawa*, TTL showed an increasing confidence in their skills and, even if 12 % of them still felt on unsafe ground, the great majority had the impression of being able to cope with writing on personal experiences, after reading.

- *Lettere dal Carcere*, Antonio Gramsci

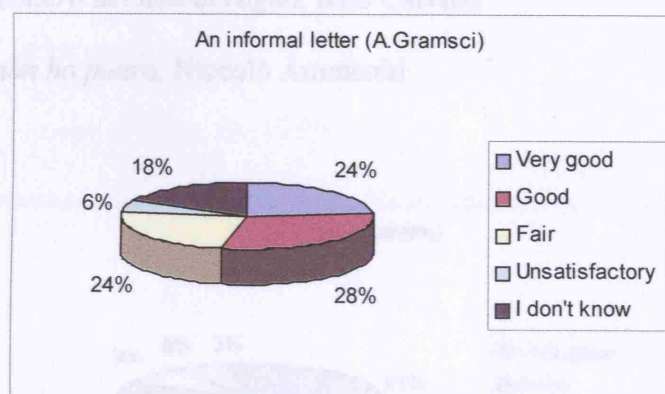


Fig. 29 – Feedback *Lettere dal carcere*

In *Lettere dal carcere*, which introduced the informal letter, there was again a split reaction between those who felt they were able to work correctly on the tasks assigned and those who felt they couldn't.

II. PLACES

Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli, Carlo Levi

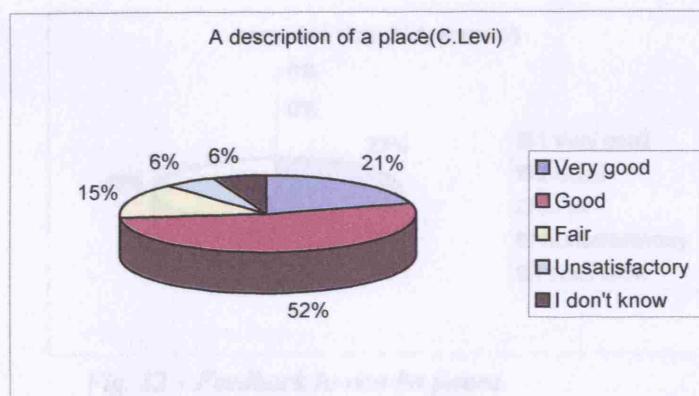


Fig. 30 – Feedback *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli*

Such a high percentage of extremely positive replies to this module were probably due to the fact that it was introduced by a drawing and was concluded by the description of a picture/drawing, so that the preoccupation about the linguistic reception/production was less stressed.

III. THE YOUNG AND THE ADULT

Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno, Italo Calvino

Io non ho paura, Niccolò Ammaniti

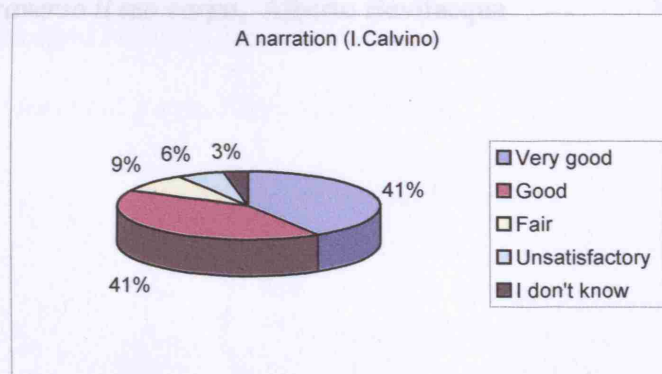


Fig. 31 – Feedback *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*

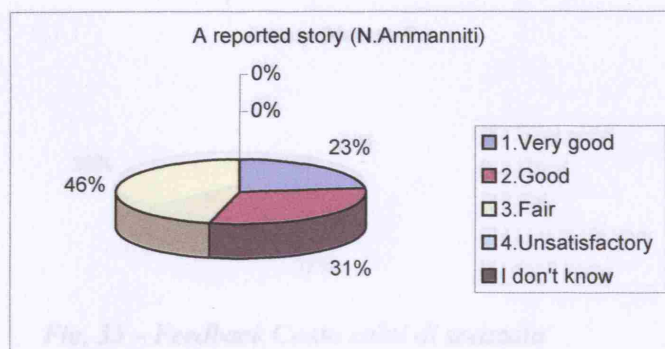


Fig. 32 – Feedback *Io non ho paura*

In these two modules an increasing self-confidence and familiarity with tasks is reflected by an increasing awareness, with the disappearance of the ‘I don’t know’ percentage. Nevertheless, in *Io non ho paura* it is interesting to underline the high percentage of ‘fair’ responds. This is probably due to the fact that the text is easy as for language and structure, but it has some intercultural references and content difficulties.

IV. SEDUCTION

Cento colpi di spazzola, Melissa P.

Attraverso il tuo corpo, Alberto Bevilacqua

La Guerra di Piero, Fabrizio De Angelis

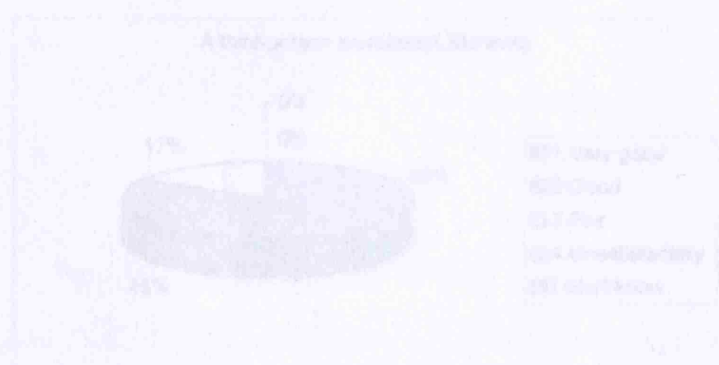


Fig. 33 – Feedback *La guerra di Piero*

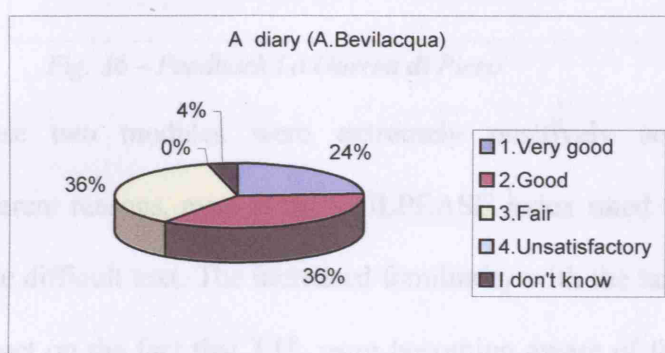
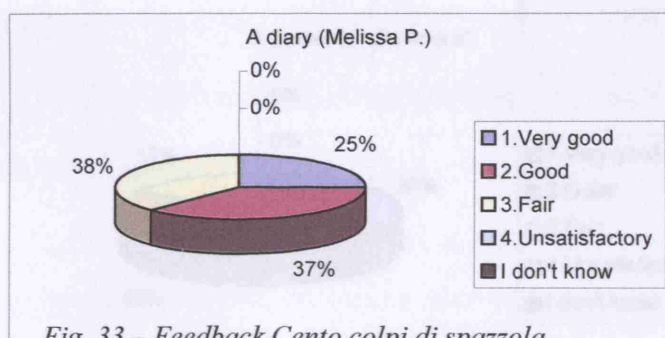


Fig. 34 – Feedback *Attraverso il tuo corpo*

Cento colpi di spazzola was perceived as 'easier' by TTL, being a stylistically typical diary. *Attraverso il tuo corpo* was a more elaborate model to follow, and this engaged learners in a greater effort.

V. THE WAR

La ciociara, Alberto Moravia

La Guerra di Piero, Fabrizio De André

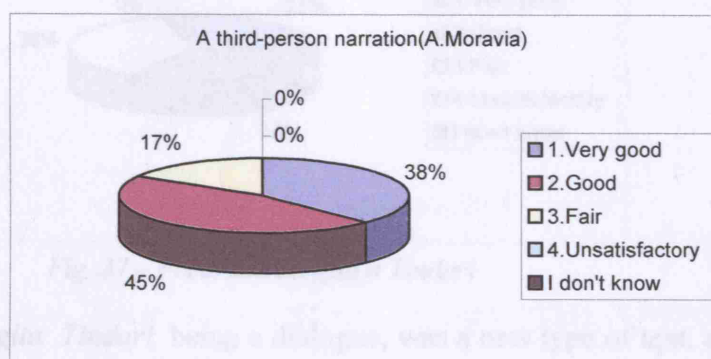


Fig. 35 – Feedback *La ciociara*

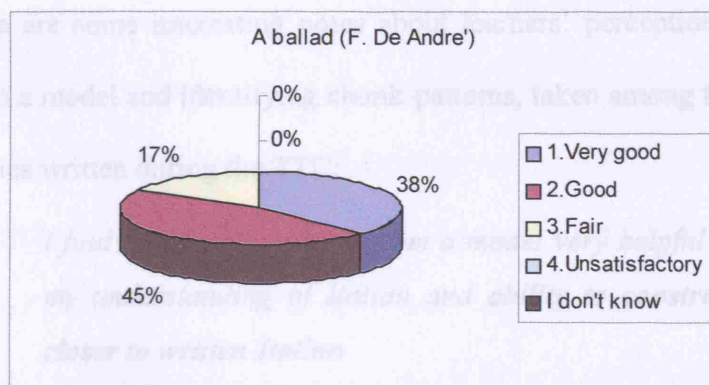


Fig. 36 – Feedback *La Guerra di Piero*

These two modules were extremely positively acknowledged for different reasons, even if the GULPEASE index rated the first one as a quite difficult text. The increased familiarity with the tasks surely had an impact on the fact that TTL were becoming aware of their potentialities not only in reading comprehension, but also in production. It seems that dealing with texts, text-types and tasks was becoming a familiar activity.

VI. BUREAUCRACY AND DUTY

La gita a Tindari, Andrea Camilleri

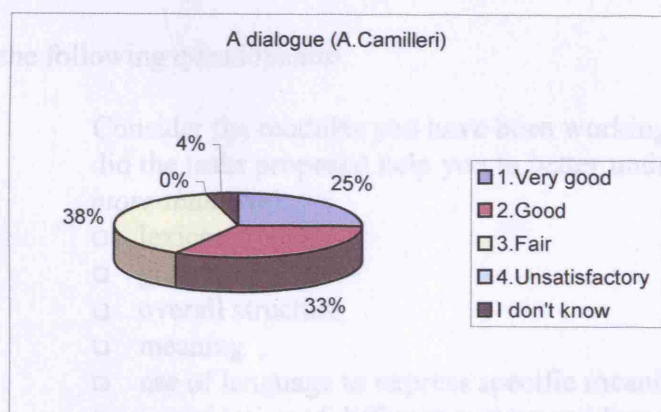


Fig. 37 – Feedback *La gita a Tindari*

La gita Tindari, being a dialogue, was a new type of text, and 4% of the TTL were not sufficiently self-confident, even if there was a quite high percentage of 'fair' comments.

Here are some interesting notes about learners' perceptions on writing from a model and identifying chunk-patterns, taken among the scrambled diaries written during the TTC:

*I find the idea of writing from a model very helpful in improving my understanding of Italian and **ability to construct sentences closer to written Italian***

*[...] a good idea, especially at beginner's level because it is useful for **building up set phrases** and getting used to expanding vocabulary*

*[...] useful because we **map some basic structures to rely on**. So we can use our imagination but get help on grammar 4 (for) additional words*

*[...] **picking out** formations of grammar*

The notes of the students show that the model text has been perceived as a precious source helping to map information and elaborating it.

2.2 Questionnaire on tasks

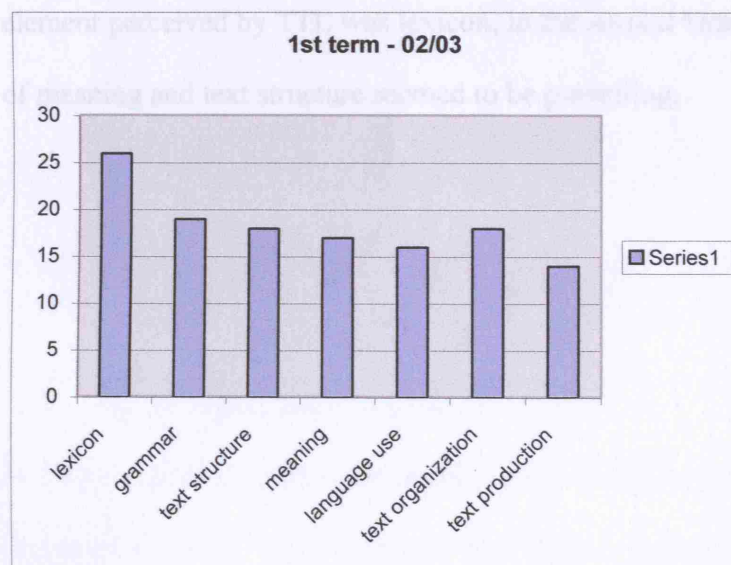
At the end of each term, during each year, TTL have been submitted with the following questionnaire:

Consider the modules you have been working on during this term, did the tasks proposed help you to better understand (*you may tick more than one*):

- ☐ lexicon
- ☐ grammar
- ☐ overall structure
- ☐ meaning
- ☐ use of language to express specific meanings
- ☐ organization of different text types (diary, informal letter, description, narration)
- ☐ production of different text types (diary, informal letter, description, narration)

The questionnaire had the double purpose of monitoring TTL and of raising their awareness on the purpose of the modules. The item 'meaning' included the overall message and cultural implications of the extract, while 'use of language' implied the specific value of words and expressions within the context of use. 'Organization of a text' referred mainly to the receptive attitude towards the text, as a counterpart to the productive attitude ('text production'). The results have been consistent throughout the research period and have shown a shifting of the focus of attention from grammar and lexicon to content and text types, both at a receptive and at a productive level.

