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Early Foreign Language Teaching
with a reference to an Indian
experience.

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*Ai miei genitori,
che fin da piccola mi chiamano “zìngana” (zingara|vagabonda):
avevano già capito tutto.*

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INTRODUCTION

“India shaped my mind, anchored my identity, influenced my beliefs, and made me who I am. ... India matters to me and I would like to matter to India.”

Shashi Tharoor

I reached India for the first time in the Summer of 2015. By asking people who have already travelled there you can get all kind of advice, but nobody can really prepare you for the moment in which you will get to meet the Indian culture for the first time. The cultural shock is inevitable, differences between Italy and India are too massive not to impress and, like it or not, the contact with this country changed me deeply. The first time I went to India it was for a period of two months, during which I worked as a volunteer English teacher in an NGO which takes care of street children in Delhi, the capital of the State. After those two months I found myself deeply in love with the new world I had discovered and I decided that I needed to live in this amazing country for a longer period. I applied for a six-month internship in an International School in Gurgaon, just outside Delhi, and I was accepted. Those six months moulded me in a way that no other training in Italy could have done: not only from a personal point of view, but also because it was my first job in an International School and it taught me a lot. Two completely different realities, one surrounded by the humblest children and the other with the wealthiest ones of Delhi. Two experiences which taught me how, even if the final aims of schools should all be the same and namely to offer the best environment in which to grow, things in reality are different and parents must be aware of it. When I joined the International School’s staff I learnt about how Indian schools organize their programmes, which problems they face, but also their strong points. From this experience I decided to conduct research considering how the ideal early foreign language course should be organized, which characteristics teachers should have and what should be the final goals in school.

In chapter 1 a brief explanation of the concept “*bilingualism*” is given. Starting from Grosjean’s definition (2014:4) “bilinguals are those who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their daily lives” different types of bilingualism are described: the phenomenon can be outlined in various

ways by looking at it from different points of view. An initial division between *infant*, *child*, and *later* bilingualism is given and it will be expanded in the following chapters. The idea of the connection between language and culture is a foundation for this dissertation since I myself had to face problems due to diversities between the Italian and the Indian culture. The idea of biculturalism is exposed in section 1.3 starting from Gardner's (1993) idea that culture modifies language and vice versa, linking these two aspects in an indissoluble way. Risks of *subtractive bilingualism* are also presented in section 1.7. A short introduction to neurological backgrounds can be found in section 1.3 together with a paragraph on brain's development. The notion of *memory* is explained as well as the advantages of bilingualism. A good knowledge of the L1 is necessary also from an academic point of view: Cummins (1983) *Iceberg's Theory* has been the springboard which lead me to the idea of the need to always safeguard the mother tongue, especially in countries like India in which part of the daily conversations are still conducted in Hindi. .

Chapter 2 focuses on the linguistic development of the child and the differences between monolingual and bilingual children's language development. The two main theories about children's development, Piaget's (1959) and Vygotskij's (1978) are presented un section 2.2, with a focus on the differences between them and the results that these differences lead to. Linguistic developmental phases are reported in 2.1, for what concerns both first and second language. *Formal* and *functional* theories about the origin of language acquisition are also expounded, arriving at Vygotskij's (1978) idea which gives a fundamental role to society and the environment which surrounds the child. I will then present the idea of *critical period(s)*, section 2.4, and how it influences the school's aims. A view on *code-mixing* and *code-switching* is also presented. The *Second Language Acquisition Theory* (Krashen 1981) is also reported, in section 2.6, due to its immense importance even in present's day curriculum planning.

Chapter 3 reports what should be the aims of early language teaching following the European Commission's idea (2011:15) of *language awareness-raising or exposure*; the concept of "*learner centred class*" and the one of teachers as support rather than leaders are then presented, sections 3.2 and 3.3 respectively. In addition, a focus on the *natural approach* is visible, as one of the approaches that best sums up all the characteristics the ideal early language teaching should have. Following the same approach's ideas an in-depth analysis of the linguistic *input* is given, in particular on *teacher-talk* and *scaffolding*.

Chapter 4 lists the main techniques teachers can adopt in order to put into practise the ideas presented in the previous chapters: the concept of *experience-based language teaching* is presented in section 4.3, with the four main characteristics reported by Daloiso (2009). *Motivation*, as a necessary element for the learning process is the topic treated in the following paragraph. Pienemann's *Processability Theory* (1998) is then introduced. This theory is strongly connected to the idea of the *student-centred class* because it focuses on students' linguistic needs asserting that there are fixed linguistic developmental stages that cannot be ignored by teachers in the process of preparation of the syllabus. Asher's (1979) *Total Physical Response* method is then introduced in section 4.4. *Playful methodology* is also described, the reasons why it works so well with children and what its benefits are; *Task-based language teaching* is another method available to teachers and it is presented in section 4.6. An important activity that should never be omitted in early language teaching classes are *routines*, described in 4.7.

The importance of culture education will be presented in chapter 5. Bennet's (2003, 2004) six stages of development from *ethnocentrism* to *ethnorelativism* are described in the paragraph 5.1 and a model for *intercultural communication* (Balboni, Caon 2015) is used as a guideline for the development of a short description of the possible intercultural communicative issues which Italian speakers might face while interacting with Indians owing to verbal codes, non-verbal ones and differences in cultural values (section 5.2).

Chapter 6 describes the present linguistic situation in India, how things evolved after India gained independence in 1947 and the linguistic chaotic state described by Mackey (1977). The dissertation focuses then on International Schools in section 6.2: differences between public and private schools, a brief description of the students of these particular schools and an analysis of the goals is given. Thomas and Collier's (1997) *Prism Model* which describes how academic, linguistic and language developments should be considered by the school is explained in section 6.2.2 and used as the starting point for my personal opinions on the school in which I worked. Different aspects of the school are presented: the aims, the staff, the daily schedule structure and also the syllabus. At the end of the dissertation I will present my final thoughts on the school considering all the theories described in the previous chapters. The final aim of this research is not only to describe the characteristics of International Schools in India but rather to highlights the features the ideal early foreign language course should have.

CHAPTER 1

Knowledge of languages is the doorway to wisdom.

Roger Bacon

Bilingualism is not an easy concept; it can be defined in different ways according to the point of view in which you look at it. It can be a phenomenon which influences a whole population or even just the choice of a single family in which parents speak two different languages and decide to educate the child using both of them. It is a decision which has been debated for years: doctors and teachers have been against it up to the 1970s when, thanks to new neurological research and development in the language education field, the mentality changed. What was once considered a risk, and a habit to avoid, became a goal to aspire to thanks to its benefits. The advantages of growing up with two languages are indeed numerous, from a higher metalinguistic awareness to a wider capacity of divergent thinking. An economical profit is also visible: in a modern world which is becoming more and more global every day, knowing two languages can be the solution to intercultural conflicts and a bridge in the case of intercultural communication.

I will start by presenting the different types of bilingualism, both individual and social, I will then offer a brief introduction to neurological backgrounds and explain how two languages can modify the brain. A short presentation about memory is also present because it is from these foundations that language education has to develop new programmes.

1.1 BILINGUALISM: A COMPLEX DEFINITION

The word “bilingual” has deeply changed its meaning in the past years. It can refer to a person who speaks two or more languages, but it can also refer to a book written in two languages or moreover

to a particular profession which might need the use of more languages or again a country which recognize more than one official language.

In this paper we will focus our attention on the bilingual person, in particular the bilingual child who acquires a second language in early childhood (0-4 years) and we will adopt the definition by Grosjean (2010:4) which states:

“bilinguals are those who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their daily lives”.

For the scope of my research it is important to point out the last part of this definition: in their daily lives. We won't be focusing so much on the competence of these people but on the use they make of it and how this can modify their minds and their way of thinking and approaching the world.

It is important to point out that bilingualism is not a rare phenomenon, Grosjean (2010) declares that more than half of the world's population can be considered bilingual and this is due to different reasons. As the website Ethnologue states, there are more than 7000 languages in the world today and the area where we can find the biggest number is in Asia with 2269 languages in all. Regarding these languages some of them are of course more spread than others. In this list we can find Chinese, Spanish, English, Bengali, Hindi, Arabic, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese and last but not least French (Grosjean, 2010).

1.2 DIFFERENT TYPES OF BILINGUALISM

Bilingualism is not a stable and fixed entity, it may vary according to the way in which you look at this phenomenon for what concerns the level of competence, the opinion of the society about it, the dominance of a language over another and so on and so forth.

Bilingualism can be an individual's choice or a social need, in this case we are talking about *elitist* as opposed to *folk* bilingualism. We can describe elitist bilingualism as: “the privilege of middle-class, well-educated members of most societies.” (Paulston 1975 in Harding-Esch E., Riley P. 1986: 24). On the other hand, folk bilingualism is “the condition of ethnic groups within a single State who have to become bilingual involuntarily, in order to survive” (Tosi 1982 in Harding-Esch E., Riley P. 1986: 24). Two completely opposite points of view then, the first one which highlights the choice of a person\family who decides to become bilingual in order to have more possibilities in the future, for example in looking for a job or applying for an internship abroad, the second one which on the contrary, shows the need to do it in order to survive in their society.

Bilingual societies may develop for different purposes: contact for commercial reasons (Spanish in Mexico), linguistic minorities due to historical events (French spoken in Alsace) and furthermore the idea of *diglossia*. Diglossia is the event according to which we can find different languages used for different aims: a “high form” used for formal occasions (for example in school or with the lawyer) and a “low form” which is used for daily life. (Harding-Esch and Riley, 1986).

We must also differentiate between *official* and *individual* bilingualism because the fact that a nation is officially bilingual doesn't necessarily always mean that all the citizens are really bilingual. There are for example lots of officially monolingual nations (France, Germany, Japan) where the only official language is the mother tongue of the majority of the population but where in facts we can find a huge number of bilingual people who are part of old minority groups. Conversely in officially bilingual nations like Canada or Belgium, where more than one language has the same importance, we notice that just a really small percentage actually use both the languages on a daily basis (Harding-Esch and Riley, 1986). In fact, there are fewer bilingual people in the bilingual countries than there are in the so-called unilingual countries. It is not always realized that bilingual countries were created not to promote bilingualism, but to guarantee the maintenance and use of two or more languages in the same nation (Mackey 1967). As for the concept of individual bilingualism we also have to discern between different categories regarding the competence in the two languages, the age of acquisition and the idea of biculturalism.

There are different levels in what concerns the competence of the two languages. First of all, we have to differentiate between people who have a *complete competence* and others who have an *incomplete* one. The first group is able to use the language in every possible way: reading and listening comprehension, being able to speak and write and also to manipulate a written text like summing up or modifying it according to their needs. The second group, on the other hand, have just partial competence and it might be able to do some of the actions listed above. They might for example have a high competence in what concerns listening comprehension but really poor productive skills, also known as *receptive* bilingualism.

The two languages might be *balanced* or there might be a situation of *dominance* in which one of the two is better known or more often used for example. The dominance of a language should not be seen as a problem, a lack, or a mistake. We have to look at bilingualism as a continuum in which we can define different degrees of bilingualism: on one side of the continuum we will find the person who shows signs of unbalanced bilingualism, whose competence in one of the languages might be low and who tends to use just one of the languages most of the time. On the other side of the continuum there is the opposite situation: a person with a balanced knowledge in both languages

and who uses both of them equally on a daily basis. As Harding-Esch and Riley (1986) point out “bilingualism is not a black-and-white, all-or-nothing phenomenon; it’s more-or-less one”.

For what concerns the age of acquisition, most authors agree on a distinction based on three age groups: *infant*, *child* and *later* bilingualism. Infant bilingualism is used in the cases where the baby goes from not speaking at all to speaking two different languages, there is then a simultaneous acquisition of both languages. These infants will hopefully then become *biliterate* (able to read and write in both languages). Child bilingualism on the other hand, describes the case in which the two languages are acquired successively one after the other. The child learns the mother tongue (L1) and later on he\she is introduced to the second language (L2). This usually happens for two main reasons: the family moves to a foreign country or the kindergarten that the child attends uses a different language from the one spoken at home. The main difference between the two groups is the way in which the input reaches the baby\child. In the first case both the two languages are present at home and in an ideal situation are both equally used (same amount of input). In the second case the second language is acquired owing to an external factor, which might be a new neighbourhood or a kindergarten, and the amount of input is deeply connected to the time spent in these environments. We must keep in mind then, that at this age the difference is not really in the age of the child but rather on the quality and quantity of input they receive. The results can be excellent in both cases if the situations are as similar as possible.

The expression *balanced bilingualism* is used in the case in which both languages are acquired at the same moment since both are equally present in the daily life of the baby from day one. Unfortunately, this happens quite rarely since it is not easy to maintain the same amount of input in both languages in a long term process. Most of the time, we end up with different kinds of *simultaneous* bilingualism according to the language\s spoken as their mother tongue by the parents, the one used to the child, the one used by the other members of the family and, last but not least, the one adopted from the community (Baker 2011).

Romaine (1995 in Pinter 2011) identifies six main types of contexts which lead to just as many types of multilingualism:

- I. One person- one language context: in which the two parents have different mother tongues but one of them is also the dominant language of the community;

- II. Non dominant home language\one language-one context: is the same situation as in type I but the language used at home is the non-dominant one, while the dominant one is used and acquired only outside;
- III. Non dominant home language without community support: in which parents share the same language but that is not the dominant language of the community, and moreover, they often don't have a high competence in the community dominant language;
- IV. Double non-dominant home language without community support: in which all the three languages, both parents and the one of the society are different. The child acquires the two parents' languages at home and the third one outside;
- V. Non-native parents: where we can find a situation in which parents' and society's languages are the same but they decide to use a different one with the child;
- VI. Mixed languages on the other hand, is the situation in which both parents are bilingual and the society agree on a bilingual use of the languages as well. The child in this case is surrounded by lots of different languages, he\she can use all of them without restrictions.

Later bilingualism leads to slightly lower proficiency due to the so-called *critical periods* (see chapter 2.4). Whereas *infant* and *child bilingualism* are famous for the native-like competence and pronunciation *later bilingualism* is usually associated with a non-complete native accent and at times lacks in grammar aspects.

1.3 LANGUAGE AND CULTURE: THE IDEA OF BICULTURALISM

The notion of *culture*, cannot be divided from that of *language* since they both modify each other in such a way that many times we also tend to consider them part of each other. Culture is the way a group of people eat, dress, it considers the idea of time, the distance between the bodies while speaking and so on. Most of the cultural rules are taught to us in a natural way, exactly like the mother tongue. Parents are an example for babies and through their way of acting they show and teach them how to behave on different occasions. Most of the time we are not even conscious of our own culture or we tend to take for granted the fact that the way we do something is the only possible way.

It happens that, in the case in which a baby has parents belonging to different cultures (who also speak different languages) might grow up in a bicultural way. *Biculturalism* is the term used to describe people who are endowed with two different cultures. These children usually know how to differentiate between one language-culture and the other creating two completely different universes where they know exactly how to act accordingly to the rules of that particular society.

Language learning is not only a cognitive process meant as learning rules and remembering words, the language acquisition process is strictly connected to the emotional and personal development and in particular to what concerns the personal identity concept. “Language is the most salient way we have of establishing and advertising our social identities. Young language learners, particularly second language learners, are developing new identities in the community and at school. (...) Looking at children’s progress in language learning through the window of identity has provided powerful messages that language learning is more than the development of language knowledge.” (Miller 2003 in McKay 2006).

Bilingualism and culturalism not always coincide. There are lots of countries in which for example a second language is used as *lingua franca* and the population doesn’t use that particular culture, in this case they are bilingual but not bicultural. Bicultural people have at least two features according to Grosjean (2010): they take part to some extent in the life of both cultures and they adapt their languages and behaviours depending on the people they are with. Here is how a Franco-American describes himself: “To me, being bilingual in the U.S and, more specifically, being Franco-American in our pluralistic society, means that I have two languages, two heritages, two ways of thinking and viewing the world. At times these two elements may be separated and distinct within me, whereas at other times they are fused together” (Grosjean, 1982:166).

Exactly as for the languages, cultures usually don’t have the same importance and one has some kind of dominance over the others called *cultural dominance*. Moreover, as for the language dominance this can change and become more or less important with the time. Due to a new job, or maybe to a relocation, one can lose or acquire new cultures and use them in a dominant way accordingly to the needs.

A difference between the bicultural and the monolingual ideas on the other hand is that it is not always easy (or possible) to deactivate one culture whenever we want. Bilingual children learn from the first years of life that whenever they are in a monolingual situation they have to modify their

way of talking, but this is not always possible regarding cultures especially if we are not deeply aware of what belongs to our culture and what doesn't. A typical example is what happens during greetings between people belonging to different cultures (and who use different languages). They immediately get settled with the languages, maybe deciding to use a lingua franca if they don't have any in common but they usually don't know how to greet the others, if by kissing the cheeks, if by shaking hands, if by hugging and so on. Culture then may lead to serious problems if we don't know how to handle it properly. (see chapter 5)

Culture not only modifies our point of view of the world but also modifies our way of learning and furthermore acquiring a language. Gardner (1995 in Caon 2008A) points out that till the fifth year of life of a child, biology and culture work together in a process of creating a mixture of theories, of ideas, of approaches thanks to which the child will also create an image of himself\herself as a student, according to the culture around him\her.

According to Whorf (Caon 2008A) three different concepts, language, thought and culture interact with each other in the process of creating a mind-set. By changing the language or the culture then we can change the whole mind-set of a person. Amitav Ghosh explains this idea really well in a simple sentence: "I think about food in Bengali, about transport in Hindi and about school in English. It's like, as if each language would have gained a part of my life" (in Caon 2008A trad. mia).

We all know the influence of culture in life and we are all aware of the problems xenophobia can lead to if we don't teach children to be aware of cultural differences and to respect all of them. Nowadays language education deeply cares about these aspects and in Balboni, Coonan, Garotti (2002) they list the goals a modern school has to aspire to in order to create bicultural students. Cultural relativism, tolerance towards what is different, interest in the other, acceptance of the fact that other cultural models exist are the four points of their thesis. They believe it is necessary to teach students these values because according to them, culture is such an important part of language education that one cannot exist without the other.

We described before the different types of bilingualism accordingly to language proficiency and use but we can differentiate another type of bilingualism taking into account a social phenomenon as in how society sees the bilingualism itself. Contento (2010) differentiates between an *additive* bilingualism in which the culture accepts and supports the bilingual attitude and a *subtractive* one in which the society is against the bilingual ideology. Baker (2006:74) sums up in this way: "there are

two opposite categories. Additive bilingualism is a positive term suggesting that the learner is unlikely to replace or threaten his or her first language while learning a second one. He or she will simply add another language to the first one. In contrast to this, if the first language and/or culture of the learner is undermined during the process of learning a second language, this leads to rather negative outcomes in that the L1 may be replaced, or subtracted.”

Society’s opinion is intensely important because, as we said before, the cultural background creates the mind-set of the student: a society which stands in the way of a bilingual path will of course not lead to good results. Baker again (2000:19) continues by saying: “when bilingual or bicultural individuals suffer a detrimental effect on personality, bilingualism is not likely to be the cause. It is not the language per se that causes personality or social problems. Rather the social, economic and political conditions surrounding the development of bilingualism generate the problems. (...) If a bicultural community is stigmatized as socially inferior, the bilingual may suffer in terms of self-esteem and identity.”

1.4 NEUROLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS

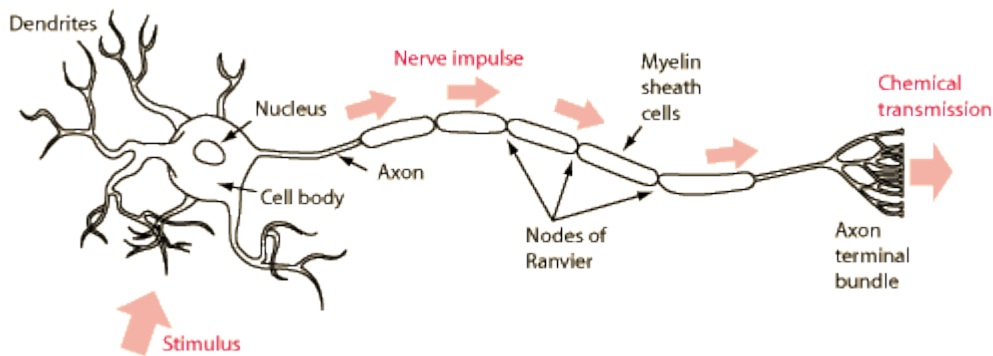
Since the aim of this paper is to outline a didactic approach strictly connected to scientific reasons it is important to focus on the one and only machine which allows the human being to differentiate between the other species: the brain and our capacity of speaking.

The brain changes through our entire life but it is during the first years, and more specifically from the first days of life, that the biggest improvements occur.

It is from the neurosciences themselves that language education has to build its foundations in order to follow in the best possible way the natural flow of the development that occurs for the acquisition of the mother tongue.

Everything in the brain is made of an enormous amount of neurons. Neurons are nerve cells which constantly carry and exchange info using electrical signals through axons and in particular the end part of the axon, the so called *synapse*. Synapses have the task of linking together different neurons so that a web of info can be created.

The only way in which modules of neurons can be made is by receiving input. Input is then essential for the development of the brain and this is true for all the modules of it, not only for the one devoted to language competence.



e-missions.net

1.4.1 NEURAL LATERALIZATION

There are medical studies dating from 1700 b.C which talk about patients caught by a mental illness and who became dumb; in the ancient Greece it was already well known that the right side of the brain governs the left side of the body and vice versa. But only in the 19th century thanks to Broca we had the first empirical results. He met a patient known in the whole hospital with the name of “Tan” due to the fact that he was only able to pronounce those three letters. He was clever, able to understand everything he heard but he wasn’t able to talk anymore. In a couple of days, he also lost the capacity of moving first his right arm and soon after his right leg. After his death, thanks to the autopsy, Broca was able to see that Tan’s brain had damage in the left frontal lobe and started his research on the now so called *lateralization*. In 1895 after he had studied eight more cases with the same features, he concluded his research by stating “nous parlons avec l’hémisphère gauche”, we speak with the left hemisphere. (Fabbro 1996). Thanks to Broca we now know where the ability of speaking is created, but it is thanks to Wernicke, a German neurologist if nowadays we know with which area of the brain we understand language. He studied lots of patients, all of them showing sign of aphasia. They all had problems in talking and according to Wernicke this was due to damage in the cerebral cortex in the temporal lobe. On the basis of his research, he concluded that, this area is where we gather all the mental images that are needed in order to understand a language. Without these images in fact our brain would not be able to recognize and match the input heard with the output we want to produce and the results would be nonsense speech. Brain damage are evidence of lateralization and neuroplasticity: young children who had aphasias in childhood were able to recover a lot better than adults who showed the same brain damages. This happens because of the young person’s brain capacity to modify its areas and to replace the blemished zones using the right hemisphere instead of the left one. (Vargha-Khadem et al. 1997 in Fabbro 2004).

1.4.2 BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Every region of the brain develops following specific phases according to Goswami (2004 in Daloiso 2007):

- I. Increase in neuron density and synaptogenesis;
- II. Slow synaptic reorganization;
- III. Completion of cerebral maturation.

Daloiso (2009) also adds that once the last phase is reached there is a visible a difference in what concerns neuroplasticity: in that it appears deeply reduced due to the fact that every section of the brain is now becoming more and more specialized in just one function and less able to modify itself as needed.

All the different areas of the brain follow the same developmental path but each of them takes a different time in reaching the point of maturation. This implies that the abilities of a child will mature in different stages and the school must take this into account while organizing the syllabus.

