

AFFECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH WHATSAPP: A CASE STUDY ON TRAINEE TEACHERS AND ITALIAN L2 LEARNERS IN A MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL BACKGROUND

APRENDIZAGEM AFETIVA E INCLUSIVA DE LÍNGUAS PELO WHATSAPP: UM ESTUDO DE CASO ENTRE UM GRUPO DE PROFESSORES ESTAGIÁRIOS E ALUNOS DE ITALIANO COM FORMAÇÃO PLURILÍNGUE E PLURICULTURAL

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study is twofold: 1 to investigate the strategies used by a group of trainee teachers during the implementation via WhatsApp of pre-task activities inspired by the autobiographical approach; 2. to analyse whether and how learners show emotional engagement through online messages, referred here as the ability to express their own personal sphere in the host country's language. The case study consists of the observation of 900 WhatsApp messages sent over a period of 39 days, aimed at carrying out 9 pre-task activities to enhance the intra-personal emotional sphere. The data were collected during an Italian L2 course designed for students of A2 level according to Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) with a multilingual and multicultural background and taught by trainee teachers.

The quantitative-qualitative survey, carried out on the basis of studies analysing digital communication and supported by the autobiographical approach, shows that pre-tasks offered the community of practice the opportunity to go beyond the teaching activity and to build an affiliate network with emotionally engaging communicative spaces, enriched by iconographic material and stylistically and linguistically refined life stories. From a professional perspective, the study shows the path taken by trainee teachers to acquire skills and competences – stylistic, pragmatic, linguistic, interactional and emotional – necessary to foster forms of affective and inclusive language learning through multimodal resources.

Keywords: WhatsApp; autobiographical task; mobile-assisted language learning; teacher training; emotional engagement.

RESUMO

Este estudo tem um duplo propósito: 1. investigar as estratégias utilizadas por um grupo de formandos durante a realização de pré-task inspiradas na abordagem autobiográfica e implementadas via WhatsApp; 2. analisar se e como os aprendizes manifestam formas de envolvimento emocional nas mensagens online, entendidas aqui como a capacidade de saber expressar sua própria esfera subjetiva na língua do país de acolhimento. Trata-se de um estudo de caso, baseado na observação de 900 mensagens enviadas via WhatsApp ao longo de 39 dias e destinadas à realização de 9 pré-task que potencializam a esfera emocional intrapessoal. Os dados foram coletados durante um curso de italiano L2/LS destinado a alunos com formação plurilíngue e pluricultural no nível A2 do Volume Complementar do QECR (2018) e ministrado por professores estagiários. A investigação quanti-qualitativa, realizada a partir de estudos que analisam a comunicação digital e auxiliada pela abordagem autobiográfica, mostra que os pré-task têm oferecido à comunidade de prática a possibilidade de ir além da atividade didática e construir uma rede de afiliação com espaços de comunicação emocionalmente envolventes, enriquecidos por suportes iconográficos e testemunhos de vida que denotam requinte estilístico e linguístico. Do ponto de vista profissional, o estudo destaca o caminho percorrido pelos professores estagiários para a aquisição de habilidades e competências – estilísticas, pragmáticas, linguísticas, interacionais e emocionais – necessárias para fomentar formas de aprendizagem afetiva e inclusiva de línguas por meio de recursos multimodais.

Palavras-chave: WhatsApp; tarefa autobiográfica; aprendizado de idiomas assistido por dispositivos móveis; treinamento de professor; envolvimento emocional.

INTRODUCTION

The use of technologies is henceforth a widely established practice in the field of language teaching. While in the past the computer was the main means to promote language learning (computer assisted language learning – CALL), nowadays it has been almost completely replaced by mobile devices (mobile-assisted language learning – MALL), which offers the advantage of being multifunctional and ubiquitous in everyday life. The advent of modern technologies has brought new ways of learning “beyond the classroom” (NUNAN; RICHARDS, 2015) to life, which are inclusive and ongoing (lifelong learning), as well as conforming to the lifestyle of learners of different age groups. A resource that has had and continues to have some success in various educational contexts,

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including the more linguistic one (ANDUJAR, 2022), is the free instant messaging service WhatsApp that allows you to share messages between individuals or groups. The success that it enjoys is partly due to its familiarity as well as the fact that it facilitates the exchange of information through multiple modes (BOUHNİK; DESHEN, 2014). Over the last few years more and more teachers have relied on this application to form specific groups that act as “simple social networks” (FISCHER, 2013), whose goals are diverse (e.g. communicating with students, socializing and carrying out educational activities).

The case study here presented is inspired by a teaching training course aimed at building and consolidating the professional practice of a group of future teachers attending the Master in *Teaching Italian to foreigners* organized by the University for Foreigners of Perugia (UNISTRAPG). Starting from the assumption that the linguistic training of students with a multilingual and multicultural background requires targeted pedagogical interventions in order to promote the sphere of affectivity (FERRONI, 2022b; COGNIGNI, 2016), the aim of the present study is twofold:

1. to investigate the strategies used by a group of trainee teachers during the implementation via WhatsApp of pre-tasks inspired by the autobiographical approach;
2. to analyse whether and how learners show emotional engagement through online messages, referred here as the ability to express their own personal sphere in the host country’s language (COGNIGNI, 2016, p. 122).

The background scenario for the following survey consists of a course delivered in synchronous mode, taught by trainee teachers and designed for students of A2 level according to Complementary Volume (2018) in order to carrying out tasks that enhance the intra-personal emotional sphere.

The article opens with a discussion on the benefits deriving from the use of WhatsApp in language learning (§1), then it follows with a presentation of the study context and methodology of investigation (§2). In § 3 the quantitative and qualitative results emerged during the didactic implementation are analysed and discussed. The conclusion sets out some considerations on the experimentation and skills necessary to contribute to the professional training of language teachers through multimodal resources and intercultural teaching practices (§ 4).

1. OVERVIEW ON THE USE OF WHATSAPP IN LANGUAGE CLASS

The study of digital communication between groups of learners and between teachers and students has seen a huge increase since the last decade. There are several communication channels that have received attention, such as Email, SMS, Facebook, Twitter and most recently WhatsApp.