The following diagrams show the common trend:



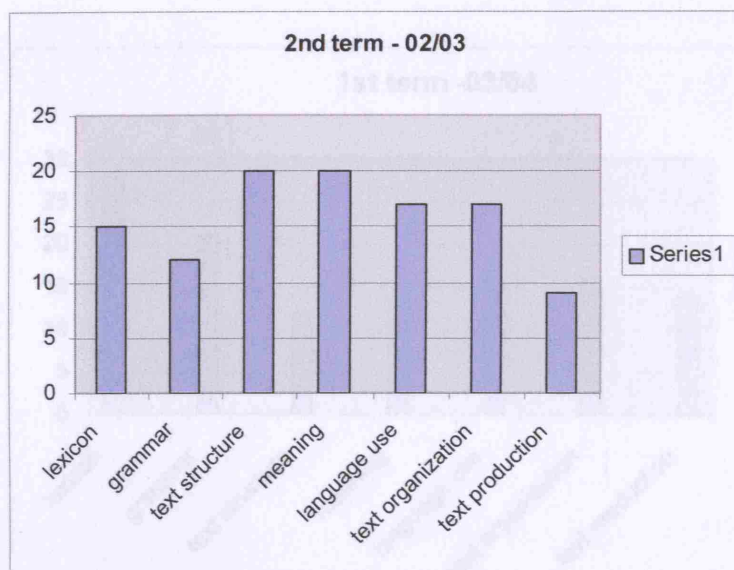


Fig. 38– Questionnaires 02/03

In the first year of research, while in the first term the most important element perceived by TTL was lexicon, in the second term the awareness of meaning and text structure seemed to be prevailing.

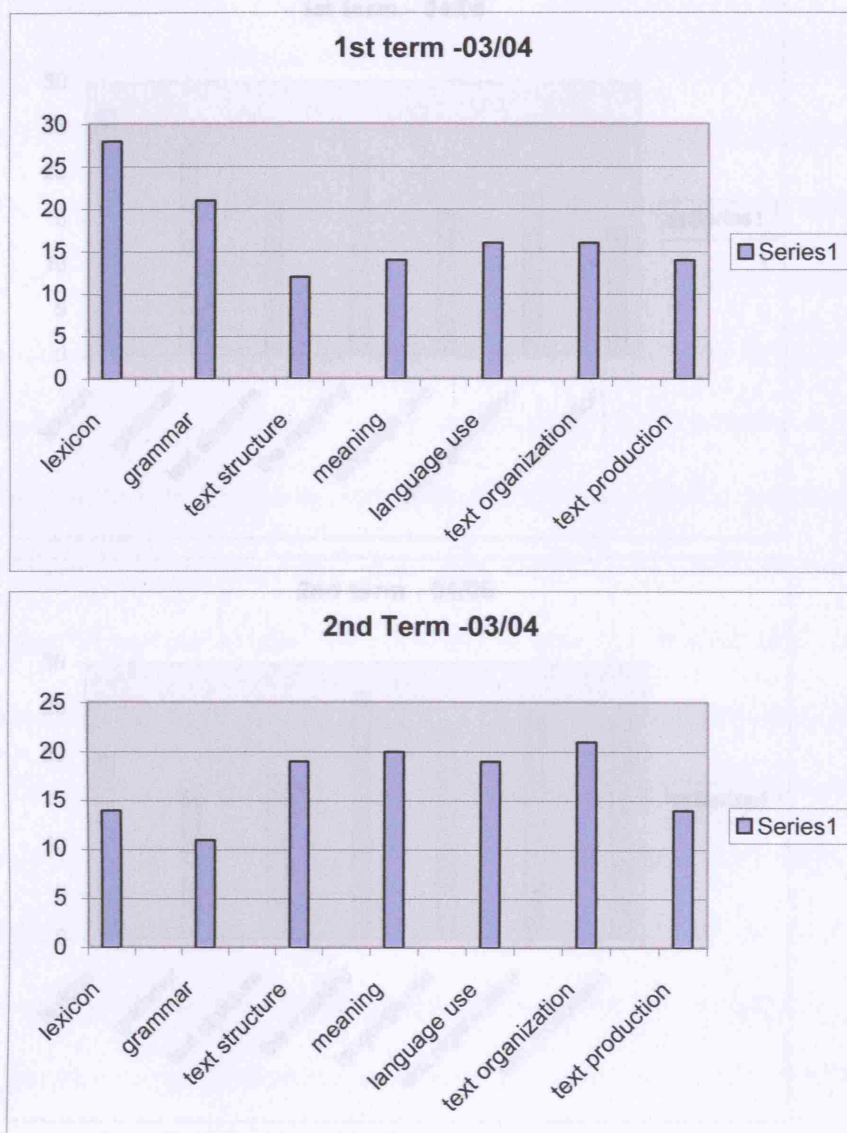


Fig. 39 – Questionnaires 03/04

In the year 2003-04 text organization in the second term received a high degree of attention, while grammar was almost ignored, if compared to the attention grammar received in the first term. This result does not mean that grammar and lexicon were not enhanced in the second term, but that they were probably acquired and used more implicitly. Re-organizing a text for meaning both at a receptive and at a productive level was considered the really important issue in the second term.

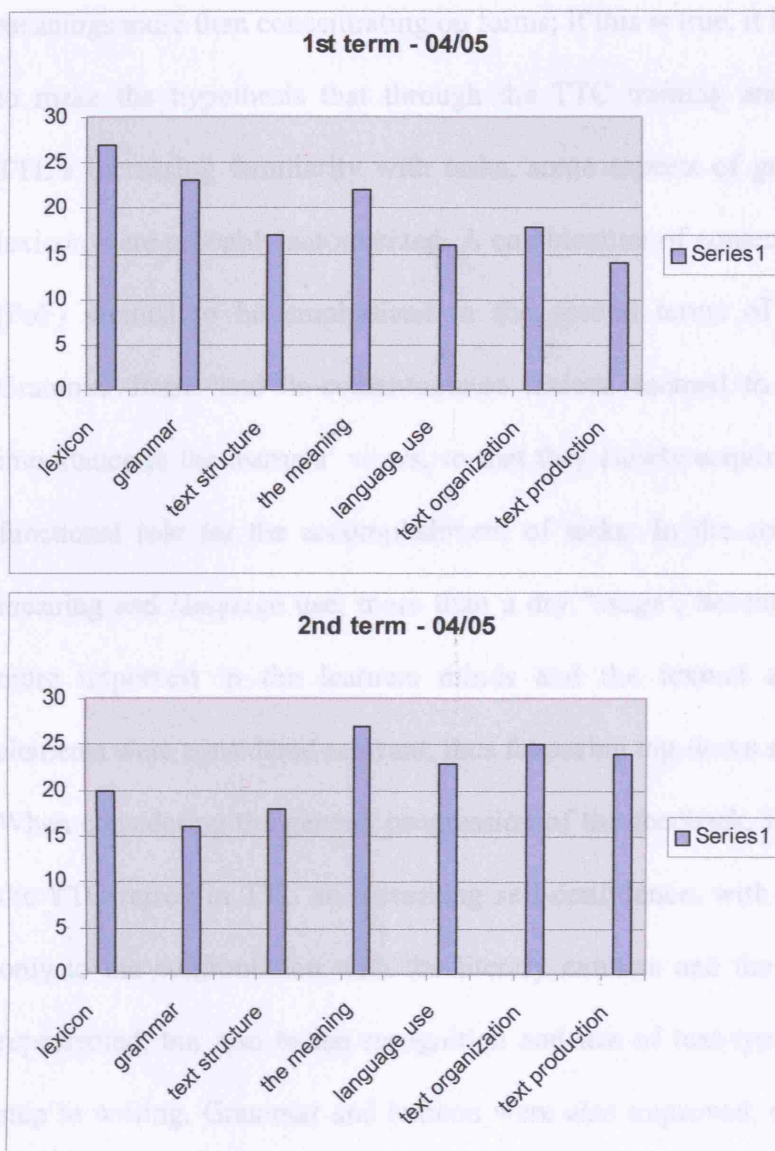


Fig. 40 – Questionnaires 04/05

Considering the 04/05 results, it seems that this trend is confirmed in the third survey, where a greater emphasis seems to be given to the production phase and to meaning in the second term.

Of course the surveys have a general significance based on self-perceptions, since grammar and lexicon were equally developed in the first and in the second terms during classroom activities. Responses were probably due to the fact that TTL's attention and awareness shifted to

meanings more than concentrating on forms; if this is true, it is consistent to make the hypothesis that through the TTC training and thanks to TTL's increasing familiarity with tasks, some aspects of grammar and lexicon were probably automatized. A combination of content and forms (FoF) seemed to be emphasized in the second terms of each year. Grammar forms and de-contextualized lexicon seemed to lose their importance in the learners' views, so that they slowly acquired a mainly functional role for the accomplishment of tasks. In the second terms, meaning and language use, more than a dry 'usage', became more and more important in the learners' minds and the textual and cultural elements were considered relevant, thus favouring top-down strategies. When considering the general progression of the feedback, it seems that the TTC raised in TTL an increasing self-confidence, with regards not only to the confrontation with the literary extracts and the world they represented, but also to the recognition and use of text-types as a first step to writing. Grammar and lexicon were also improved, even though the emphasis was not any longer assigned to these elements.

3. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The quantitative and qualitative data that have been extracted and analysed during the action-research, contributed to consolidate the hypotheses that a) a meaningful input facilitates acquisition and b) tasks are an essential tool to facilitate the input elaboration. In particular noticing and attention management tasks have a positive influence on the re-organization of forms and meanings. Production task help the integration of the new information in the acquisitional system and the familiarity with the tasks helps to overcome difficulties.

The TTC approach instead of focusing on the formal aspects of language disguised in supposedly everyday life situations (but an everyday life far away from the students' reality), focused on a challenging content to be elaborated and produced in Italian. In such a course, language forms were acquired explicitly, through formal instruction, and implicitly, i.e. learning from input (DeKeiser, 2003) and while accomplishing tasks (Skehan, 1998). This appeared in the feed-back forms where learners perceived that the focus of their study, mainly in the second term, was more on how to organize meanings in Italian, than on grammar and syntax. On the other hand, from the analysis of written productions it seemed clear that their formal proficiency improved through TTC. In fact, productions showed the level of control of the combination of forms and content, by using an increasingly complex system.

Interlanguage development occurred mainly as far as written production was concerned, and it is consistent to believe that it was favoured by the

training learners received in TTC, i.e. guided and creative elaboration of a meaningful input, which was recognized as ‘meaningful’, through production tasks, which had a positive influence on the perception of ‘input salience’ (Giora, 2003).

The action-research aimed also at verifying how written performance in ab initio students proved an elaboration of both language and content, which was favoured by a first-hand contact with texts and by tasks facilitating comprehension and awareness. A modular and not strictly sequential approach to teaching allowed for an iterative perspective in the planning of the teaching units, in a sort of segmented process, in which reflection and awareness were constantly fostered. In particular, the awareness of complex structures came to the surface through the use of language to express thoughts and meanings, and learning became a cyclical process and not a sequential one. From a pedagogic perspective, the TTL’s written productions at the end of each module might be considered a part of a portfolio evaluation, rather than a self-contained assessed result. In other words, it was important to emphasize the process of writing as a progression in a diachronic perspective, and not the positive or negative product of a specific teaching unit.

Both qualitative and quantitative data confirm that the recurrent pattern of the action-research was that TTL were enabled to reproduce the text types they were presented and to include in their productions personal and creative views, mind-sets and perspectives. At the end of TTC, they showed an acquisition of the written skill at level B1 of the CEF, in a

period of two terms, in 20 hours of specific instruction, with an acceleration of the usually acknowledged time necessary to attain the B1 level in written production.

To sum up, the while-tasks and production tasks allowed not only the development of linguistic competence and of comprehension skills, but also the awareness of meaning (semantic competence) and of the strategies applied to handle the text, in continuous negotiation and comparison with the self. Moreover, TTC met its objective and proved to fill the traditional gap between language and content, by creating a bridge between the two and thus integrating students' mind sets and experiences both personal and academic.

Furthermore, the use of a meaningful input helped to contextualize learning, thus facilitating language use and creating an active attitude to language learning. In doing so, general competences, including cultural and literary knowledge and critical perspective, were progressively increased.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 1. THE ACTION-RESEARCH RESULTS*
- 2. THE VALIDITY OF THE TEXT AND TASKS
APPROACH*

1. THE ACTION-RESEARCH RESULTS

The hypotheses to be verified in my action-research which spanned three academic years (2002-2005) were that the interlanguage development of *ab initio* University learners in written skills might be accelerated through a Texts and Tasks approach a) if texts are related to the interests of the learners and b) if they are enhanced by tasks allowing the four SLA processing stages of Noticing, Controlling, Patterning and Lexicalising.

In order to test my initial hypotheses, after considering the major studies in the field, my action-research followed four steps (Fig.6, Ch.3):

- selection of appropriate texts and appropriate tasks;
- gradation and organization of texts and tasks into modules and of modules into thematic units (TTC);
- monitoring of TTL's feedback and productions;
- validation of the chosen approach.

As for the link between SLA and contexts of learning, in line with the theoretical debate, learners were the actors of TTC and their multiple identities were placed at the centre of the learning process since their personal and academic experiences, beliefs and attitudes emerged in the accomplishment of tasks.

A flexible model, such as the SRN model, proved to be effective for *ab initio* IFL learners and appropriately selected literary texts represented

the input and the meeting point between Italian and TTL's languages and cultures.

Input was enhanced by meaningful inductive tasks, which were designed so as to increase motivation, and actively to involve learners in personal re-elaboration. The success they attained in IFL was measured in the production tasks.

1.1 Selection and organization of appropriate texts

The claim of the action-research was that the introduction of literary texts at early stages might help overcome the boredom of some text-books used to teach language as if it were a system related either only to linguistic organization (grammar-translation method) or to social performance (communicative approach). The focus of my model was to involve learners' mind sets, their "philosophy", attitude, interests, and interpretative and reprocessing skills. In line with this view, literary texts seemed to be an ideal input for TTL since they organised meaning in an original way and were relevant to the learners, dealing with universal themes and at the same time offering an insight into the world of the target language. Moreover, they offered exposure to a great variety of language in forms of syntax, grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, of different types of discourse (dialogue, description, narration, poetry), and of cohesive and coherent structures.