There are three main phases a brain has to go through in order to reach the last stage of maturation:

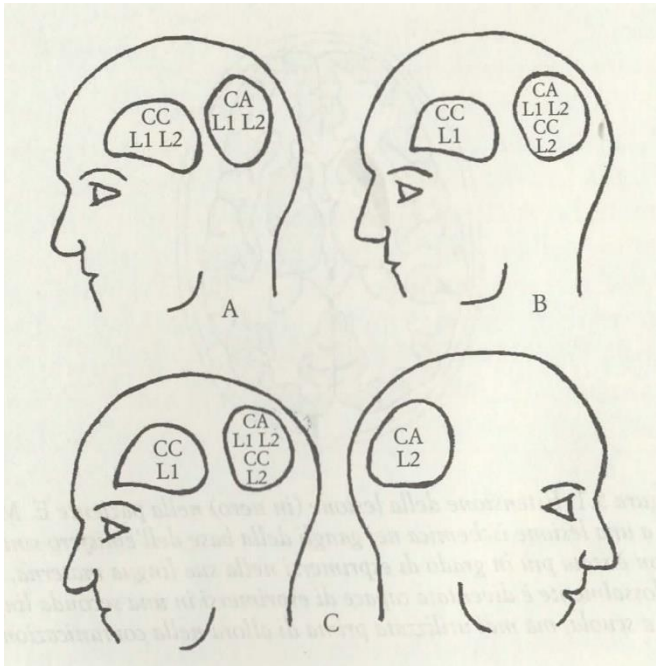
- I. Neural density, the quantity of neurons. It keeps decreasing from day one;
- II. Dendrites development. They get more and more complex with the years;
- III. Synaptic density, the quantity of synapsis.

Synaptic density can be divided into six more phases, the first three go from week 6 of pregnancy to year 3 of life. The age of 3 is when most researchers observe the first so called *critical period* (see chapter 2.4) in what concerns linguistic, cognitive and motor skills. The 4th, 5th and 6th phases go up to puberty when we can find the second *critical period* for language acquisition. During this time neuroplasticity seems to stop (or at least to drastically slow down) making the language acquisition process slow and difficult for grown up students. (Fabbro 2004)

1.5 LANGUAGES IN THE BRAIN

Not only the different languages are situated in different areas of the brain according to the period in which people acquired them or to the modality they used to acquire them, but also different aspects of the same language appear to be placed in different zones. Neville et al. (1992 in Fabbro 2004) show that function words appear in the frontal lobe of the left hemisphere while content words are in the rear areas of both hemisphere, mainly however in the left one. In the case in which the second language has been acquired before the age of eight those areas tend to be the same for both first and second languages; when, on the other hand, the second language is introduced after

the age of eight all these areas are separated. This means that a bigger area of the brain needs to be activated when an older student is using the second language and this leads to a bigger effort due to the inferior grade of automatic work in the process.



*A: languages acquired before the age of 7
 B: languages acquired between 7 and 16
 C: languages acquired after the age of 16*

CC= classe chiusa\function words CA= classe aperta\content words

Fabbro 2004:94

It is now clear then that there are different areas in the brain and that all of them take care of different aspects of our life. Another important hypothesis to keep in mind is the so-called “soglia di attivazione linguistica” that states that each neuron has a specific level of activation, that means it has to receive a minimum amount of input in order to activate its capacities (Kandel, Schwartz, Jessel in Dalouis 2009).

This is of course also true for all that concerns linguistic capacity and furthermore the difference between the level of activation needed for the mother tongue and the second language. This idea of the level of activation is a good answer to the fact that learning a second language might at times appear a challenge; this might be due to a particularly high level of activation for a second language acquisition.

It is also important to point out that this level might be reduced by using three strategies (Dalouis 2009):

- I. Regularity, as in how often a person can actually use the language;
- II. Recency, as in the time since which he\she has last elapsed that language;
- III. Emotional engagement, as in how involved the person is while acquiring the language.

These three strategies usually justify the differences in the learning process of different people but other causes are also involved. The most important one seems to be the age at which the person came into contact with the language: according to this idea people who acquired the second language before the 8th year of life have a more direct access to the areas of the brain where the languages are situated. Moreover, it seems that, thanks to deep motivation and a regular input the areas designated to the storage of first and second language might appear as just one compared to people who acquired the two language later on in the life. (Gullberg, Indefrey 2006 in Daloiso 2009).

One of the first studies about where languages are located in the brain is by Sigmund Freud and it is dated 1891. He stated that both mother tongue and other possible languages must be situated in the same brain area. On the other hand, Scoresby-Jackson in 1867 said that any new language acquired would have led to the creation of a new centre in Broca's area. Afterwards, a new hypothesis declared that different languages might have parts in common and parts specifically created for the new language. This is the theory which is still active even now as it is the one which can explain some of the phenomena registered in the case of aphasia in bilingual people (Fabbro 1996).

1.6 MEMORY

The new technologies are the reason why we are nowadays able to understand how memory works and especially how it is related to language learning. The most important research is dated 1953 and it is well known as the case of the patient H.M. H.M was a young man, 27 years old, who had been suffering from an extreme form of epilepsy since he was 16. In order to try to improve his situation doctors decided to remove first the right side hippocampus and then the left one as well since the first operation didn't help the situation. After the second operation his epilepsy got better but from that day onwards H.M was not able to remember anything new anymore. However, he had a good memory for what concerned everything which had happened before the second operation. The only thing he was able to do was to memorize new info for a small amount of time even though without being able to acquire those data permanently. (Cohen et al 1994. in Fabbro 2004)

This is the study from which much research started and from which doctors began to believe in the presence of two kinds of memory, a *short-term memory* (also known as working memory) and a *long-term* one.

Input reaches the brain, and the first phase which gets activated is the so called *sensory memory*. Here the input is not organized according to its meaning but rather on the features of it, as if it were visual, auditory or tactile. Input endures in the brain only for a couple of seconds, during which a rehearsal takes place and the input is then analysed according to its meaning not only its features. The input is then elaborated in the working memory which has specific characteristics (Daloiso 2009):

- The need to deactivate everything that surround the input and might distract;
- a quantitative limit which is usually not more than eight elements; even though by applying specific strategies we can improve this capacity (Cardona 2001)
- By using repetition strategies, we can allow the input to stay longer in this “storage area” in order to understand the input better and then move on to the long-term memory.

In the case of H.M, his long-term memory before the second operation was intact, the working one as well, but the ability to use the long-term memory had been completely lost. H.M, moreover was able to talk and to do new procedural works without however being conscious of it, the only difference between him and the control group was that H.M needed explanations every single day since he wasn.t able to remember what had happened the day before. This new notion allowed doctors to divide the memory into two more groups: *explicit* and *implicit* memory. Explicit memory contains all the info that we are aware of (our past history, people’s faces, school notions for example), implicit memory, on the other hand, contains all the unconditioned reflexes (the ability to breath for example). Basically the explicit memory is the one which includes all the knowledge that can be explained to somebody else, while the implicit one is the opposite.

The importance of implicit memory is that it works without us being aware of it, this allows a 10-month-old baby to acquire linguistic notions without being aware of it. This is the process through which the mother tongue is acquired and the reason why we are not able to remember anything that happened before the age of three: explicit memory develops only later on. Memory is deeply related to languages and the difference between the implicit and the explicit one explains the difference in the acquiring process for what concerns the first and the second language. The first one, as we saw

before, is acquired in an automatic way without the baby being even conscious of it and by using implicit memory. The second language, on the other hand, if not acquired at the same time as the first one, is acquired by using the explicit one, transforming the whole process from a natural to a more structured and complex. Regarding language acquisition, the two types of memory (implicit and explicit) are equally important since the implicit one is needed in order to acquire phonological and syntactic elements while the second one is the one through which we are able to acquire lexicon (Fabbro 2004).

Taking into account the aim of the paper to establish a scientific approach to language education in early childhood following the natural development of the child it is important to consider that all the structures listed above develop in different stages and are not all available at all ages. Explicit memory for example reaches its maturation point only at the age of seven, this implicates that even though a 5 years old child might have a well-established phonological and syntactic knowledge, his/her lexical competence might still be really low and underdeveloped. Moreover, while explicit memory stays active for life (allowing us to learn new words during our whole life, implicit memory seems to be dominant only in the first years of life. (Aglioti, Fabbro 2006).

This distinction implies two specific notions:

- I. Children are able to acquire the functional lexicon using implicit memory, adults on the other hand use the explicit one as it would be part of the lexicon,
- II. Children's mistakes follow specific rules. Bilingual children seem to memorize regular verbs by using the implicit memory while the irregular one are in the explicit memory.

The second point is the explanation of mistakes in overgeneralization that often occur with young children: in the beginning they acquire irregular rules by using implicit memory considering them as pre-made structures. Only later on, with the explicit memory starting developing, they will reconsider these verbs by using a semantic method through the more controlled and aware explicit memory.

1.7 BILINGUALISM ADVANTAGES

In the case of *elitist bilingualism* what are the reasons that lead parents towards this choice? Why should bilingualism be considered "better" than unilinguism? Moreover, are there actually advantages in what concerns the bilingual brain?

In the past, and some of them still remain, there used to be lots of myths about bilingualism. There are three main schools of thoughts that we can identify starting from the 19th century till today: the period of *negative effects*, the *neutral one* and no less important the one of *positive effects* (Baker 2000).

1.7.1 NEGATIVE EFFECTS PHASE

Up to the 1960s bilingualism was considered in the same way as an illness, it was considered dangerous, and it was suggested both by teachers and doctors, to strictly avoid educating a child in a bilingual environment.

As Baker (2000:17) points out: “negative views about the personality and social development of bilingual children have been frequently expressed. Bilingualism was long associated with, and even said to cause, schizophrenia, mental confusion, identity and emotional problems, social attachment deficits, loyalty conflicts, and poor self-esteem and self-concept. Problems as diverse as stuttering and poor moral development were regarded as likely consequences of bilingualism”. In this paragraph a list of the most important myths will be presented and a critical point of view on them will be given.

Bilingualism will cause negative effects on child’s cognitive and intelligence development.

It is important to point out that researches in the past ended up by showing negative effects of bilingualism mainly because of methodological mistakes or subject-selection problems. This said, it is not difficult to find opinions like Laurie’s: “If it were possible for a child or boy to live in two languages at once equally well, so much the worse. His intellectual and spiritual growth would not thereby be doubled but halved. Unity of mind and of character would have great difficulty in asserting itself in such circumstances” (Laurie 1890 in Grosjean 2010:219). It was only with the presentation of the results collected by Peal and Lambert in 1962 that things started to change. The result showed that bilinguals had different benefits in what concerns intelligence and they appeared to be more flexible, creative and with innovative thought as well. Swain and Cummins, a couple of years later, conducted more research and concluded by saying that bilinguals appear to be more sensitive to semantic relations, their results are better than monolinguals’ when they have to restructure a perceptual situation, they have a more developed social sensitivity and they find it

easier to complete rule-discovery tasks (Swain, Cummins 1986 in Grosjean 2010). The only way to understand why there is such a huge difference between these studies is to focus on the methodologies used in the first ones. Factors like age, sex, social background and educational opportunities, for example, were not taken into account during the process of subject selection. Another important note is that their level of competence in the language that was used for the test is not reported. All these key factors led to unreliable results and nowadays they are not considered as valid anymore. On the other hand, we cannot consider Swain and Cummins' study as completely trustworthy since, as they themselves pointed out, positive results were usually associated with children from the majority-language group who were taking part in language-immersion courses and were living in a society where bilingualism was widely accepted. On the opposite side, negative results usually came from subjects belonging to the minority group in which bilingualism was, on the contrary, not valued. Nowadays researchers try to avoid giving this kind of drastic definitions whether if bilingualism is, or is not a positive path to follow for children's education: they tend to say that the fact itself of being bilingualism doesn't strictly imply particular differences between bilingual and monolingual subjects. What is usually pointed out is that bilinguals tend to score better in specific tasks as in the ones related to selective attention and inhibitory control. Another important field in which bilinguals seem to prevail on the monolingual peers is the metalinguistic one. (Bialystok, Senman 2004 in Grosjean 2010). In conclusion, there are no solid bases to assert that bilingualism leads to a higher IQ, on the contrary, by taking into account other factors, without simply considering the intelligence, it is proved that bilingualism helps in creating a more open-minded child, who will differ from the monolingual peers more from the cultural point of view than on the intelligence one. As the final report on the European Union survey declares: "the benefits of knowing foreign languages are unquestionable. Language is the path to understanding other ways of living which in turn opens up the space for intercultural tolerance. Furthermore, language skills facilitate working, studying and travelling...and allow intercultural communication." (in Grosjean 2010;100)

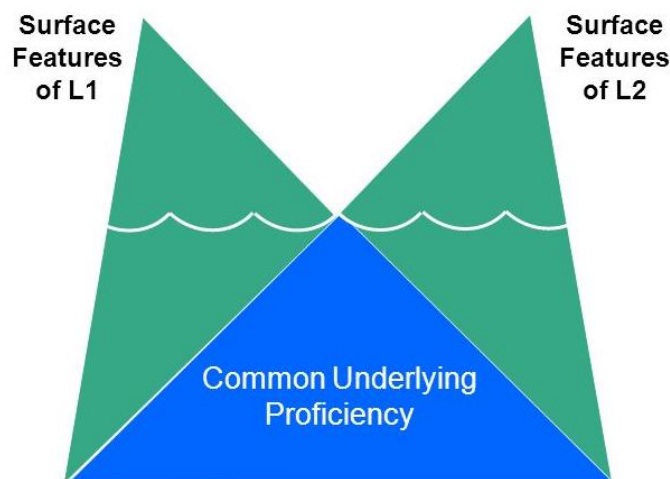
When in a situation in which the child is acquiring a L2 which is considered the majority language, the mother tongue is an obstacle.

Writing ability has always been considered the one which represents human being development, this is due to the fact that the ability to write is considered to be strictly connected to a high and advanced mental state. This is the main reason why the formal acquisition, the one that happens in

school, usually starts at around 6, when the child is “ready” to learn how to write. Howard Gardner (1985 in Balboni 1999) points out that the ability to write is only one of the copious ways in which the human brain can show its potential. The old belief that the written competence in L1 would lead to confusion and mistakes in the process of acquiring written competence in L2 widely spread over the years to other competencies as well, not only the written one, but the oral one as well. For years then the purist of languages considered bilingualism as a threat towards the mother tongue convincing parents to avoid the choice of educating a child with two languages. Luckily lots of research in this field has been carried out and nowadays the opinion about the connection between mother tongue and second language is exactly the opposite.

1.7.1.1 MOTHER TONGUE AND SECOND LANGUAGE: A STRONG LINK

Cummins (1984) declared that the formal use of the mother tongue during the process of acquisition of a second language not only is not an obstacle, but rather a help for the child who can use it as a support in this process. Cummins (1983 in Balboni et al. 2002) described this process well through a metaphor which is still considered valid even though expressed more than thirty years ago, the so-called “*iceberg metaphor*”. According to Cummins we can think about our linguistic competence as an iceberg which floats in the sea, only small parts of it are visible coming out from the sea surface but underneath a huge amount of ice is present. These external peaks are visible only thanks to the submerged part of the whole structure. While adding material to the base of the iceberg new peaks will become visible and the ones already exposed will get taller and taller. The same happens with our linguistic competence: the peaks are just a small part of general knowledge and they are usually considered to be the actual linguistic communication. The whole part above on the other hand is made of all the unconscious thoughts that are needed in order to produce that communication: grammar rules, extra linguistic codes, pragmatic conventions and so on and so forth. By adding material to our linguistic competence we will be increasingly able to produce language. Cummins also points out that the base of the iceberg is in common with all the peaks, this means that the general linguistic knowledge of the mother tongue, the second language and maybe a third language as well are all in common and all cooperate in raising up the upper part of the iceberg.



“The dual iceberg” Cummins 1983

The strong beliefs of the danger of the L1 were considered real also taking into account the idea of a “limited space” available for the language in the brain. The presence and the daily use of a L1 then, would have wasted precious space that would no longer have been available for the L2. Lots of children in the past fifty years were forced to grow up avoiding the use of their mother-tongue because of these beliefs. This misconception contributed to the formation of a generation of youth who lost their competence in the mother-tongue due to the lack of practise and to being forced of facing a long and difficult process, such as the one of acquiring a second language without the support of a L1.

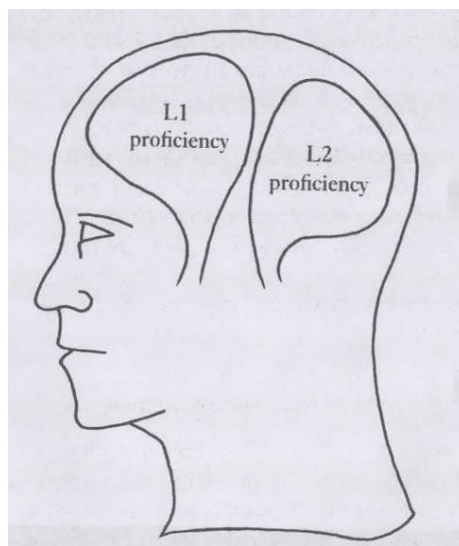
Cummins and Swain (1986:94) add “sufficient exposure to the school language (L2) is essential for the development of academic skills; however, equally or more important, is the extent to which students are capable of understanding the academic input to which they are exposed (see chapter 3.4) In the case of minority students this is directly related to the conceptual attributes which have developed as a result of interaction in their L1.” Clark (1978; 36 in Bialystok 2001) specifies even better by saying “learning two languages at once, for instance, might heighten one’s awareness of specific linguistic devices in both”.

This idea of a limited space is of course nowadays considered nonsense since the new neurolinguistics discoveries have shown that the brain of a bilingual child develops in a different way compared to the monolingual one. Danesi (1988) sums up the main differences in the following way:

- I. The structure of the language in a bilingual brain appears as more bilateral compared to a monolingual one;

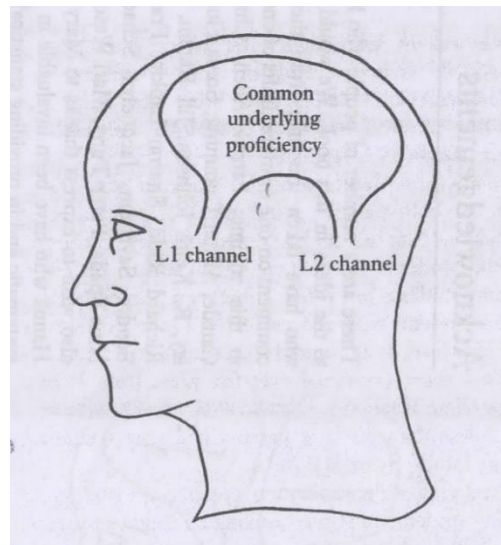
- II. The right hemisphere is a lot more involved in the linguistic work in a bilingual brain rather than a monolingual one where it is mainly the left one which works;
- III. Cerebral dominance seems then to be less evident in the bilingual than in the monolingual.

The old beliefs about a limited neurological space and the myths about the threat of the L1 towards the L2 originated from the so called SUP idea, *Separated Underlying Proficiency* (Cummins and Swain 1986). According to this theory, languages are stored in two different areas and they don't communicate to each other. Skills, knowledge and capacities in L1 cannot be used in the L2.



SUP model (Cummins and Swain 1986:81)

Thanks to the new neural discoveries, we now consider the SUP model as outdated and the CUP, *Common Underlying Proficiency* model has taken its place.



CUP model (Cummins and Swain 1986:83)

As stated in this theory the proficiencies of both languages are linked together so the development of one language will automatically lead to an improvement in the others as well. The CUP model has been the basic theory for the development of immersion programs and international schools (see chapter 6.2)

Summing up, none of the research carried out up to now show negative effects of bilingualism, at the same time its advantages are mainly related to metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness, not of intelligence. On the other hand, the only issues bilingualism can lead to are the ones linked to a low cultural and language proficiency which can actually become problems generally spread out on linguistic and personal competence. The basic aim of a well-designed bilingual approach for concerning formal education seems to be the safeguard of the mother tongue which can provide both cultural and linguistic support during the life long process of acquisition of a second language.

1.7.2 POSITIVE EFFECTS PHASE

Between the 1950s and the 1960s we can see a period in which bilingualism was considered as a neutral factor: a series of studies reflected that there were no massive differences between unilingual and bilingual children. This phase is not important from a scientific point of view but it is

important because it highlighted the methodological mistakes which were present in previous research.

From the 1960s on, researchers started looking at bilingualism as a possible resource instead of a threat and the most important studies are dated over those years. Cummins and Swain (1986) talk about bilingualism “as a bonus”. According to them the easiest way to destroy the myths about the risks of growing up with two languages is to let the students, parents, and anybody else involved in the education system know about the benefits of it. All the points of view must be considered, not only the cognitive advantages but also the more practical ones like the political and economic ones.

Cultural and communicative competence.

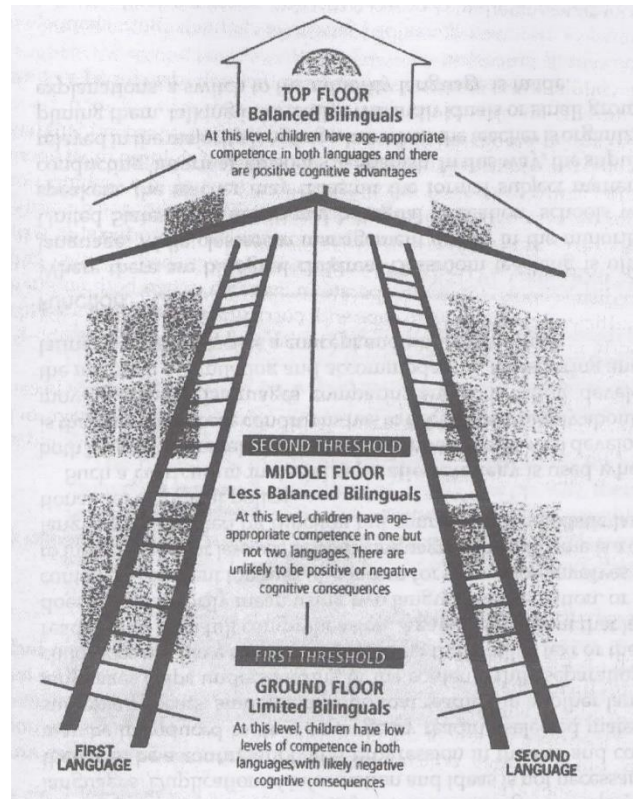
Knowing more than one language means having the possibility of access to double the info available to a monolingual person: more languages more knowledge. Colin Baker (2011) talks about their possibility to “look at the world through two different windows”. Two different windows that might bring out two completely different worlds creating children able to accept the fact that more than one option is possible, that different cultures exist, one is not more important than the other and he\she must pay respect to both of them. According to Ben-Zeev (1977 in Abdelilah-Bauer 2012) this aspect leads to children who are abler to communicate, they seem to be better prepared in understanding body gestures, face expressions and to better understand the other speaker’s reaction according to which they can adjust his\her way of speaking or maybe decide to use some strategies when difficulties in the dialogue occur. Bilingual people therefore seem to be more tolerant in all the occasions in which they have to include or exclude somebody who appear different. In a study conducted in Canada for example, Guimond and Palmer (1993 in Abdelilah-Bauer 2012) notice that the two groups of children, one bilingual and one monolingual, used to react in a different way towards peers who used to speak the other language (French\English). Monolingual ones would reject the children, bilingual ones on the other hand, would accept both French and English peers. This is due to the fact that bilingual children actually empathize with both groups since they don’t really belong to a specific one: when you identify yourself with somebody in the other group it becomes more difficult to see them from a bad point of view. Baker (2000:15) adds: “language is sometimes seen as a barrier to communication and friendship across social groups and countries. Bilinguals in the home, community and society, can lower such barriers. They can be bridges within family, community, and across societies. Those who speak two

different languages personify this bridging of gaps between peoples of different colour, creed, culture and language”.

Cognitive, metalinguistic and economic advantages.

The fact that early bilingual children are exposed to two different vocabularies from childhood helps them understand the noteworthy difference between *significant* and *signifié* according to De Saussure’s idea. Signifier and meaning are then firmly clear in a bilingual child brain at least a year earlier than in monolingual ones. “Mom says ‘chair’ dad says ‘Stuhl” affirms a two and a half-year-old girl. This ability usually leads to a faster development in what concern reading capacity as well (Bialystock 1988 in Abdelilah-Bauer 2012). Another field in which bilinguals seem to have some advantages over monolinguals is that of art and innovation. The phenomenon Grosjean (2010) talks about is the so-called *divergent thinking*: bilingual have the capacity to find new and more sophisticated solutions to problems, they usually provide different suggestions and possibilities, and more often than monolinguals, they create new points of view. This is connected to the fact that bilinguals know at least two words to identify the same object and this lead to lots of different possible associations. (Baker 2011). They also seem to be better in works that request to select some specific info among others. This seems to be due to the capacity of bilingual people to continuously select one language and inhibit the other while they talk to a monolingual. They seem to result better and to be faster than their peers every time they have to pull essential info out of a text or a conversation. Basically they are less influenced by the presence of non-relevant info. Furthermore, with high language competence they also seem to be helped in what concern acquiring a third or fourth foreign language. This is due to their metalinguistic ability and in their capacity of using the previously acquired languages as a support and a comparison for the new ones (Cummins 1984). Summing up by using Grosjean’s (2010;100) words: “bilingualism is reported to foster open-mindedness, offer different perspectives on life and reduce cultural ignorance.” Another important effect is what Baker (2000) describes as economic advantages. Nowadays bilingual people also have additional benefit in the research for a job. In a world that is becoming more and more global every day, the capacity of speaking more than one language is of course considered an added value. In most fields, from transports, to tourism, from public relations to teaching, it is at this point valued as a huge benefit compared to unilingual people.