Although the branch of research that studies the use of WhatsApp in language learning is quite extensive these days, many researches have focused on investigating the perceptions and effects that the application produces between students with different levels of proficiency. Equally diverse are the research tools applied to the study of the phenomenon: qualitative-quantitative surveys can therefore be carried out from samples of interviews, questionnaires, tests and studies of a more ethnographic nature (TRAGANT et al. 2021; NURAENI; NURMALIA, 2020). Regardless of the search modes selected, the results tend to provide the countless benefits that can be obtained from WhatsApp.

Most researchers point out that the application can promote interaction between teacher and students in the target language (MACKAY et al. 2021), which in turn is considered essential for language learning, since it is during interactions with others when the individual has the opportunity to produce “comprehensible or pushed output” (SWAIN, 1985, p. 248) and to increase his exposure to understandable input. Participation in interactive exchanges tends to increase when the WhatsApp group is made up of learners who have unequal levels of proficiency: in such case requests for clarification and confirmation, repetitions, simplifications and reformulations are employed to make the input understandable (CASTRILLO et al. 2014). On the contrary, negotiation activities tend to decrease when groups are made up of learners who have homogeneous levels of proficiency and share the same mother tongue (MACKAY et al. 2021): in that case the conversation takes place mainly in the target language, even though there are some examples of code-switching (CASTRILLO et al. 2014).

Longitudinal investigations – carried out starting from the analysis of interactions between teachers and learners – have highlighted that communication via WhatsApp fulfils different functions: 1. sharing service

communications (e.g. notice of delays/absences, such as giving information about exams and changes in the academic calendar); 2. carrying out tasks with educational aim; 3. reflecting on how the target language works by focusing on particular lexical, morphological and syntactic aspects. Hence gradually, as the group consolidates, off-tasks sequences appear and serve as means of socialization not controlled by teacher, which may extend over the duration of the course and are considered actually spontaneous communications. In these sequences members share moments that belong to their daily lives, joke around with each other or agree to meet outside the academic context (MACKAY et al. 2021; TRAGANT et al. 2021). The WhatsApp group is a preferred learning context compared to the traditional class as it emerged from a series of interviews between teachers and students. For instance, informants reported to feeling comfortable thanks to the physical distance that stimulates the participation of those who usually tend to remain on the sidelines during class (LA HANISI et al. 2018). Compared to the traditional lesson, the teacher is perceived by the students as a peer, a kind of facilitator that does not discourage the conversation but rather feeds it with interventions focused on meaning rather than form, guiding discussions and providing target language models (CASTRILLO et al. 2014). Some surveys show that the learners adapt to the medium and for this reason they use a simplified register typical of the digital context, which tend to be informal and characterised by punctuation games with expressive functions, short and poorly cohesive texts as well as absence of punctuation and capital letters (TRAGANT et al. 2021).

One aspect to consider when deciding to use WhatsApp in language learning is that not all students always participate in discussions, some of them just copy the task assigned from the internet. Moreover, the use of a technological device can sometimes be invasive since messages can be sent at any time of the day (NURAENI; NURMALIA, 2020). On the other hand it is essential that the teacher has adequate pedagogical preparation to plan the activity and implement the material taking into account the needs of the group and the software features (HAMAD, 2017).

From these premises, the questions that underlie this survey and which we will try to answer in the course of the work are the following:

1. What strategies are used by a group of trainee teachers to emotionally involve an online community of Italian L2 learners during the performance via WhatsApp of pre-tasks activities based on the autobiographical approach?
2. Whether and how does emotional involvement manifest itself in the messages that students and teachers share in chat while performing autobiographical pre-tasks?
3. What information can be obtained for initial and ongoing training?

2. METHOD

The following paragraph provides information on the Italian course, research participants and analytical methods used on the online community.

2.1 Course

The Italian language A2 level course Complementary Volume (2018), by UNISTRAPG, is one of the activities provided by the supervised internship and held in *Teams* over the period from May 30 to July 7 2022 for a total of 24 hours of lessons¹. The group of trainee teachers was made up of 10 Italian native and 2 Italian L2 speakers at C1 level of the Complementary Volume (2018): these latter are Mila², a Serbian woman who has been living in Italy for about 7 years, and Xian Xian, a Chinese native speaker living in China. As far as regards the trainee teachers, three of them had already experienced teaching Italian as L2 in different contexts. The trainee teachers prepared the intervention and material in pairs, with support from their tutor³. The class had 13 students (see § 2.2.). During each lesson (in total 9), an autobiographical task⁴ was proposed on the basis of the linguistic and educational needs emerged from a questionnaire given to the students at the beginning of the course. As

1 The meetings took place twice a week, each class lasted 2 hours

2 Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

3 The author of the article took part in this experience as a teacher and tutor.

4 The autobiographical task highlights the personal domain and encourages narration of the self to others.

pointed out in previous studies (FERRONI, 2022a, 2022b), the supervision programme adopted in this context is a variety of reflective practice (SCHÖN, 1987) and encourages the trainee teachers to explore new fields and possibilities in light of a transformative vision of education. After the first lesson, a WhatsApp group was created. At the beginning, it was aimed to facilitate access to *Teams* and share any service information, later on under the guidance of the tutor it served to share 9 preliminary pre-tasks for the realization of the final task. In other words, a few days before the lesson the trainee teachers sent a message in which they anticipated the topic covered during the lesson and invited the students to chat autobiographical experiences using various modes (images, text/voice messages, links).

The thematic areas dealt with various topics, including: family, travel, food and cuisine, music, legends of their own country, moods and migration. The aim of the pre-task was to activate a set of previous knowledge, stimulate curiosity, introduce the subject and the vocabulary useful for the realization of the final task as well as encouraging forms of narration focused on the synchronic and diachronic dimension starting from suggestions closely connected to the daily life of the learners. The autobiographical material produced online by the students was then reused during the 9 lessons in the form of educational support to enhance forms of self-narration and increase motivation.