The selection of literary extracts was based on the central theme of each text, on its 'easiness', i.e. use of common lexicon and of simple morpho-

syntactic structures, and on the type they belonged to, i.e. letter, dialogue, poem, narrative, description.

In particular, 'the comparison of the language of the discourse with the language schemata of the reader, and of the text structure with the text schemata of the reader' (Cook,1994) created an awareness in the reader/learner of what had to be done in order to extend understanding and re-create meaning. In fact reading, as well as writing, involved not only a knowledge of language, but also an 'organized knowledge of the world' (Cook, *ibid.*).

Nevertheless, in the first modules some learners found some difficulties in the comprehension of texts, and only after an increased familiarity with TTC task they were able to apply the strategies necessary to recognize the salient elements and to re-use them.

1.2 Selection and organization of appropriate tasks

Repeated tasks (cyclic approach) accompanying different literary texts, gathered into recognizable categories (familiar input) over an academic year (two terms of 10 weeks each, for a total 20 hours classroom instruction) helped to accelerate from the early stages the inter-language change, transferable strategies and a balance between content and form (accuracy, complexity and fluency) in written performance.

Tasks selection and design was a key issue for the applicability of the TTC approach to language teaching since teaching/learning a foreign language implies a vision not only of 'what' (the content of a language

curriculum) has to be taught/learnt, i.e. declarative knowledge, but also of 'how' it has to be presented and 'how' it is acquired by the learner, i.e. procedural knowledge (Anderson, 1983). In particular, since the cycle of tasks respected the natural processing phases of SLA as described by Skehan (2002), it favoured the TTL writing process leading to the controlled and rule-based use of Italian. The tasks accompanying each literary extracts were *pre-tasks*, favouring the noticing process, *while tasks*, favouring the patterning and controlling, and *production tasks*, favouring a deeper controlling and the lexicalizing process. The latter, even if more demanding, generated a greater involvement and gave a greater space to individual voices than the previous tasks, which were sometimes considered less creative and sometimes less stimulating.

As a result of the increasing familiarity, the task-type exposure during TTC facilitated performance and helped learners to integrate the new information of each TTC module on previous modules, which represented a sort of memory stores. Over the 20 weeks each year, in fact, learners developed a thorough use of language, as proved by the results attained in written production, without focusing on any specific morpho-syntactic sequencing, and without being stressed by the task-demands. Morpho-syntactic elements were selected, re-called, analysed and used only when necessary to accomplish tasks.

1.3 Monitoring

The monitoring of TTL's reactions was a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches at any stage, i.e. at pre-actional , actional, and post-actional stages (students' production).

The monitoring phase aimed at finding a balance between holistic perspectives, in line with individual mind sets and personalities, and linguistic perspectives, in line with the conventions of the Italian language and during the course, the effects of TTC on TTL became consistently observable. Measures for written productions were: Holistic Rating (fluency and creativity), Accuracy Ratios (intelligibility index and error index) and Complexity Ratios (dependent and coordinate clauses per t-units ratio and re-elaboration of a model or text type). They showed that the TT approach allowed for the fusion of an holistic perspective and language enhancement, and the processing of forms and meaning. Even if no formal grammar instruction was given during TTC, the continuous balance between a linguistic and a non-linguistic perspectives, created a combination between explicit instruction plus practice and personal re-elaboration and implicit learning from the models proposed.

Even if linguistic tasks were constantly present in each module, with the passing of time learners almost 'forgot' that they were also working on grammar and lexicon, and perceived TTC as mainly meaning and text-type oriented.

Therefore, since language and culture were considered strictly connected one to the other, the core of the instruction was on the operational role of language, focusing not so much on its formal aspects, but on the meaning-form relationship (FoF), and its dependence on the individual mind-sets.

1.4 Validation

The validation of the TTC as a whole is a very important issue in this action-research and has been kept in mind throughout this study. The introduction of new modules each year contributed to find confirmations about the validity of the approach in general, regardless of what specific text was chosen, and about the hypothesis that any carefully selected text accompanied by carefully selected tasks, respecting the SLA processing stages and aiming at written production, might facilitate an acceleration of the interlanguage development. This validation of the approach will be thoroughly discussed in the following chapter.

2. THE VALIDITY OF THE TEXT AND TASKS APPROACH

A particular attention was dedicated to the pedagogical relevance and educational accessibility of the TT approach and the answers to the initial research questions lead to its validation.

What is the link between Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and contexts of learning, i.e. between the acquisition of IFL and the instructional context?

The context of learning is an essential variable in SLA. The findings suggest that the effects of TTC instruction facilitated TTL in the production of accurate, fluent and relatively complex Italian at the end of one academic year, with only 20 hours contact time to develop written skills. It is consistent to claim that, in order to achieve the highest results in IFL written skills, teaching language cannot be separated from content. In this specific case, TTC showed how this combination is not only possible, but even necessary. Moreover, given the variables of the instructional context, TTC became a unifying element.

How can we best conceive a model that integrates Italian language acquisition with the cultural categories that are particularly relevant in adult learners?

The SRN, being a multi-dimensional model applied to the teaching/learning of IFL, may help to map the relationships among the variables, also taking into consideration the instructional and environmental constraints that play a role in the way the different factors are linked. In particular, the study proved that the adaptation of the SRN model might integrate Italian language acquisition with cultural categories, through the use of literary extracts.

The proposed TT approach may be represented in the following cycle, adapted from Corbett's model (Fig.4, Ch. 2):

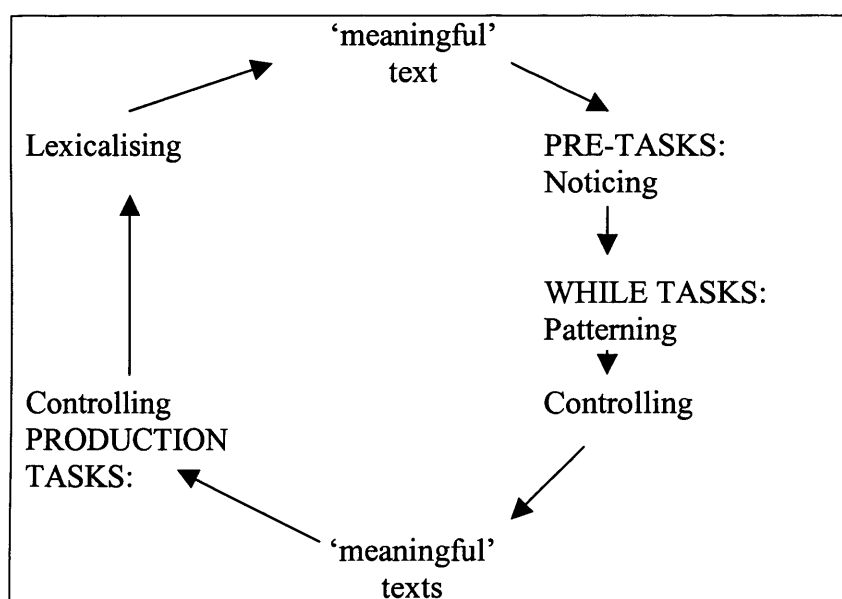


Fig. 41 - Cycle for the TT approach

Here texts, meaningful to the learners, are the starting point and the final objective of each module and they may change in length, difficulty, typology and topic, depending on the instructional environment in which the TT approach is applied.

How may one meet the challenge of accelerating the interlanguage development of IFL learners within the University context and of controlling and speeding up the acquisition of written skills in Italian?

In the case of this study, literary texts seemed to represent the source underpinning L2 production and underlying the development of the interlanguage system. The completion of pre-tasks and while-tasks and the elaboration of FL in production tasks results place the learner as an information processor, who is enabled to produce foreign language at a pace which proved to be more rapid than in the traditional approaches.

Given a traditional underachievement in written skills after one year traditional instruction, TTC instruction proved to be more effective than the traditional one in the process of control and of acceleration of the acquisition of written skills in Italian as a Foreign Language, from A1 to B1 level of the CEF.

So the task-based approach adopted in the TTC allowed for the development of interlanguage skills in writing, which are usually delayed in the communicative approach, and are over-anticipated in the grammar-translation method. Writing skills were activated through the accomplishment of tasks and writing revealed to be a gate-opening activity, showing how written performance in *ab initio* students led

towards an integration of language and content, as clearly appears in TTL's responses.

To what extent does the students' production, as an elaboration of input related to learners' academic experience, show the stages of interlanguage development?

The three year study showed that not only did learners receiving TT instruction gain the ability to process input better, but their developing system was also affected so that they could produce accurate and relatively complex output, which was the result of both the explicit teaching received and the implicit re-elaboration of morpho-syntactic structures and lexicon activated through pre- and while-tasks. The complex syntactic structures and lexical expressions reoccurred in students' written productions in Italian when they were creatively involved in a relevant input-output task , and when the structure and lexicon were redundant in the input.

In particular, the study confirms the inseparable unity not only of language and content, of language and culture, but also of the foreign language and the mind-sets of the native and non-native speakers of that language. The research was based on the respect of learners, considered individual human beings, different one from the other as far as aptitudes, attitudes, motivation and background factors are concerned.

In conclusion, the combination of qualitative and quantitative data allowed for the validation of the impact of TTC on learners' written productions and at the same time they suggested the transferability of the TT approach to other contexts. With the experience of TTC, other modules and thematic units were created in order to be able to re-apply the TT approach and these modules have recently been published¹.

Of course, the TT approach may be considered reliable only in given circumstances, its limitation being that the development of other skills cannot be proved. The focus on the linguistic aspects would also require more time, if learners have to rely only on the TTC. The texts to be selected in other circumstances should respect the academic context of the learners and therefore it is not proved that literary texts would be the appropriate type of input in other instructional situations.

Furthermore, one of the aims of this action research is to help researchers in SLA and practitioners identify some important priorities for the development of agendas in Texts and Tasks based courses, within a procedural syllabus.

Finally, this research is an attempt to develop a coherent framework in which learners' mind sets and the instructional context are essential variables in the design of information-processing syllabuses, activated by tasks. Texts are pivotal and have to be adapted to the needs of the learners.

¹ Tamponi, A.R., *Italiano a Modello*, Bonacci, Roma, 2006

The focus too on written production through an operational approach places the results of this research in the post-communicative debate. In line with this debate and with the operational approach to foreign language teaching and learning, this research is part of on-going confrontation and aims at filling the gap between theoretical models and pedagogical applications, thus allowing a greater commitment of SLA theoreticians and of L2 teachers.

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8. APPENDIX

I. Feedback Form

II. Texts and Tasks

I. FEEDBACK FORM

TEXT AND TASK COURSE
(term: - year:)

Rating:

1) *Very Good* 2) *Good* 3) *Fair* 4) *Unsatisfactory* 5) *I don't know*

1. Consider the texts as a model of different text types. How would you rate the awareness you have reached on how to write a text from a given text-type model::

- A diary (*text:*)

1) 2) 3) 4) 5)

- A poem (*text:*)

1) 2) 3) 4) 5)

- A description of a place (*text:*)

1) 2) 3) 4) 5)

- OTHER (*text:*)

1) 2) 3) 4) 5)

2. Did the tasks proposed help you to better understand :
(*you may tick more than one*)

- ☐ lexicon
- ☐ grammar
- ☐ overall structure
- ☐ meaning
- ☐ use of language to express specific meanings
- ☐ organization of different text types (diary, informal letter, description, narration)
- ☐ production of different text types (diary, informal letter, description, narration)

II. TEXTS AND TASKS¹

1. Lui ed io²

Natalia Ginzburg

Lui ha sempre caldo; io sempre freddo. D'estate quando è veramente caldo, non fa che lamentarsi del gran caldo che ha.

Lui sa parlare bene alcune lingue; io non ne parlo bene nessuna. Lui riesce a parlare, in qualche suo modo, anche le lingue che non sa.

Lui ha un grande senso dell'orientamento; io nessuno. Lui ama il teatro, la pittura e la musica: soprattutto la musica. Io non capisco niente di musica, m'importa molto poco della pittura e m'annoia a teatro. Amo e capisco una sola cosa al mondo, ed è la poesia.

Lui ama i musei, e io ci vado con sforzo, con uno spiacevole senso di dovere e fatica.

Lui ama le biblioteche, io le odio.

Lui ama i viaggi, le città straniere e sconosciute, i ristoranti. Io resterei sempre a casa, non mi muoverei mai.

Lo seguo, tuttavia, in molti viaggi. Lo seguo nei musei, nelle chiese, all'opera. Lo seguo anche ai concerti, e mi addormento.

Non è timido; e io sono timida.

A lui piacciono le tagliatelle, l'abbacchio, le ciliegie, il vino rosso. A me piace il minestrone [...]

Io non so amministrare il tempo. Lui sa.

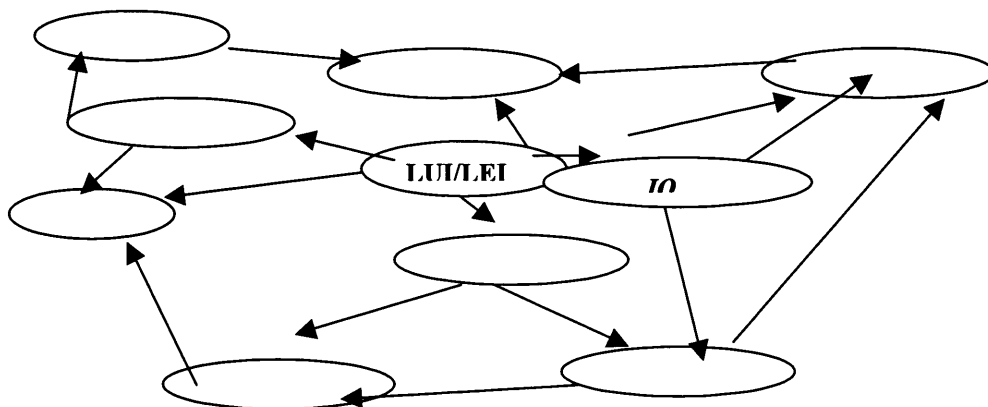
Io non so ballare, e lui sa.