As we said before, bilingualism is a spectrum, a continuum of different cases corresponding to different levels of competency. To these levels of competency correspond as many advantages of which children can or cannot avail themselves. Cummins (2000 in Baker 2000) describes this event with the name of *Thresholds theory*.



Thresholds theory by Cummins (2000)

According to the image above it is apparent how different levels of competency lead to different results: the bottom floor corresponds to the children who are underdeveloped: their competence is not like the one of their monolingual peers: they may have problems in coping in the classroom and do not process curriculum information properly. The middle floor is the one of the children who have an adequate competence in one of the language but not in the other. This might be true for both grammatical competencies or cultural ones; in any case these children are not balanced and they might still face lots of problems in operating with the weak language in the minority culture. At the top, on the other hand, we find those children who managed to develop both languages and cultures equally. This is the level at which they can gain the cognitive advantages and moreover all the linguistic and cultural ones. Bilingualism itself then, doesn't automatically lead to benefits; we

must carefully consider proficiency in order to understand if the child will obtain profits or if an unbalanced bilingualism will cause some kind of lack in their general development.

CHAPTER 2

Children are not a distraction from more important work. They are the most important work.

C. S. Lewis

Since this dissertation focuses only on children and young acquirers, I decided to dedicate a whole chapter to them where I analysed all the specific characteristics which make them so different from older learners. It is from these features that teachers have to develop school programmes: the school cannot leave them aside but rather must focus on them so that classes and syllabuses can be created specifically around their needs. The two main theories about child development are presented; starting from them I will explain how important the role of teachers, and care-takers in general, is and how it can influence the whole development of the child. I will then make a comparison between the phases monolinguals and bilinguals go through noting that there are no massive differences: this has to be kept in mind by teachers who have to try to plan activities which follow the natural order of acquisition of the mother tongue, only by doing so will the child be facilitated. Variations between adults and children are also expressed, these two groups are extremely different from the linguistic point of view due to the critical periods theory. At the end of the chapter a short presentation of the concepts of *code-mixing* and *code-switching* is offered and the well-known *Second Language Acquisition Theory* by Krashen will be exposed: it is indeed from this theory itself that I based my thoughts in the following chapters.

2.1 CHILD DEVELOPMENT

We can identify the two main theories which try to explain how a child develops: Piaget's and Vygotskij's. The first one is known as the *organisation, adaptation, assimilation and accommodation theory*. According to Piaget (1959 in Pinter 2011:9) "when interacting with the

environment, children create mental structures or schemes”. Conforming to Piaget’s theory, all children go through this process every time they pick up something new. They learn following four stages:

- I. 0-2 years: sensory-motor stage;
- II. 2-7 years: pre-operational stage;
- III. 7-11 years: concrete operational stage;
- IV. 11-12 and beyond: formal operational stage.

One of the biggest limits of Piaget’s work is that he tends to focus on children’s deficiencies rather than their improvements. According to him, children are in a phase of ego-centrism: they do not follow formal logic and are not yet ready to receive any explicit instruction. Meadows (1993:24 in Pinter 2001:11) points out their lack of operational thoughts which means “flexible, reversible reasoning which allows them to conserve, classify, seriate, coordinate perspectives and overcome misleading perceptual impressions’ is not available yet”. It seems obvious that this Piagetian limit can easily be overtaken by adapting the educational process to children’s needs instead of proposing tasks for which they are not ready yet. Moreover, due to the lack of formal logic, they can only understand and answer questions which can be applied to concrete objects and daily life.

Vygotsky (1978) offers a completely different theory which highlights the huge learning capacity of the child if he\she is connected to a proper social environment and has expert helpers available who can assist him\her. In line with Vygotsky’s idea, all the knowledge which the child can acquire comes from the interaction with parents\care-takers. Through this relationship they interact and construct new knowledge. Adults then are like a filter: knowledge passes through them and it is modified according to the child’s need and then is proposed to them.

2.1.1 THE ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT

The theory of the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) sums up this idea of the central role of the adult. “The ZPD is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky 1978:86 in Pinter 2011). The researcher places the young learner in a more important position: he\she is not the “not-yet-ready” child proposed by Piaget, on the contrary he\she is a person who, with the support of a helper, can increase his\her competencies improving his\her knowledge (Thompson 2000). Vygotsky moreover, suggests a differentiation between *learning* and *developing*. The first one is

considered formal education, whereas the latter happens on a daily basis every time the child is exposed to something new. We can sum up by saying that following Piaget's idea the developmental path goes from social to individual life and thought comes before speech while Vygotskij says exactly the opposite: in order to obtain a certain amount of individual development we need a social environment and language capacity is the one which leads to the evolution of thoughts (Arace 2010). Piaget highlighted children's limits, Vygotsky's idea could be summed up by saying that he tries to predict what the children will be able to do, he highlights "what he/she not yet is" (Turuk 2008).

2.2 STARTING WITH THE FIRST LANGUAGE

Before proper medical and scientific studies were made about how children acquire the first language, the only thing available to researchers were the diaries of scientists who used to write down all the phases their own children were going through.¹ We can consider the progression towards the adulthood linguistic production as a path constituted by different steps; one a little bit more complex than the previous one (Stoel-Gammon and Menn 1999 in Fabbro 2004).

The first 12 months of life of a child are considered a *pre-verbal stadium*. The child doesn't talk yet but he/she is able to interact through smiles, looks and simple gestures.

Following Arnberg (1987), by around 6 to 10 months we can find the so-called "reduplicated babbling" which consists in the repetition of the same sounds over and over again: this is a way for the child to practise the new productions. At the beginning the babbling produced by all children seems to be similar, but in the following months it will start to differentiate by getting closer to the sounds produced in the specific language used around them. Between the age of 12-18 months they start producing words and they tend to use them as full sentences. During this phase there is a huge dissimilarity between the number of produced words and the comprehended ones: at around 10 months they understand fifty words, but they will be able to produce the same amount of words only eight months later. When they reach the milestone of the fifty words is when they usually start combining them in sentences made of two words (18-24 months). Till the age of three they will keep improving this ability of putting together words and they will increase this capacity up to the

¹ The most famous one is by Leopold (1939-49 in Bialystok 2001) in which the researcher described all the features of speech produced by his daughter.

age of five improving their knowledge about grammar and morphosyntax as well (Tager-Flusberg 1999 in Fabbro 2004). They can now use more than 1000 words, they understand the ideas of space and time and they are mostly able to notice the errors they make and to correct them. At the age of six the child is usually able to elicit sentences which resemble the adult ones and they can actively participate in conversation.

We will now analyse one by one the different aspects which compose linguistic competence.

Lexicon

Lexicon is considered to be the vocabulary of a person. Lexicon evolves according to three aspects: the amount of words known, how these words are used and the relationship between the child's cognitive development and the lexicon. Between the age of two-three year children start to understand that everything has a name and during this phase they love to find out and learn new names amplifying their cultural competence in this way. Even if the developmental phases seen before are not fixed and may vary from child to child, they always follow the same order (with just some minor differences) and appear generally around the same age.

Syntax

Syntax are the rules that govern the structure of sentences. The most significant aspect of how syntax is acquired by children is the fixed order that they seem to follow when we consider the different structures which create a syntactic competence. Brown (1973 in Bialystok 2001) declares that in almost 90% of cases the children studied would acquire fourteen syntactic rules following the same path. Moreover, another specific factor of children' acquisition is that all of them, around the age of three, seem to face a phase in which they tend to overextend grammatical rules to irregular verbs, for example by adding *-ed* to such verbs as *go*; *goed* (Bialystok 2001).

Phonology and phonetics

Phonology is the branch of linguistics which studies the sounds of a language. This area might be considered the only one that starts developing from day one in a baby's life. Vocal production takes a couple of years before becoming similar to an adult production, but it is clear that the efforts of babies to communicate are present in different ways from the beginning. From crying to talking, the difference is massive but, just as for syntax, it is possible to highlight some fixed milestones that all children go through in an average locked time. Linguistic sounds are usually present at around one

month, babbling appears at about eight months and the first words by twelve. At least three more years will be needed in order to transform those early productions into something that will match the adults' speech ability. For what concerns the timing in which these abilities appear, Eimas et al. (1971 in Bialystok 2001) discovered that babies between one and four months were already able to discriminate between certain sounds (/pa/ and /ba/). Taking into account instead the sounds produced as first Vinham (1992 in Bialystok 2001) noticed that the syllables produced are usually the ones which belong to the first words in babbling. The ability to differentiate between linguistics and non-linguistic sounds starts decreasing from the first month of life, when this capacity reaches the maximum level, but doesn't stop till when the phonological system is settled, which happens around the age of five (Daloiso 2009). From day one to the age of five, the baby learns how to recognize the sounds which belong to his\her mother tongue. Even though this receptive capacity is amazing since the first months of life, the production of sounds develops a lot more slowly.

Pragmatic

Pragmatic means the use of language in order to satisfy specific needs. It is common to notice that babies tend to use series of strategies in order to communicate even before they are able to talk, as in signing, pointing and crying, among others. Pragmatics then can be considered a language faculty only after the child starts speaking and day by day improves his\her capacity to modify the sentences according to their aim. Pragmatics is not usually taught, children acquire it by using adults' conversations as an example and by adding, with time, new cultural info to their competences. Pragmatics is made by pauses, the idea of politeness, how a discourse can be direct or must be hidden, which topics can be used and which ones must be avoided. All this info comes directly to the child through their exposure to input.

2.2.1 THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE CAPACITY

We noticed that the main areas which form language capacity follow fixed steps in order to develop. The only possible reason for that is the presence of an innate predisposition which equate all human beings. Unfortunately, we must also consider the fact that every child is born, grows up and is surrounded by different societies which mandatorily influence their development.

How can we all follow the same path? How much is genetics responsible for our way of speaking and how, on the other hand, is the world around us the guilty part?

There are two main schools of thought which try to answer this question, one by Chomsky and other by Vygotskij who expressed two opposite ideas: the first one is more interested in the structures underlying the languages and the second one focuses its attention on the contexts in which language is used, a *formal* and a *functional* approach respectively. These two ideologies differ for three main reasons:

- The independence of language from the rest of cognitive functions;
- The role of input in language development;
- The nature of linguistic capacity.

In the formal approach by Chomsky language is considered independent of the other faculties, input is seen as the trigger from which language acquisition starts, but its influence is minor compared to natural and linguistic structures which are abstract rules.

The functional approach by Vygotskij believes in the complete opposite. First of all, language competency is strictly connected with the rest of cognitive functions and they develop in a simultaneous way. Input is mandatory in order to start the whole process of language acquisition and without social interaction no natural acquisition can take place. Linguistic structures then, are considered deeply specific and connected to what society is teaching (Bialystok 2001). These two ways of thinking can be put on the opposite extreme ends of a line in which we can represent all available hypotheses about language acquisition.

2.2.1.1 CHOMSKY: THE INNATE CAPACITY

Chomsky (1965 in Contento 2010) speculates that children acquire the first language as a result of a genetic device (*Language Acquisition Device*, LAD) which translates itself into the language of the community rules of Universal Grammar (UG). The main reason why Chomsky (1986) started believing that language capacity had to be innate is because he noticed that a child is not exposed to a sufficient quantity of input which could explain the velocity in which he/she actually learns the first language. According to the LAD's theory the only role of society, background and community is that of leading the child to tune into the same language. Input is not considered an important factor since all the grammatical rules are already with the child, nor is the relationship with adults considered important; the child is autonomous in the process because of the LAD. Linguists still partially agree with this theory, even though totality of the credit to LAD has been deleted and been put it on other factors like society, family and peers in general. We agree with the idea of an innate skill, which would explain why children can acquire a language in such a short amount of time but

this process is not completely automatic: specific conditions must be present in order for the LAD to be properly activated. Moreover, not all the researchers agree on the fact that this device can help in the learning of a second language. Researchers who agree on the presence of the LAD for second language acquisition put less importance on other factors like the role of input, and exposure to new speakers among others.

2.2.1.2 VYGOTSKIJ: THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIETY

On the spectrum which shows Chomsky on the one side we find Vygotskij on the opposite side. Vygotskij stipulates that without social interaction no learning can happen. It is not an innate skill; it is because of society that a child acquires a new language (see chapter 2.4). Turuk (2008) re-elaborates Vygotskij's idea by saying that in the beginning children are completely dependent on other people, usually parents or care-takers who instruct the child by saying what they can or cannot do and how to do it. Vygotskij (1978 in Turuk 2008:246) adds: "the child acquires knowledge through contacts and interactions with people as the first step (interpsychological plane), then later assimilates and internalises this knowledge adding his personal value to it (intrapshychological plane)". The passage from social to personal property is not a mere copy, but a deep transformation which transforms the presented knowledge in personal values according to Vygotskij. It is only in the progression from a social to an intimate phase that learning can happen. Ellis (2000 in Turuk 2008) adds that learning arises not through interaction but in interaction. Learners first succeed in performing a new task with the help of another person and then internalise this task so that they can perform it on their own.

In the middle of the line we can find at least another theory, which has something in common with both the previous ones. Bruner (1983) postulates an intermediate idea in which he agrees on the existence of Chomsky's LAD but he accompanies it to a LASS, *Language Acquisition Support System*, which shares some features with the previous idea on the importance of input but is expanded also to considering the importance of the school, technological devices and all the rest that can create input. Linguistic capacity is then created thanks to the interaction of an innate skill (LAD) and the presence of a support system (LASS). Parents naturally work as a LASS from the first months of life of a child when they adopt a particular way of talking while communicating to them. They tend to modify their productions in order to make it easier to understand. (see chapter 3.4).

2.3 ADDING ANOTHER LANGUAGE

We saw the main theories, divided into *formal* and *functional* ones, concerning language acquisition of the first language. We can thus apply the same ideas to the cases in which two languages need to be acquired. According to the first one, both languages should be learnt following the same path, since the procedure is natural and unconnected to the circumstances. The second theory says that since the possibility of a child being exposed to the same amount of input, from people with the same level of proficiency, at the same time, through the same methods is practically impossible; those two languages would be, by will or by force, learnt in a different way and with different results. Politzer (1974 in Hamers and Blanc 1989:220) suggests that “the degree of interdependence (between L1 and L2) will vary according to the developmental approach adopted: from a cognitive-developmental point of view the acquisition of L1 and L2 might seem rather different, whereas if the focus is on processes and strategies, there might be a greater interdependence between the acquisition of L1 and L2”.

Bialystok (2001:57) proposes that: “a plausible but complex view of language acquisition is achieved by incorporating aspects of both the acquisition of linguistic competence explained by formal theories and the acquisition of communicative competence explained by functional theories”. Once again a compromise between both theories seems to be the ideal answer. A continuum of ideas (see chapter 1 ... continuum sul bilinguismo) that were once considered completely opposite, renders the concept of bilingualism less defined as well. It doesn't seem possible to identify marked boundaries between categories like first and second language acquisition, successive or simultaneous bilingualism and the influence of the input. All the theories are mixed together in the attempt to outline features common to the acquisition of all languages in all situations.

We will now compare how the phases of language acquisition in a unilingual child differ from that of a bilingual.

Lexicon

According to an old theory by Volterra and Taeschner (1978 in Contento 2010) bilingual children acquire lexicon following three different stages. During the first one only one system was available and words from both languages were stored together. In a second moment two different containers were built as chambers for the two different vocabularies but the grammatical rules were still in common. Only in the last phase, both grammar and words were divided for the two languages. Volterra and Taeschner (1978: 312 in Genesee and Nicoladis 2006) explain: “In the first stage the

child has one lexical system which includes words from both languages, in this stage the language development of the bilingual child seems to be like the language development of the monolingual child. In the second stage, the child distinguishes two different lexicons, but applies the same syntactic rules to both languages. In the third stage the child speaks two languages differentiated both in lexicon and syntax.”. This theory is nowadays considered backward and the examples of code-mixing\switching (see paragraph 2.5) show us why. From their first productions, children are deeply aware of the distinction between the two languages, both in the lexicon and in the grammar. Mistakes appear in such a small percentage that they have to be considered as a phase, rather than as lacks or confusion due to the presence of two languages.

Grosjean (2010:182) states that “these children master morphology correctly (...) and they follow the syntactic rules of these languages. (...) The two languages in the young bilingual are definitely in some form of contact but not in a state of fusion”. Abdelilah-Bauer (2006) highlights the fact that the amount and type of words known by a bilingual child are not going to be the same in both languages: different languages develop in distinctive orders as regards lexicon. English children for example, start learning nouns before verbs, whereas French do the opposite. An English-French child will then know a bigger amount of English nouns rather than French in the beginning. When we want to compare the amount of words a bilingual child is aware of we cannot simply consider the lexical development of one language, but rather we have to sum up both vocabularies and consider the differences related to the acquisition order among languages. A bilingual child will reach the milestone (when they will know more or less fifty words) at around 18 months, exactly like their monolingual peers, but this milestone will be the sum of both wordings. A slight difference can be noticed between *coordinate* and *consecutive* bilingualism. In the first case, the child is exposed to both languages from the beginning and they will both grow along with him\her from day one creating two different compartments. In the case of consecutive bilingualism, on the contrary, the child creates first a brain area for the L1 and secondly, when the second language is introduced he\she will develop the second container.

Tabors (1997 in Contento 2010) describes the phases through which the child goes before he\she feels confident in using the L2. At the beginning, the child who is placed in a new environment which uses a distinct language, will continue using his\her L1 even if the peers around him/her are not be able to understand. The child will start to realize that the communication through L1 is not possible anymore, and in many cases he\she can switch to a different modality for communication, most of the time a more gestural one. We would then notice all over again the phases through which he\she went through while acquiring the mother tongue but this time using the second language:

first a telegraphic speech and later an improvement in communication skills. Before the production phase becomes visible, a period known as the *silent period* appears. Coonan (in Balboni, Coonan, Garotti 2002) describes the silent period as a phase during which the child is active in reception but he/she is not yet producing in L2. This period, according to a more humanistic approach, has to be considered deeply important and must be respected. This phase is absolutely natural and teachers and caretakers have to avoid forcing the child's production: forcing the children would lead to the raising of the *affective filter* (see chapter 2.6) and all the consequences related to it. Moreover, teachers usually tend to push children because they consider this phase time wasted. It is important to highlight that before production comes comprehension, trying to speed up this step would be like skipping one of the steps of the *natural order* (see chapter 2.6) leading to a bad connection between child and language.

Syntax and phonology

The main difference in the development of lexicon between unilingual and bilingual is that bilingual children understand that not only everything has a name, but is not mandatory for that particular thing to have exactly that name. They are conscious of the difference between vocabularies in different languages and therefore they do not mix them. Meisel (1993 in Bialystok 2001) demonstrates that bilingual children acquiring languages which uses two different word orders (SOV\SVO) understand and discriminate among the two since when they are two years old. This evidence shows that children are aware of the differences in the grammars of the two languages and apply specific rules for each of them. Romaine (1995:217 Bialystok 2001) asserts that: "the majority of studies seem to support the conclusion that the developmental sequence for the bilingual child is the same in many respects as for the monolingual". For what concerns phonology, studies on the critical periods (see chapter 2.4) helped to create new theories for bilingual children and vice versa. It is nowadays well known in fact, that the process of distinguishing between sounds belonging to the mother tongue and different ones, is one of the faculties that disappears early in childhood. During the first year of life the brain learns how to focus on linguistic sounds and to ignore others. If in the family more than one language is spoken, the brain will get used to both, otherwise, if one of the two languages is introduced too late, this ability is not going to take place and the sounds will always be considered as foreign.

2.4 CRITICAL PERIOD(S)

Language acquisition is related to both a neurological development (see chapter 1.4) and to the influence of the surrounding input. In the cases in which one of these two factors is missing, we can see the lack of generation of this capacity. There are numerous studies about *wild children*, those children who grew up alone, in isolated situations and never started talking (at times they didn't even have the capacity to grab objects or walk) not even after their reintroduction in the society (Skuse 1984 in Fabbro 2004).

Genie's case

The most famous story is the one of Genie, a Californian girl who lived her life till the age of 13 isolated from the rest of the world, without the possibility of talking to the mother (both were hostages of the father who suffered from a mental illness) or of leaving the house. Once she was found, she had the physique of a 7 years' girl, she was unable to talk, to chew or to complain (Curtiss 1977 in Fabbro 2004). Even years after her liberation she still showed huge delays in social relationships and specifically in the use of the language. At the age of 18 she wasn't able to produce correct sentences in English and she had problems especially in phonology and morphology. Genie's case actively contributed in a series of studies about the *critical period*. In the beginning it was thought that critical period was the period during which the possibility of learning a language was activated, once that phase had passed this capacity would have been lost forever leading to irreparable lacks and delays compared to the normal speech development. She learnt a huge amount of words but her progress stopped after a certain point and she wasn't able to improve anymore showing that in the end the hypothesis was correct. Starved of stimulations, Genie's brain didn't have the capacity to start the language acquisition process, the development happened to some extent, but it could not go further.

Penfield's children case

Other fundamental studies are the ones conducted by Penfield (1959,1965 in Fabbro 2004) where he reports his personal experiencing trying to learn foreign languages and raising three children bilingually. Penfield's mother tongue was English, but during adolescence he studied three foreign languages, one of which was German. Even though he studied those languages in a really accurate way, with dedication and commitment, in the end he was able to use only German and with huge difficulties. He compared his own training in languages to the one of his three children who were

able to speak not only English, but also French and German without foreign accent. The main difference between them is that Penfield started learning the second languages when he was older than the children who, on the other hand, had been surrounded by all the languages since birth. He started his research by noticing that children with aphasia used to recover in a really short time and with excellent results while adults' recovery was usually a lot slower and problematic. According to Penfield, the brain is designed differently depending on the age: childhood is specialized in language acquisition, on the contrary, after the age of ten, the brain becomes less capable of doing this and in fact decreases its capacity of learning and remembering notions. For the reasons explained above, Oyama (1979 in Hamers and Blanc 1989) proposes the idea of *sensitive periods* rather than critical: periods during which the brain shows signs of greater receptivity for language. The question here seems to be always the same: how much is society and background around us responsible for how\who we are, and that how much is simply genetic predisposition? The scheme below is by Dalouso (2009) and shows the idea of multiple critical periods:

CRITICAL PERIODS FOR LANGUAGE ACQUISITION			
	FIRST PERIOD (0-3 YEARS)	SECOND PERIOD (4-8 YEARS)	THIRD PERIOD (9 YEARS ONWARDS)
LINGUISTICS FEATURES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfect pronunciation • Excellent development of linguistics abilities • Perfect grammar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfect pronunciation • Excellent development of linguistics abilities • Perfect grammar • Possible interferences among the languages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign accent • Difficulties in syntax • Complications in learning functional words
NEUROLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maturational factors • Implicit memory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maturational factors • Explicit memory • Lateralization begins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable cognitive functions • Complete lateralization
NEURAL RAPPRESENTATION	Acquired languages are represented in the same neural areas.	Acquired languages share some neural areas.	Languages learned after the L1 are represented in different areas of the brain, wider than the one for the mother tongue.