Experiences based on narration and applied to language teaching contexts, although still limited, tend to highlight the benefits that can be obtained from this approach (FERRONI, 2022b; COGNIGNI, 2016). The act of narrating is a form of liberation and reunification of the self that makes you feel good: the individual tends to represent his or her self, thanks to an activity that attempts to stem the inner contrasts and shape memories, making them more fascinating through control and concentration (DEMETRIO, 2003, p. 77).

The autobiographical tale collects many of the instances promoted by the CEFR Complementary volume (2018), such as the exploration of different personal and collective life stories that allows to develop cultural and multilingual awareness as well as encouraging opening and curiosity towards linguistic and cultural diversity. In an intercultural perspective, writing, reading and listening to autobiographical tales promote the encounter and comparison with the other through forms of intercultural communication (BYRAM; FLEMING, 1998, p. 12). For the narrator to open up to the autobiographical tale without fear of being judged, it is important that the teacher develops specific communicative-expressive and interpersonal skills, as it emerges from a series of research carried out by Ferroni (2022a, 2022b) within a group of future teachers. Participation in the autobiographical dimension acquires a certain emotional charge, prone to poetic emotions and collective socialization, whenever autobiographical iconographic resources are used together with empathic interactional strategies (FERRONI, 2022b).

2.2. Participants

The WhatsApp group was created by one of the trainee teachers on June 01, 2022⁵. The student participation in the course was rather uneven due to work reasons. Consequently, some of them had to drop the lessons and in their place new members took over⁶, so the number of students who participated in the WhatsApp ranged from 7 to 13 pupils, to whom 12 trainee teachers and the tutor should be added. The learners' profile is quite diverse in age, origin⁷, profession, linguistic repertoire, time and reason for moving to Italy, but all of them had already attended Italian language courses. Except for Tatiana and Maria Carmen who attended the lessons from their corresponding countries⁸, the rest of the trainees lived in the centre of Italy.

2.3 Procedures used for the data analysis

The case study here presented has been conducted through the analysis tools available from virtual ethnography (CALIANDRO; GANDINI, 2019) and is based on the observation of interactional exchanges that took place within an online community. It is important to point out that the researcher's observation is a participatory one (KOMITO, 1998) since she took part in the social practices of the community by intervening as

5 Participation in the Whatsapp group was voluntary.

6 Foreign students took part in the free UNISTRAPG course voluntarily.

7 Respectively: Albania, Brasil, Egypt, Philippines, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Senegal, Sudan, Ukraine and Venezuela.

8 Respectively Ukraine and Venezuela

a tutor whenever she felt it necessary. The conversations were transcribed trying to remain as faithful as possible to the original. At the end of the course the informers signed a consent to authorize the treatment of data: the profiles of the participants are all unrecognizable, we changed the name and deleted the photo material shared on WhatsApp. To facilitate the analysis of the corpus we transcribed the communication via chat in a Microsoft Word document. Each message was reported with information about the sender, the day and time of sending to guarantee fidelity to the original. According to the subject matter we identified 4 macro-categories:

1. text messages to manage the group (communicating delays/absences, welcoming new members, sharing the lesson link);
2. messages with educational aim or designed for the development of the pre-task;
3. messages sent by students about the assignments and feedback from teachers;
4. off-task messages to share no educational related information.

Subsequently we proceeded to the creation of frequency lists for each macro-category, since in the present research we focused solely and exclusively on the analysis of international exchanges aimed at the realization of pre-task. To learn about participation in pre-tasks by group members we divided the messages into 3 sub-groups:

1. Messages from the teachers in charge for the lesson;
2. Messages sent by learners;
3. Messages from trainees and tutor.

In the course of the qualitative analysis we will comment on some exchanges extrapolated from the corpus and analyse the strategies used by the teachers to emotionally involve the students. For lack of space parts of the text and most of the iconographic material containing personal information about the participants were omitted. The qualitative analysis employed the tools made available by the studies investigating digital communication as a genre whose textuality is of a prominently dialogical nature, each message must therefore be understood as a turn that awaits a reply, a confirmation or postponement (PISTOLESI, 2022, 2014, 2004). To fully understand the users' practices within a group is fundamentally important the concept of online community, that is to be viewed as a form of "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (RHEINGOLD, 1993, p. 5). Digital communication presents a textual and linguistic organization extremely fragmented and crossed by graphic phenomena such as abbreviations, alternation of upper/lower case words and iconic signs (emoticons and emoji) that seek to replace a complex repertoire of verbal behaviours and facial expressions integrating face-to-face verbal communication at a multimodal level (DOMANESCHI et al. 2019). Particularly positive and cooperative interactional contexts can encourage the expression of non-verbal emotions and behaviours through the use of emoticons and emojis, commonly employed to express feelings in the presence of people with whom they have friendly relationships (DOMANESCHI et al. 2019, p. 564).

3. FINDINGS

We then analysed student participation from a quantitative and qualitative point of view, and the strategies used by the teachers to facilitate emotional involvement through snippets taken from the corpus.

3.1 *Quantitative analysis*

A total of 900 messages were sent within the group of which: 739 text messages, 129 photos, 33 links to songs, 1 voice message. The messages were sent over a period from June 01 to July 9, 2022 (39 days). Table 1 reproduces the information on the nature of the interactions identified in chat and their percentage:

Table 1. Nature of chat interactions represented in percentages.

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Group management	150	16,66 %
Autobiographical <i>pre-task</i>	683	78, 88%
Assignments	7	0,77 %
Off-task	60	6,66 %

As you can see much of the interactive activity that took place in the WhatsApp group revolves around the exchange of messages with an educational aim. Participation by members in the different activities proposed varies greatly (see Table 2).

Table 2. Information on participation in pre-tasks shared in the WhatsApp group.