Non so scrivere a macchina, e lui sa.

Non so guidare l'automobile.

PRE-TASK

Create una associazione di parole e idee partendo dalle parole *Lui, Io*.



¹The following texts and tasks have been included in Tamponi, A.R., *Italiano a Modello*, Bonacci, Roma, 2006

²*Le piccole virtù*, Einaudi, Torino, 1961

ELEMENTI LINGUISTICI

- 1) Leggete il testo e riportate gli elementi che trovate nel testo nella colonna appropriata:

Pronomi personali soggetto

Verbi: Indicativo presente

Verbi: Infinito

- 2) E a voi che cosa piace? Usando le colonne del task 1, scrivete cinque frasi che contengano un elemento da ciascuna colonna. Notate che alcuni verbi sono seguiti da preposizioni(*riesco a, non m'importa di, mi annoio a*) mentre altri sono seguiti direttamente dal complemento oggetto(*so, mi piace, amo, odio*).

- 3) Rileggete il testo e riportate le i sostantivi relativi a ciascuna categoria nella colonna appropriata;

Arti	Cibo	Mezzo di trasporto	Luogo

- 5) E al vostro compagno che cosa piace? Scrivete cinque frasi che inizino con *lui* o *lei* e relative a ciascuna delle categorie

SIGNIFICATO

- 1) Elencate i gusti di *Lui* ed *Io* nel testo:

- a) Lui ama :

Io amo:

- b) A lui piace/piacciono:

A me piace/piacciono:

- c) Lui sa

Io non so

INTERPRETAZIONE

- 1) Secondo te i protagonisti: (potete scegliere più di una risposta)

- ☐ sono felici
- ☐ sono tristi
- ☐ sono simili
- ☐ sono diversi
- ☐ vivono insieme da molto tempo
- ☐ sono giovani sposi
- ☐ altro:

- 2) Che cosa devono fare i protagonisti?

- ☐ seguire i desideri di uno dei due
- ☐ fare le cose separatamente

- ☐ mettersi d'accordo e cedere una volta per uno
- ☐ altro:

TECNICA NARRATIVA

1) Chi racconta la storia? (potete scegliere più di una risposta)

- ☐ uno dei personaggi
- ☐ l'autore
- ☐ un testimone esterno alla storia

2) Il lettore vede la storia:

- ☐ attraverso gli occhi del narratore
- ☐ attraverso gli occhi degli altri personaggi
- ☐ attraverso una prospettiva esterna alla storia, personale

PRODUZIONE

Riscrivete il testo attraverso gli occhi di una terza persona:

Loro sono molto diversi, infatti...

ESPANSIONE E SCRITTURA

1) Intervistate il vostro ragazzo/la vostra ragazza, il vostro migliore amico/la vostra migliore amica. Riportate le domande nella colonna 1, le risposte nella colonna 2 e le vostre opinioni nella colonna 3. Siete liberi di informarvi del tempo libero, dello sport, della musica, ecc.

DOMANDE	A lui/lei piace/piacciono Lui/Lei ama	A me piace/piacciono Io amo
---------	--	--------------------------------

2) Scrivete un diario relativo alla vostra esperienza personale e agli elementi comuni o diversi dal vostro amico/ ragazzo o dalla vostra amica/ragazza

2. Berah di Kibawa³

Dacia Maraini

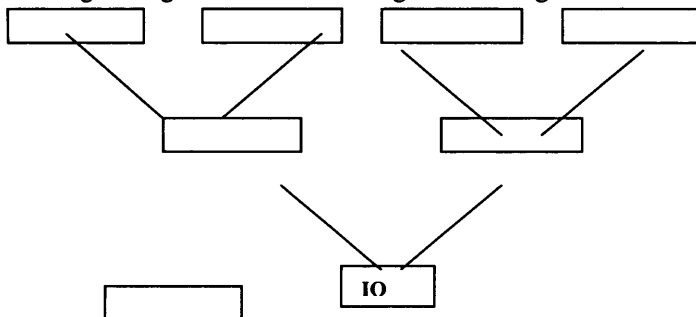
La famiglia di Berah è composta da un uomo sui cinquant'anni, dalle sue tre mogli che lavorano i campi per lui e da tredici figli. All'uomo tocca la semina del miglio, spetta la decisione di quando comprare il sale e il sapone al mercato della domenica, compete il controllo del buon andamento della comunità, nonché la responsabilità del comportamento delle mogli e dei figli. Alle donne appartiene invece il lavoro dei campi, il trasporto della legna e dell'acqua, la raccolta del miglio, la fabbricazione della birra, la battitura dell'ignam che si esegue in comune, cantando, in mezzo all'aia su cui razzolano le galline, la preparazione del cibo e la vendita dei prodotti al mercato.

La madre di Berah è giovane, ma già sciupata dalle tante gravidanze e allattamenti. Anche in questo momento tiene un bambino al seno, mentre cucina all'aperto su un fuoco acceso fra sassi ammucchiati. In Africa le donne tengono i figli al seno anche fino a tre anni, perché hanno paura di dare loro da bere l'acqua che quasi sempre è inquinata. Il passaggio dal latte all'acqua è il momento più drammatico per un piccolo africano. È proprio durante questo passaggio che tanti bambini muoiono.

Ma nonostante queste minacce e questi pericoli, Berah non ha mai sentito la giovane madre lamentarsi o mostrare una faccia lunga e immusonita. Al contrario, Ama è allegra e pronta al riso. Ride della pentola che si rovescia sul fuoco, anche se oggettivamente si tratta di un dramma perché l'acqua bisogna andarla a prendere a due chilometri di distanza. Ride perché la pecora legata al paletto vicino casa sta cercando di dare delle testate a un bambino che cammina a quattro zampe, scambiandolo per un agnellino.

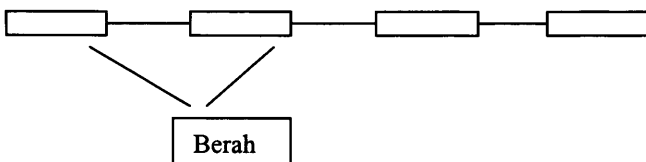
PRE-TASK

Riempite l'albero genealogico della vostra famiglia con tutti gli elementi necessari.



ELEMENTI LINGUISTICI

1) Leggete il primo paragrafo e riportate l'albero genealogico di Berah:



- Qual è la più grande differenza fra la vostra famiglia e quella di Berah?

Genitori:

Fratelli/sorelle:

Parenti:

2) Riempite la seguente tabella con il nome o con il verbo mancante:

³ Gremese Ed., Roma, 2003

Nomi	Verbi
Semina	Seminare
	Decidere
Controllo	
	Lavorare
Trasporto	
	Raccogliere
Fabbricazione	
	Battere
Canto	
	Preparare
Vendita	

3) Cosa fanno gli uomini e le donne? Usando la tabella 2) descrivete la suddivisione del lavoro:

Uomo:

Donne:

4) Leggete il secondo paragrafo e riempite la tabella sulla madre di Berah e le donne africane:

	Aspetto fisico	Che cosa fa o che cosa fanno
Madre di Berah		
Donne Africane		
Bambini africani		

5) Leggete il terzo paragrafo e dite quando la mamma ride:

6) Rileggete il testo e trovate gli elementi che descrivono l'ambiente:

Natura;

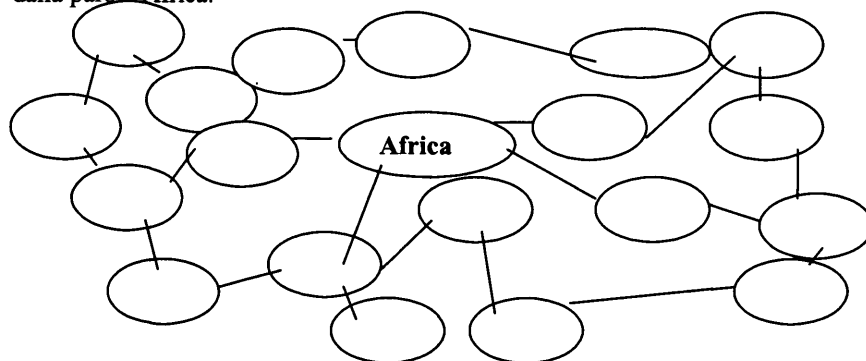
Animali:

Tempo:

Colori:

SIGNIFICATO

1) Usate le parole fin qui incontrate e riempite la associazione di parole che partono dalla parola Africa.



2) Qual'è la sensazione generale provocata da quelle parole? (Potete scegliere più di una risposta)

- ☐ Nostalgia
- ☐ Melanconia
- ☐ Letizia
- ☐ Speranza
- ☐ Paura
- ☐ Senso di colpa

- ☐ Disperazione
- ☐ Allegria
- ☐ Paura
- ☐ Illusione
- ☐ Altro

Riportate le parole o le frasi nel testo che vi hanno fatto scegliere:

INTERPRETAZIONE

Rispondete alla seguente domanda:

- 1) La famiglia di Berah e' ricca o povera? Perché?
- 2) La famiglia di Berah è triste o felice? Perché?

TECNICA NARRATIVA

Rileggete il testo e scegli una risposta:

1. La narrazione è:
 - a) in terza persona:
 - b) alternata:
 - c) in prima persona:
2. il narratore è
 - a) uno dei personaggi:
 - b) l'autore:
 - c) un testimone esterno alla storia:

PRODUZIONE

Scrivete una breve intervista a Berah ed immagina le sue risposte:

Intervista:

Come è composta la tua famiglia?

Berah:

Hai fratelli?

Berah:

Come passi il tempo?

Berah:

Cosa studi?

Berah:

Sei felice? Ti piace il tuo paese?

Berah:

ESPANSIONE E SCRITTURA

1. Immaginate di essere un bambino/una bambina che cresce in un paese di vostra scelta e riempite la seguente tabella

Il paese:	Il bambino/ la bambina:
nome: dove è:	nome: età: personalità:
<i>Economia:</i>	Cosa fa tutti i giorni:
<i>Paesaggio:</i>	Cosa vede:
<i>Animali:</i>	Cosa desidera:
<i>Industrializzazione:</i>	Cosa spera:

2. Seguendo la tabella compilata, scrivete una breve storia dove raccontate l'esperienza del bambino/ della bambina durante una giornata della sua vita. (circa 200 parole)

3. Lettere dal Carcere⁴

Antonio Gramsci

20 Maggio 1929

Caro Delio,

Ho saputo che vai a scuola, che sei alto ben 1 metro e 8 centimetri e che pesi 18 chili. Così penso che tu sei già molto grande e che tra poco mi scriverai delle lettere. In attesa di ciò, puoi già oggi fare scrivere alla mamma, sotto la tua dettatura, delle lettere, come facevi scrivere a me, a Roma, i pimpò⁵ per la nonna. Così mi dirai se a scuola ti piacciono gli altri bambini, e cosa impari e come ti piace giocare. So che costruisci aereoplani e treni e partecipi attivamente all'industrializzazione del paese, ma poi questi aereoplani volano davvero e questi treni corrono? Se ci fossi io, almeno, metterei la sigaretta nella ciminiera, in modo che si vedesse un po' di fumo!

Poi mi devi scrivere qualcosa di Giuliano. Che te ne pare? Ti aiuta nei tuoi lavori?

È anch'egli un costruttore, oppure è ancora troppo piccolo, per meritarsi questa qualifica? Insomma io voglio sapere un mucchio di cose e poiché tu sei così grande, e, mi hanno detto, anche un po' chiaccherino, così sono sicuro che mi scriverai, con la mano della mamma, per adesso, una lettera lunga lunga, con tutte queste notizie e altre ancora. E io ti darò notizie di una rosa che ho piantato e di una lucertola* che voglio educare. Bacia Giuliano per conto mio e anche la mamma e tutti quanti di casa e la mamma bacerà te a sua volta per conto mio.

Tuo papà

*Ho pensato che tu forse non conosci le lucertole: si tratta di una specie di coccodrilli che rimangono sempre piccini.

PRE-TASK

Che cosa pensi quando sei lontano da casa?

<input type="checkbox"/> Luoghi:	<input type="checkbox"/> Lavoro
<input type="checkbox"/> Persone amiche:	<input type="checkbox"/> Divertimento:
<input type="checkbox"/> Persone della tua famiglia:	<input type="checkbox"/> Il tuo letto:
<input type="checkbox"/> Persone del tuo	<input type="checkbox"/> La tua stanza:
lavoro/scuola:	<input type="checkbox"/> La tua casa:
<input type="checkbox"/> Amore:	<input type="checkbox"/> Il cibo:
<input type="checkbox"/> Tempo:	<input type="checkbox"/> Le bevande:
<input type="checkbox"/> Situazioni:	<input type="checkbox"/> La musica
<input type="checkbox"/> Ricordi belli:	<input type="checkbox"/> Altro:
<input type="checkbox"/> Ricordi brutti:	

ELEMENTI LINGUISTICI

- 1) Leggete il testo e decidi se la lettera è formale o informale? (Riporta per lo meno tre esempi per la tua risposta).