The most impressive effect of advancing age on the ability to learn a language is in what concern phonology, and in particular the theory of *foreign accent*. The foreign accent theory focuses on the

ability of young learners to acquire a native-like accent while older students usually cannot. Eimas et al. (1971 in Bialystok 2001) reports that babies are able to distinguish between phonemically relevant contrasts by about one month of age, Werker (1995 in Bialystok 2001) moreover notices that there is a significant change in the ability to make these distinctions somewhere between six and twelve months of age. The innate mechanism seems then to be available only for a period of more or less 12 months, after which the process changes. According to Flege (1992 in Bialystok 2001) the differences in phonetics acquisition are deeply connected to the stabilization of the phonetic system: with the time it gets more and more difficult to establish new categories of sounds and reorganize the old ones. Unfortunately, differences in the results among the researchers show that in many cases older students can acquire a language with a native-like pronunciation as much as younger ones. Weber-Fox and Neville (1996 in Bialystok 2001) propose that age-related differences might be the result of a change in the selection of cognitive strategies rather than the existence of a real critical period. Older students in that case would utilize different methods instead of the LAD like children do, obtaining in some cases results as good as theirs. Since the foreign accent theory doesn't seem stable at different ages, it might be possible that older students simply apply different cognitive strategies in order to acquire a native accent while younger ones might take advantages of the neurological capacity. The main question about the existence of a critical period for second language acquisition (SLA) doesn't seem as easy as the one for the acquisition of the mother tongue. In the case of SLA, the brain already possesses knowledge about the L1 and uses it in order to acquire the second one. The LAD is already active and the risks of growing up with neural, emotional and social deficiencies due to the lack of a mother tongue are not present. It is not only the age factor which influences the final results in SLA and not all the features of the language seem to be affected by it. Phonology might, in a way, be affected, while syntax and lexicon on the other hand seem to leave the possibility of being learnt during the whole life span. Scovel (1988 in Bialystok 2001) was the first one to propose a theory of *multiple critical periods* and they may apply more strictly to some aspects of language and not to the others. Kim et al. (1997 in Bialystok 2001) noticed, by conducting studies through fMRI, that there are differences in the activation of the brain's area between late and early students in what concerns Broca's but not Wernicke's area. This seems to be the neurological cause that leads to differences in some aspects of the language but not others. Critical periods seem to be a lot more rigid in acquisition of a first language rather than a second one, but it is inevitable to note that by changing the key age factor, results are different. According to these theories, it is important to elaborate a project of language education which include all the advantages of an early presentation of the language. Linguistic

environments need to be considered as a complex learning situation which consists not only of the student (with all his\her features such age, sex, background) but also of the differences between first\second language acquisition and the strategies adopted by the different students to cite only a few.

2.4.1 ADULTS vs CHILDREN

According to Penfield (1959), there are seven main differences between children's and adults' brain: adults are less able to imitate; they tend to be linguistically blocked due to inhibitions; they have less free time to dedicate to language acquisition; since they are aware they are learning a foreign language they tend to face it in an anxious way; they usually want to perform in a great way from the beginning. Children acquire step by step, making lots of mistakes on the way; the idea adults have about mistakes is a lot worse than that of children; last but not least, as seen in chapter 1.4 children's brain have a lot more neural plasticity. Penfield's opinion about adult language acquisition is negative for two reasons: a neurological one linked to neural plasticity, which is less available, and one related to society which imposes a worse consideration of mistakes and moreover leaves adults less free time to invest in this journey of language learning.

Other important studies come from Paradis (1995) who is nowadays considered the most important expert in bilingual sciences and thanks to him we now have access to new awareness when we plan the syllabus for schools. Paradis agrees with Penfield's ideas and adds new ones as well. He states that the mother tongue is acquired and stored in the implicit memory while the second languages are learnt and are stored in the explicit one. (see chapter 1.6). Both researchers agree on the concept that languages, in order to be acquired and not simply learnt, must be introduced to the students during early childhood so that the Language Acquisition Device (see chapter 2.6) may become activated and lead to high and long term proficiency (Paradis 1995 in Fabbro 2004).

A new and more modern point of view is given by Goswami (2004) who says that instead of thinking of critical period as a stable and irreversible entity, we should actually think of it as a continuum of multiple critical periods (Knudsen 2004 in Daloiso 2009) in which we can identify different stages, levels, intervals but not as rigid as we thought before. Moreover, it is important to point out that not all the components of linguistic competence are touched by these temporal intervals but mainly the phonetic and morphosyntax ones (Fabbro 2004).

2.4.2 NEUROSENSORY RECEPTIVITY

Dalorso (2009) adds more good reasons to start the approach to a second language as soon as possible. In addition to the ones already mentioned up to now he highlights another important advantage for children compared to adults.

Children do not acquire a language in the same way that adults do, they not only differ in the strategies applied but also in the ways they get in touch with the language itself. Adults usually adopt a formal process by attending a language course or by moving to a different country for a certain period; children on the contrary, take advantage of an innate capacity known as *neurosensory receptivity*. Children use not only hearing when they acquire a language, but due to a natural curiosity and incentive towards what is new, they also use touch, taste and sense of smell. This great stimulus reaches the brain in a deeper way and helps the children to learn faster and better. Every stimulus\input is followed by a judgment made by the brain: if the input is a pleasure for the child, this will be learnt and he\she will look forward to trying it again. On the contrary, if it causes a bad experience, the child will try to avoid it the next time. Language is acquired like any other action in the baby's development: it is through all the senses together that he\she activate the first analysis of the input. Only later on he\she will pull out the elements which are typical of the language and he\she will associate sensorial data to linguistic constructions. Summing up, children seem to use a wider range of receptive techniques compared to adults, who usually use only sight and hearing (Mukherjee and Guha 2007). Children use these techniques in order to acquire all the aspects of the language. Job and Tonzar (1993) also highlight how widely children use the context (images, facial expression, non-linguistic elements) while they are acquiring new lexicon. According to Griffiths (1986 in Job and Tonzar 1993) this might be the reason why they first learn the names of common objects and people around them, and only later on they acquire other words to indicate more abstract phenomena.

Children not only use an increased number of strategies in order to absorb as much input as possible, but they also seem to be deeply interested in modifying their productions in a way as near as possible to the adults one. Aglioti and Fabbro (2006) point out that children try to imitate adults precisely from the onset of language production by using two specific operations:

- I. The "contagion", according to which initially they imitate actions and verbal productions of parents and caretaker around them in an accidental way, then as a game and later on as a proper exercise which will lead to a more sophisticated and accurate production;

- II. The “vocal accomodation”, a theory which states that the child tends to adjust his\her verbal production in a way closer and closer to the correct one. (Rizzolati and Craighero 2004 in Daloiso 2009, also see Aglioti and Fabbro 2006)

Perhaps the main difference between children and adults in learning a new language is in the aim of doing it. Penfield postulates all the detriments adults have to face when they acquire a L2 and this shows the other side of the process if we consider children: they do not approach a language in order to get a better job or to be able to read books in different languages, they do it with the aim of communicating with more people if the people around them speak a different language. In a way, they want to empathize with the speaker, they want to integrate themselves in society. They utilize language in the purest way possible, to communicate, finding in the process the real pleasure of learning. Camaioni (2001) points out that this pleasure in communicating is not only visible in the interactions between parents and children but also between older and younger children. Older children know that there is a particular way to talk to the younger ones, that they must speak more slowly and use shorter sentences for example. This is the same situation that we can see in the case of a parent\caretaker talking to a child (see chapter 3.4).

2.5 CODE-MIXING\CODE-SWITCHING

Hamers and Blanc (1989:35) draw attention to the fact that “certain aspects of linguistic development follow a monolingual pattern closely than others. Moreover, bilingual development is characterized not only by a possible lag but also by linguistic behaviour specific to the bilingual speaker, such as mixings and loan blends.” In linguistic mixing we can distinguish between two cases: *code-switching* and *code-mixing*. In the case of code-mixing, children use elements taken from language B while talking in language A. On the other hand, code-switching is the alternation between the two languages. These two processes do not have to be considered as mistakes, but rather as proper strategies to be used when needed. Genesee and Nicoladis (2006) points out, furthermore, that bilingual children tend to mix more when they use their less proficient rather than their more proficient language. Bilinguals tend to use these capacities freely while talking to other bilinguals or in any case when they are not able to remember a specific word or simply because there is no proper translation from one language to the other. Loan blending is a different concept, also known as *borrowing* and it happens when a word from language A is taken and modified according to the grammar of language B, for example *mailer*, obtained mixing the English verb *to*

mail and the suffix *-er* used to create verbs in French. Mixings are considered a proof of the CPU model (see chapter 1.7) since the child uses knowledge from both languages. Harding-Esch and Riley (1986) define these cases as a skill “which provides the bilingual with a further communicative means of great expressiveness”.

They also analyse the three main reasons why people use code-switching/mixing:

- I. solidarity: they use languages in order to reinforce a relationship:

“Papa, wenn du das Licht ausmachst, then I’ll be so lonely...”

(Daddy if you switch off the light...);

- II. to amplify a point:

Mother: Philip, viens, tons repas est pret. (Philip come, your meal is ready)

Philip:

Mother: Phi-lip! Viens ici! (Philip! come here!)

Philip: ...

Mother: Philip Harding come here!

Philip: ok, J’arrive. (Ok, I am coming);

- III. to exclude somebody from the conversation:

Mother (to Anne): tu reprendras un peu de ça? (would you like some more?)

E. (to her mother): Jag trot inte att hon tycjer om det. (I don’t think she likes it)

Examples from Harding-Esch and Riley (1986)

As it is visible from the examples, children are deeply aware of the existence of two languages and they can decide to use them according to their needs. Code-mixing and code-switching have to be considered not as mistakes or as mental confusion. They are strategies used on purpose which actually show the deep linguistic capacities of the children to pass from one language to the other. By having another look at the examples we will also notice that no mistakes are present in these productions, which means that children associate the right grammatical rules to the right languages.

2.6 THE SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THEORY

The main theory which tries to sum up the five features of the second language acquisition is the so called *Second Language Acquisition Theory* by Krashen (1981):

- I. Acquisition vs Learning;
- II. Monitor hypothesis;

- III. Input hypothesis;
- IV. Natural order and
- V. Affective filter.

The first point in this theory is the opposition between *acquisition* and *learning*. Acquisition, according to Krashen is the product of a natural approach to the language, a type of connection between language and student similar to the one of the child who is acquiring the first language. The language is brought in through communicative acts, it is seen as an instrument for communication. The learnt material on the other hand, is the result of a formal study and it usually leads to an unstable knowledge which tends to be forgotten with time. What is learnt, following Krashen's idea, is what will be used by the student for the monitor.

The *monitor* is a process according to which the brain checks, corrects and modifies what is in the mind before the production of language happens. At this stage the student is making a conscious effort in producing L2 sentences and he\she has the time to revise them since this process is not autonomous yet.

Input hypothesis and *natural order* are deeply important for the aim of this paper since they are strictly connected to the idea of a natural approach and the respect for an innate development of the brain. Krashen points out that the only input useful in order to create acquisition is the comprehensible one. If the student is not able to understand the input, it would appear to be absolutely useless. The input not only has to be comprehensible, but neither should it be too difficult so that the student can focus his\her attention on a small, workable challenge rather than on an impossible one. This idea is summed up by the formula $i+1$ in which $+1$ is the challenge, the work that the student has to do, the new info, and i is the input. All the input that reaches the student's brain has to be put in a correct order, a natural one. This order is predictable and it seems to have lots of things in common among all the languages of the world. Putting the input in a different order would mean offering material too difficult for the brain, leading to misunderstanding or lacking in particular topics. Cummins and Swain (1986:117) point out that "although comprehensible input may be essential to the acquisition of a second language, it is not enough to ensure that the outcome will be native-like performance".

The fifth point in the hypothesis is the one of the *affective filter*. The affective filter is considered as an obstacle to acquisition and it seems to become activated in the cases of anxiety, very hard challenges, inappropriate environment. It is therefore important to never to forget that acquisition is a complex process which involves not only cognitive but also emotional factors.

CHAPTER 3

Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.

Aristotle

While chapter 2 focused on children, chapter 3 places on the “educational stage” the other character as well: the teacher, the director of the scene. In the following paragraphs both roles are presented, the student as the actor and the teacher as the support in the learning process. The first part of the chapter is dedicated to the aims of early foreign language teaching which are intrinsically different from the ones for older children due to the personal features of children explained in the previous chapters. After differentiating between the two subjects I will then focus on teachers’ input because it is through this that children learn the foreign language. In the cases in which the foreign language is not spoken outside the school, the classroom is the only place where the child will be in contact with the input. It is then extremely important for it to be as wide, correct and rich as possible so that it can reach the child’s brain in a sufficient quantity and activate the innate processes of language acquisition. Two particular types of input are then described in depth in the last part of the chapter: teacher-talk and the process of scaffolding, which seem to be the two more useful procedures with children.

3.1 AIMS OF EARLY LANGUAGE TEACHING

Childhood is considered to be an extremely important phase for the general development of the child. William and Burden (1997 in Turuk 2008:247) believe that for this reason education should be concerned “not just with theories of instruction, but with learning to learn, developing skills and strategies to continue to learn, with making learning experience meaningful and relevant to the individual, with developing and growing the whole person”. We will go back later to the idea of *meaningful experience* but starting from this quotation it is evident that the school and in general the

teachers' attention has to switch from instruction to the acquirers, focusing on their entire development. We have discussed in chapter 2.3 the differences between the acquisition of a first and a second language and Moskovsky (2001:3) sums them up by stating: "learners involved are very young and cognitively underdeveloped, and yet they learn a very rich and highly complex hierarchically structured communication system; they are insensitive to correction or instruction; individual cognitive ability, motivation or social status play no role. Learning involves no visible effort, they can learn any language they are exposed to with equal ease. All learners unfailingly manage to acquire complete sentences, the whole process is largely uniform in terms of onset and completion times across cultures and environments."

How can teachers in a second language class reach the same goals?

Teaching a foreign language is a difficult job and it becomes even more difficult when the students are young children: they not only have didactic and developmental needs but they also have strong affective and relational demands that have to be taken into account while organizing the syllabus of a class. The modern idea of linguistic education cannot ignore these urgencies and has to find new solutions in order to reach the main goal of the school: help the child in growing up in the most natural and harmonious possible way.

The idea of language education in the pre-kindergarten is deeply different from that in other schools. The European Commission (2011:15) describes the aim through the definition of *language awareness-raising or exposure*: "the main aim of language awareness-raising is to develop the perception and recognition of different sounds and concepts of one or more languages and the ability to understand and reproduce them in an interactive way. It is not meant to convey knowledge of structures or vocabulary of one or more languages, it aims at preparing and helping children to learn a new language". The aim of language courses nowadays is completely different from what it used to be in the past. If grammar and linguistics accuracy were the focal points, today an approach to language (for what concerns children) and a communicative competence are the main goals. Terrel (1997) describes the idea of *communicative competence* as the case in which "a student can understand the essential points of what a native speaker says to him in a real communicative situation and can respond in such a way that the native speaker interprets the response with little or no effort and without errors that are so distracting that they interfere drastically with the communication".

Daloiso (2007) describes the three main dimensions which constitute the early language teaching methodology: *acquisitive*, *linguistic-cultural* and *methodological*.

The acquisitive dimension is the one which focuses on the child: Who acquires? How?

It is based on the recent neural studies related to growth (see chapter 1.4), intellectual inclinations and different learning strategies. The linguistic dimension highlights the concepts of language and culture (see chapter 1.3), acquisition of L1 and L2 (see chapter 2.3) and the overall growth of the child.

The last dimension studies the theoretical models of ELTM (Early Language Teaching Methodologies), techniques and operative models that can facilitate teachers in this process (see chapter 4). Every student is different, that means they have different styles, ideas and ways of facing problems, to list just some of them. When we consider a group of older students compared to a group of younger ones, we need to keep in mind that the aim of the whole project in L2 is different. In the case of formal instruction, in higher levels (from primary school onwards) the goal is competence in the language itself; when we talk about children on the other hand we apply the approach towards the foreign language.

Balboni (Balboni, Coonan, Garotti 2002:10) explains the three main targets of early language education:

- I. Discover diversity: children will be aware of differences among cultures, languages and ways of thinking;
- II. Improve metalinguistic competence: his\her capacity to reflect on the language will get a boost;
- III. *Éveil au langage*: help the child to notice the various aspects of languages, how they can be used and the features which characterize each of them.

The main aim of the school is to teach children how to use languages rather than the languages themselves; they have to get in touch with new codes and be able to understand that people around the world use different languages in order to communicate. The goal of the school is reached whenever the child “does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence (...) in which languages interrelate and interact” (Council of Europe 2007 in Caon 2010).

The goal of teachers has to be to promote and support the child rather than lead without considering the speed and the necessities of the students: they have to teach children how to be autonomous, how to be confident and how to achieve academic success.

In 2011 the European Commission published a document focused on the pre-primary school's efficiency and sustainability. In the paper we can read (2011:9): "A supportive environment is essential to ensure that Early Language Learning (ELL) is beneficial. (...) Practical experience as well as academic evidence suggest that ELL should pursue the following goals as part of generic early childhood education and care:

- I. Support intercultural education: raising awareness of language diversity supports intercultural awareness and helps convey societal values such as openness to diversity and respect (see chapter 5.1);
- II. Foster the personal development of the child: multilingual activities aimed at systematically raising awareness of different languages contribute to the development of child's general competences and skills;
- III. Lifelong learning perspective;
- IV. Where appropriate (and possible,) introduction to the same second\foreign language which will be consequently learnt in primary school is given."

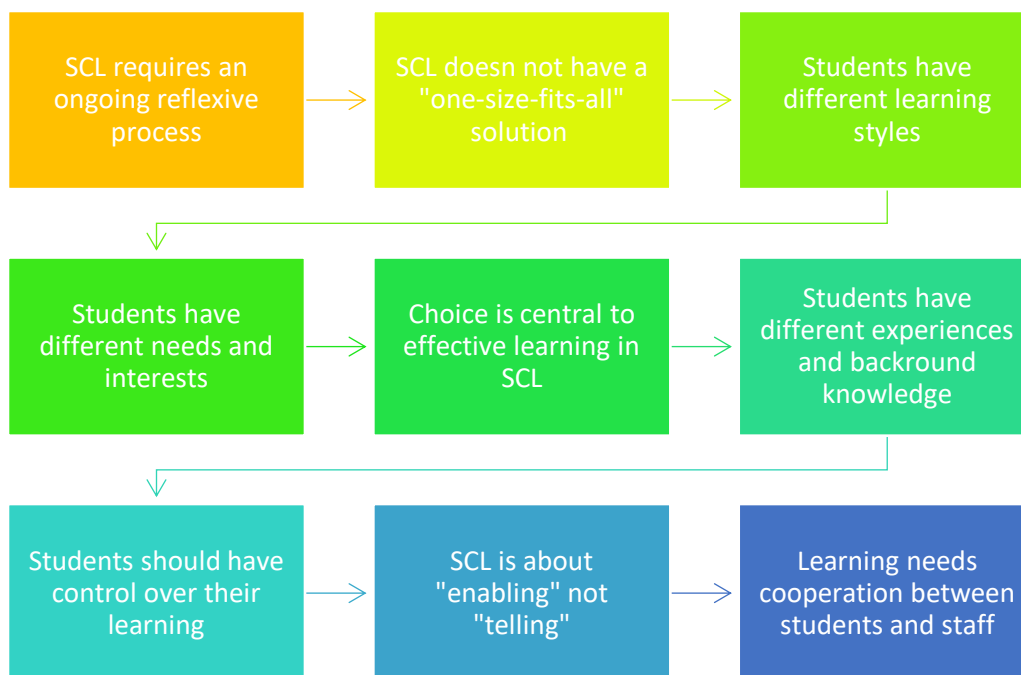
The European Commission (2011:10) concludes by saying that: "pre-primary language education aims to offer all children equal opportunities for emotional, social and cognitive development resulting from language exposure; taking into account their needs and interests."

3.2 THE STUDENT: THE ACTOR OF THE PROCESS

Every person is different and the same is true for young students too. In order to create a student-centred syllabus we cannot forget the profound differences which distinguish one from the other. Della Puppa (2006 in Caon 2008b) reminds us how a person can use different approaches in the acquisition process; how different styles of learning, needs and habits can also influence both the student and, as a result, the teacher and the whole class. Lea (2003 in Attard, Di Iorio et al. 2010:2) highlights the main features a student-centred learning (SCL) approach should have:

- Reliance on active rather than passive learning;
- Emphasis on in depth learning and understanding;
- Increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the students;
- Interdependence between teacher and learner;
- Respect within the learner-teacher relationship, and;
- Reflexive approach to the teaching and learning process.

Nine principles of the Student-centred Learning theory (SCL) have been summarized during the conference in 2010 in Bucharest organized by the European Students' Union:



The syllabus, i.e. the material which the child will be learning during the year, changes according to the school and the age of the child. Teaching foreign language to young students is greatly different to teaching older students especially in the aims: where we usually see lists of grammatical rules and various topics we will find fewer points and more interest in the way in which the child faces the foreign language. Coonan (Balboni, Coonan, Garotti 2002) distinguishes between *product syllabus*; in which destinations are set in the beginning and *process syllabus*, which follows the development of the child and it is subject to modification all year around. A natural approach based school will adopt a process syllabus so that teachers will be free to change the programs according to the different needs children may show with time.

3.2.1 THE NATURAL APPROACH

A natural approach based school is created on Krashen's (1981) dichotomy between *acquisition* and *learning* (see chapter 2.6). Learning should always be avoided because it usually does not lead to permanent knowledge and what teachers and parents should look for is acquisition. Acquisition with children from 2 to 5 years of age can only be possible in a natural way since their

characteristics and their innate advantages towards a foreign language make them perfect students. When we talk about a natural approach we consider Krashen and Terrell's (1983) idea. They did not completely exclude the concept of learning but they focused their attention on moments during the class in which students can use language in a spontaneous way leaving aside the worries related to mistakes and grammar, focusing on fluency, rather than on accuracy.

The main features of the natural approach can be summed up in a list:

- Importance of input;
- Respect for the learning speed of the child: do not push early production in L2;
- Comprehension is more important than production and oral abilities come before written ones;
- No importance given to mistakes;
- Use of topics which are really interesting for students rather than boring and common ones;
- Always leave open the opportunity to communicate in L1 following a natural way;
- No explicit teaching of grammar. Grammar is acquired through meaningful contexts.

Terrell (1977), like Krashen, differentiates between learning and acquiring and he identifies in the latter the goal of language education, which according to him, is possible only with the "absorption of general principles of grammar through real experiences of communication using L2 (...), commonly known as picking up a language". Terrell (1977) sums up his idea of the natural approach in four points: immediate communicative competence (not grammatical perfection) has to be the goal of language education; instructions should be directed to modifying and improving the students' grammar; students should be given the opportunity to acquire language (rather than be forced to learn), and affective (not cognitive) factors are the primary forces operating in language acquisition.

Many possibilities are available for teachers who want to follow a natural approach with students. The most famous one in Italy is by Freddi (1990 in Balboni, Coonan, Garotti 2002) and distinguishes between eight specific characteristics:

- Neurosensory receptivity (see chapter 2.4);
- mobility: deeply connected to the neurosensory receptivity and the Total Physical Response (see chapter 4.4);
- brain bimodality (see chapter 1.4);
- semiotic: language is part of the whole process of acquisition of all the sphere of communication (gestures and pauses among others);

- relations: languages are used with other speakers;
- pragmatic; when we talk we do so in order to reach an aim;
- expressivity; we use language in order to share feelings, desires, fears,
- authenticity as children learn in real daily situations not in a formal and abstract way.

Caon (2006:10) adds that “the final objective is to make the students aware of differences, reduce possible ethnocentric vision by making it relative, expanding their point of views, and by promoting an interest in otherness”. Not only this cultural goal exists when we consider ELTM; an affective one is present as well. Any relationship between students and teachers is important and is independent of the learner’s age but it becomes crucial when we talk about early language education since the school, and the care-takers in general, become part of the group of loved ones for the child. The affective goal of teachers is to aspire to the realization of meaningful learning which, following Ausubel’s thought (in Caon 2006:10) is “a process through which new information enters into relation with pre-existing concepts in the cognitive structure of the brain, but it is only the student who can decide to implement this process”. According to Novak (in Caon 2006:10) this is only possible when there is a “constructive integration of thoughts, feelings, and actions in the pupil and teacher. (...) This educative relationship is based on shared actions that permit exchange of meanings and emotions between the student and the teacher”.