Task	Participation of the teachers in charge for the lesson	Learners' participation	Participation of other teachers and tutors
La mia famiglia (My family)	5	3	3
Il nostro viaggio (Our trip)	64	40	40
Italiani nel mondo (Italians around the world)	12	13	13
Il piatto del cuore (My favourite dish)	52	49	49
Il tempo libero (In my free time)	51	24	24
Fiabe e leggende nel mondo (Fairy tales and legends around the world)	33	12	12
Una storia di emozioni (A story of emotions)	39	37	37
Stati d'animo in musica (Moods in music)	24	13	13
Chiudiamo in bellezza (Ending in style)	7	7	7

Task 1 is the one that has recorded the least participation by learners (3 messages), followed by task 9 (7 messages), 6 (12 messages), 3 and 8 (13 messages per task). Task 4 was best appreciated in participatory terms (49 messages), since recounting and sharing dishes from the past is an operation that promotes collective participation in the communicative event (FERRONI, 2022b). Tasks 2 (40 messages), 7 (37 messages) and 5 (24 messages) follow. An interesting fact that can be drawn from Table 2 is that participation was broadly active even with respect of the other teachers who, as we will see, took part in the tasks offering a significant contribution in interactional terms.

3.2 Qualitative analysis

3.2.1 A matter of style

Pre-task assignments are always preceded by opening formulas (PISTOLESI, 2004, p. 237) to open the channel of communication and engage learners:

16/06/2022 Maria: Buongiorno a tutti e a tutte! (*Good morning everyone!*)

It is interesting to note that, as the group consolidates and the teachers become more aware of their professional practice, the opening formulas are customized by learners with autobiographical features that help create an emotionally engaging environment. To this regard we compare the following messages:

07-06-2022 Filippo: Ciao ragazzi, per la prossima lezione per chi vuole, potete inviare qui in chat una foto che rappresenti un viaggio che avete fatto e condividere il link di una canzone per voi importante sempre restando sul tema del viaggio? Grazie mille e a giovedì *Hi guys, for the next class whoever wants to do it can send here a photo representing a trip done and share link to a song important to you always related to trip theme? Thanks a lot and see you thursday*

Extract 1

22-06-2022 Franca: Ciao a tutti! Siamo Franca e Sandro, i vostri professori di giovedì. Vi chiediamo, per favore, la foto di un'attività che vi piace tanto fare quando siete liberi. Grazie Mille! 😊 *Hi everybody! We are Franca and Sandro, your teachers on Thursday. We ask you to please send a photo about an activity you really like to do in your free time. Thanks a lot!*



22-06-2022 Sandro: Che bello 😊 anche a me piace molto fare lunghe passeggiate nella natura *That's great I really like taking long nature walks too*

Extract 2

As you will notice the first text that was posted almost at the beginning of the course is free of references that can lead to the identity of the sender, while in the second extract teachers, before sharing the task, present themselves in order to make the students know they could rely on them for the development of the activity. Moreover, to encourage collective participation immediately after sending the message one of the teachers offers her own contribution to the pre-task which will serve as a model for the students and consists of a personal photo accompanied by a written caption describing an activity she does in her spare time. After that, to reinforce what the speaker said, the colleague sends a reply with verbal and non-verbal feedback (Che bello 😊) that conveys emotions and moods. If at first the trainees focus their attention only and exclusively on the task and its development, they progressively acquire the necessary skills also in managing the final part of the pre-task by sending closing formulas (PISTOLESI, 2004), as we see in Extract 3 which was produced mid-course by Franca

and Sandro, precisely after the implementation of task 5. The message is a sort of conclusion of the lesson, through which the teachers say goodbye to the students and warmly thank them for their participation and the iconographic media shared online. Some students do the same like Afaf, who responds praising the teachers for their work with expressions of thanks emphasizing the enthusiasm and positive emotions he feels every time he attends a lesson.

25-06-2022 Sandro: Ciao a tutti ragazzi, io e Franca vi ringraziamo per tutte le bellissime foto che avete mandato 😊 sono fantastiche. *Hello to all of you guys, Franca and I thank you for all the beautiful photos you sent they are amazing*

25-06-2022 Afaf: grazie perché ho imparato molto e ne ho tratto beneficio, grazie per aver cercato di trasmettere l'idea a tutti, anche se i livelli sono diversi. quando abbiamo una lezione, sono emozionato e felice. *Grazie Thank you because I learned a lot and benefited from it, thank you for trying to convey the idea to everyone, even if the levels are different. When we have a lesson, I am excited and happy. Thanks.*

Extract 3

From the linguistic point of view, the variety of language used in the pre-task by the trainees corresponds to the standard Italian with a high degree of planning, generally free of typing errors and with an accurate punctuation:

28-06-2022 Mila: Buongiorno a tutti 😊

Siamo Lucia e Mila. Per la prossima lezione vi chiediamo di raccontarci la vostra esperienza vissuta in un altro paese. Ci potete mandare un vostro video o audio di massimo 2 minuti o, se preferite, potete mandarci un messaggio scritto. A presto. *Good morning to all We are Lucia and Mila. For the next lesson we ask you to tell us about your experience in another country. You can send us a video or an audio of maximum 2 minutes or, if you prefer, you can send us a written message. See you soon.*

Extract 4

28-06-2022 Mila: Buongiorno a tutti mi chiamo Mila e oggi volevo condividere la mia esperienza vissuta in un altro paese. Sono nata a Sarajevo la città capitale della Bosnia e quando avevo undici anni ho dovuto lasciare la mia città a causa della guerra. In quel giorno ho provato molta paura e tristezza perché non volevo lasciare la mia mamma e i miei amici, dopo quel giorno non mi sono mai più veramente sentita a casa da nessuna parte [...] *Good morning to you all my name is Mila and today I wanted to share my experience in another country. I was born in Sarajevo the capital city of Bosnia and when I was only eleven years old I had to leave my city because of the war: On that day I felt a lot of fear and sadness because I didn't want to leave my mom and my friends, after that day I never really felt at home anywhere.*

Extract 5

The teacher's painful testimony above about her experience in her home country is a formal written language model for the students. Although it is planned, its language is very rich from an evocative point of view and brings out some poetic emotions that make the subject deal with inner moods not easy to communicate (DEMETRIO; FAVARO, 2002, p. 98).