LETTERA FORMALE	LETTERA INFORMALE

- 2) Leggete il testo e trova le informazioni relative a Delio e Giuliano

⁴ Einaudi Ed., Torino, 1971

⁵ Parola inventata da Delio che vuol dire "bigliettini con disegni"

Delio

Giuliano

Altezza:

Peso:

Età:

3) Scrivete i rapporti di parentela fra :

Delio e Giuliano:

Delio e Antonio Gramsci:

Antonio Gramsci e mamma:

Antonio Gramsci e nonna:

4) Leggete il testo e riporta le espressioni richieste negli spazi della tabella

Espressioni che indicano un ricordo	Espressioni che indicano situazioni reali	Espressioni che indicano situazioni immaginate ma non realizzate o non realizzabili	Espressioni che indicano situazioni desiderate, realizzabili

SIGNIFICATO

1) Fate una lista di quello che il papà chiede al figlio Delio:

2) Fate una lista di quello che il papà promette al figlio:

INTERPRETAZIONE

1) Qual è lo scopo della lettera? (potete indicare più di una risposta)

- ☐ Mandare notizie
- ☐ Mantenere la comunicazione
- ☐ Ricevere notizie
- ☐ Prendere accordi
- ☐ Mandare gli auguri
- ☐ Rispondere a una richiesta
- ☐ Esprimere i propri sentimenti
- ☐ Inviare un invito
- ☐ Fare una proposta

2) Secondo voi il tono generale della lettera è

- ☐ felice
- ☐ triste
- ☐ malinconico
- ☐ disperato
- ☐ ottimista
- ☐ pessimista

3) Antonio Gramsci pensa

- ☐ di poter uscire dal carcere e rivedere il figlio presto
- ☐ di non uscire mai più dal carcere
- ☐ di poter uscire fra molto tempo e quindi non vuole perdere i momenti della crescita del figlio.
- ☐ di morire

PRODUZIONE GUIDATA

1) Riscrivete la lettera di Gramsci, indirizzandola alla moglie:

Carissima,
mi manchi molto,

ESPANSIONE E SCRITTURA

1) Immagina di dover stare lontano da una persona cara per uno dei seguenti motivi:

Motivo della lontananza	Persona lasciata lontano	Cosa vuoi sapere
a. devi studiare un anno in un altro continente	Sorella Mamma Amico/a Ragazzo/a Fidanzato/a Marito/moglie Figlio/a Altro:	Pensieri Sentimenti Vita quotidiana Lavoro Esperienze particolari
b. devi lavorare un anno in un altro continente	Sorella Mamma Amico/a Ragazzo/a Fidanzato/a Marito/moglie Figlio/a Collega Altro	Pensieri Sentimenti Vita quotidiana Lavoro Esperienze particolari Rapporti con partner lavorativi
c. ti hanno esiliato dal tuo paese per motivi politici	Sorella Mamma Amico/a Ragazzo/a Fidanzato/a Marito/moglie Figlio/a Collega Altro:	Pensieri Sentimenti Paure Piani Vita quotidiana Lavoro Esperienze particolari Situazione politica
d. sei andato via dal tuo paese perchè c'è una situazione difficile per te	Sorella Mamma Amico/a Ragazzo/a Fidanzato/a Marito/moglie Figlio/a Altro	Pensieri Sentimenti Paure Piani Vita quotidiana Lavoro Esperienze particolari Situazione politica

2) Scegliete fra le situazioni presentate nella tabella e fate una lista personale delle cose che vorreste sapere da una persona cara dalla quale siete lontano

Motivo della lontananza	Persona lasciata lontano	Cosa vuoi sapere	Cosa vuoi dire su di te
-------------------------	--------------------------	------------------	-------------------------

- 3) Scrivete una lettera alla persona cara dalla quale siete lontano, in cui includete gli elementi della tabella 2.(Approx. 200 words)

4. Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli⁶

Carlo Levi

La piazza non è veramente che uno slargo dell'unica strada del paese, in un punto più piano, dove finisce Gagliano di Sopra, la parte alta. Di qui si risale un altro po', e si ridiscende poi, attraversando un'altra piazzetta, a Gagliano di Sotto, che termina sulla frana. La piazza ha case da una parte sola; dall'altra c'è un muretto basso sopra un precipizio, la Fossa del Bersagliere, così chiamata per esservi stato buttato un bersagliere piemontese, sperdutosi in questi monti al tempo del brigantaggio e fatto prigioniero dai briganti.

Era il crepuscolo, nel cielo volavano i corvi, e nella piazza arrivavano per la conversazione serale i signori del paese. Essi passeggiano qui ogni sera, si fermano a sedere sul muretto, e, voltando la schiena all'ultimo sole, aspettano il fresco accendendo le loro sigarette economiche. Dall'altra parte, addossati alle case, stanno i contadini, tornati dai campi, e non si sentono le loro voci.

Il podestà mi riconosce e mi chiama. È un giovanotto alto, grosso e grasso, con un ciuffo di capelli neri e untati che gli piovono in disordine sulla fronte, un viso giallo e imberbe da luna piena, e degli occhietti neri e maligni, pieni di falsità e di soddisfazione.

Porta gli stivaloni, un paio di brache a quadretti da cavallerizzo, una giacchetta corta, e giocherella con un frustino.

PRE-TASK

Carlo Levi – Cristo si è fermato a Eboli

Disegnate la piazza descritta nel testo:

La piazza ha una forma circolare e si trova all'incrocio fra sette strade. Al centro c'è una fontana con un obelisco. Sulla sinistra ci sono due strade che portano a un parco. Di fronte ci sono due chiese uguali divise da una strada. Altre due strade sono a destra di una chiesa e a sinistra di un'altra. A destra della piazza ci sono due strade.

Disegno:

ELEMENTI LINGUISTICI

- 2) Leggete il testo e riportate gli elementi che trovate nel testo nella colonna appropriata::

Verbi: Indicativo presente

b)

Verbi: Indicativo imperfetto

- 3) Rileggete il testo e riportate le i sostantivi relativi a ciascuna categoria nella colonna appropriata:

Luoghi	Tempo	Persone	Vestiti	Animali

⁶ Ed. Einaudi, Torino, 1965

- 4) Usando le informazioni della tabella scrivete cinque frasi nelle quali riferite le caratteristiche della descrizione:

- 5) Concentratevi sul quarto e quinto paragrafo e riportate i seguenti elementi che descrivono il giovanotto:

statura::

corporatura:

capelli:

viso:

occhi:

SIGNIFICATO

- 1) Come è fatto il paese di Gagliano?
- ☐ A circolo intorno alla piazza principale
 - ☐ Esteso solo da un lato della piazza
 - ☐ Esteso sopra e sotto la piazza
 - ☐ Adagiato in una valle
- 2) Come è fatta la piazza?
- ☐ A circolo con case intorno
 - ☐ Con case solo da un lato e dall'altro una foresta
 - ☐ Con case solo da un lato e dall'altro un precipizio
 - ☐ Rettangolare
- 3) La sera nella piazza si ritrovano due gruppi di persone. Riempi la tabella con le loro azioni

	I signori del paese	I contadini
Dove stanno?		
Cosa fanno?		

- 4) Il tempo imperfetto è usato solo in due righe del testo perchè:
- ☐ Si riferisce ad azioni occasionali
 - ☐ Si riferisce ad azioni abituali
 - ☐ Si riferisce ad azioni passate
 - ☐ Si riferisce ad azioni presenti

INTERPRETAZIONE

- 1) Cosa rappresentano le azioni dei due gruppi di persone nella piazza? (potete scegliere più di una risposta)
- ☐ Le donne non potevano stare in pubblico
 - ☐ Le donne avevano da fare
 - ☐ C'era una distinzione di classe
 - ☐ Erano tutti poveri
 - ☐ Erano tutti ricchi
 - ☐ Non comunicavano fra loro
- 2) Come considerate il podestà? (potete scegliere più di una risposta)
- ☐ Una persona simpatica
 - ☐ Una persona antipatica

- ☐ Un ignorante
- ☐ Una persona colta
- ☐ Una persona ridicola
- ☐ Una persona autoritaria
- ☐ Una persona autorevole

TECNICA NARRATIVA

1) Chi racconta la storia? (potete scegliere più di una risposta)

- ☐ uno dei personaggi
- ☐ l'autore
- ☐ un testimone esterno alla storia

2) Il lettore vede la storia:

- ☐ attraverso gli occhi del narratore
- ☐ attraverso gli occhi degli altri personaggi
- ☐ attraverso una prospettiva esterna alla storia, personale

PRODUZIONE GUIDATA

1) Riscrivete il testo dal punto di vista di uno dei contadini che sta in piazza:

ESPANSIONE E SCRITTURA

1) Portate la foto o disegnatte una piazza, con tutti gli elementi importanti (per esempio: fontana, chiesa, alberi, persone, bambini, negozi ecc.)

2) Elencate gli aggettivi necessari a descrivere gli elementi che avete inserito:

3) Elencate gli aggettivi necessari a descrivere la piazza in generale. Per esempio: *grande, piccola, lunga, corta, larga, stretta, rotonda, quadrata, ovale, verde, grigia, spoglia, vuota, affollata, ecc.*

5) Descrivete la piazza con tutti i suoi elementi (200 parole)

5. IL SENTIERO DEI NIDI DI RAGNO⁷

Italo Calvino

I sogni dei partigiani sono rari e corti, sogni nati dalle notti di fame, legati alla storia del cibo, sempre poco e da dividere in tanti: sogni di pezzi di pane morsicati e poi chiusi in un cassetto. I cani randagi devono fare sogni simili, d'ossa rosicchiate e nascoste sottoterra. Solo quando lo stomaco è pieno, il fuoco è acceso, e non s'è camminato troppo durante il giorno, ci si può permettere di sognare una donna nuda e ci si sveglia al mattino sgombri e spumanti, con una letizia come d'ancore salpate.

Allora gli uomini tra il fieno cominciano a parlare delle loro donne, di quelle passate e di quelle future, a fare progetti per quando la guerra sarà finita, e a passarsi fotografie ingiallite.

La Giglia dorme vicino al muro, al di là di suo marito basso e calvo. Al mattino ascolta i discorsi degli uomini carichi di voglia, e sente tutti gli sguardi che s'avvicinano a lei come una schiera di bisce tra il fieno. S'alza allora, e va alla fontana a lavarsi. Gli uomini rimangono nel buio del casolare con pensieri di lei che s'apre la camicia e s'insaponi il petto. Il Dritto, ch'è sempre stato in silenzio, s'alza e va a lavarsi anche lui. Gli uomini insultano Pin che legge i loro pensieri e li canzona.

Pin è in mezzo a loro come tra gli uomini dell'osteria, ma in un mondo più colorato e più selvatico, con quelle notti passate sul fieno, e quelle barbe cariche d'insetti. C'è in loro qualcosa di nuovo che attrae e impaurisce Pin, oltre quella ridicola smania di donne comune a tutti i grandi: ogni tanto tornano al casolare con qualche uomo sconosciuto e giallo, che si guarda intorno e sembra non riesca a schiudere gli occhi spalancati e sembra non riesca a schiodare le mascelle per chiedere qualcosa che gli sta molto a cuore.

PRE-TASK

Che idee associate al ragno e alla sua ragnatela?

ELEMENTI LINGUISTICI

1) Leggete il primo e secondo paragrafo e riportate gli elementi che trovate nel testo nella colonna appropriata:

Sostantivi singolari	Sostantivi plurali
----------------------	--------------------

2) Rileggete i due paragrafi e completate le frasi:

a) I sogni dei partigiani sono generalmente:

b) Quando lo stomaco è pieno, il fuoco è acceso, e s'è camminato troppo, il sogno dei partigiani è:

c) Gli uomini tra il fieno cominciano:

- a.....
- a.....
- a.....

3) Leggete il terzo paragrafo e

a) elencate le azioni di Giglia:

b) elencate le azioni degli uomini:

c) elencate le azioni di Pin:

⁷ Oscar Mondadori, Milano, 1993 (Prima edizione: Einaudi, Torino, 1947)

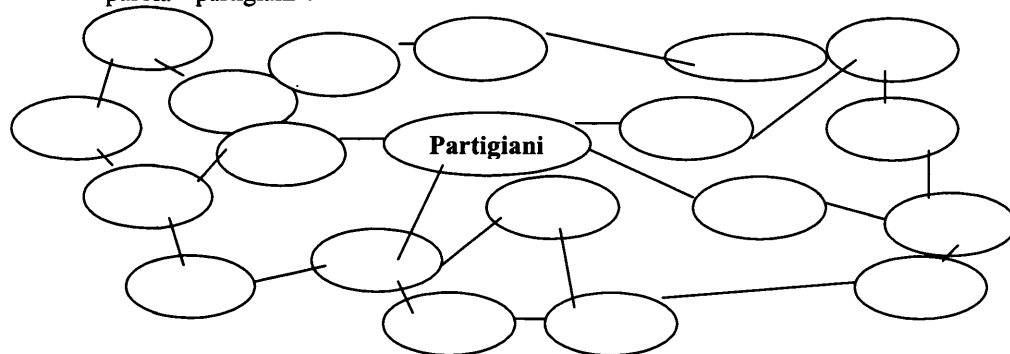
- 4) Leggete il quarto paragrafo:
 a) Come descrive Pin il mondo degli adulti?
 b) Cosa attrae e impaurisce Pin?

SIGNIFICATO

- 2) Elencate i personaggi nelle colonne appropriate:

Personaggi generici	Personaggi specifici

- 3) Considerando il testo e le vostre conoscenze create una rete di associazioni con la parola "partigiani".



INTERPRETAZIONE

- 1) Considerando i loro sogni, come vivono i partigiani?

- ☐ Al sicuro
- ☐ In pericolo
- ☐ In vacanza

- 2) Come si sente Pin in mezzo a quegli uomini?

- ☐ In un mondo felice
- ☐ In un mondo interessante
- ☐ In un mondo simile a quello animale e confuso

- 3) Secondo te il lettore si immedesima:

- ☐ in Pin, il ragazzo
- ☐ in Giglia, la donna
- ☐ nei partigiani

TECNICA NARRATIVA

1. La narrazione è:

- a) in terza persona:
- b) alternata:
- c) in prima persona:

2. il narratore è

- a) uno dei personaggi:
- b) l'autore:
- c) un testimone esterno alla storia:

- 3) la focalizzazione è

- a) varia, spostandosi da dentro a fuori della storia

- b) esterna
- c) interna

PRODUZIONE GUIDATA

1) Considerate tutti gli elementi e raccontate la storia in prima persona, con la voce e la prospettiva di Pin (150 parole).