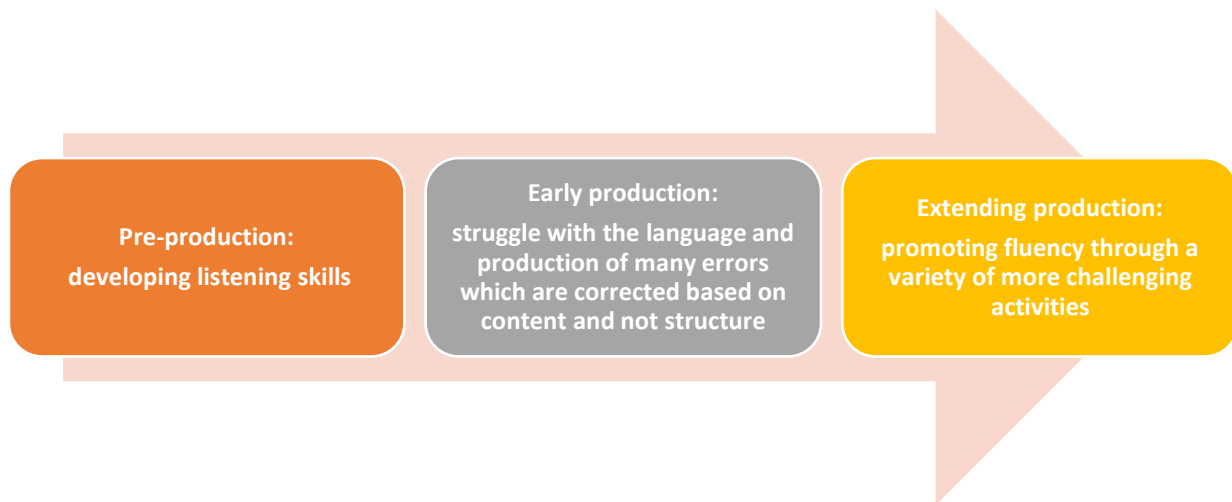
A meaningful relationship can be summed up in four points following Caon’s scheme (2006):

- I. Attention to the student’s needs: different abilities, lack of certain linguistic elements;
- II. Attention to the interests of the child: planning classes on the basis of topics that can actually involve children;
- III. Capacity to negotiate choices by welcoming the student’s requests without neglecting the necessities dictated by the curricula or by the school;
- IV. Capacity to create teaching contexts that are complex and rich in opportunities for the development of both linguistic, cognitive and social competences.

The teacher, in the natural-communicative approach is seen as a facilitator and he\she must have four characteristics (Caon 2006): he\she has to recognize that it is the student who carries out the main role in the learning process, the focus must be on them and their needs; the teacher’s goal has to be to promote intrinsic motivation. This can be done by connecting the didactic items with the personal interests of the learners; he\she has to organize a classroom environment that is as serene as possible: challenges must be achievable and no stress should be present; the teacher must also

lead, day by day to a higher level of autonomy in the child. He\she has to be a helper in the process but also has to respect all the steps of the acquisition process without forcing, but rather by offering support and teaching new helpful strategies.

The natural approach moreover, leaves the child free to go through the three phases of linguistic production without pressure (2010 englishraven.com):



Krashen (1981 in Krashen 1985) furthermore, points out that the strength of the *affective filter* (see chapter 2.6) may also change according to age: it gains dramatically in strength at around puberty and it will never go all the way down again, thus leading to the well-known social differences between children and adult acquisition. He also adds that while the filter may exist in the case of a formal second language acquirer, in natural informal language acquisition situations it is rarely high enough to prevent native-like levels of attainment. That has to be the teachers' aim according to Krashen: to recreate a natural informal language acquisition situation in which the innate capacity of the child can be formed.

3.3 THE TEACHER: THE SUPPORT

The concept of *servant leadership* was first introduced by Robert Greenleaf in 1977 who asserted that: "servant-leaders are driven to serve first, rather than to lead first, always striving to meet the highest priority needs of others." (in Hannay 2009:2). Hannay applies this idea of the servant leader to the classroom and she proposes the concept of the *servant-professor* which requires that "the focus be shifted to the needs of the student rather than on the opportunity for the professor to put him or herself on centre stage" (Hannay 2009:4). She highlights the fact that the world is changing

and the idea of education has to change accordingly or the result will be a backward product: “building a student-focused classroom can be challenged and will compel professor to focus more on the needs of the students and less on what is easy, comfortable and familiar. (...) While the traditional approach is professor and process centred the “new” approach is more student and learning centred. Applying some of the student-focused principles of servant leadership, focusing on techniques to promote student learning, utilizing the principles of active learning, and applying the new learning systems and technology that are available, all provide a starting point for the development of a new paradigm of teaching.” (Hannay 2009:13). Benefits of opting for a SCL approach are visible for both students and teachers: students will become more independent because their ideas and choices are taken into account in the creation of the syllabus making them an integral part of the academic community. By doing so their motivation increases (see chapter 4.1) since they are actively involved and are not only passive viewers in the classroom. Teachers, on the other hand, are helped in the daily life in school because of higher motivation of students and they are facilitated in the creation of materials for the classes as well since the majority of topics are chosen according to students’ preferences.

3.4 INPUT

Fillmore (2000:5) highlights the importance of input by saying that: “communication with students is essential in effective teaching. To communicate successfully, teachers must know how to structure their own language output for maximum clarity and have strategies for understanding what students are saying”. It is important to point out that bilinguals, compared to monolinguals, usually receive less input in the single languages, as Nicoladis and Montanari (2016:3) declare: “children growing up with more than one language usually obtain their input from each language from different sources. They may have relatively balanced exposure or this may be skewed in favour of one language over the other. In comparison with monolinguals, bilinguals are generally assumed to hear comparatively less input per language than their monolingual peers”. Since the quantity of input seems to be less in bilingual situations, it is even more important for bilingual children to receive high quality input so that they can develop language capacities properly. Bruner (1978 in Foley 1993) believed that for language acquisition, appropriate social interactional frameworks must be provided. For what concern young children this consists in a care-taker who provides the framework which allows the child to learn. The care-taker should always be one step ahead of the child (see chapter 2.2.1) and using familiar and routinized speeches can help him/her even more.

Applebee and Langer (1983 in Foley 1993) describe the formal learning instruction as a process of gradual internalization of routines (see chapter 4.7) and procedures available to the learner from the social and cultural context in which the learning process takes place.

Following Krashen's (1985) idea we can say that: "people acquire second languages only if they obtain comprehensible input and if their affective filters are low enough to allow the input in. When the filter is down and appropriate comprehensible input is presented (and comprehended) *acquisition is inevitable*. It is, in fact unavoidable and cannot be prevented- the language organ will function just as automatically as in other organ." Krashen (1985) moreover, describes input as "the essential environmental ingredient". It is extremely important for teachers to be able to re-create this kind of input inside the classroom if they want to help children in the activation of the LAD (see chapter 2.2.1): "teacher talk is an indispensable part of foreign language teaching in organizing activities, and the way teachers talk not only determines how well they make their lectures, but also guarantees how well students will learn. (...) The interaction between teachers and students constitutes a most important part in all classroom activities. Appropriate teacher talk can create a harmonious atmosphere and at the same time promote a friendlier relationship between teachers and students, and consequently create more opportunities for interactions between teachers and students." (Yanfen and Yuqin 2010:76)

One of the main mistakes teachers make while talking in class is creating dialogues with no communicative aim since they are specifically created on purpose for practising of some particular grammatical item. Teachers must avoid this kind of input because it does not involve any kind of active relationship between teacher and child: the child, most of the time, is not interested in the topic chosen by the teacher and all the questions asked do not have any social goal; language learning only takes place when there is a real need and motivation. Terrell (1977:329) also points out another problem: "since the teacher takes responsibility for explanation, practice and application, most of the classroom time is necessarily spent on explanation and practice, and very little on communicative situations in which the student may use what he has learnt".

This has nothing whatsoever to do with the natural path that a child usually follows while acquiring a mother tongue. How can this old way of teaching be modified in a modern way taking into account and respecting the general development of the child? Terrell continues: "there can be no real change in this pattern unless a change in attitude is made toward the relative importance of communication versus correct form (...) If communication is more important than it follows that most if not all classroom activities should be designed to evoke real communication".

“To evoke real communication” must always be the aim in teachers’ minds and the leitmotiv for all educational activities organized in class. Long (1996 in Yanfen and Yuqin 2010:77) points out that: “interaction is an important concept for English language teachers, it facilitates acquisition because of the conversational and linguistic modifications that occur in such discourse and that provide learners with the input they need. Through the interaction, learners have opportunities to understand and use the language that was incomprehensible. Additionally, they could get more input and more opportunities for output”. Fillmore and Snow (2000:7) highlights the fact that: “teachers are responsible for selecting educational materials and activities at the right level and of the right type for all of the children in their classes. (...) Teachers need to understand how to design the classroom language environment so as to optimize language and literacy learning and to avoid linguistic obstacles to content area learning.”. The language used in class has to be of a certain type in order to be useful for acquisition. Daloiso (2009) identifies three neuropsychological phenomena typical of children which allow them to improve their knowledge: neurosensory receptivity, sensory attention, and perceptual conceptualization. We have already talked about the neurosensory receptivity idea (see chapter 2.4.1) as one of the differences between adults and children in the process of acquisition. It shows that the child has an advantage during the acquisition process and the same can be used by teachers in order to support it. In order to build stable neural connections the same input needs to reach the child’s brain repeatedly or it will be lost and it will not lead to stable acquisition.

These neuro-sensorial stimulations then have to be:

- Constant, so that the brain will have the chance to fix the new information in a stable way;
- Gradual, as in suitable for the age and the level of competence of the;
- Coherent and in a proper order, in order to facilitate the child who, in this way, will not be confused or slowed down (see chapter 2.6)

The attention span in a child is usually quite short and this is due to the lack of a complex mechanism of attention (Fabbro 2004) and the incapacity to select particular aspects of the input and analyse them later on (Ladavas and Berti 2002 in Daloiso 2009). For this reason, sensorial attention is considered extremely important in early year language acquisition: it can replace these limitations by using different strategies. Visual and hearing attention are present in children from the beginning and these allow them to internalize info in a completely different way as compared to adults. It is through short videos, songs, games and flash cards that a child will be able to register something, rather than through a formal language class. Mukerjee and Guha (2007 in Daloiso 2009) sum up these two phenomena; sensorial attention and neurosensory receptivity in the idea of

perceptual conceptualization. Perceptual conceptualization is the phase through which input is analysed, comprehended and internalized by the child. It is by virtue of actions that a child is able to understand abstract concepts like the time, presence\absence and the weather amongst others. By using role-play or didactic routines (see chapter 4.7) children will be able to create a link between the physical action and the complex idea.

Kersten et al. (2010:106) describe the fact that not only linguistic input but also body language input is important in communication with young children because of their wider neurosensory receptivity: “when children encounter the L2 as a commentary of every activity in the classroom, they do not understand every single word of this continual input due to their limited L2 proficiency. This experience is natural for children in the acquisition of their L1, thus they are usually much more capable and willing to cope with it than adults. (...) Teachers have to use body language as pointing, gestures, facial expressions, and pantomime to underline the meaning of what they say. Such strategies help identify the object or activity that is focused on, and help the children establish the connection between the content and its meaning. Language input, which would otherwise remain meaningless for the children, receives a context and a meaning through such non-verbal strategies.”

In section 3.4 I pointed out the importance of an understandable input but when we consider a language class a question comes to our mind: in which language should the teacher speak?

As we saw in chapter 1, for what concerns bilingual families there are different options according to the aim parents want to reach. Fabbro (2004) points out that a noteworthy characteristic of children is the “laziness” in using the L2, especially whenever they notice that they can use the L1. The L1, in the case of *consequent bilingualism*, in fact, is considered the easier language, the one used more often and in which they feel more confident. The L2 is, most of the time, considered the language of school, while the L1 is the language of the family. Fabbro suggests to avoid using L1 as much as possible during school time so that the child can distinguish between the two places and develop according to the OPOL (see chapter 1.2) which in this case would be One Place One Language (and not One Person One Language). He moreover recommends avoiding mixing the two languages and denying code-switching. Fabbro’s idea is nowadays considered too rigid and changes have been made in order to simplify the relation between child and second language, taking into account the emotional sphere as well. The idea of leaving out the mother tongue, and in a way to belittle it, might indeed be dangerous and lead to a *subtractive bilingualism* as years pass by (see chapter 1). Researchers today believe that not only the L1 must be preserved but it can also help in the

acquisition of the L2 (see chapter 1.7). Fabbro (2004) in addition, focuses on the importance of the linguistic competence of teachers. Especially in the early years (0-3 years) it is important to offer correct input, to avoid grammatical mistakes which will become increasingly difficult to correct in the future.

3.4.1 TEACHER-TALK

Baby and care-takers have an innate wish to communicate and they both have to modify their outputs in order that the speaker can facilitate the comprehension; “the participants in the interaction adjust to one another (...) even with different competence levels and degrees of awareness” (Camaioni 1981 in Caon 2010). The modality through which parents talk to the child is usually called *baby-talk* and it is the most common example of modification of speech proposed by parents when they want to communicate with children. The same happens in the classroom every time a teacher modifies her\his way of talking: this modality is called *teacher-talk*. Teacher-talk has been seen from different points of view by researchers over the years, some believed that in order to offer a correct and rich input teacher-talk should be avoided. Others, and we also agree with this thought, believe that teacher-talk, exactly like baby-talk, is the empathic way care-takers use in order to respect the readiness of the child. In other words, teachers who adopt the teacher-talk strategy are trying to approach the child in the most natural possible way, through a simplified input, offering them a new and more complexed information only with time. Krashen (1987 in Caon 2010) asserts that “the best methods are (...) those that supply comprehensible input in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language (...) recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production”. Krashen (1985:2) describes what teacher’s input should be like by mentioning that “the care-taker provides extra-linguistic context by limiting speech to the child to the here and now. The beginning-language teacher provides context via visual aids (pictures and objects) and discussion of familiar topics.”

We have talked a lot about the importance of input and when we consider the situation of children who have to acquire a second\foreign language, it becomes a huge responsibility for school teachers since children will get most of the input from them.

This kind of input differs from others for three main reasons:

- I. Formal adjustments: compared to the communication between adults, when an adult talks to a child he\she tends to produce easier sentences, both phonologically and semantically. The voice tends to rise, velocity slows down, pauses are longer and sentences shorter. Adults usually select common words, with an easy meaning and they always make sure they insert the new words in a well-known context;
- II. Interaction: it is not only the way in which the parent\care-taker produces his\her sentences which creates a distinction compared to a common conversation. Adults also modify their interactions with children. Adults usually ask questions to support children's production, they continually show if they are understanding the dialogue or if something is not clear enough and they also motivate children in producing more and more complex sentences;
- III. Vertical constructions: the method adults most often use in order to help children in oral production is *vertical constructions*. Children use adult oral productions as a scaffolding and they then build their own production firmly attached to these constructions.

It is also known as *collaborative discourse* and Crystal (1986 in Balboni, Coonan, Garotti 2002) offers us an example:

Child: (coming in from the garden) Daddy knee.

Mom: What's that darling? What about daddy's knee?

Child: Fall down daddy.

Mom: Did he? Where did he fall down?

Child: In garden fall down.

Mom: Daddy's fallen down in the garden! Poor daddy. Is he all right?

Child: Daddy knee sore.

Mom: Daddy's fallen over and his knee's sore? I'd better come and see, hadn't I?

As we can note from the example the mom takes, modifies and re-proposes the child's production offering him\her a new version of it, grammatically correct and syntactically rich. The mom understands the aim of the child and supports his\her production with elements that are not available yet in the child's linguistic competence. The adult asks questions and the baby utilises the new words in order to go on in the development.

"The teacher who helps doesn't push (the baby) to talk, he\she accepts the silent period and the non-verbal answers. He\she doesn't submerge the child with unintelligible linguistic inputs which lead to anxiety and annoyance, he\she rather offers few sentences at the time. He\she supports and boost

comprehension also by using extra linguistics supports (...) he\she moreover simplifies the way of speaking (...)” (Favaro 2002 in Caon 2010).

There are various characteristics that teacher-talk has to have in order to be considered useful for early language teaching: Garotti (Balboni, Coonan, Garotti 2002) declares that the input offered to the children has to be complete, nor excessively simplified nor broken up in smaller sentences and it has to be suitable for the age but linguistically realistic. Kuhl (2004 in Castello 2015:9) explains that. “the combination of parental and social interaction with frequent exposure to practical language in use can greatly assist language learning and positively affect the linguistic competence of the child.”

Krashen (1977 in Castello 2015:10) adds that: “the success in language learning requires access to input that is modified to make it comprehensible and, by extension, functional in nature. In this way, information about grammar is automatically available because the input is understood in context; this is similar to the process of L1 acquisition where the child discovers, interprets and ascribes meaning through contextualised behaviour”. Krashen (1981:125) also highlights that care-taker’s speech: “is known to be composed of shorter sentences, with less subordination, has a more restricted vocabulary and refers to a more restricted range of topics among the other features”.

McLaughlin (1995) elicits some more golden rules for an effective teacher-talk:

- To present new information in the context of known information: children should receive new information in a context which is familiar so that they can face less issues in the understanding process. New vocabulary should not be presented in isolation but inserted in a wide context from which children can take out the needed information;
- To paraphrase often: the teacher should paraphrase what the child said with the correct grammar rather than correcting it;
- To use simple structures and avoid complex ones: it is important to keep language to the right level of complexity so that the effort in understanding is not too much;
- To repeat the same sentence, patterns and routines: see chapter 4.7 for a wider explanation of the importance of routines in children’s daily life.

Teachers should use the L2 as much as possible, offering in this way a rich environment which will help in the activation of the LAD. The mother tongue should be used in an affective way, following the idea of Garotti (Balboni, Coonan, Garotti 2002): L1 in cases of children from 3 to 6 years of age is more important as a sentimental language rather than for didactic reasons. Obstacles which parents, and adults in general, see towards the L2 are most of the time merely related to

preconceptions: Garotti in her studies noticed that after just one year of exposition to a foreign language children started producing sentences freely. She also noticed that most of these productions in the beginning appear mostly during routine moments (see chapter 4.7.).

Not only the quality, as we have said till now, is important for the linguistic competence children will acquire but also the quantity, and in particular the Teacher Talk Time idea (TTT). The amount of time the teacher talks has to be set according to students' needs: it has to be used as often as possible so that they can be exposed to a huge amount of target language but at the same time it has to give them the time and possibility to practise themselves. In a way the amount of TTT can be inversely correlated to the amount of active speaking time students have, the longer the teacher talks the less time is left for learners. Allwright (1982 in Davies 2011) points out that teacher who "work" too much in the classroom are not teaching effectively. He said that a good language teacher should be able to get students to do more work rather than bombarding the students with useless input.

3.4.2 SCAFFOLDING

Two actors are present on the "educational stage": teacher and student. Although they do not play the same roles; the protagonist always has to be the student while the teacher plays the role of the director who leads the difficult journey towards linguistic knowledge. The quantity of responsibility every actor has will change with the improvement of the child's abilities. In the beginning the teacher's presence is massive, especially during the phases in which the child is settling into the new class and the silent period (see chapter 2.2); the teacher has to provide a huge amount of input so that the child, in this apparently static phase, is able to internalize new linguistic knowledge.

As time passes, a phase of *scaffolding* will take place: responsibilities will pass from adult to child who will become more and more independent.

According to McKenzie (1999 in Turuk 2008) scaffolding provides the following advantages to children:

- It provides clear directions for students;
- It clarifies purpose of the task;
- It keeps students on the task;
- It offers assessment to clarify expectations;
- It directs students to worthy sources;
- It reduces uncertainty, surprise and disappointment;

- It delivers efficiency;
- It creates momentum.

Teachers' productions are considered to be the structure on which students will, with time, create new knowledge. The idea of scaffolding is only one of the examples of the relationship between student and teacher: the teacher provides input and the student receives it, but learning occurs when the acquirer actively transforms his\her world and does not merely conform to it following Donato's idea (1994 in Turuk 2008); an active approach by the student is absolutely necessary.

According to Kersten et al. (2010) two types of scaffolding are available to teachers: verbal and content. *Verbal scaffolding*, following her idea, is the one offered by teachers when they provide input which is at an appropriate level, correct and recurrent. She also highlights the importance of offering enough time to respond questions, allowing students to code-switch and offering them supportive corrections if needed. *Content scaffolding* on the other hand, sums up the idea of proposing references to previous acquired knowledge, visualisation techniques, give accurate feedback and allow students to discuss concepts in their mother tongue if they don't feel like using the L2 yet.

A third type of scaffolding is then proposed by the author (Kersten 2010:110), the so-called *organisational scaffolding*: "a daily schedule which remains the same every day, recurring social patterns and activities, and reliable routines serve as scaffolding and, at the same time, as "safety nets" for children, who understand the structure of the daily routines with the help of these signs. They do not only, however, serve as organisational scaffolds but, when expressed verbally, they also serve as language scaffolds, therefore enabling the children to become attuned to the foreign language" (see section 4.7).

CHAPTER 4

Teaching children is an accomplishment; getting children excited about learning is an achievement.

Robert John Meehan

Chapter 4 presents the most famous didactic methodologies used with children: how they work, how they can be blended with the school's daily schedule and what their benefits are. Not all the activities are, as a matter of fact, usable with young learners due to their peculiarities: their attention span is too short and moreover they have specific needs that have to be taken into account, like, the need of repetition. In order to put together necessities and characteristics of children three methodologies are usually utilized: the *Total Physical Response*, the *Playful Methodology* and the *Task-Based Instruction* one. The idea from which I will start is the one of the *experience-based learning* which takes into account all the features of children for the creation of a syllabus. An entire paragraph about motivation is also present: with no motivation no learning can occur and it is important to aim at the right kind of motivation in order to facilitate young learners. An extensive research about routines is also offered at the end of this chapter: they are considered to be one the most helpful activities with children due to their need of repetition. Moreover, they are also considered to be a strategy often used by children: when they don't know a word, they tend to use the whole routine sentence as a block and they will only later learn how to analyse it, word by word, when their linguistic competence will be higher.

4.1 MOTIVATION

We pointed out the importance of offering good quality input (see chapter 3.4), we said how relevant it is to focus on students rather than on language but another concept is extremely important if we aim at acquisition: motivation.

Children, and adults as well but in a less relevant way, do not go to school and to study new concepts in order to use them later on, they will become involved only if they see the need to do it. Titone (in Caon and Rutka 2004:17) points out that: “l’apprendimento, in quanto acquisizione in profondità e durata, è soprattutto dipendente dalla presenza attiva dell’io soggetto. È a questo livello che si collocano i fattori affettivi in generale (motivazione, atteggiamento, tono emotivo, reazioni profonde conscie e inconscie), che determinano, per così dire, la sedimentazione tenace delle acquisizioni. La motivazione costituisce il processo dinamogenetico dell’apprendimento e insieme la garanzia della sua durata e utilizzabilità. Di qui la sua importanza nell’economia generale dello sviluppo umano, dall’infanzia all’età adulta.”² He also distinguishes between two kinds of motivation: *intrinseca* (intrinsic) and *estrinseca* (expressed). Caon and Rutka (2004:18) describe them by saying: “possiamo parlare di motivazione intrinseca quando si crea una situazione per cui lo studente prova interesse, desiderio, curiosità, piacere nell’imparare. Si parla di motivazione estrinseca invece, quando le ragioni che stanno alla base dell’apprendimento non sono legate al piacere personale, autodiretto, ma hanno stretti legami con fattori esterni quali, ad esempio, la gratificazione, o la ricompensa da parte dell’insegnante.”³ Playful methodology, according to Freddi is the best way to activate an intrinsic motivation in young students. (see chapter 4.1)

There are three famous models that try to explain how motivation becomes activated during the learning process and how students and teachers can work in order to keep it active: Titone’s model (1973), Freddi’s model (1970) and last Balboni’s model (1994 all three in Caon 2006). I will focus my attention on Balboni’s model since it is the one that best applies to the case of early language education. Since the focus of this paper is on young learners we cannot really use the motivation theories that are usually true for older students (see Gardner and Lambert 1972). The only motivation young students seem to have, at least till when they are old enough to appreciate the role of the school, is the motivation towards new things, the one instigated by curiosity. A secondary motivation might be the one of being able to communicate with peers if they use a different language. Learners of an L2 in an informal space (both home or kindergarten if it follows a natural

² Learning, a deep and long term acquisition is strictly dependent in the presence of an active subject. It is at this level where we can find affective factors (motivation, behaviour, emotions, reactions to language) which determine the long term acquisition of knowledge. Motivation is the dynamo-genetic process in learning and at the same time the guarantee for its long term and possibility to be used. This is the reason why it is considered to be so important for general development, from infancy to adulthood.