On the other hand, if read in a pedagogical key, the teachers' decision to prioritise a standardised language variety is to be understood as a conscious choice whose aim is to adapt to the real skills of the learners and to facilitate the comprehensibility of the input and the performance of the tasks. Consequently, the strategies of textual simplification in the morphosyntactic and pragmatic level must be interpreted in the same way and they consist in the use of:

- not too large sentences:

Anna: Buongiorno a tutti 😊. Vi ricordo di inviare su questa chat una foto della vostra famiglia! Ci servirà per la lezione di domani 😊 😊 😊 *Good morning everyone I remind you to post on this chat a picture of your family! We will need it for tomorrow's lesson*

Extract 6

- messages in the form of requests:

Maria: Buongiorno a tutti e tutte! Per la lezione di domani vorreste condividere una foto (anche presa da internet) di una città in cui vi piacerebbe andare a vivere? Grazie 🙏 *Good morning to all! For tomorrow's lesson would you like to share a photo (also taken from the internet) of a city in which you would like to live? Thank you*

Extract 7

– images or links providing task examples:

Federico: Queste sono le polpette al sugo. Quando le mangio penso tanto a mia nonna e alla mia infanzia 😊 *These are meatballs with sauce. When I eat them I think a lot about my grandmother and my childhood*



Extract 8

– iconic elements (emojis) to emphasize the end of the speech turn or to express a mood, often iterated to strengthen the effect:

Sandro: Ciao a tutti, siamo Franca e Sandro e la prossima lezione sarà con noi. Come vi sentite oggi? 😊😞😞 Convidetete qui con noi una canzone che rappresenta il vostro stato d'animo. Può anche essere una canzone del vostro paese. Grazie e a presto! *Hello everyone, we are Franca and Sandro and the next lesson will be with us. How do you feel today? Share here with us a song that represents your mood. It can also be a song of your country. Thank you and see you soon!*

Extract 9

– graphic intensifiers to recreate the voice effect:

Lucia: Ciao a tutti! Siamo Lucia e Giada, martedì a lezione insieme a voi parleremo di FIABE e delle LEGGENDE POPOLARI 🌍 Quale fiaba e leggenda è famosa nel vostro Paese? Vi chiediamo di mandarci il TITOLO e un'IMMAGINE che la rappresenta. Grazie mille! *Hello everyone! We are Lucia and Giada, this Tuesday in class we will talk together about FAIRY TALES and FOLK LEGENDS Which fairy tale or legend is famous in your country? We ask you to send us the TITLE and an IMAGE that represents it. Thank you very much!*

Extract 10

As can be seen from the examples, these are strategies that in a sense recall some of the prototypical traits of teacher-talk, a variety widely described in the field of language teaching (see DIADORI, 2013; LARSEN-FREEMAN; LONG, 1991). In this case it undergoes a process of adaptation due to the physical and spatial distance that separates the participants in the communicative event. Phonological and multimodal⁹ strategies indeed are replaced by a repertoire of compensation strategies using iconic elements, graphics and audiovisual media. A prominent role is played by emojis that, within a cooperative and positive context such as the one analysed here, are used by interlocutors to express non-verbal emotions and behaviours (DOMANESCHI et al. 2019).

3.2.2 Repetition

The pre-tasks shared in the WhatsApp group prepare the students to complete the final task, so when students' engagement is low it's necessary to employ strategies that help the participants to get back to the initial

⁹ Think of all those gestures that teachers use to facilitate the learning of syntactic, lexical and prosodic traits of the target language, especially in the starting levels (NOBILI, 2021).

request, avoiding a possible failure in the final task (PISTOLESI, 2004, p. 199). In this corpus there are examples of auto- or hetero-initiated repetition whose conversational function is exactly that of encouraging production (BAZZANELLA, 1999). At first the tutor gives her help such as happens at the beginning of task 2. The teachers in charge send the assignment on June 7 at 20:27, at 21:44 a student shares a message with a photo and the link to a song:

08-06-2022 (21:45) Fernanda: Santa Martha, mia bellissima colombia, è stato il primo viaggio che ho fatto con i mie figli al mare 🌊❤️ (photo of Fernanda at the sea and link to a song in Spanish omitted) Santa Martha, my beautiful colombia, was the first trip I made with my children to the sea

Extract 11

At this point, considering that one day has already passed since the application was sent and the engagement is low, the tutor takes over and decides to repeat the task (BAZZANELLA, 1999, p. 207)¹⁰ explicitly asking for collaboration from all and renewing the assignment. From 8:45 to 10:34 the same trainee teachers give life to a very intense exchange activity in which they share forms of self-narration accompanied by images and songs that evoke travel memories.

08-06-2022 (08:07) Tutor: Ragazzi buongiorno. Anna e Filippo hanno bisogno del vostro aiuto. Potete per favore dire qual è una canzone importante e condividere la foto di un viaggio? *Good morning guys. Anna and Filippo need your help. Can you please say which is an important song for you and share the photo of a trip?*

(08:45) Maria: Buongiorno a tutti. Questa è la foto del mio viaggio a Lisbona, una città che amo. Mi piacerebbe tornarci. (photo of Maria in Lisbon omitted) *Good morning everyone. This is the photo of my trip to Lisbon, a city I love. I would love to go back.*

(08:49) Giada: La canzone che vi ho mandato mi ricorda la mia terra. La canto ogni tanto quando sento mancanza di casa e faccio le valigie perché mi ricorda di portare “lo stretto necessario”. (link to an Italian song omitted) *The song I sent you reminds me of my land. I sing it sometimes when I miss home and pack because it reminds me to bring “the bare essentials”.*

(09:23) Anna: Questa è una foto del mio primo viaggio in Inghilterra. È del 2008...è passato un po' di tempo da allora ma la mia voglia di viaggiare è rimasta sempre la stessa 😊 (photo of Anna in London omitted) *This is a picture of my first trip to England. It's from 2008... It's been a while since then but my desire to travel has remained the same*

(09:30) Anna: Questa è una canzone che amo ascoltare...mi fa riflettere sulla fortuna che ho di vivere questa meravigliosa vita! ♥️ (link of a Spanish music piece omitted) *This is a song I love listening to... it makes me think about how lucky I am to live this wonderful life!*

Extract 12

The liveliness of the exchange is perceived by one of the students who at 11:21 sent a photo followed by an evocative memory:

(11:21) Vira: Buongiorno, questa è una foto di una vacanza in Sardegna, San Teldoro, 2017. (photo of Vira on the beach omitted) *Good morning, this is a picture of a holiday in Sardinia, San Teldoro, 2017*