ESPANSIONE E SCRITTURA

3. Immaginate di essere un bambino che vive durante una guerra e riempite la seguente tabella:

<i>Il bambino pensa a</i>	
<i>Il bambino vede</i>	
<i>Il bambino ha paura di</i>	
<i>Il bambino vorrebbe</i>	
<i>Il bambino non capisce perché</i>	

4. Seguendo la tabella compilata, scrivete una breve storia, o diario, dove raccontate l'esperienza del bambino durante la guerra. (Approx. 200 words)

Esempio:

Caro Diario,

Anche oggi non ho capito cosa sta succedendo. Ogni volta che esco da casa devo correre perchè.....

6. IO NON HO PAURA⁸

Niccolò Ammaniti

È apparsa una signora. Elegante. Bionda. Non era né giovane né vecchia, ma era bella. Stava seduta su una grande poltrona di cuoio in una stanza piena di libri. Aveva gli occhi lucidi. Si stringeva le mani come se le dovessero scappare. Ha tirato su con il naso e ha detto guardandoci negli occhi:

- Sono la madre di Filippo Carducci. Mi rivolgo ai sequestratori di mio figlio. Vi imploro, non fategli del male. È un bambino buono, educato e molto timido. Vi imploro di trattarlo bene. Sono sicura che conoscete l'amore e la comprensione. Anche se non avete figli sono certa che potete immaginare cosa voglia dire quando te li portano via. Il riscatto che avete chiesto è molto alto, ma io e mio marito siamo disposti a darvi tutto quello che possediamo pur di riavere Filippo con noi. Avete minacciato di tagliargli un orecchio. Vi prego, vi supplico di non farlo... - Si è asciugata gli occhi, ha preso fiato e ha continuato. - Stiamo facendo il possibile. Per favore. Dio ve ne renderà merito se saprete essere misericordiosi. Dite a Filippo che la sua mamma e il suo papà non lo hanno dimenticato e gli vogliono bene.

Papà ha fatto con le dita il segno della forbice.

- Due orecchie gli tagliamo. Due.

Il vecchio ha aggiunto: - Così, troia, impari a parlare alla televisione!

E tutti hanno cominciato a urlare.

Mi sono infilato in camera, ho chiuso la porta, sono salito sulla finestra e l'ho fatta di sotto.

Erano stati papà e gli altri a prendere il bambino a quella signora della televisione.

La pipì scrosciava sul telone del camion e le gocce brillavano alla luce del lampione.

“Attento, Michele, non devi uscire di notte”, mi diceva sempre mamma. “Con il buio esce l'uomo nero e prende i bambini e li vende agli zingari”.

Papà era l'uomo nero.

Di giorno era buono, ma di notte era cattivo.

Tutti gli altri erano zingari. Zingari travestiti da persone. E quel vecchio era il re degli zingari e papà il suo servo. Mamma no, però.

PRE-TASK

Che cosa vedete nella immagine?

ELEMENTI LINGUISTICI

- 1) Leggete il testo e riportate nella tabella tutte le informazioni relative a Signora Carducci, Filippo e papà.

Signora Carducci	
Filippo Carducci	
Papà	

- 2) Completate le seguenti frasi dette dalla signora Carducci:

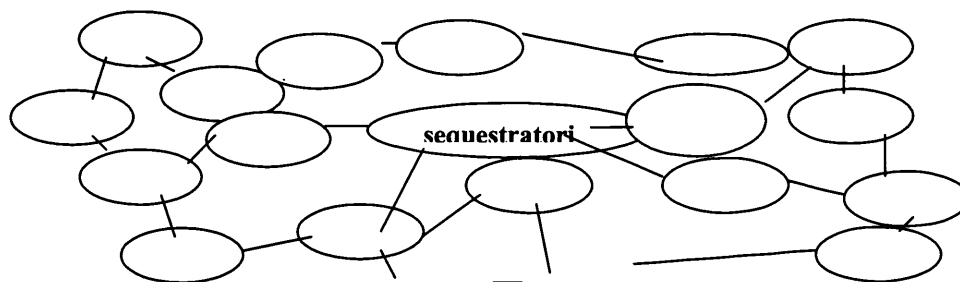
- Vi imploro,
- Vi imploro di
- Sono sicura che
- Sono certa che
- Vi prego, vi supplico di

⁸ Einaudi Tascabili, Torino, 2001.

3) A chi si rivolge la Signora con “vi”?

- ☐ Ai bambini
- ☐ Ai ladri
- ☐ Ai sequestratori
- ☐ A tutti
- ☐ Altro

3) Considerando il testo, create una rete di associazioni a partire dalla parola “sequestratori”.



SIGNIFICATO

1) Il bambino Filippo Carducci è:

- ☐ scappato di casa
- ☐ stato sequestrato
- ☐ in vacanza con Michele

2) La Signora parla in televisione perché:

- ☐ Fa un appello ai sequestratori per la liberazione del figlio
- ☐ Racconta un episodio della sua vita
- ☐ Appare in un film sul sequestro di un bambino

3) Michele è:

- ☐ un bambino che vive nel mondo delle favole
- ☐ il figlio di uno zingaro
- ☐ un bambino che ha scoperto che il papà e gli altri hanno sequestrato un altro bambino

4) *Tutti hanno cominciato a urlare perché:*

- ☐ Hanno paura perché pensano di essere stati scoperti
- ☐ Vogliono il riscatto subito e decidono di tagliare le orecchie al bambino per ottenerlo
- ☐ Decidono di liberare il bambino

INTERPRETAZIONE

1) Qual è il sentimento predominante? (potete scegliere più di una risposta)

- ☐ Rassegnazione
- ☐ Pericolo
- ☐ Felicità
- ☐ Melanconia
- ☐ Spensieratezza
- ☐ Disperazione
- ☐ Speranza
- ☐ Paura

- ☐ Rabbia
- ☐ Incertezza

3) Come si sente Michele?

- ☐ In un mondo felice, pieno di sogni
- ☐ In un mondo cattivo, dove tutti sono pericolosi
- ☐ In un mondo che non capisce, soprattutto di notte
- ☐ In un mondo pericoloso, nel quale si fida solo della mamma

4) Secondo te il lettore si immedesima:

- ☐ Nella signora
- ☐ In Michele
- ☐ Nel vecchio
- ☐ Nel papà di Michele

5) *Tutti gli altri erano zingari. Zingari travestiti da persone. E quel vecchio era il re degli zingari e papà il suo servo* rappresenta:

- ☐ la descrizione di una situazione, in cui in casa di Michele ci sono gli zingari
- ☐ la descrizione di una realtà che spaventa Michele, associata al mondo delle favole
- ☐ il ricordo di una fiaba
- ☐ la descrizione di un sogno

TECNICA NARRATIVA

1. La narrazione è:

- a) in terza persona:
- b) alternata:
- c) in prima persona:

2. il narratore è

- a) uno dei personaggi:
- b) l'autore:
- c) un testimone esterno alla storia:

PRODUZIONE GUIDATA

1) Scrivete un breve testo narrativo in cui raccontate la storia in prima persona, con la voce di Michele.

ESPANSIONE E SCRITTURA

1) State correndo in un bel campo di grano, ed improvvisamente trovate una fossa in cui è tenuta prigioniera una persona. Riempite la seguente tabella

Chi è la persona	Chi la tiene prigioniera	Perché	Cosa puoi fare?

<input type="checkbox"/> Una donna adulta	<input type="checkbox"/> Dei banditi	<input type="checkbox"/> Per il riscatto	<input type="checkbox"/> Fare compagnia
<input type="checkbox"/> Un uomo adulto	<input type="checkbox"/> Dei contadini	<input type="checkbox"/> Per ottenere dei favori	<input type="checkbox"/> Portare da mangiare
<input type="checkbox"/> Un ragazzo	<input type="checkbox"/> Un gruppo di ragazzi	<input type="checkbox"/> Per ottenere uno scambio di	<input type="checkbox"/> Denunciare
<input type="checkbox"/> Una ragazza	<input type="checkbox"/> Un gruppo di bambini	<input type="checkbox"/> prigionieri	<input type="checkbox"/> Liberare
<input type="checkbox"/> Un bambino	<input type="checkbox"/> Degli elfi	<input type="checkbox"/> Per dare una lezione	<input type="checkbox"/> Altro:
<input type="checkbox"/> Una bambina	<input type="checkbox"/> Un mago cattivo	<input type="checkbox"/> Per ottenere una eredità	
<input type="checkbox"/> Un vecchio	<input type="checkbox"/> Un gruppo politico:	<input type="checkbox"/> Per sapere un segreto	
<input type="checkbox"/> Una vecchia	<input type="checkbox"/> Dei terroristi:	<input type="checkbox"/> Altro:	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altro:		

2) Usando le informazioni che hai selezionato nella tabella, scrivete la storia dell'incontro con questa persona (200 parole)

7. CENTO COLPI DI SPAZZOLA⁹

Melissa P.

10 Luglio 2003

10,30

Sai cosa penso? Penso che forse è stata una pessima idea iniziare un diario... Lo so come sono fatta, mi conosco. Fra qualche giorno dimenticherò la chiave da qualche parte, o magari smetterò volontariamente di scrivere, troppo gelosa dei miei pensieri. O forse (cosa non inverosimile) quell'indiscreta di mia madre sbircherà fra i fogli e allora mi sentirò stupida e smetterò di raccontare.

Non so se mi faccia bene sfogarmi, ma perlomeno mi distraigo.

13 Luglio

mattina

Diario!

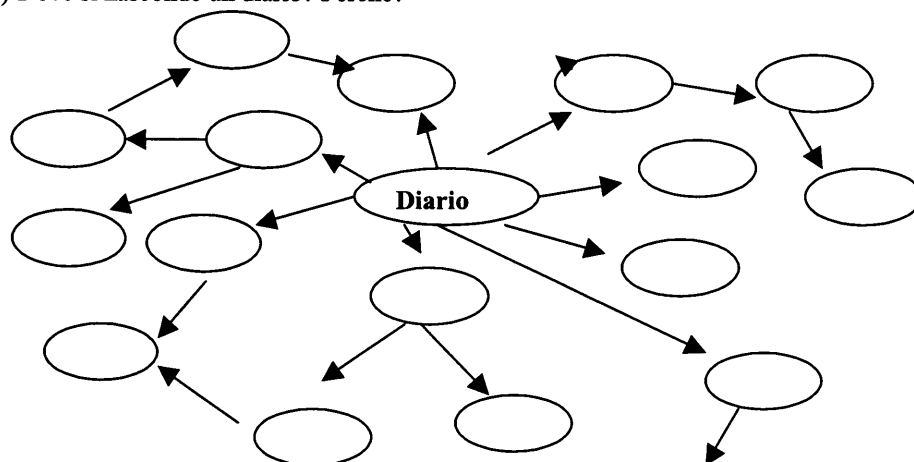
Sono contenta! Ieri sono stata a una festa con Alessandra, altissima ed esile sopra i suoi tacchi, bella come sempre, e come sempre un po' rozza nelle espressioni e nei movimenti. Ma affettuosa e dolce. All'inizio non volevo andare, un po' perché le feste mi annoiano e un po' perché ieri il caldo era così soffocante da impedirmi di fare qualsiasi cosa. Ma poi lei mi ha pregata di accompagnarla e così l'ho seguita. Siamo arrivate cantando sullo scooter in periferia, verso le colline che l'arsura estiva ha trasformato da verdi e rigogliose in secche e sciupate. Nicolosi era riunita a gran festa in piazza e sull'asfalto reso tiepido dalla sera c'erano tante bancarelle di caramelle e frutta secca. La villetta era alla fine di una stradina non illuminata; arrivate davanti al cancello lei si è messa a gesticolare con le mani come se volesse salutare qualcuno e ha chiamato forte : <<Daniele, Daniele!>>.

Lui è arrivato a passi molto lenti e l'ha salutata. Sembrava piuttosto bello anche se il buio lasciava scorgere ben poco. Alessandra ci ha presentati e lui mi ha stretto la mano debolmente. Ha sussurrato pianissimo il suo nome, e io ho sorriso un poco pensando che fosse timido; a un certo punto ho notato un luccichio ben evidente nel buio: erano i suoi denti di un biancore e di una brillantezza stupefacenti. Allora stringendogli più forte la mano ho detto a voce un po' troppo alta: <<Melissa>> e forse lui non avrà notato i miei denti, non così bianchi come i suoi, ma forse avrà visto i miei occhi illuminarsi e brillare.

PRE-TASK

1) Scrivete il maggior numero di associazioni legate alla parola *diario*

2) Dove si nasconde un diario? Perché?



⁹ Fazi Ed., Roma, 2003.

ELEMENTI LINGUISTICI

1) Leggete il testo del 10 Luglio:

a) Riempite la seguente tabella con le forme verbali al presente e al futuro dell'indicativo

Presente	Futuro

- Le azioni legate al futuro sono positive o negative?

b) trovate il maggior numero di informazioni relative a Melissa

Caratteristiche personali	Pensieri	Azioni	Previsioni	Descrizioni

2) Leggete il diario del 13 Luglio.

a) riportate i verbi (con i soggetti se necessario) che corrispondono a ciascuna data

13 luglio	12 luglio	Condizione continua nel passato

b) trovate le informazioni su:

	Stato d'animo	Aspetto fisico/Età	Azioni	Pensieri
Melissa				
Alessandra				
Daniele				

4) Scegliete il punto di vista di Daniele o di Alessandra e scrivete un breve diario degli stessi eventi del 13 luglio (50 parole)

SIGNIFICATO

1) Secondo voi Melissa scrive il diario perchè

- ☐ è felice
- ☐ è triste
- ☐ è depressa
- ☐ è giovane
- ☐ è anziana
- ☐ vuole capire se stessa
- ☐ vuole capire gli altri
- ☐ vuole sfogarsi
- ☐ vuole confessarsi
- ☐ altro

2) I valori più importanti per Melissa sono: (potete scegliere più di una risposta)

- ☐ divertirsi
- ☐ studiare
- ☐ guadagnare
- ☐ incontrare le amiche
- ☐ trovare un ragazzo
- ☐ uscire in motorino
- ☐ fare felice la mamma
- ☐ cercare avventure
- ☐ prepararsi al futuro

- ☐ andare alle feste
- ☐ altro

TECNICA NARRATIVA

1) A chi parla Melissa quando scrive usando il “tu”? (potete scegliere più di una risposta)

- ☐ a uno dei personaggi
- ☐ al lettore
- ☐ al diario
- ☐ a se stessa allo specchio
- ☐ alla mamma
- ☐ altro

2) Il lettore vede la storia:

- ☐ attraverso gli occhi di Melissa
- ☐ attraverso gli occhi degli altri personaggi
- ☐ attraverso una prospettiva esterna alla storia, personale

PRODUZIONE GUIDATA

1) La mamma ha trovato il diario di Melissa e lo racconta ad una amica. Scrivete il racconto.