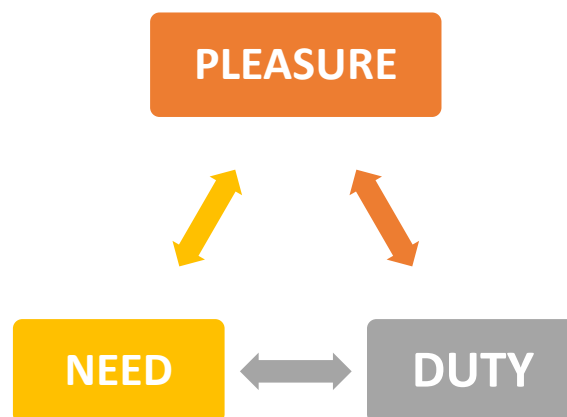
³ We can talk about intrinsic motivation when the student is interested in the situation, when he\she is curious about it and when he \she feels pleasure in learning. Expressed motivation on the other hand, is created when the reasons why the students are learning are not connected to personal pleasure but rather to external factors like gratification of a good mark or the recognition of the student performance.

approach) will have the stimulus to interact with friends in daily life and will have lots more opportunities to get in contact with different structures compared to students of a LS in a formal situation.

The other two models, Freddi's and Titone's, take for granted the active decision of the learner to face the difficult task of language education. Children usually do not decide to attend language courses, or to take part in formal classes, their motivation is mostly connected to language acquisition intrinsic pleasure, and that's what Balboni states in his theory.

4.1.1 THE TRI-POLAR MODEL: PLEASURE, DUTY, NEED

by Paolo E. Balboni



This model is based on the idea that three possible activating factors exist: duty, need and pleasure.

- *Duty* is the most common feeling in school but it does not lead to a strong motivation since students are usually not interested in subjects and the sense of duty, or discipline, only lasts till the realization of the goal: to get a good mark, to pass an exam.
- *Need* can lead to a stable enough motivation but, as we said for “duty”, it expires as soon as the expectations are reached: once they have mastered those challenges they will probably lose interest and will not go further in the study. Moreover, Balboni specifies that usually goals set by students and the ones set by teachers are different: students tend to settle for lower results compared to teachers who would rather expire to a life-long learning process.

- *Pleasure* seems to be the determinant factor for a meaningful acquisition: pleasure keeps generating motivation and creates new energy for the learner. Balboni (2002 in Caon 2006:18) states that “pleasure is a concept to be interpreted not only as a pleasant feeling or emotion but also, as a gratification of a cognitive need and of a desire for participation, as the pleasure of making new experiences, the pleasure of a challenge, the pleasure of systematizing knowledge by making it into a personal competence, of establishing connection between the new concepts acquired at school and the ones already possessed.”

How to recreate a pleasant environment for children? How to help them improve and permit this gratifying motivation to grow?

I will try to answer these questions starting from Humboldt’s quotation (1836): “one cannot teach a language but can only create the conditions in which the language will spontaneously develop in the mind in the appropriate way”.

Children find pleasure in communication itself, they love telling stories, sharing opinions and being involved in chats with peers and care-takers. It is this innate joy that teachers have to aspire to, and in order to help them in this process they have to provide classes during which they can feel free to use the L2 (but also, when needed the mother tongue) in a familiar environment.

According to Daloso (2009) it is deeply important to organize classes in an inspiring way so that children can find pleasure in going to school and studying. We always have to keep in mind the personal needs of every single child and, moreover, we have to consider some common needs which are usually true for the majority of students: safety\challenge, originality\periodicity, objective\subjective goals.

- Safety\challenge: is connected to the idea that students will participate in an activity if they consider it achievable, not too difficult and not too easy. It is important not to offer too difficult tasks because in that case children will not even try to fulfil the work, while on the other hand, a too easy task would not create the challenge needed in order to create interest. This is the idea expressed by the *attribution theory* by Weiner (1985 in Caon 2010). As reported by Weiner students tend to lose confidence if they consider the work they have to do too difficult; a small challenge is tempting, too big a demand would destroy the collaboration;
- Having said this, we cannot forget the fact that children tend to get bored and distracted really easily and one of the best ways to keep attention span active as long as possible is to continuously submit new and original activities: this is the idea of periodicity\originality. In order to always use activities which are as original as possible we can switch from one

didactic technique to the other or we can for example change the way the same topic is being presented to the class: once by using a song, once by showing a video, a third time while using the whole body for example. With really young children though, it might be useful to keep a certain routine (see chapter 4.7) so that they can avoid feeling confused and unsecure;

- The third point should help the teachers to keep a balance between the needs and the goals of the student and those of the school: objective and subjective ones. Every student faces the learning process in a different way and children might find some activities particularly pleasant or boring. Teachers should always try to find harmony between duty and pleasure during lessons. The best way to do so is by linking together enjoyable topics with school subjects; teachers might for example use particular characters, which might be animals or cartoons, as actors in role-play or interchange a funny song with a more serious lesson so that everybody can always enjoy without raising the affective filter (see chapter 2.6).

4.2 PROCESSABILITY THEORY

The idea behind Pienemann's Processability Theory (1998 in Kessler 2008:9) is that: "at any stage of development the learner can produce and comprehend only those L2 linguistic forms which the current stage of the language processor can handle. It is therefore crucial to understand the architecture of the language processor and the way in which it handles a second language. This enables one to predict the course of development of L2 linguistic forms in language production and comprehension across languages". Pienemann's idea is strongly connected to the one of the student-centred class (see chapter 3.2) because it is starting from the innate steps (and in some cases difficulties) children have to face that teachers must plan the syllabus and not vice-versa. Doman (2012:813) adds that following Pienemann's theory we can say that language is learnt in sequences, which have been defined by Johnson (1985) as "developmental stages": "according to the definition of developmental stages, it follows that new linguistic information can only be acquired if the prerequisites have been met beforehand. In short, language is a series of building blocks".

Following Pallotti and Zedda's idea (2003) teachers have to be sure to follow three basic principles in the classroom: to select proper input for students, propose the right structures at the right moment and never push nor force the introduction of a new topic when the child is not ready for it. Implications of Pienemann's theory show that language education has limits and teachers have to live with them: since we are looking for a natural approach teachers have to plan classes at school

according to what children naturally need. These needs might at times be a long period spent on a single topic rather than the presentation of a new topic every day and they might also lead to months of *silent period* instead of the desired early production.

Pallotti and Zedda (2003) sum up Pienemann Teachability Theory in three main points:

- School cannot modify the natural sequence of language acquisition; formal education cannot skip or switch steps;
- The attempt to teach structures prematurely would lead to negative consequences: regression and raising of the affective filter (see chapter 2.6) among others;
- School can accelerate the process of acquisition of a specific step by providing proper support to children.

Chini (2011) explains Pienemann's idea by saying that we can only teach what in that particular moment can be learnt; the step that immediately follows what has just been acquired, following a fixed acquisition sequences; she also asserts that teachers must leave children free to experience the language, to play with it and to evolve their competence day by day but she also highlights the importance of feedbacks. Conversations with children have to be meaningful and grammar cannot be completely left aside. Through feedbacks teachers can help children notice mistakes and lead them through the corrections. With children the best feedback seems to be the use of prompts: teachers do not give the correct answers, rather they ask simple questions to indicate to the child that a mistake has been made (e.g Pardon? What did you say?). Children who are used to this technique show a consistent capacity to reformulate the sentence without mistakes. In the cases in which an additional correction seems to be needed the teacher will provide the correct answer.

4.3 EXPERIENCE-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

The *experience-based language teaching* is different from the classic methodologies generally utilized in a language course since it considers language not as the object\aim of the learning experience but rather as the way through which new knowledge can be acquired. Since knowledge and language are acquired together it is important to offer as much varied input as possible and moreover as often as possible (see chapter 3.4). The foreign language is not only seen as a way of communicating but also as a vehicle through which the child can learn different things thus becoming a complex way to discover the whole world around. Garotti says (Balboni, Coonan, Garotti 2002) that this new conception of the language as a way of communicating, leads to a modification of the class itself: every activity, game, lesson needn't to be planned starting from the

language: teachers must focus on the activity itself being sure to transfer input in a meaningful way and leaving language as the mere vehicle of knowledge. Having said this, it is obvious that the whole syllabus has to be organized according to the general development of the child and the needs at that particular time. Coonan (2002) puts this case in the ones of a foreign language used as a vehicular language; L2 is an instrument used in order to increase the capacity of the entire infant brain.

Daloiso (2009) sums up the four main characteristics of the *experience-based teaching* methodology:

- I. Experience comes first: experience-based teaching is part of the so called humanistic-affective approaches. The student is the central focus of the whole project and his\her needs are considered to be extremely important. Moreover, since it is usually used with children the specific features of these learners are also considered; (see chapter 2.4)
- II. Immersion in the language: since it is through the language itself that the child is going to acquire both the linguistic rules and the rest of the syllabus it is mandatory for the teachers to offer input in a very great quantity. Language cannot be used only on specific occasions but it should always be present in class so that the child will have the occasion to live a situation similar to that of the acquisition of the mother tongue at home; (see chapter 3.4)
- III. Learning through the language itself: as we said before, foreign language is the vehicle through which new notions will be acquired. Not an obstacle then, but rather a support and a help;
- IV. Integration: finding a way to connect L1 and L2 in the curriculum so that they can both develop together and help the child in the comprehension of new material.

4.3.1 THEME-BASED INSTRUCTION (TBI)

One of the possibilities available to teachers who want to organize the class following the idea of the experience-based teaching is offered by the Theme-Based Instruction.

The theme-based instruction (TBI) model is one of the techniques more often used in the case of early language approach: according to this model the whole program of the didactic year will be linked to a topic (the theme) which will allow the connection of different subjects following a common path. The TBI offers teachers the possibility to use familiar and interesting topics through which the language is more likely to be accepted and acquired. Mumford (2000:3) points out that: “integrating various subjects in the curriculum can contribute to a greater awareness of the relationship of school programs and make learning more relevant. Integration of subject content is

intended to help students make sense of many dimensions of their world. Integration also enhances students' ability to transfer the competencies and skills acquired in one context to the other appropriate situations". Theme-based instruction classes provide a language rich environment by offering students the possibility to see the same words used in different contexts, moreover it offers them the possibility to create connections between different topics. Teachers furthermore, can take advantage of this technique as a way to link various activities: the use of the theme "animals" for example would permit the class to face topics like the adjectives needed in order to describe the different creatures, colours, sounds, different places like the jungle, the house and the sea among others. Various methodologies might be used: TPR for the introduction of new verbs, story-telling, some authentic experiences like for example a visit to the zoo or playful LTM asking students to mimic animals by using role-play.

The European Commission's handbook (2011:13) offers us other golden rules for the ELL (Early Language Learning):

- "ELL should not foster languages as a specific subject but rather as a communication tool to be used in other activities;
- ELL should be integrated into contexts in which the language is meaningful and useful, such as in everyday (see chapter 4.7) or playful (see chapter 4.5) situations, since play is the child's natural medium of learning in pre-primary;
- The role of ELL is to provide an enriching, engaging environment, a structure that supports and extends learning opportunities through scaffolding processes (see chapter 3.4). This will identify and build upon each child's unique potential".

As we can read on the handbook published by the European Commission (2011:11): "teaching a language should not be done in any formal way, since the first objective is to help children realise that there are languages other than their own, raising the interest and curiosity in discovering similarities and differences between languages and making them familiar with different sounds and intonations."

It is not enough to offer input to children in order for them to acquire it, the stimulus must be authentic and realistic as well. Since the aim of languages is to communicate we cannot expect children to use a foreign language in a situation in which this is not needed, for example if they understand they can use the mother tongue. The school has to re-create real situations in which children will be "forced" to produce in L2 as the only language available (at the same time it is important never to forget the right to safeguard L1). In the case of international or bilingual schools (see chapter 6.2) this is easier because in these places the idea of OPOL (in this case One Place One

Language) is usually true and after a short time of adjustment the child will understand that during school time a different language, compared to the one at home, is used. In the case of FL (Foreign Language), on the other hand, teachers still have to try to offer authentic situations and they can do it in two ways: in a psychological and in a situational way (Balboni, Coonan, Garotti 2002). Psychological authenticity is needed in any case, even in L2. Students will learn a lot more easily if they can experience the language they are studying in all-round situations: every time a new topic is introduced students will have the possibility to touch, taste, smell or watch something related to it, it is not through grammatical rules that children acquire, but rather through experience. Situational authenticity on the other hand is connected to the idea of laziness that sometime may be identified in children. Asking children to interact among themselves and towards the teacher in a foreign language when they know that everybody shares the same mother tongue would not lead to good results. Through games or easy solutions, like using a puppet who speaks only in L2, students will have the right amount of motivation in order to start appreciating and producing in the foreign language.

4.4 TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE (TPR)

Asher (1979 in Balboni, Coonan, Garotti 2002) proposes a method which is usually used with young learners in order to take advantage of their natural mobility and neurosensorial receptivity benefits. The TPR is based on the idea of using the entire body during the process of language acquisition so that children can link together the vocal order expressed by the teacher and react to it with movements: “this method was designed to accelerate listening comprehension of a foreign language by having subjects give a physical response when they heard a foreign utterance” (Asher 1968:1).

According to Asher (1968) listening comprehension is necessary in order to improve language capacity, young children first acquire a high level of listening before they can produce any sentence in the mother tongue. The same happens for the L2, the use of TPR during class aims at taking advantage of the innate learning capacity babies use while acquiring the mother tongue and applies it to the L2 context. The teacher takes the place of the parent and by offering students proper input tries to encourage them in the development.

Asher (1979) lists a numerous amount of reasons why TPR is considered a suitable method for children:

- I. Easy to implement\no translation: it requires no translation or L1 support, it can help students in the transition to a foreign language environment;
- II. New playing field, no disadvantages for academically weaker students: since it does not depend on the left side of the brain (the one usually involved in language acquisition) it is a chance for the children who works better in the right-side mode to enjoy and learn with less effort;
- III. Reducing pressure and stress for students: TPR does not require a spoken answer from students. This allows students who are facing the *silent period* to take part in the class without forcing them;
- IV. Trains students to react to language and not think about it too much: TPR requires an instant reaction, this allow students to go with the flow and learn while practising, even making mistakes;
- V. Different style of teaching\learning: since it is completely different from the common classes TPR is a break for both students and teachers;
- VI. Long term retention: as we will see later children love and need routines, TPR is a way through which they can practise the same action\language item over and over again without getting bored.

TPR has a huge neurological advantage as well: most of the activities usually proposed in class focus on the left hemisphere: when children talk, discuss, analyse, they always train the left side of the brain. We shouldn't forget that language acquisition only occurs in the case in which both hemispheres are involved and TPR is a good way to actively use the side of the brain that is usually left apart: the right side. When children move their bodies, act, draw, point or even use metaphors they practise the use of the right side.

TPR can be used in different ways, it might be used as a warm-up for 5-10 minutes at the beginning of each class, an occasion for the students to prepare their bodies and brains for the class itself, or it can also be used in regular classes: teachers could use TPR as a break from the daily routine, a way to distract from a more formal environment and leave the brain a bit freer for a short period.

Krashen (1985) describes Asher's TPR method as a method with huge didactic potential since it provides a great deal of comprehensible input in the second language in the classroom and aim for a low-anxiety environment.

Caon and Rutka (2004) list other benefits of TPR method:

- the student is not forced to produce orally in the L2 but he\she can actively participate in the TPR activities training his\her linguistic knowledge,
- at the same time the teacher can have a direct feedback of the competence of the child without putting him\her under pressure,
- Another feedback is offered, this time to the student itself, who can check, through the comparison with his\her peers if he\she has acted in the right way, in the case of a mistake he\she can simply modify the performance to the other children without activating the affective filter (see chapter ...).

It is also easy to notice how TPR can help students with different leaning styles and predominance of intelligences: this method is the most natural one for children who prefer kinaesthetic activities because they find easier to learn when they can use their bodies but it can also be helpful for that group of children who use visualisation a lot: by seeing the teacher or other peers acting following the commands they can find the visual support that would otherwise be missing. The same is true for learners who rely on the auditory learning style: by listening to the same oral input over and over again they can easily acquire new knowledge without even noticing.

4.5 PLAYFUL METHODOLOGY (PLTM)

Karl Groos (1901 in Freddi 1990:19) pointed out the importance of the game in a human's life by stating: "il periodo giovanile dell'uomo è più esteso di quello di tutti gli altri esseri viventi perchè, per mezzo del gioco, egli deve prepararsi alla complessa vita adulta."⁴ Freddi (1990:130) explains that through the playful methodology "è possibile pensare ad una glottodidattica centrata sulle caratteristiche funzionali ed evolutive del bambino; una glottodidattica che raccordi in modo armonioso lingua materna, straniera\seconda e riesca ad integrarsi con codici non verbali (linguaggio musicale, corporeo, artistico ecc.)"⁵

A great possibility is available to teachers: Playful Language Teaching Methodology. Caon and Rutka (2004) explain that through this method, teachers can "translate into practice both the presupposition and the purposes of the humanistic (affective and functional) and communicative approach, and the presuppositions and purposes of socio-cultural constructivism". Caon (2006) points out another advantage of a class structured following the playful LTM which is specifically

⁴ The phase of youth in human beings is longer compared to other species because it is through games that the child learns about the complexity of adult life.

⁵ It is possible to think about a language education methodology focused on functional and evolutionary characteristics of the child; a methodology which can link together in an harmonious way the mother tongue, the second\foreign language but also the non-verbal codes (music, body language and art).

useful in the case of children. Through games we engage students in two ways: a synchronic one during the course of the game when he\she is multi-sensorially motivated and involved and a diachronic one while continuously repeating the same sequences his\her competence steadily evolves and motivation remains stable because they tend to constantly pass the achieved aim.

Polito (2000 in Caon 2006) says in addition that “the game ignites the enthusiasm, fires the interest, primes the involvement, favours social activities, increases expression, stimulates learning, and reactivates affections, emotions and thoughts. By valorising the playful dimension of learning we avoid orientating the school solely towards the cognitive plane to the detriment of other formative dimensions such as the affective, interpersonal, corporeal and manual ones”.

Daloiso (2006) reports Freddi’s list of values that a well-planned playful activity needs to have:

- **Sensoriality:** taking advantage of the wider spectrum of possibilities children have for analysing input it is important that games exploit all these possibilities by using images, smells and different tastes among the others;
- **Mobility:** children love moving and they learn better when they can actually put into actions what they have been learning. Playful LTM must offer a wide range of possibilities for children to move and explore;
- **Semiotics:** all the different codes have to be presented and taught to children, from the linguistic one to the one of clothes and gestures. Through role-plays and action games children can pretend to live different situations and learn about different aspects of language competence;
- **Interpersonal relationship:** through games the child can learn how to share and interact both with peers and with the teacher. It can be a big help in overcoming the egocentric phase;
- **Pragmatics:** language is used in order to do things, to express needs and to reach goals. Through simulated situations children can understand how to use language properly and improve their opinion about the foreign language which becomes an instrument that allow them to do new things rather than to waste fruitless effort;
- **Emotions:** stress, anxious feelings, fear and other negative sentiments must be avoided if we do not want the affective filter to rise up (see chapter 2.6). Games can help maintaining a serene atmosphere in the class. Moreover, in a less formal environment even shyer children can find the perfect setting where they can release worries and feel free to produce sentences in L2;
- **Genuine context:** by using games teachers can recreate a credible situation in the classroom which would show students how to use language in daily situations.

There is also a third reason why the playful LTM should be considered the most suitable option for children: while playing children do not think about the linguistic rules that are underneath the game itself, they forget they are learning while they are busy playing: *the rule of forgetting*.

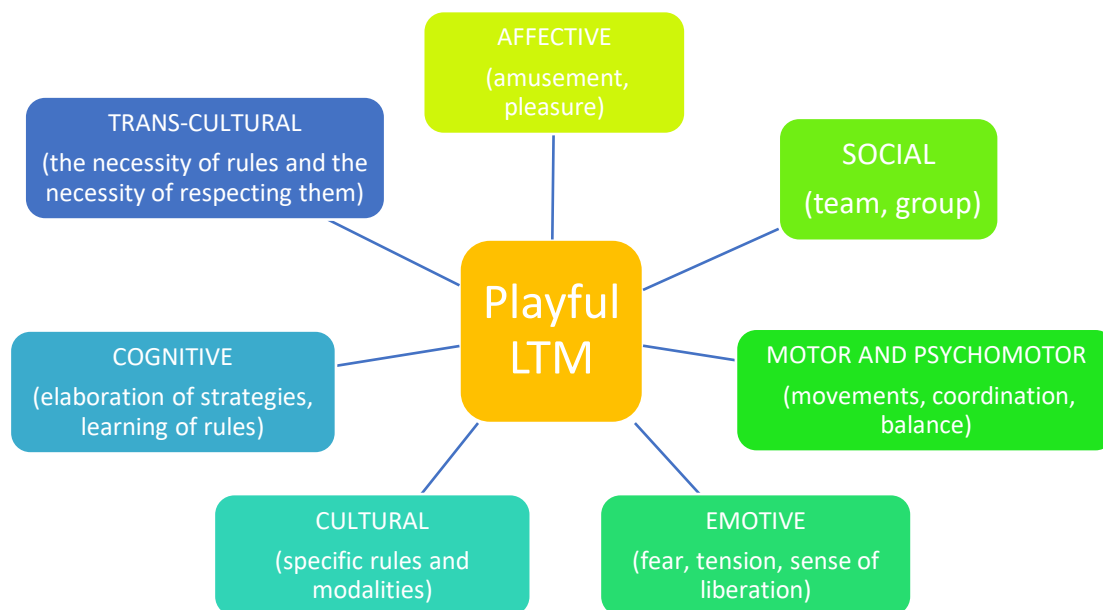
Krashen's rule of forgetting is that "the (affective) filter is lower when the acquirer is so involved in the message that he temporarily forgets he is hearing or reading in another language." (1985)

Regarding the attention to the personal development of a child through game teachers can also try to find a solution to what Piaget calls "egocentric theory": children in the beginning (especially if they don't have siblings) tend to believe that everybody shares the same ideas, points of view, ways of thinking. While playing children understand that there might be differences from one another and they moreover comprehend that by working together they can reach better results. Castello (2015:8) points out that. "children are highly egocentric: they consider themselves the centre and sole focus of the world and exhibit concepts of "self" and other such that they are unaware of any vulnerability in their self-identity".

Playful methodology can be useful in the modification of this mentality because it forces children to play together and respect each other by following the rules of the games.

Moreover, Caon and Rutka add that a healthy sense of competition can be established thanks to the playful methodology: thanks to group games children can learn the meaning of respect, acceptance of others and mutual help.

The seven components of a game from the playful LTM point of view are (Caon 2006):



Surdyk (2011) proposes the use of the playful LTM even for just a small part of the lesson. He asserts that, instead of starting off the class with the usual routine, a playful routine can instead take its place: “this can help the teacher to gain the positive attitude of the students to the activities awaiting them and to establish contact with the students. (...) It also helps students to switch from their mother tongue to the foreign language. Finally, in a heterogenic group of students, it can help integrating the activities for the impulsive learners and the more reflexive ones. Additionally, when based on the material introduced in the previous lessons, the technique can play a checking function although in a less formal way.” The same researcher also adds that a look-alike activity can also be used at the end of the class as a summing up which can help students to realize what they have learnt.

Daloiso (2006) appraises though that a playful methodology can only be successful in the case where specific conditions are applied:

- Giving students the opportunity to do things: offering children materials like songs and rhymes is not enough for them to acquire fully. They need to interact with the words, modify the sentences and, if possible utilize them in their daily life so that they can associate actions and words;

- It takes advantage of the *implicit memory* (see chapter 1.6): language has to be a medium which leads to the general development of the child. Through the foreign language children will acquire new knowledge, different ways of expressing their feelings and will learn new cultural aspects as well;
- Wide neuro-sensorial exposure: games must be planned in a way that can involve the child in the greatest possible way. Movements, repetitions, actions, thoughts, speeches, interactions, creation of materials...all these possibilities must be used in order to allow the child to become immersed in a meaningful language environment.