Una delle mie canzoni preferite (11:25) (link to a Russian song omitted) *One of my favourite songs*

(13:12) Tatiana: Viaggio a Roma (4 photos of Tatiana in Rome omitted) *Trip to Rome*

Extract 13

Later, most of the foreign students will follow in the footsteps of Vira and Tatiana. From this example clearly emerges the sense of belonging that is established among the members of a virtual community. As the community consolidates, the network of relations between the participants expands by providing, when necessary, support through interactive exchanges with an educational aim (PISTOLESI, 2022, p. 40), since one of the prerequisites for an online community is the willingness to participate by giving and receiving support (SCHAU et al. 2009). In proximity of Tasks 5, 6 and 8, trainee teachers perceive that participation begins to decrease and as a result they intervene independently, without the support of the tutor, to relaunch the activity through self-repetitions. In extract 14 Franca simultaneously uses a rather diversified repertoire of textual strategies to rerun the assignment:

¹⁰ Depending on the temporal distance with which the repetition is produced it can be immediate or delayed (BAZZANELLA, 1999, p. 207).

use of a graphic intensifier at the beginning of the turn to draw attention; formulation of explicit questions inspired by the experiences shared by colleagues; sending the message through 4 separate conversational turns to make the request more visible; use of emojis.

22-06-2022 (11:25) Franca: PER tutta la classe: chi di voi fa foto? *FOR the whole class: which one of you takes pictures?*
 chi di voi guarda film? *which one of you watches movies?*
 chi cammina tanto come me 😊? *who walks as much as me?*

(11.26) Franca: foto...foto... 😊 siamo curiosi *we are curious*

Extract 14

Very interesting is also the strategy employed by Lucia who writes a synthesis of the legends shared by the group and accompanies the terms that belong to the lexicon of legends to the respective images to facilitate the understanding of the message:

26-06-2022 (13:28) Lucia: Finora abbiamo trovato draghi 🐉, una pavonessa 🦚, una mosca gigante 🪰, sirene 🧜 e yeti 🧊...Di quali altri creature parlano le leggende popolari? *So far we have found dragons a female peacock, a giant fly, mermaids and yeti... What other creatures do folk legends speak of?*

Extract 15

In other circumstances the teacher can invite the students to share their testimony by calling by name the people who have not yet sent their contribution, it is a strategy that is practiced only after an empathetic atmosphere has been established among members of the online community and is more targeted than the previous ones (extract 16), since the speaker in charge is directly hetero-selected by the teacher:

03-07-2022 (12: 17) Franca: chi, oggi, vuole condividere il suo stato d'animo con le canzoni? Tatiana, Vira, Peter...e tutti gli altri 😊 *who wants to share his mood with songs today? Tatiana, Vira, Peter... and all others*

03-07-2022 (23: 48) Tatiana: Ciao a tutti!!!! Mi piace il canto di tre famosi cantanti lirici: Jose Carreras, Placido Domingo e Luciano Pavarotti. *(link to an Italian song omitted) Hello everyone!!!! I like three famous opera singers: Jose Carreras, Placido Domingo and Luciano Pavarotti.*

Extract 16

3.2.3 Feedbacks

The analysis of the teacher feedback, on the messages that students shared in chat, proved to be an interesting tool for guiding professional training and emotional involvement of the teachers who were observed. To this regard we have identified several functions we will review with the help of examples extracted from the corpus. A first core is made up of a group of reactions sent by teachers and students as a response to a message and made of non-verbal emotional signals that reflect the degree of involvement in the interactive exchange. Among all these hearts, smiling emojis, thumbs up, as well as animated hearts (animoticons) stand out, see the feedback received from Peter after sharing a fragment of everyday life:

08-06-2022 (20: 10) Peter: Questo il mio foto di un viaggio città , Nettuno *(photo omitted) This is my picture of a city trip, Neptune*
 ♥ 👍

Extract 17

Equally productive are the verbal feedback used to express an appreciation of what the speaker in charge said through expressions that convey emotions and moods, the example that follows is taken from task 2, specifically Ali posted a sequence of photos in which he tells his first experience as a skydiver accompanied by a short caption as follows:

08-06-2022 (15: 06) Ali: Questa è la mia prima esperienza di paracadutismo a maggio 2022 Terni (4 photos of Ali while practicing sport omitted) *This is my first experience of skydiving in May 2022 Terni*

♥👍🤔4

(15: 07) Filippo: Fantasticoooo *Fantastiiiiic*

(15:31) Anna: Grazie Ali. Un'esperienza incredibile 🤩👍 *Thank you Ali. An incredible experience*

Extract 18

In addition to the non-verbal reactions of the participants, the post receives feedback from teachers through a wide variety of stylistic resources, including the use of vocatives (fantastico, incredibile), the graphic intensification of the final letter (Fantasticoooo), the emoji inserted at the end of the turn that simulates a state of shock, interest and personal surprise towards the extreme sport practiced by Ali.

Since task 4 listening to autobiographical stories triggers among the trainee teachers the desire to create moments of openness and curiosity towards forms of cultural otherness with feedback that encourage participation and empathic involvement. In extract 19, Peter shares a photo of a dish from his past in a chat without adding information about the name and its origins.

17-06-2022 (12:49) Peter:



♥

(14:05) Tutor: Grazie Peter. Deve essere buonissimo. È pesce fritto, vero? In quale paese viene fatto? *Thank you Peter. It must be yummy. It's fried fish, right? In what country is it made?*

(12:48) Peter: Sudan, questi Pesce del fiume Nilo *Sudan, these Fish of the Nile River*

♥

(14:26) Tutor: Che sapore ha la carne del pesce di fiume? Te lo chiedo perché in Brasile, dove ho vissuto per molti anni, ho mangiato pesce del rio Amazzonia molto simile alla carne di pollo *What does river fish meat taste like? I ask because in Brazil, where I lived for many years, I ate fish from the Amazon River very similar to chicken meat*

(14:41) Peter: Non come il pollo Ha un gusto speciale *Not like chicken It has a special taste*

(14:43) Peter: Anche ottimo odore *Also very good smell*

14:44 Tutor: 😊

14:46 Peter: 🤩👍🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔

Extract 19

At 14:05 the tutor sends a message in which she expresses a certain interest in the gastronomic culture of Peter's country. To satisfy her curiosity she asks for information that requires further participation by the interlocutor. The request opens a dialogue composed of 6 turns that follow each other in synchronous mode in which the participants, in line with multilingual and multicultural education (CEFR COMPLEMENTARY VOLUME,

2018), draw from their own autobiographical experience in order to identify similarities and differences between cuisines.