ESPANSIONE E SCRITTURA

1) Scegliete una data nel passato e pensate al giorno precedente o successivo e ad elementi permanenti e riempite la seguente tabella con le azioni relative a ciascuna data, scegliendo la soluzione a) o b) e quindi i tempi verbali adatti.

Data 1: a) oggi b) ieri	Data 2: a) domani b) oggi	Condizione continua nel passato

2) Immaginate tre personaggi e riempite la tabella:

	Stato d'animo	Aspetto fisico/Età	Azioni	Pensieri
Narratore				
Personaggio 1				
Personaggio 2				

3) Immaginate un luogo.

Dove:

Quando:

Caratteristiche:

5) ora utilizzate gli elementi da voi identificati nei punti 1,2,3 e scrivete un diario (circa 250 parole).

8. ATTRAVERSO IL TUO CORPO¹⁰

Alberto Bevilacqua

27 Giugno

Bianca ha animato la mia festa di compleanno.

Ha portato i suoi amici: ragazzi e ragazze. Un interludio che ha affollato il teatro di questa avventura con giovani e giovanissimi attori. Hanno invaso il giardino, i corridoi, hanno fatto arrivare le loro musiche persino nell'interrato. Un andirivieni festoso anche nella vecchia camera che fu di Lawrence e di Frieda.

Bianca, ormai, ha molto di me e io mi specchio nelle sue invenzioni improvvise.

[...]

"La musica sale, sale, fino ad essere quasi un ritmo intollerabile, e c'è un momento in cui il ballare diventa quasi un amplesso, i giovani afferrano le ragazze....Ritmo dentro ritmo. Sempre di più, sempre di più, finché le ragazze si trovano come sospese, con il corpo sollevato dall'onda del corpo maschile...È un istante di perfezione."

Bianca e i suoi amici entravano e uscivano dalla camera, portando cibo e bottiglie.....

Nessun dramma. Solo Allegria.

E' stato davvero un colpo di vento oppure Bianca, con una delle sue trovate? Dai miei fogli ammicchiati sul tavolo, una ventina sono volati via, e sono usciti dalla finestra svolazzando nell'aria verso il giardino, ed è stato un gioco di tutti quei ragazzi afferrarli al volo, come Lawrence aveva inseguito i fogli del suo manoscritto dopo la scenata di Frieda all'Hotel Miramare. Bianca, accaldata dal ballo, mi indicava: "Guarda!...è segno di buona fortuna!".

Era ironica e affettuosa, e io la desideravo. I fogli che uscivano dalla camera in alto, con le loro facciate bianche, diffondevano nel buio un altro ballo aereo, di candore.

...Poi se ne sono andati tutti. Nella camera, siamo rimasti io, Bianca e Angelo. E anche Angelo se ne stava andando, lanciandomi un'ultima occhiata dalla porta, e poi una strizzatina d'occhio che avrebbe voluto essere complice e ironica, senza riuscirci...

Vedendo sparire Angelo, mi sono detto che la sua solitudine è sempre di una gentilezza estrema.

Ho pensato che, ormai, ho un anno in più. E molte ore tranquille da godere fra noi, io e Bianca.

[...]

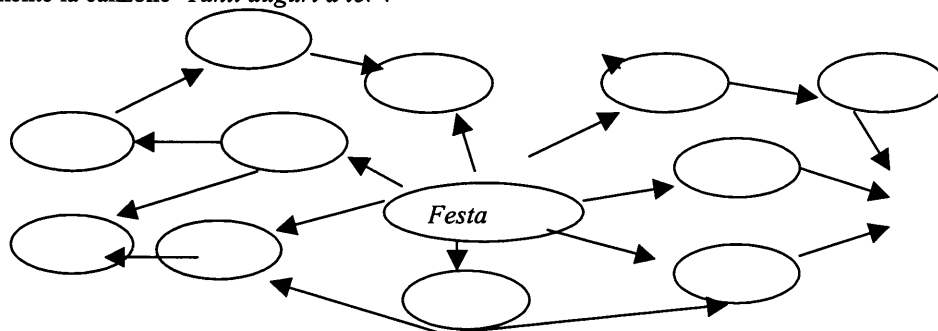
Una lettera...

Bianca l'ha lasciata sul tavolo coperto dal logoro panno verde, sopra i fogli del mio diario:

[...]

PRE-TASK

1) Create una associazione di parole e idee partendo dalla parola *Festa*. Cosa vi fa venire in mente la canzone *'Tanti auguri a te!'*?



¹⁰ Arnoldo Mondadori, Milano, 2002, pp.209-211.

ELEMENTI LINGUISTICI

- 6) Leggete il testo, pragrafo per pragrafo, e riportate i verbi nella colonna appropriata:

Verbi: Indicativo passato prossimo	Verbi: Indicativo presente	Verbi: Indicativo imperfetto

- 7) A cosa si riferisce il pragrafo “La musica sale [...]”?
- ☐ Ad eventi presenti
 - ☐ Ai pensieri del protagonista
 - ☐ Ad eventi futuri
- 8) Le espressioni che usano il tempo imperfetto si riferiscono:
- ☐ Alla descrizione di eventi ripetuti durante la festa
 - ☐ Ad una azione specifica
 - ☐ Ai pensieri del protagonista

SIGNIFICATO

- 1) Rileggete tutto il testo e scegliete dalla lista sotto la tabella gli aggettivi più adatti a ciascun personaggio. Potete utilizzare tutti gli aggettivi che ritenete utili e aggiungere quelli che volete.

L'autore:	
Bianca:	
Angelo:	

Incerto, sicuro, allegro, curioso, disperato, senza scupoli, impertinente, annoiato, spaventato, sfrontato, solitario, triste, allegro, pensieroso, romantico, arrabbiato, soddisfatto, ottimista, pessimista, insolente, gioioso, giovane, vecchio, anziano,.....

INTERPRETAZIONE

- 1) Che cosa esprime lo scrittore nel suo diario? (potete scegliere più di una risposta)
- ☐ Desiderio di un futuro diverso
 - ☐ Bisogno di superare la noia
 - ☐ Paura di un futuro diverso
 - ☐ Ricerca di compagnia
 - ☐ Sintesi di sensazioni presenti e passate
 - ☐ Selezione di ricordi importanti da associare al presente
 - ☐ Altro:

PRODUZIONE GUIDATA

- 1) Scrivete un breve testo scegliendo fra i seguenti (200 parole):
- a) la continuazione di questo diario , dopo la frase “*Ho pensato che , ormai, ho un anno in più. E molte ore tranquille da godere fra noi, io e Bianca*”.
 - b) il diario del 27 Giugno dal punto di vista di Bianca.
 - c) la lettera che Bianca ha lasciato sopra i fogli del diario dell'autore.

ESPANSIONE E SCRITTURA

- 1) Pensate al giorno di un vostro compleanno e scegliete per lo meno due persone che erano con voi (amico/a, ragazzo/a, parente, ecc.). Scrivete gli aggettivi appropriati a ciascuno.

NOME /RELAZIONE	AGGETTIVI
Persona 1:	

Persona 2	
Persona 3	

2) Elencate le azioni avvenute, la descrizione delle persone e i vostri pensieri decidendo il tempo appropriato.

Azioni	Presente: Passato Prossimo: Imperfetto:
Descrizioni	Presente: Passato Prossimo: Imperfetto:
Pensieri	Presente: Passato Prossimo: Imperfetto:

3) Considerando le due tabelle precedenti, scrivete il diario del vostro compleanno (250 parole)

9. LA CIOCIARA¹¹

Alberto Moravia

Finalmente, ecco apparire in fondo alla pianura distesa e verde, una lunga striscia di colore incerto, i sobborghi di Roma. E dietro questa striscia, sovrastandola, grigia, sullo sfondo del cielo grigio, lontanissima eppure chiara, la cupola di San Pietro. Dio sa se avevo sperato durante tutto l'anno di rivedere, laggiù all'orizzonte, la cara cupola, così piccola e al tempo stesso così grande da poter essere scambiata per un accidente del terreno, per una collina o una montagnola; così solida benché non più che un'ombra; così rassicurante perché familiare e mille volte vista e osservata. Quella cupola, per me, non era soltanto Roma, ma la mia vita di Roma, la serenità dei giorni che si vivono in pace con se stessi e con gli altri. Laggiù, in fondo all'orizzonte, quella cupola mi diceva che io potevo ormai tornare fiduciosa a casa e la vecchia vita avrebbe ripreso il suo corso, pur dopo tanti cambiamenti e tante tragedie. Ma anche mi diceva che questa fiducia tutta nuova, io la dovevo a Rosetta, e al suo canto e alle sue lacrime, e che senza quel dolore di Rosetta, a Roma non ci sarebbero arrivate le due donne senza colpa che ne erano partite un anno prima, bensì una ladra e una prostituta, quali appunto, attraverso la guerra e a causa della guerra, erano diventate.

Il dolore [...] adesso, invece capivo che Michele aveva avuto ragione, e che per qualche tempo eravamo state morte anche noi due, Rosetta ed io, morte alla pietà che si deve agli altri e a se stessi. Ma il dolore ci aveva salvate all'ultimo momento; e così il passo di Lazzaro era buono anche per noi, poichè, grazie al dolore, eravamo alla fine, uscite dalla guerra, che ci chiudeva nella sua tomba di indifferenza e di malvagità, ed avevamo ripreso a camminare nella nostra vita, la quale era forse una povera cosa piena di oscurità e di errore, ma purtuttavia la sola che dovessimo vivere, come senza dubbio Michele ci avrebbe detto se fosse stato con noi.

PRE-TASK

Guardate l'immagine e riempite la seguente tabella

	Sostantivi	Aggettivi
Primo piano		
Sfondo		

ELEMENTI LINGUISTICI

- 1) Leggete il testo e riportate nella seconda colonna gli aggettivi che si riferiscono a ciascun sostantivo

Pianura	
Striscia	
Colore	
Cupola	
Cielo	
Io	
Vita	
Cambiamenti	
Tragedie	
Fiducia	
Rosetta ed io	
Passo di Lazzaro	

¹¹ Mondadori, Milano, 1957

2) Leggete il testo e riportate gli elementi che trovate nel testo nella colonna appropriata:

<u>TEMPO</u>	<u>LUOGO</u>	<u>STATO D'ANIMO</u>	<u>PROTAGONISTI</u>	<u>EVENTI</u>
Finalmente	Sobborghi di Roma	Colore Incerto	Io	Ecco apparire

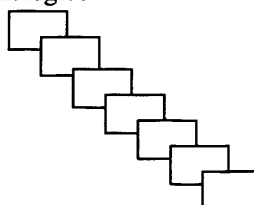
3) Inserite la punteggiatura:

Finalmente ecco apparire in fondo alla pianura distesa e verde una lunga striscia di colore incerto i sobborghi di Roma e dietro questa striscia sovrastandola grigia sullo sfondo del cielo grigio lontanissima eppure chiara la cupola di San Pietro Dio sa se avevo sperato durante tutto l'anno di rivedere laggiù all'orizzonte la cara cupola così piccola e al tempo stesso così grande da poter essere scambiata per un accidente del terreno per una collina o una montagnola così solida benché non più che un'ombra così rassicurante perché familiare e mille volte vista e osservata quella cupola per me non era soltanto Roma ma la mia vita di Roma la serenità dei giorni che si vivono in pace con se stessi e con gli altri

SIGNIFICATO

1) Riordinate la sequenza degli eventi in ordine cronologico

- Visione della cupola di San Pietro
- Ritorno a casa
- Vita serena a Roma
- Tragedie
- Speranza del ritorno
- Guerra
- Partenza da Roma



2) Le protagoniste sono fra loro:

- ☐ Zia-Nipote
- ☐ Madre-Figlia
- ☐ Sorelle
- ☐ Nonna-Nipote

b) Fate una lista di aggettivi, sostantivi o frasi tratte dal testo che ci presentano le due donne:

- ☐ Rosetta:
- ☐ Cesira

INTERPRETAZIONE

1) Michele, secondo te (potete scegliere più di una risposta):

- ☐ E' morto durante la guerra
- ☐ E' vivo
- ☐ Sta aspettando le due donne
- ☐ Ha perseguitato le due donne
- ☐ E' amico delle due donne
- ☐ Era amico delle due donne
- ☐ Altro

2) La Cupola di San Pietro nel testo rappresenta:

- ☐ Roma
- ☐ Ogni città
- ☐ La casa
- ☐ La guerra
- ☐ La speranza
- ☐ La religione
- ☐ La colpa
- ☐ La morte
- ☐ La serenità
- ☐ La famiglia
- ☐ Gli amici
- ☐ Altro

2) Quale stato d'animo suscita il testo?

<input type="checkbox"/> tristezza	<input type="checkbox"/> inesperienza
<input type="checkbox"/> malinconia	<input type="checkbox"/> fragilità
<input type="checkbox"/> felicità	<input type="checkbox"/> rabbia
<input type="checkbox"/> speranza	<input type="checkbox"/> dolore
<input type="checkbox"/> disperazione	<input type="checkbox"/> impotenza
<input type="checkbox"/> angoscia	<input type="checkbox"/> altro
<input type="checkbox"/> ineluttabilità	

☐

TECNICA NARRATIVA

1. La narrazione è:

- a) in terza persona:
- b) alternata:
- c) in prima persona:

2. il narratore è

- a) uno dei personaggi:
- b) l'autore:
- c) un testimone esterno alla storia:

3) la focalizzazione è

- a) varia, spostandosi da dentro a fuori della storia
- b) esterna
- c) interna

PRODUZIONE GUIDATA

1) Scrivete un testo in cui raccontate la storia a) dal punto di vista di Rosetta, oppure b) attraverso il dialogo fra Cesira e Rosetta mentre arrivano a Roma.