4.6 TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING (TBLT)

In the early 1980s the idea of communicative competence and the focus on actual language use started to be present in language education programs. TBLT is one of the method used in the case of learner-centred approaches. The idea behind the TBLT method is that “practising of newly grasped rule or pattern and relatively free language production in a wider context consolidate what has been presented and practised, such as a communication task or a role play activity” (Willis 1996 in Izadpanah 2010).

Nunan (2005 in Izadpanah 2010), sums up the main differences between a traditional classroom and a TBLT one:

TRADITIONAL FORM-FOCUSED CLASS	TBLT CLASS
Teacher controls topic development	Students free to control topic development
Teacher regulates turn-taking	Turn-taking is regulated by the students
Rigid discourse structure	Loose discourse structure
Teacher knows the answers	Teacher does not know the answer
Little negotiate meaning	More negotiate meaning
Scaffolding for enabling students to produce correct sentences	Scaffolding for enabling students to say what they want to say
Form-focused feedback	Content-focused feedback
Echoing	Repetition\production

In a L2 situation learners are even more motivated than students of a foreign language because they will be using that language in daily concrete problems. Moreover, they can take advantage of the

wider exposure available to the language compared to learners who have only teacher's input. The task-based approach is based on this idea: whenever the language is used in order to reach extra linguistic aims or even to solve daily situations the acquisition seems to be easier and to lead to better results. Ellis (2000 in Turuk 2008) postulates that the application of this theory is clearly visible in the task-based approach, where the research noted the connection between the learners and the scaffold which supports the L2 acquisition process in a collaborative way. Richards and Rodgers (2001 in Izadpanah 2010) add that "tasks are believed to foster a process of negotiation, modification, rephrasing and experimentation that are the heart of second language learning".

Breen (1987 in Izadpanah 2010) offers us a definition of "task" which is still considered to be true: "any structured language learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task. "Task" is therefore assumed to refer to a range of work plans which have the overall purposes of facilitating language learning."

Skehan will add a year later (1988 in Izadpanah 2010) that there are five features in a task: the meaning is primary, learners are not given other people's meaning in repeating, the task needs to have some connection to the real world. Furthermore, the completion has some priority and the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome.

Nunan (2005 in Izadpanah 2010) suggests additional principles:

- Scaffolding: lessons and materials should provide support to the students;
- Task chains: each exercise or activity should build upon the previous ones;
- Organic learning: language ability grows gradually,
- Copying to creation: learners should not only copy what has been taught, they should have the opportunity to use their creativity and imagination to solve real world tasks.

Willis (1996 in Mao 2012) moreover, makes a classification of all the different types of tasks we can propose to children:

- I. Listing: it involves brainstorming and it offers students the possibility of expressing their own opinion;
- II. Ordering and sorting: putting events in a logical sequence or chronological order might be a well-accepted challenge;
- III. Problem solving: it might seem difficult to ask children to find solutions to certain problems but if we apply the problems to daily situations the task will appear a lot more achievable;

- IV. Sharing personal experiences: children love sharing and it might be an occasion for shier children to tell their stories as well, especially if the teacher shares as well.

“Setting specific tasks for students so that they act if they were using the language in real life; this is part of the essence of task-based teaching” said Chun-hua (2004 in Ferdousi, Munira).

TBLT encourages students to try new things out. Since they are asked to act without having the time to actually think about it and reflect, they are set free to try without fear of failure. Willis (1998 in Ferdousi, Munira) identifies three advantages of TBLT: it is a great exposure to the target language, it is an opportunity to use the L2 for expressive meaning moreover, it activates a deep motivation to use what students know.

4.7 ROUTINE

Foreign language is not considered a subject in school, it is used during daily life and it is characterized by linguistic routines. Routines are those moments in the life at school during which the class always does the same activities using the same linguistic outputs. Routines might be used as transitions between one event and the other (pre-made sentences like: “let’s go wash our hands”) or they can be considered an activity itself (circle-time). Routines are considered extremely important especially in the first stages of early language acquisition because they offer the possibility for the child to insert the expression in the middle of a well-known moment, helping him\her in the transitions and creating a familiar environment. Linguistic routines, moreover, are usually used in connection with body movements or particular objects and this would help in the comprehension since they produce a richer context from which children may deduce meanings.

Linguistic routines appear, in the beginning, in correspondence to daily moments in children’s lives: when they reach the school building in the morning, when they move from one classroom to the other, when they go to the cafeteria or to the washroom, among others. It is important to select a fixed sentence to propose to children always in the same way so that, with time, they will start associating that activity to that particular sentence. Bruner (1983 in Balboni, Coonan, Garotti 2002) identifies routines with linguistic formats and describes them as a “standardised initially microcosmic interaction pattern between an adult and an infant that contains demarcated roles that eventually become reversible...They have a script-like quality that involves not only action but a place for communication...”. Kersten et al. (2010:110) describe the benefits of daily routine situations by saying that “children will quickly understand these formulaic expressions or routine

phrases (even if they do not necessarily understand the full literal meaning at the beginning) because they occur frequently in the input, and because they are contextualised in such a way that the children can infer the meaning from the situation.”. Garotti (Balboni, Coonan, Garotti 2002) agrees on the idea of offering new and interesting input but she also highlights the importance of allowing children to have the time to set new info in their long time memory: for this reason, the same input must be presented many times, preferably through different modalities so that the child will have the possibility to see the same construction in different contexts. She continues by adding that it is not relevant to offer new material every day, children enjoy routines and this helps both teachers and students.

Different kinds of memory allow different kind of learning. Thanks to the mnemonic memory children learn ready-made sentences and songs and this is usually the first spontaneous production we can note in L2. Coonan (Balboni, Coonan, Garotti 2002) proposes the use of these routines\ready-made sentences as much as possible so that children can feel safe (thanks to the daily repetition) and at the same time proud because they will be able to interact by using the L2 quite early. Repetitions used to be the base of the behavioural approach where children were thought to learn only following a strict sequence of stimulus-answer. In the natural approach, on the contrary, teachers still use repetitions as a way to mark concepts and help the brain in fixing new material but input is always meaningful and never out of a proper context.

There is a small risk in using too many routines without explaining the actual meaning of the sentence: children might understand the sentence as “unit” without deeply understanding the meaning of it, simply associating the sentence with the moment. Caon (2010) offers a solution to this risk by introducing the idea of role play. In role play children might still use routine sentences but they will be inserted in a situation and this allows the child to move that sentence to the usual situation in which it is used and put it in a new one.

4.7.1 FROM FORMULAIC TO CREATIVE SPEECH

Before arriving at an adult-like production in L2 children usually follow a path which goes from a routine speech to a high linguistic competence. By introducing routine sentences in the school the child, with time, will be aware of them and will start using them as well “e.g what’s your name?, wash your hands.”. In this first phase the child doesn’t really understand all the elements of the sentences, he\she is using them in a telegraphic way in which the whole sentence has a meaning, not the single words. It is only later on that they will start analysing the sentence word by word starting

a creative work of construction that will lead them to use those “blocks” in new sentences (Balboni, Coonan, Garotti 2002).

Formulaic speech refers to language consisting of fixed, stereotyped expressions which are learned as chunks and analysed as wholes, following Yomoto’s idea (Yomoto 1992). Formulaic speech can be divided into two more categories: *prefabricated routines* and *patterns*. Prefabricated routines are phrases learned as memorized chunks and used without any knowledge of their internal structure (Krashen and Scarcella 1978 in Yomoto 1992) such as “How are you?” or “What time is it?”. Patterns on the other hands consist of partly creative and partly memorized wholes like “it is --- (mine, my bed, my teddy)” (Krashen and Scarcella 1978 in Yomoto 1992). It has been suggested that “children with advanced semantic development and yet no form with which to express such thoughts” (Hakuta 1974 in Yomoto 1992) develop formulaic speech as an “immediate response to communicative pressure” (Ellis 1985 in Yomoto 1992).

Formulaic speech, according to this point of view can be seen as another strategy, in addition to code-switching (see chapter 2.5) used by children when needed. The innate aim of communication is to develop social relation with peers and formulaic speech can be a solution available to children from the beginning, when they are not yet ready to produce creative sentences in L2. Children seem to memorize ready-made sentences easily and be able to use them whenever they want to compensate for lacks in L2 competence. Routines might also be a shortcut for children during the silent period (see chapter 2.3): during this period the innovative production in the second language is absent but the child is still alert to the input and easily grasps and reuses the formulaic speech as a sort of springboard before actually feeling ready to utilize the L2. Brown (1973 in Krashen 1981:86) noticed that: “some of his subjects’ sentences were memorized wholes and patterns. He hypothesized that prefabricated routines in children were the results of very high input frequency of a structure that was, at that time, beyond the child’s linguistic maturational level.” Fillmore (1976 in Yomoto 1992:6) not only agrees on the importance of formulaic speech as an alternative option to creative speech while this is not yet available, she also believe that formulaic speech itself will lead to the development of a freer production. She argues that “larger units were broken into smaller units, routine became patterns, and parts of patterns were *freed* to recombine with other parts of patterns. This break-up of routines and patterns provided the basis for syntax....”

Yomoto (1992) also reports the evidence that children often use the formulaic speech learnt in school from peers or teachers in monologues while playing alone such as “I can do it” or even the whole dialogue with a friend “Play with me?”- “No”. They can also imitate teachers’ routine speech while at home using sentences like “all right guys, come here” or after dinner “everybody going

home”. Formulaic speech is the base on which rules-based speech will develop, thanks to a gradual and analytic process, children will then be able to understand which parts of the sentence remain stable and which can be changed in order to modify the whole phrase.

Hakuta (in Krashen 1981:92) suggests that: “until the structure of the language is acquired it is conceivable that the learner will employ a strategy which tunes in on regular, patterned segments of speech, and employs them without knowledge of their underlying structure, but with the knowledge as to which particular situation call for what patterns. They may be thought of as props which temporarily give support until a firmer foundation is built”.

Skehan (1998 in Ellis) points out that “proficiency in a L2 requires that learners acquire both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions, which cater to fluency, and rule-based competence consisting of knowledge of specific grammatical rules, which cater to complexity and accuracy”. In the case of early language acquisition we cannot really set complexity and accuracy as goals but we can certainly structure lessons keeping in mind the goal of improving the numbers of routines a child can actually use.

CHAPTER 5

*Learning another language is not only learning different words for the same things,
but learning another way to think about things.*

Flora Lewis

This chapter moves from the narrow didactic point of view and arrives at a wider one which leads to an international situation. I will expound the concept of intercultural communication competence and I will present the six stages that, following Bennett's thought, bring us from an *ethnocentric situation* to an *ethnorelative* one. This indeed has to be the aim of teachers: to prepare children for a global future, in which they will not only need linguistic competences but also, and perhaps more importantly, intercultural competence. Since intercultural competence cannot be taught, due to its intrinsic characteristics of being too various and too wide, a model is here explained. By teaching this model to students they will be equipped with the right instruments to be able to face conversations with speakers of different cultures without running into intercultural communication problems. In the second part of the chapter a short presentation of the possible problems which can occur between Italians and Indians is also presented.

5.1 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

As we discussed in chapter 1.3 language and culture are highly connected. This is mostly due to Bruner's (1999 in Caon 2008A) idea that the human brain is in part modified by the mother tongue because it is through the L1 itself that children, from zero to five years of age, create scripts, modules and ideas about the surrounding world. All these parameters will modify their learning experiences in the future. Despite the recommendations of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages published in 2001, however, the main focus of language education is still, in most of the cases, on fluency and grammar. As we read in the publication of the Council of Europe of 2007: "a good knowledge of grammar rules, a rich vocabulary, a few memorized speech

acts and cultural facts will not sufficiently help non-native speakers of a language to successfully communicate with people from other cultures.”

But how can we define *culture*?

According to Hofstede (1995:5) it is “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another”; Bowers (1992) adds that “it is an inherited wealth in which we share memories, metaphors, maxims and myths; Alptekin (1993:136) reinforces by saying that our socially acquired knowledge is “organized in culture-specific ways which normally frame our perception of reality such that we largely define the world through the filter of our world view” (all definitions in Council of Europe 2007:7).

The modern world has become intensely different from what it was a century ago and this is mainly visible in *globalization*. The borders of the countries are getting more evanescent and people travel from one place to the other on a daily basis thus increasing the necessity to adapt language education as well. It is from the school itself that governments should try to help build the minds of young world citizens by teaching them, from an early age, how to live in a world where cultures, ideas, religions and other foundations are all mixed together. Caon (2008A:10) points out that without a great modification of the mentality in schools, interculturality and plurilingualism will remain only “fairy tales” and the school will resemble a “recipiente d’acqua con una serie di bolle d’olio separate tra loro: all’interno della scuola vi sarà la scuola dei cinesi, quella degli italiani italofofoni, quella degli italiani dialettotofofoni, quella degli islamici ecc ecc”⁶.

Intercultural language learning is becoming more important day by day and schools are slowly modifying the syllabus in order to offer students the possibility to learn how to live in a multicultural world: “the importance of developing intercultural communicative competence alongside linguistic competence has resulted from learners’ needs for acquiring intercultural skills for cross-cultural communication in which they may encounter linguistic and cultural barriers. Teaching from an intercultural perspective involves developing in learners’ critical cultural awareness of their own culturally-shaped world view and behaviours as well as the skills and attitudes to understand and successfully interact with people from other cultures” (Kiet Ho 2009).

⁶ Bowl full of water with lots of oil separate bubbles: inside the school we will find the group of Chinese students, the one of Italians who speak Italian, the one of Italians who speak dialect, the one of Islamic students and so on and so forth.

The school is considered a place where students can grow under multiple perspectives: they can acquire new knowledge, but they will also increase their social awareness, they will develop their linguistic capacity and they will moreover learn about different cultures and populations.

Freddi and Titone place linguistic education inside a three-points based model. The three final aims that education has to look to are *acculturation, socialization and self-realization* (see Caon 2008A). Acculturation is the idea according to which acquirers inside the school have to learn about both the cultures, of their own country and of the rest of the world so that they can develop a “citizen of the world” point of view. Socialization is particularly related to languages because it is through them that people interact. Languages have to be considered as a way to create new meaningful relationships and to focus on aim and not on form (see chapter 3.1). Self-realization, to conclude, is the idea that school has to help students to find pleasure in learning, to set new goals and to support them in their own realization.

The final aim of the school is to provide students with *intercultural communicative competence* which is: “the ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and the ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality” (Byram 2002 in Kiet Ho 2009). According to Damen (1987:140 in Council of Europe 2007:8) “culture learning is a natural process in which human beings internalize the knowledge needed to function in a societal group. It involves the process of pulling out of the world view of the first culture, learning new ways of meeting old problems, and shedding ethnocentric evaluations”

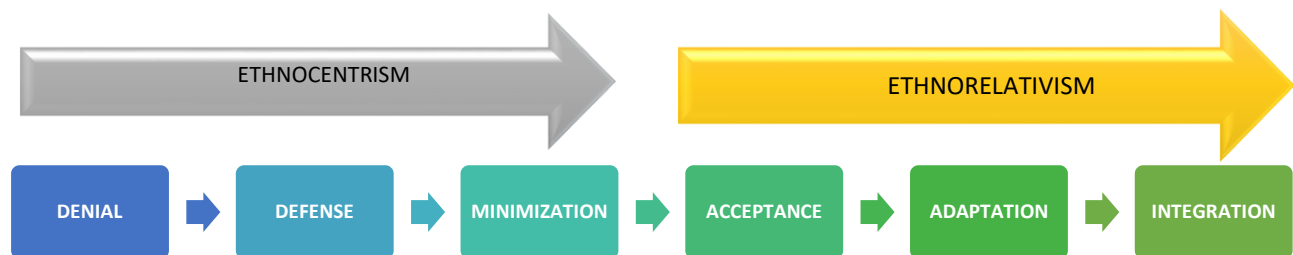
Liddicoat (2002) describes the path of Intercultural Language Learning (IcLL):

- I. Exploring self: learners have to explore their own invisible cultural dimension and activate a process of self-reflection in order to understand others. Understanding the influence our own culture has on other people is the first mandatory step students have to take if they want to develop cultural awareness. “An increased cultural awareness helps learners broaden the mind and increase tolerance” (Tomlinson 2001 in Kiet Ho 2009);
- II. Comparing cultures: once learners have understood their own culture, they will be able to see similarities and differences in the culture of the language they are studying. Comparison leads to wider acceptance of others and helps students in starting the process of decentralization;
- III. Finding one’s own “third place” between cultures: students now know about both cultures, their own and the target one and they have to learn how to place themselves in an outside

position between both, to avoid choosing one or the other point of view and looking for a neutral role.

Bennet (2003, 2004) describes the six stages of development from *ethnocentrism* to *ethnorelativism*: he asserts that we have never questioned beliefs and behaviours that we received from our parents\care-takers in childhood, they are considered true and experienced as “just the way things are”.

With the term *ethnorelativism* he points out that the opposite is actually true: what has been taught us is just one organization of reality among many other possibilities.



DENIAL: this is the phase during which one’s own culture is experienced as the only real one, “patterns of beliefs behaviours and values that constitute a culture are experienced as unquestionable real and true” (Bennett 2004). Other cultures are not noticed at all or at times even ignored on purpose.

DEFENSE: this phase is common when a feeling of superiority is present, “defense perspective is stereotypical, one’s own culture is superior and others are inferior” (Bennett 1998:16). People belonging to dominant cultures might experience this phase when issues with migrants occur or when they feel attacked about their values.

MINIMIZATION: it happens when “elements of one’s own cultural worldview are experienced as universal” (Bennett 2004). People experiencing minimization might become arrogant and insistent about correcting others behaviours because according to them there is no other way to behave apart from their own. It is different from the *denial* phase because in this case differences are noted and a sort of comparison is beginning.

ACCEPTANCE: people in this phase not only have noticed differences but they are also able to build a self-reflective scheme in which their own culture can be placed.

ADAPTATION: one’s worldview is expanded and includes new features taken from other cultures and mind-sets. A feeling of empathy is spread and people are able to share and respect each other without prevailing. During this phase the idea of *biculturalism* can take place: students realize that

there is no need to lose their own identity in order to cooperate with people belonging to other societies.

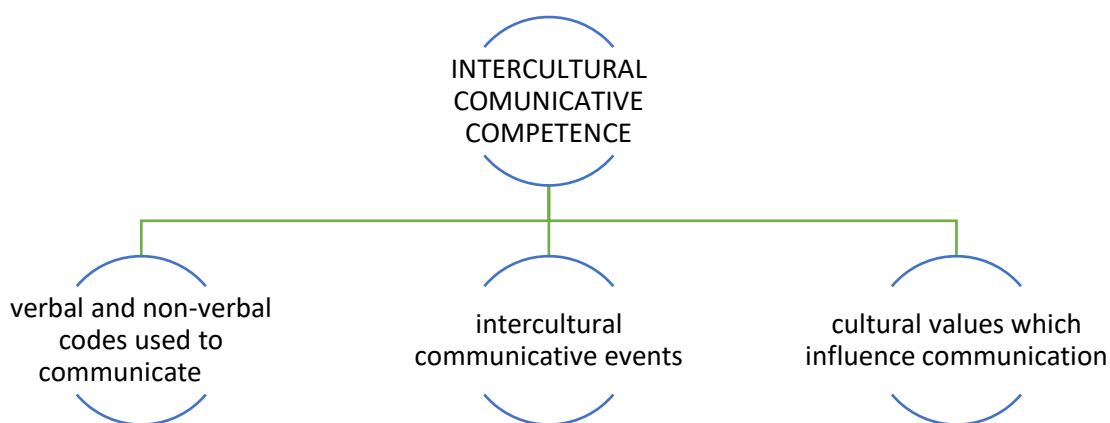
INTEGRATION: it is the strongest phase of adaptation and it describes the ability to choose the most appropriate behaviour according to the cultural context. People at this stage know aspects of different cultures and accept all of them with a neutral point of view: all the cultures are considered equal, including their own and they can select features from one or the other according to the needs. *Integration* is the final aim schools have to point to for the students, teachers have to offer new methodologies and new ways to propose learners aspects from different cultures so that they can start their own path towards it.

5.1.1 A MODEL FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Balboni (2006:5) states that most of the available research about intercultural communication teaching is *descriptive*, but this method cannot be the ultimate one because culture changes and is modified with time so any kind of description will be unreal on the long term. His solution is to create a model which might help students and teachers in the understanding of culture: “a shift from description to modelling is needed, in order to design a process of competence building, because descriptions cannot be taught (or are useless if they are taught), while models can be taught and competences, based on models, developed.”

The model proposed by Balboni (2006:13) is made up of three components:

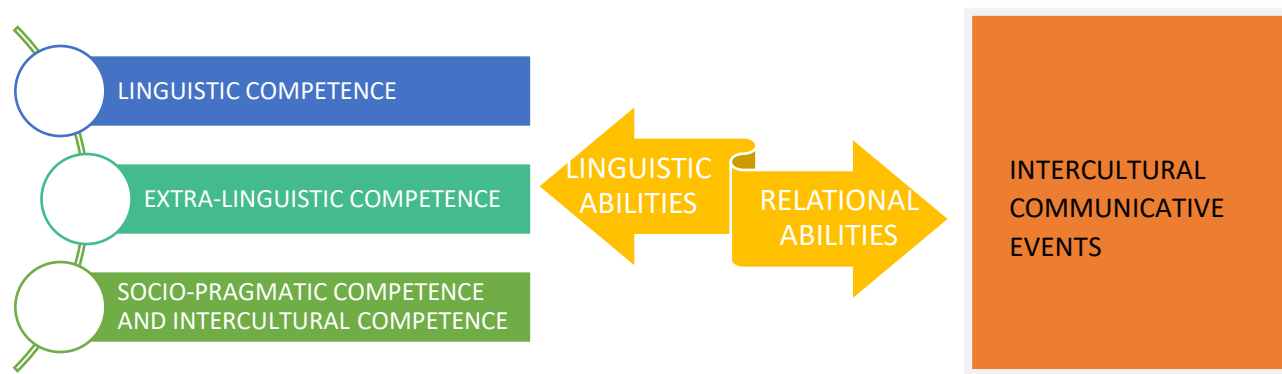
- Software of the mind: the cultural components which affect communication;
- The communicative software: the codes in use, both verbal and non-verbal;
- The context software: the socio-pragmatic software which governs the beginning, the direction and the conclusion of the communicative event.



The diagram should be interpreted as follow: “Intercultural communication is governed by competence groups, respectively verbal and non-verbal and it is realised in the context of communicative events governed by grammar which contain both universal elements and local cultural elements” (Balboni 2006:14).

The idea of Balboni (2006:49) is that students, or people in general, starting with this scheme should keep adding new information and knowledge creating their own model, which will be different according to the culture considered. The scheme has to be “constructed” and this recalls to the idea that: “knowledge is imparted by someone who has it to someone who hasn’t, but it is constructed together, through dialogue and shared experience”.

The following scheme is the one created by Balboni and Caon (2015):



Always keeping in mind the affective-communicative approach, teachers have to consider students as individuals with their own past stories and with a cultural background which might be extremely different from one child to the other. As we realized in chapter 3.2, differences among students have to be considered in the process of developing a school program and these differences include culture as well. Cultural aspects can widely modify children's attitude in school: the relationship between teachers and students might vary according to the culture, the way children consider the school itself is seen differently amongst different groups. Other variations can be seen in the relationship between parents and teachers or even between boys and girls in class. Clothes, food, forbidden topics and other social issues will be presented with a focus on India's situation in the chapters ahead.

Teachers, in any case, have to consider these differences as productive topics through which they can show to the whole class how differently people live in the countries of the world. Changes among students are resources for the class not obstacles, and individual growth, even from the cultural point of view, has to be one of the didactic aims.

This way of thinking has become important in Italy in the last fifty years, since the number of migrants increased, but it has been extremely relevant in India where, for the past centuries, people from different cultures have been sharing the same country.