At this point the interactional space expands further: the story of Peter therefore encourages the emotional and personal participation in the communicative event of one of the trainee teachers, as you can see in Extract 20, in which the autobiographical memory linked to the gastronomic culture of origin becomes an opportunity to express a sincere and authentic interest in forms of cultural otherness establishing moments of collective socialization that make the learning space intensive and participatory in international terms.

(11:25) Franca: Cia a tutti! sono Franca, ci conosceremo nei prossimi giorni! *Hi everybody! I am Franca, we will meet in the coming days!*

(11:30) Franca: x Peter: mi piace molto il pesce fritto! io lo mangio soprattutto in estate e al mare x Peter: *I really like fried fish! I eat it especially in summer and at the sea*

(11:32) Franca: ecco il mio piatto del cuore: risotto ai funghi! *(photo with a risotto dish omitted) here is my favourite dish: mushroom risotto!*

(11:33) Franca: mi ricorda il profumo di casa! *It reminds me of the scent of home!*



(11:36) Franca: vorrei mangiare il pesce del Sudan...ma non sono mai stata in Africa *I would like to eat the fish of Sudan... but I have never been to Africa*

(11:37) Peter: Perché *Why*

(11:38) Peter: Benvenuto in Sudan *Welcome to Sudan*

(11:42) Franca: non lo so...ma ho ancora tempo per venire *I don't know... but I still have time to come*

(11:43) Peter:

Extract 20

3.2.4 Affective engagement

Social relations within the community of practice gradually tend to strengthen among members thanks to online classes that allow weekly attendance. The crescendo of emotions reaches its peak during the performance of Task 7 which consists in telling your migratory experience. The activity is presented with extreme care by the teachers, especially Mila shares a fragment of her memory in the form of a video linked to the consolidation of the migratory adventure with moments not easy to communicate (see Extract 5). Then there are forms of self-narration in which the pragmalinguistic dimension acquires a secondary value compared to the affective and motivational dimension of the learners:

29/06/2022 (11:49) Tatiana: Ciao a tutti!!! 2 anni fa ho fatto un sogno: ho visto che ero in una grande stanza con una parete trasparente e fuori dal mare ovunque! E sento una voce: “Vieni fuori!” Ho avuto paura, ma ho obbedito...E quando sono uscito, ho visto una strada attraverso il mare, come un corridoio di pietra chiara. Ho pensato: “Dov’è questa strada?” qui vedo Pompei e sento l’italiano...E ho avuto grande gioia e pace !!!! E così mi sono trasferito in Italia e grazie a Dio per questo *(link to a Italian song omitted) Hello everyone!!! 2 years ago I had a dream: I saw that I was in a large room with a transparent wall and out of the sea everywhere! And I hear a voice: “Come out!” I was afraid, but I obeyed... And when I came out, I saw a road over the sea, like a light-coloured stone hallway. I thought, “Where is this road?” here I see Pompeii and I hear Italian... And I had great joy and peace !!!! And so I moved to Italy and thank God for that!*



(12:02) Mila: Tatiana, grazie per la canzone che hai condiviso, non la conoscevo. È piena di emozioni. Anche questo che hai scritto è molto profondo e rispetto la forza che senti dentro di te. *Tatiana, thank you for the song you shared, I didn't know it. It is full of emotions. What you wrote is very deep and I respect the strength you feel within yourself*

Extract 21

In her story Tatiana, a student who at the time the course was offered lived in Ukraine, uses a dreamlike language during her journey through abyssal spaces that inspire her fear and bewilderment until she reaches Pompeii, her goal, when she feels peace and joy. The narrator’s memories are returned in the form of verses and as can be seen are subjected to a transformation, whose process is hence typical of the autobiographical education (DEMETRIO, 2003, p. 32). The teacher, for her part, moves with extreme delicacy in the field of memories self-

motivating the narrative of Tatiana with comments and assessments that trigger among the participants desire and curiosity to know the stories of others beyond their own. One of the aims of the autobiographical approach is precisely to ensure that the story-telling does not have a self-referential cycle but that it encourages others to participate (DEMETRIO, 2003). Attention to the stories of others and to one's own causes each to rediscover the value of each plot (DEMETRIO; FAVARO, 2002, p. 140). Gradually even the teachers let themselves go to forms of self-narration and share their own migratory adventure like the students, see Franca's testimony:

29/06/2022 (18:47) Franca: Ciao a tutti! Io sono stata in Scozia per 6 mesi. Non ero contenta del tempo, infatti pioveva e c'era vento quasi tutti i giorni! 😊 però ho visto posti magnifici, ho bevuto whisky in buona compagnia e mi sono fatta nuovi amici. Da questa esperienza ho capito che le cose belle possiamo trovarle in ogni luogo e stare bene anche lontani dal nostro paese! 😊 👍 *Hello everyone! I was in Scotland for 6 months. I was not happy with the weather, in fact it was raining and it was windy almost every day! But I'd seen great places, I'd had whisky in good company, and I'd made new friends. From this experience I understood that we can find beautiful things in every place and feel good even far from our country*



(20:11) Tatiana: 😊

Extract 22

The interactional space expands and becomes increasingly engaging when memory reactivates moments not easy to communicate aimed at synthesizing the main stages of Peter's troubled migration project.