ESPANSIONE E SCRITTURA

1) Guardate la foto e riempite la seguente tabella:

	Sostantivi	Aggettivi
Primo piano:		
Sfondo:		

1) Scrivete i pensieri della donna mentre guarda il panorama.

10. La guerra di Piero

Fabrizio De André

Dormi sepolto in un campo di grano
non è la rosa non è il tulipano
che ti fan veglia dall'ombra dei fossi
ma sono mille papaveri rossi

Lungo le sponde del mio torrente
voglio che scendano i lucci argentati
non più i cadaveri dei soldati
portati in braccio dalla corrente

Così dicevi ed era d'inverno
e come gli altri verso l'inferno
te ne vai triste come chi deve
e il vento ti sputa in faccia la neve

Fermati Piero, fermati adesso
lascia che il vento ti passi un po' addosso
dei morti in battaglia ti porti la voce
chi diede la vita ebbe in cambio una croce

Ma tu non lo udisti e il tempo passava
con le stagioni a passo di giava
ed arrivasti a varcar la frontiera
in un bel giorno di primavera

E mentre marciavi con l'anima in spalle
vedesti un uomo in fondo alla valle
che aveva il tuo stesso identico umore
ma la divisa di un altro colore

Sparagli Piero, sparagli ora
e dopo un colpo sparagli ancora
fino a che tu non lo vedrai esangue
cadere in terra coprire il suo sangue

E se gli spari in fronte o nel cuore
soltanto il tempo avrà per morire
ma il tempo a me resterà per vedere
vedere gli occhi di un uomo che muore

E mentre gli usi questa premura
quello si volta ti vede ha paura
ed imbracciata l'artiglieria
non ti ricambia la cortesia

Cadesti a terra senza un lamento
e ti accorgesti in un solo momento
che il tempo non ti sarebbe bastato
a chieder perdono per ogni peccato

Cadesti a terra senza un lamento
e ti accorgesti in un solo momento
che la tua vita finiva quel giorno
e non ci sarebbe stato un ritorno

Ninetta mia crepare di maggio
ci vuole tanto troppo coraggio
Ninetta bella dritto all'inferno
avrei preferito andarci d'inverno

E mentre il grano ti stava a sentire
dentro alle mani stringevi il fucile
dentro alla bocca stringevi parole
troppo gelate per sciogliersi al sole

Dormi sepolto in un campo di grano
non è la rosa non è il tulipano
che ti fan veglia dall'ombra dei fossi
ma sono mille papaveri rossi

PRE-TASK

- 1) Trovate le parole in rima una con l'altra e riportatele nella tabella 1
- 2) Raggruppate le parole in aree di significato nella tabella 2

grano cuore ora fossi artiglieria soldati paura croce
frontiera tulipano sangue inferno rossi adesso argentati esangue corrente
inverno deve muore voce maggio peccato lamento primavera parole
coraggio valle colore giorno cortesia sole ritorno umore bastato torrente
momento morire ancora neve spalle premura addosso

- Tabella 1: Rime

- Tabella 2: aree semantiche

Elementi Naturali	Stato d'animo	Guerra
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ELEMENTI LINGUISTICI

9) Leggete il testo e riportate le forme verbali dell'indicativo nella seguente tabella:

Verbi: Presente	Verbi: Imperfetto	Verbi: Passato remoto
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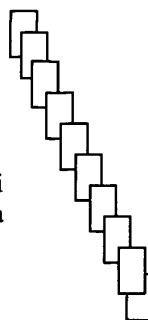
2) Leggete il testo e riportate le parole relative ad ognuna delle seguenti categorie:

Elementi naturali	Stagioni	Guerra	Religione	Stati d'animo
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SIGNIFICATO

1) Riordinate la sequenza degli eventi in ordine cronologico:

- a. Piero é ucciso dal soldato con la divisa diversa
- b. Piero vuole parlare, ma le parole si gelano in bocca
- c. Piero non spara
- d. Piero cade a terra
- e. Piero vuole che nel fiume scorrano pesci e non cadaveri
- f. Piero vede un uomo come lui ma con una divisa diversa
- g. Piero é sepolto in un campo di grano
- h. Piero non vuole morire
- i. Piero pensa a Ninetta
- j. Piero vuole sparare
- k. Piero passa la frontiera in primavera
- l. Piero marcia d'inverno



2) Riscrivete la storia di Piero seguendo l'ordine cronologico.

3) Qual è la sensazione generale che provoca la canzone? (potete scegliere più di una risposta):

<input type="checkbox"/> tristezza	<input type="checkbox"/> inesperienza
<input type="checkbox"/> malinconia	<input type="checkbox"/> fragilità
<input type="checkbox"/> felicità	<input type="checkbox"/> rabbia
<input type="checkbox"/> speranza	<input type="checkbox"/> dolore
<input type="checkbox"/> disperazione	<input type="checkbox"/> impotenza
<input type="checkbox"/> angoscia	<input type="checkbox"/> altro
<input type="checkbox"/> ineluttabilità	

INTERPRETAZIONE

1) Qual è l'atteggiamento dell'autore nei confronti della guerra? (potete scegliere più di una risposta)

- ☐ Uno spreco di energie
- ☐ Un'azione giusta
- ☐ Un gioco incomprensibile ma necessario
- ☐ Un gioco in cui si è protagonisti
- ☐ Un gioco in cui si è marionette
- ☐ Un modo per combattere per un ideale in cui si crede
- ☐ Un modo per morire dando un senso alla propria vita
- ☐ Un modo per morire senza una ragione
- ☐ altro

2) Perché?

Parole usate: Immagini evocate: Situazione:

PRODUZIONE GUIDATA

1) Riscrivete la storia di Piero, adattandola ad un momento storico diverso: una lettera del soldato alla famiglia, un diario del soldato, una narrazione in terza persona. (250 words)

ESPANSIONE E SCRITTURA

1) Riempite le seguenti tabelle considerando una delle seguenti tematiche:
Amore – Solitudine – Amicizia - Vacanza – Gioia - Altro

Tabella 1: rime

Tabella 2: aree semantiche

Elementi Naturali	Stato d'animo	Immagini	
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2) Unite rime e aree semantiche in un breve testo rimato (ballata, poesia,...) e date un titolo al vostro testo.

11. La gita a Tindari¹²

Andrea Camilleri

Fermò davanti al Municipio, acchianò all'Ufficio Anagrafe. Conosceva l'addetto, il signor Crisafulli.

"Mi necessita un'informazione"

"Mi dica, commissario"

"Se uno è nato a Vigàta muore in un altro paese il suo decesso viene comunicato qua?"

"C'è una disposizione in proposito" rispose evasivamente il signor Crisafulli.

"E viene rispettata?"

"In genere sì. Ma, vede, ci vuole tempo. Sa come vanno queste cose. Però le devo dire che se il decesso è avvenuto all'estero, manco se ne parla. A meno che un familiare si occupi lui stesso di....".

"No, la persona che m'interessa è morta a Trapani".

"Quando?"

"Più di due anni fa".

"Come si chiamava?"

"Giuliana Di Stefano".

"Vediamo subito"

Il signor Crisafulli mise mano al computer che troneggiava in un angolo della càmbara[❧], isò[❧] gli occhi a taliare[❧] Montalbano.

"Risulta deceduta a Trapani il 6 Maggio 1997"

"C'è scritto dove abitava?"

"No. Ma se vuole, tra cinque minuti glielo saprò dire"

E qui il signor Crisafulli fece una cosa stramma[❧]. Andò al suo tavolo, raprì[❧] un cascione[❧], tirò fora[❧] a una fiaschetta di metallo, svitò il cappuccio, bevve un sorso, riavvitò, lasciò la fiaschetta in evidenza. Poi tornò ad armeggiare col computer. Visto che il portacenere sul tavolino era pieno di mozziconi di sicarro[❧] il cui odore aveva impregnato la càmbara, il commissario si addrumò[❧] una sigaretta. L'aveva appena spenta che l'addetto annunciò con un filo di voce:

"Lo trovai. Abitava in via Libertà 12"

Si era sentito male? Montalbano voleva spiarglielo, ma non fece a tempo. Il signor Crisafulli tornò di corsa al suo tavolo, agguantò la fiaschetta, bevve un sorso.

"È cognac" spiegò. "Vado in pensione tra due mesi".

Il commissario lo taliò interrogativo, non capiva la relazione.

"Sono un impiegato di vecchio stampo" fece l'altro "e ogni volta che faccio una pratica con tanta velocità, che prima ci volevano mesi e mesi, mi pigliano le vertigini".

¹² Sellerio Ed., Palermo, 2000.

❧ acchianò -arrivò

❧ càmbara - camera

❧ isò - alzò

❧ taliare -scrutare, guardare intensamente

❧ stramma -strana

❧ raprì - aprì

❧ cascione - cassetto

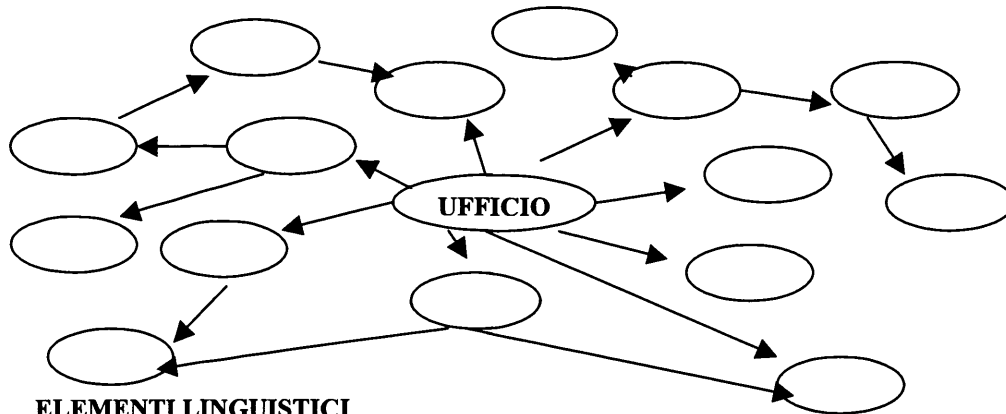
❧ fora - fuori

❧ sicarro - sigaretta

❧ addrumò - accese

PRE- TASK

Create una associazione di parole e idee partendo dalla parola *ufficio*



ELEMENTI LINGUISTICI

1) Leggete il testo e decidete se il dialogo è formale o informale? (Riporta per lo meno tre esempi per la tua risposta).

DIALOGO FORMALE	DIALOGO INFORMALE
-----------------	-------------------

2) Leggete il testo e trovate le informazioni relative alle persone nominate

NOME	PROFESSIONE	ALTRE INFORMAZIONI
Giuliana Di Stefano		Nata a: Il: Morta a: Il: Residente in:
Sig. Crisafulli		In pensione fra..... Fumatore: ◇ Si ◇ No
Montalbano		Fumatore: ◇ Si ◇ No

3) Trovate nel testo i sinonimi delle seguenti parole o espressioni:

Morte:

Ho bisogno:

Nemmeno:

Di vecchio tipo:

Usare, manipolare:

Circolare:

Mi meraviglio di me stesso:

4) Leggete il testo e riportate le azioni compiute dai due personaggi:

Sig. Crisafulli	Montalbano

INTERPRETAZIONE

Dal dialogo capisci che l'Ufficio dell'Anagrafe raccoglie informazioni su:

- ☐ Indirizzi e numeri di telefono
- ☐ Vita, morte, residenza
- ☐ Professioni
- ☐ Altro

SIGNIFICATO

- 1) Il Sig Crisafulli rappresenta:
 - ☐ Un impiegato modello
 - ☐ Un impiegato che ha cambiato spesso lavoro e modo di lavorare
 - ☐ Un impiegato che ha lavorato tutta la vita nello stesso posto e nello stesso modo
- 2) Gli “pigliano le vertigini” perchè completa una pratica velocemente:
 - ☐ Mai
 - ☐ Raramente
 - ☐ Spesso
 - ☐ Regolarmente
- 3) La sua personalità è
 - ☐ Ansiosa
 - ☐ Frustrata
 - ☐ Laboriosa
 - ☐ Sfaccendata
 - ☐ Routinaria
 - ☐ Estemporanea
- 4) Montalbano è
 - ☐ Meravigliato
 - ☐ Interessato
 - ☐ Paziente
 - ☐ Impaziente
 - ☐ Curioso

TECNICA NARRATIVA

1. La narrazione è:
 - a) in terza persona:
 - b) alternata:
 - c) in prima persona:
2. il narratore è
 - a) uno dei personaggi:
 - b) l'autore:
 - c) un testimone esterno alla storia:

PRODUZIONE GUIDATA

- 1) Raccontate la situazione del testo dal punto di vista del Signor Crisafulli.(150 parole) *Oggi è venuto in ufficio il commissario Montalbano.*

ESPANSIONE E SCRITTURA

- 1) Riempi la seguente tabella

UFFICIO	COSA SI RICHIEDE	COSA FA L'IMPIEGATO
1. Anagrafe		
2. Commissariato di polizia		
3. Ufficio Immigrazione		
4. Ufficio dogana		
5. Ufficio delle tasse		
6. Ufficio Matrimoni		
7. Banca		

- 2) Scegli una delle seguenti situazioni e ambientala in uno degli uffici della tabella precedente. Scrivete un testo narrativo che includa un dialogo con l'impiegato (250 parole).

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. E' nato il vostro primo figlio2. Avete subito un crimine3. Siete appena arrivato in un nuovo paese4. State passando la dogana sapendo che hai portato qualcosa di troppo5. Vi siete dimenticati di pagare le tasse6. Vi dovete sposare7. Dovete chiedere un prestito per comprare una casa |
|---|