29/06/2022 (21:43) Peter: il mio viaggio lungo ha iniziato dal mio paese Sudan c'era un conflitto armato nel mio regione Si chiama Darfurpoi poi sono partito in Libia qui la situazione era molto difficile , ho deciso di andare in europa sono partito con barcone e dopo tre arriva giorni in Italia sono stato due mesi e sono andato via in Francia, Germania , belgio perché volevo andare in inghilterra quando non sono riuscito , sono tornato in Italia .adesso ho deciso di stare qui e faccio tanti cose per vivere bene (29/06/2022 (21:43) *My long journey began from my country Sudan there was a military conflict in my region It is called Darfurpoi then I left to Libya there the situation was very difficult , I decided to go to Europe I left by boat and after three days I arrived in Italy I stayed two months and I left to France, Germany , Belgium because I wanted to go to England when I did not succeed in it, I came back to Italy . Now I've decided to stay here and do many things to live well*

👍👍👍 (photo of a person walking in the desert and link to a song in Italian omitted)

(21:47) Franca: Peter, grazie per aver condiviso la tua storia con noi ❤️👍👍❤️👍👍 sei stato molto coraggio ad affrontare questo viaggio... *Peter, thank you for sharing your story with us you have been very brave to face this journey...*

(21:47) Peter: Grazie mille *Thank you very much*

(22:28) Lucia: Grazie a te!!! Per aver condiviso con noi la tua storia. Mi hai emozionato! Spero che in Italia tu possa sentirti sempre a casa tua ed essere felice. *Thank you!!! For sharing your story with us. You moved me! I hope that in Italy you can always feel at home and be happy*

Extract 23

After leaving his native country because of ethnic conflicts, Peter passes through Libya to arrive to the fateful embarkation to Europe, where he will move from one nation to another in search of a place to live. The narrative acquires a therapeutic value and at the same time the past becomes a resource from which to draw to live the present experiences in a more conscious and reflective way (DEMETRIO, 1996). Peter's testimony is particularly interesting because listening to the migratory adventure of one of the group's participants creates an affiliate network between people who have very different backgrounds. The feedback that his message receives restores empathy and solidarity towards a life experience from which each one can learn. As has been noted, on the affective level it is when a personal story serves as a pedagogical practice particularly suitable for migratory contexts "as much in the narrator as in the listener, that emotional involvement so important for stable learning and effective interaction in the classroom" (COGNIGNI, 2016, p. 121). From the linguistic point of view it is evident that the students' testimonies have as reference the written text, whose style, unlike what was highlighted by previous research (TRAGANT et al. 2021; CASTRILLO et al. 2014), refers to forms of autobiographical writing that were not written spontaneously but that were planned by the author. As Demetrio & Favaro (2002, p. 113) point out, the exploration of personal stories takes time in order to bring memories to the surface. In the case of Tatiana (extract 21) we appreciate a certain care for the lexicon characterized by a repertoire of adjectives that recreate in detail the environment that surrounds her and the emotions experienced during her dream journey.

While Peter's testimony (extract 23) is marked by a series of key words that are part of the properly migratory vocabulary (D'AGOSTINO, 2021). Both productions contain elements that belong to an interlingual variety still in development, including: the lack of agreement of the past participle (*sono uscito, mi sono trasferito*), the omission of the auxiliary in the present perfect (*arriva*), the lack of concordance in verb tenses (*E ssetto una voce, vedo*), the exchanges of auxiliaries in the verbal system (*ha iniziato*), the absence of concordance (*tanti cose*) and the exchanges of prepositions (*sono partito in Libia*).

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From a quantitative point of view, the data reveal that the participation in the activities proposed in chat has been fluctuating, in fact only a part of the students took part in the activities offered. There are many variables that may have influenced the level of participation of students including the number of students, irregular attendance, the amount of time given for sharing in chat and each participant's sense of belonging to the group. The formation of a group as a community of social aggregation takes time before it can be consolidated (PISTOLESI, 2022, p. 40). From a more strictly didactic point of view, the affinity with the subject, the clarity of the presentation, the strategies used by the teacher to encourage participation and the level of difficulty of the task may have encouraged or discouraged engagement.

Although the participation of the learners is not constant, the qualitative analysis reveals that the pre-tasks have offered the members of the practice community the opportunity to go beyond the purely didactic activity by building:

- emotionally involving communicative spaces, enriched by personalised iconographic aids and life stories that are not always easy to tell;
- an affiliate network between people with very different backgrounds;
- spaces of pedagogy of listening and curiosity towards the one who narrates his or her story with moments of encounter and discussion in an intercultural perspective from which to learn.

Unlike the results from Tragant et al. (2021), where learners adapt to the medium and use a variety of prototypical features of the typed text, the implementation of the narrative approach has stimulated within the observed context the production of autobiographical written texts that denote a certain stylistic and linguistic refinement conforming to the linguistic level of the students. This data is very interesting if we consider the tide of digital texts that are rampant online and that, because of their evanescent and nebulous nature (SERIANNI, 2019), have been the subject of criticism by well-known scholars, not only because they present a less planned language, much more similar to that used in speech, but especially because “the text is not perceived as a cohesive and compact whole, thought to be read from the first to the last word” (SERIANNI, 2019, p. 23).

From a professional perspective, the study highlighted how the teachers, thanks to the scaffolding activities undertaken by the tutor, have gradually acquired professional awareness by appropriating a series of strategies -stylistic, pragmatic, linguistic, interactional and emotional- to facilitate the understanding of the messages, to encourage participation and broaden the inter-national space. Moreover, these strategies led to catch learners' attention, to strengthen the sense of belonging to the online community as well as encouraging forms of auto and hetero affective self-narration through the use of multimodal resources.

The study shows that WhatsApp, apart from serving as a means of communication and socialization between teachers and students, can turn into a valuable learning space in which to share teaching activities. On the other hand, in order for users to benefit from the above described, it is desirable that the teacher during his initial and ongoing training can be equipped with specific professional skills that, valuing a reflective paradigm (SCHÖN, 1987), allow him to set up and test a multimodal teaching capable of keeping the students engaged according to their real needs and learning objectives. We hope that this work can offer some food for thought to teachers and those involved in teaching training as far as the design of paths enhancing forms of emotional language learning through the support of WhatsApp is regarded.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST CONFLICT

The authors declare don't have any affiliation or involvement with institutions that may have financial interest or not financial interest with the subject in the article. School canons and literary mashups... articles.

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