As we can read in the "Dieci tesi per l'educazione linguistica democratica" (GISCEL 1975): "lo sviluppo delle capacità verbali va promosso in stretto rapporto reciproco con una corretta socializzazione (tesi 1); lo sviluppo e l'esercizio delle capacità linguistiche non vanno mai proposti e perseguiti come fini a se stessi ma come strumenti di più ricca partecipazione alla vita sociale e

intellettuale (tesi 2); la sollecitazione delle capacità linguistiche deve partire dall'individuazione del retroterra linguistico-culturale personale dell'allievo, non per fissarlo (...) ma per arricchire il patrimonio linguistico attraverso aggiunte e ampliamenti (tesi 3); la scoperta della diversità (...) degli allievi caratterizza il patrimonio linguistico dei componenti di una stessa società: imparare a capire e apprezzare tale varietà è il primo passo per imparare a viverci in mezzo senza esserne succubi o calpestarla (tesi 4)"⁷.

Caon (2008A: 21) also highlights other intercultural aims: "l'ascolto attivo, l'empatia, ovvero la capacità di mettersi nei panni degli altri e l'exotopia, la capacità di riconoscersi diversi dagli altri e di riconoscere la loro diversità"⁸. By teaching these skills to children, we will end up with a global new generation which will be able to be a bridge between different cultures and even between cultural conflicts.

Milan (in Caon 2008A) explains the difference between the *melting pot* model and the *salad bowl* one. When he talks about melting pot he considers the case in which different cultures get mixed together and end up forming a new kind of society which shows peculiarities of a variety of different societies all together. The salad bowl idea, on the other hand, describes those countries in which there are different populations, who all live in the same area but even if they belong to different cultures they never really influence each other. They co-exist but they do not mix. Milan asserts that we should aim at a "glocal" generation: a generation which can be both "local", aware of its cultural background and "global" at the same time, as in showing respect and interest for other cultures as well.

The idea of Bauman (Caon 2008A: 17) sums up perfectly what the final goal of teachers should be, to help children in: "riconoscere l'unità umana attraverso le diversità culturali, le diversità individuali e culturali attraverso l'unità umana"⁹.

The idea of school\education itself greatly changes from one culture to another: as Gardner (1985) points out, one of the script of our mind creates the idea we have about school, teachers and

⁷ language communication skills have to develop side by side with the process of socialization; development of linguistic skills does not have to be the final aim, but rather an instrument to use in order to achieve an active social life; development of linguistic abilities has to start from the identification of students' social background, not with the goal of blocking it but rather with the scope of expanding it; discovering differences among students should help them in learning, understanding and appreciating particular aspects of people so that they can accept them and not be scared by them.

⁸ active listening, empathy, as in the ability to put themselves in other people's shoes, and exotopy, the capacity to see differences when comparing ourselves to others and to recognize their diversity.

⁹ recognizing man's unity in cultural differences and, vice versa, considering individuals and cultural diversities as a realization of human unity.

education in general. Moreover, culture also influences how the different “intelligences” are considered in society: oriental countries consider musical intelligence to be highly important, in other countries logical-mathematic intelligence is recognized as the most important or, once again, in the old Greek world the linguistic one used to be contemplated as the essential intelligence. Gardner (1985), moreover, asserts that, culture severely affects children up to the age of five: adults, and care-takers in general instil into them ideologies and beliefs that will mould their entire way of being. Bruner (1999 in Caon 2008: 26) adds that “la cultura modella la mente dei singoli individui” (culture shapes people’s each individual’s brain). The idea people have about certain topics is also very different according to the language they speak. Language and culture together create the mind-sets which make one person different from another.

The leitmotiv that should always be kept in mind in the case of an international class is that students are deeply different from each other and teachers must respect and make good use of these differences using them as advantages rather than obstacles. This is the idea expressed by Caon (2008 B:12) in the definition of Classe ad Abilità Differenziate (CAD, differentiated abilities class): “considerare le classi non come una somma di persone differenti ma come un sistema dinamico che dipende dalla natura e dall’apporto di ogni persona che lo compone e che agisce in esso, la CAD si presenta come un sistema aperto nel quale il parametro della differenza è la chiave di lettura per la gestione efficace dell’apprendimento linguistico”¹⁰.

Boghetta (in Caon 2008A) highlights the fact that teachers have to be aware of the cultural differences that can be presented to the students in the class. What happens in schools is instinctively captured by children, and teachers, or care-takers in general, have to be careful in offering the best input possible not only linguistically (see chapter 3.4) but also educationally speaking. Even if castes in India are not legally recognized anymore, diversities among groups of people are still undoubtedly present. Capecchi (in Caon 2008 A;65) highlights the fact that: “la scuola è il luogo fondamentale, proprio per la sua natura, per sviluppare il modello solidale (...)”¹¹. In a country in which clashes between castes are in the daily news, schools must teach how to respect others and how to avoid conflicts based on social hierarchy. Dolci (in Caon 2008 A:110) points out that the idea of communicative competence has to be central: “viene intesa non solo come conoscenza della lingua, ma come capacità di mettersi in relazione con il sistema di

¹⁰ We shouldn’t consider classes as the union of different people but rather as a dynamic system modified by the nature and the particularities of each component of the group. CAD is an open system in which the differences are the way by which teachers can create the right environment for language acquisition.

¹¹ school is the fundamental place, because of its nature, in which to develop a supportive mind-set.

comunicazione della comunità ospitante e quindi di apprenderne le regole e i codici comportamentali”¹².

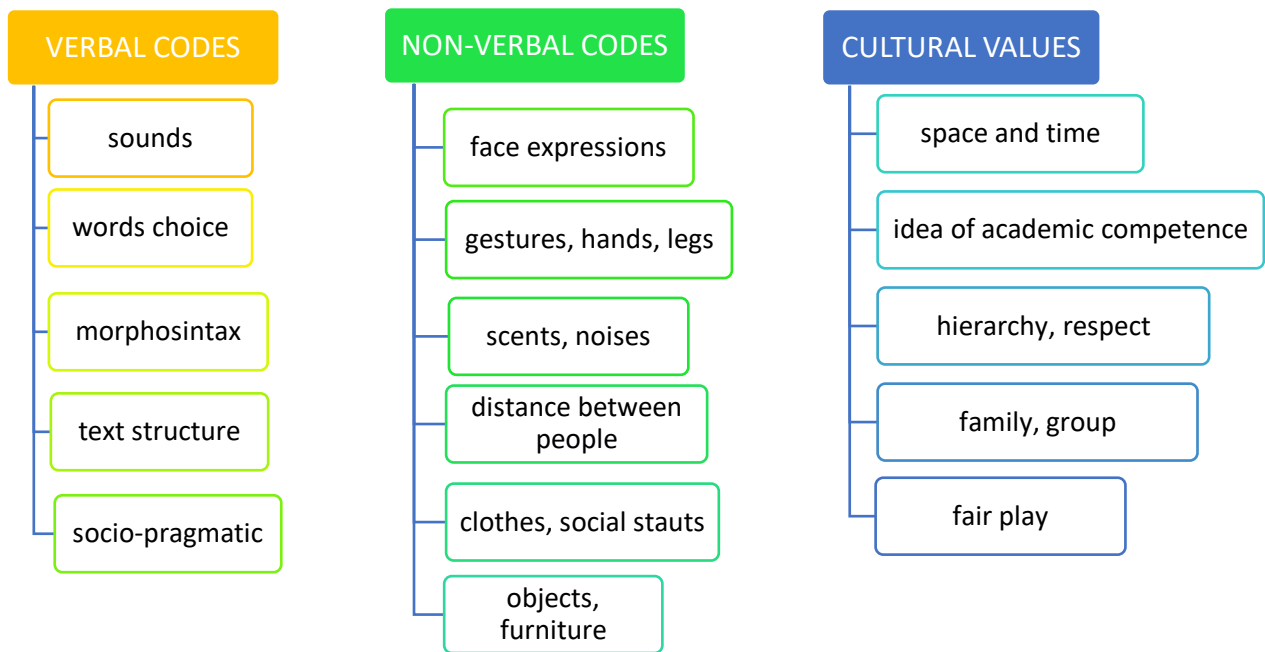
In an article by the CommGAP a definition of the competent communicator is given: “certainly proficiency in the host culture language is valuable for intercultural competence but it is not enough to know the grammar and vocabulary of that language. The competent communicator will also understand language pragmatics like how to use politeness strategies in making requests or how avoid giving too much information. Equally important, competent communicators are sensitive to nonverbal communication patterns in other cultures. In addition to avoiding insults and gaffes by using gestures that may mean different things in a host culture as opposed to one’s home culture, competent communicators understand how to use touch, proximity in physical space and paralinguistic sounds to convey their intended meanings.”

5.2 POSSIBLE PROBLEMS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Balboni and Caon (2015) focus their attention on intercultural problems and sum them up in three main categories: verbal codes, non-verbal codes and cultural values. In their research Balboni and Caon reported a wide list of problems that might occur during the communication between people who belong to different cultures.

In this chapter I will highlight those particular issues that can develop between Italians and Indians and which might lead to problems or misunderstandings. Various were the intercultural communicative issues I had to face in India and most of them were due to different points of view between the Italian mentality and the Indian one. From the cultural point of view, I will talk about problems in what concern the role of the woman in the society, both adults and girls in school; the opinion about students with mental problems or particular necessities, differences in dressing codes, diets and religions among others.

¹² communicative competence doesn’t simply mean linguistic competence but rather the ability to react positively in the hosting community and learn from it rules and behavioural patterns.



5.2.1 VERBAL CODES

The characteristics of a society are various concerning the language itself. Some languages may sound louder than others and raising the voice can be a symptom of contrasts in some of them while in others it can signify cohesion between people. Indians, just like Italians, especially those in the South, tend to be quite loud and the volume of their voices is usually high and excited. People spend lots of time in the street and it is common to see women chatting from one balcony to the other without caring about the noise. Men tend to get into fights quickly, they use their voices in order to express their opinions and since they usually do not physically fight they use their voices in order to win the argument.

The idea of what certain words evoke in our minds is connected to our mother tongue and cultural background as well: for a child in Italy “elephant” is the name of an exotic animal, which they might have seen in the zoo or in various cartoons. For Indian children “elephant” is the representation of Lord Ganesh, symbol of good luck and prosperity, moreover, elephants can easily be found in the streets of many cities turning an exotic creature into a common animal.

Bad words among young people have the same use as that in Italy. While the highest respect is shown in front of adults they tend to freely insult and mock each other even by using offensive words which might involve names of relatives.

Children, from the first days in pre-school interact with teachers by calling them “madam\|sir” and this puts them in a relationship of high respect and distance. Students rarely share personal opinion or problems with care-takers who are usually seen as masters rather than helpers.

In the majority of the Indian states, especially in the poorer areas where schools are starting to develop only in recent years, the role of the teacher is still profoundly grounded in the old idea which was spread in Italy as well more than fifty years ago; the teacher is considered a master, students are subjected to him\|her and no meaningful relationship is present. Due to the lack of empathy but also due to the low respect for the affective-communicative approach. The affective filter (see chapter 2.6) is usually on and the connection between learners and school is weak and without pleasure. All this is due to the fact that teachers are seen as authorities rather than helpers, they are officials and not supporters and this cannot lead to a “modern” school. Another cultural problem connected to the image of the teacher itself is the possibility for the students to ask questions or to convey their opinions. In the old school in India these possibilities are still missing but in the new ones, which usually follow ECE (Early Childhood Education) and later on IB curriculum (International Baccalaureate), the Natural Approach is slowly spreading.

Grammar itself is different between British English and Indian English (also known as Hinglish: Indian+English). Not only phonological and morphological differences, for example the lack of distinction between the sound /v/ and /w/ which might sound difficult for foreigners at the beginning; also, the tendency of Indians to mix English and Hindi words together like ‘taxi-wala’ instead of taxi driver (Bansal 1990). Other differences are visible in what concerns syntax: reduplication of words as a way to emphasize an action “come come!” or to amplify a feature “hot hot water” (Wiltshire 2005).

The linguistic situation in India is not easy (see chapter 6.1) and the relationship between the languages must be taken into account in the school in order to avoid rivalry among languages, and even between dialects, and to preserve all of them as national heritages. Hindi and English have been competing with each other from the beginning but things nowadays are getting worse day by day for the Hindi-only speakers. At the moment, English is considered to be the language with power even though it is a lingua franca from which every cultural characterisation has been removed. Hindi is slowly losing its power and the competence in this language is becoming impoverished in the most recent generations. The school has to help maintain the balance between languages not only because the mother tongue plays a huge role in the L2 acquisition (see chapter

1.7.1) but also because Hindi\Sanskrit are still deeply important in Indian culture and without the schools' support this knowledge will soon be lost forever.

A big difference between Italian and Indian culture is also visible in what concerns the reasons for which we thank people. Indians use the expression “thank you” a lot less than Italians and we tend to appear too polite or at times even nagging and annoying from their point of view. Indians thank when the situation involves an unassumed favour while Italians thank in every situation in which somebody does something for them, we tend to be more formal.

The idea of family can create intercultural issues. Nowadays families in Italy are quite small, formed by two parents, and one, maximum two children, while fifty years ago the idea of a bigger family was diffused in the country. The number of siblings was larger and grandparents used to be considered as part of the family. This distinction is in part true in India as well: in the previous generations, extended families were present while nowadays most of the students are only children. The concept of family in India though, changes compared to the Italian one when we take into account distant relatives. It is common in India for cousins, uncles, aunties or even simply friends to move into distant relatives' houses; most of the time this is due to the fact that those relatives might live closer to the school\job.

A common family in India is usually formed of two parents, grandparents, siblings and other relatives like for example a cousin who is considered as part of the family (they are called *didi* “sister” and *bhaiya* “brother”).

These differences in the mind-set of the family might lead to “problems” during the preparation of the syllabus in international schools (see chapter 6.2). Due to the heterogeneity of the students in the class teachers have to take into account these cultural peculiarities and offer students a wide, logical and proper explanation for these variations. If the topic of the class in an Indian pre-school is the “family” the words taught that day would be different from the ones learnt in Italy and this is true for all the topics because language and culture and indissolubly linked together.

Regarding epithets Italians are more official than Indians. According to Italian grammatical rules we tend to “dare del lei” when talking to elders or unknown people while Indians follow the English rules and do not use a formal form. Indians, moreover, do not usually use forms like Sir or Madam in daily situations, instead they adopt Hindi forms *Aunty* and *Uncle* for elders and *Didi*, *Bhaiya* (sister, brother) for peers where we would use forms like *Signora**Signora*.

5.2.2 NON-VERBAL CODES

It is through language that people communicate but the verbal code is not the only one available.

Balboni (in Caon 2008A: 129) highlights the fact that most of the time intercultural misunderstandings are due to non-verbal causes and this, according to him is caused by two reasons: “siamo prima visti che ascoltati” and “siamo più guardati che ascoltati” (first we are seen and then we are heard, other people look at us more than they listen to us).

Schools usually focus their attention on form and on grammatical accuracy forgetting about the fact that people communicate in a space, while using facial expressions, in a situation in which objects, clothes and different bodies are present and that all this influences actual verbal communication.

Agreeing with the two statements offered by Balboni I will now list the major non-verbal differences I noticed while in India.

Our face expresses a lot and most of the time we are not even completely aware of it. A girl who is having a conversation with a boy and who is smiling too much can be considered too forward and even provocative. The same is true for female eyes which shouldn't be too lively while talking to men and which, according to some particular religions have to be covered by a veil and can be seen only by the husband.

Hand gestures might be the cause of intercultural problems due to the fact that their meaning might change depending on the culture. The sign that Italians usually use in order to describe a thin person (little finger pointing up) is the gesture used by Indian children when they want to say that they need to go to the bathroom.

Blowing one's nose is an action which is considered rude in India. In Italy it is a common habit to blow one's nose, using all the educational precautions, while in India is considered disrespectful even among children who learn to simply dry their noses on their hands.

The opposite happens for what concerns feet and other hygienic habits. Italians avoid touching, rubbing or massaging their feet in public while in India it is common to see ladies or men touching their feet on the metro after a long day at work. The idea of not blowing their noses then, leads to actions that appear extremely gross to Italians like using the sleeves of the shirt or even the hands. The same happens with the custom of spitting or burping: in Italy it is absolutely not acceptable while in India it is natural and universally accepted.

Differences in the way of dressing are one of the things that tourist immediately notice once they reach India. While men have adjusted their look to Western fashion, women still proudly maintain their Indian outfits. In Italy bellies are usually covered and ankles can freely be showed, in India the opposite happens. Sarees, the typical Indian dress daily used by women, entirely covers the legs but leave the belly completely exposed.



Saree by zarilane.com

Blue jeans are not allowed at work because it is considered too informal while precious dresses covered in glitters are used in daily life. Colours used for the dresses at times have opposite interpretations in the two countries: if the colour of funerals in Italy is black in India it is white, and future wives, for this reason would never choose white for the colour of their *lehenga*, the wedding gown, which instead is usually red.

Jewellery still indicates prosperity and opulence not only for women but also for men who wear various bracelets and rings which usually have particular meanings at times even linked to religion.

Food is another topic in which the two countries extremely differ: vegetarianism is widely spread in India while in Italy only the minority of people agree with this life-style. Food does not only influence what we actually serve for lunch but our point of view on many other things like respect for animals, the link between body and food and partially the architecture of houses and dishes as well.

A Hindu person would never agree to eat beef since cows are considered holy animals, and their diet is mainly based on cereals and vegetables. Houses are different to Western ones due to different ways of eating food. In the room where the family gathers to eat, a sink is usually present so that people can wash their hands before and straight after the meal. This is extremely important because Indians eat without using cutlery most of the times.

Indian greetings can leave the tourist surprised due to their peculiarities compared to Italian ones. People rarely cheek-kiss each other, while hand shaking is more wide spread. The well-known “Namaste” salute is still used, especially on formal occasions or when a younger person meets an older one. Another way younger ones have to show their respect to elders is by touching the points of their feet (Pranam’s gesture).



Pranam’s gesture by metaphysics-knowledge.com

Not only greeting but also signs of affection have different meanings. Couples in India do not kiss in public, a sense of modesty is still generally diffused, on the other hand friendship among males is expressed in a more open way through a sign that in Italy might be seen among girls but never among boys: holding hands.

5.2.3 CULTURAL VALUES

Time, space, respect, forbidden topics can be misleading when we don’t know the habits of the other culture.

Italians, especially in the North, have a rigid idea of time similar to the American one. They do not like to waste time and they would never arrive late for an appointment. Indians, on the other hand, probably partially due to the weather, which tends to be unbelievably hot for most of the day, live a more relaxed life: mornings start early, maybe with a yoga class but days tend to be slow and calm compared to Western patterns. It is not difficult to see taxi drivers sleeping in the early afternoon in their own cars and even teachers in school tend to take long breaks between one class and the other. Things can of course be different between one city and the other but generally speaking, Europeans live a frenetic life compared to the Asian population.

Festivals split the year into different sections in India compared to Italy. Only few people celebrate Christmas and most of them observe Diwali, the festival of lights (which usually happens around October\November depending on the Indian calendar) which signs the beginning of the “cold season”. In Italy Easter represents Spring’s rebirth while in India we can find Holi, commemoration of colours, joy and hot season celebrated around April. Children associate rainfalls with Summer because this usually happens due to the monsoon season. In Italy summers are usually arid and the majority of the time rain appears in Autumn. There is no respect for public space in India, it is not unusual to see right outside the gate of a clean and tidy private gardens loads of garbage being kept. In Italy the idea of respecting public areas is finally spreading and environmental awareness is taught in school as well.

Arranged weddings are still popular in India even if less than in the past. Wedding parties are huge events and they are still a way by which wealthy families show off in the society: a huge number of guests, ceremonies which last for days and an incredible amount of money invested in the big day of the son\daughter.

The idea of religion in India is divergent from the one in Italy: the number of people who are regularly involved in some kind of religious ritual is a lot bigger in India and this influences their lives in different ways. Their daily life, the architecture of the houses changes according to the system of beliefs of the family: most of the houses have a room specifically intended for cults. Clothes, relationships with others and even simply the diet can be different due to religious beliefs.

5.3 EDUTAINMENT

Following Caon and Orsini's proposal (Caon 2008A) a way through which teachers can introduce children to aspects of different cultures is "edutainment". The word *edutainment* comes from the two words *educational* and *entertainment* and it describes the idea of using movies, videos and TV in the process of language education. Just as for the playful methodology (see chapter 4.5) this kind of activity has the benefit of being highly accepted by children and furthermore follows the *rule of forgetting* by Krashen. Students, especially young children, find pleasure in watching television and this helps the activation of a strong form of motivation. In the case of culture, edutainment can help because, as we saw before, more aspects together create the idea of cultural competence: not only the language itself but also clothes, religion and relationship between men and women and so on and so forth. By watching a short video in which characters, who in the case of children can be animated as well, belong to different societies the teacher can take advantage of the fact that as the video characters move, speak and interact most of the cultural elements are shown.

By observing the cultural behaviour of people from different countries learners will "become aware of the ways in which their own cultural back-ground influences their own behaviour, and develop a tolerance for behaviour patterns that are different from their own" (Tomalin & Stempleski 1993: 82 in Kiet Ho 2009).

By watching a video, language itself become easier thanks to the context shown on the screen. Nursery rhymes and cartoons can be extremely helpful in the explanation of concepts that otherwise might be considered difficult to understand. Ricci Garotti and Stoppini (2010) point out that children find receiving and seeing input in the foreign language helpful: they explain that an order like "Sit down, please" or "Silent, please" are understood a lot better when children can see actions instead of simply listening to it. Edutainment, moreover, offers the possibility for children to be exposed to input produced by different speakers. Nicoladis and Montanari (2016) point out that the number of speakers who provide L2 input is a significant predictor of children's vocabulary scores. They suggest that by exposing children to different sources this will support "later recognition and production" (2016:7). Through videos, different speakers can be seen, each of them could belong to a different country and can interact with the other characters by using their own variety of the L2. This would put the child in the situation of having to compare all the possible varieties regarding the language and they will soon learn that even in the same language differences in pronunciation and accent may occur. The Council of Europe (2007:20) asserts that: "when using a film as teaching material, we do not just bridge the media gap that might exist between the generation of the teacher and the students, we also enable the audience to see the places they have been reading and hearing

about, to decode the body language of the characters, to listen to various languages, accents and intonation patterns.”

There are mind-sets that an Italian child can take for granted but which the teacher has to express in an explicit way to a foreign child, in my case to Indians. If we look through the most common topics usually selected for syllabus in a pre-school we will find items like food, seasons, animals, climate and the family among others. I have already given an example of how a simple idea like “elephant” differs between children belonging to different cultures but the same is true for most of the other topics as well. Seasons in India are deeply different from what we experience in Italy and even among different States in India things can be divergent. Winters are usually really short, children rarely have the possibility of seeing the snow and most of our festivals are connected to Christian festivals like Easter for Spring and Christmas for Winter. In India the variety of religious is so wide that you can see people celebrating for one reason or the other frequently during the year. Even in the case in which the same festival is celebrated in both countries routines might be different. I “shocked” the children in my class by showing them a short video in which a family was spending the day of Christmas in Italy: they woke up, they opened the presents which were kept under the Christmas tree and then they went to church. In this short 5-minute video more than one intercultural hitch happened: children weren’t able to understand why we keep a fir tree inside our home and we decorate it. Secondly they were astonished by seeing that people in Italy enter churches wearing shoes. The idea that they didn’t know about the habit of decorating the Christmas tree was easily understandable but the reason behind the second intercultural problem arises from the fact that in India people enter temples barefoot. By looking for the answer to this cultural difference I actually got to know that even Christian Indians enter Christian churches barefoot. Children applied their Indian mentality to an Italian situation and they realized that routines might change according to the society.

A school whose goal is to teach more languages, and at the same time more cultures has to take into account these differences and try to offer the students a selection of cultural input as wide as possible.

Demetrio (in Caon 2008 A:119) asserts that: “grazie alla loro curiosità e voglia di imparare I bambini sono interculturali per natura”¹³.

Balboni (Balboni and Caon 2015) describes what it means to create a communicative competence:

¹³ children thanks to an innate curiosity and interest in learning are intercultural by nature.

- I. To accept the fact that there are various cultural models and that one is not more important than the other;
- II. To know that there are stereotypes and preconceptions and learn how not to let us be influenced by them;
- III. To learn how to learn from others, create our own collection of cultural information and add to it every time we get in touch to new ones;
- IV. To respect differences among people and societies;
- V. To agree on the fact that some cultural model can have better features than our own and modify our ideas by learning from others’.

In a school which presents itself as international, teachers must teach students all these five foundations so that they can learn from the beginning how to live in harmony in an environment in which more than one culture is present.

Balboni (Balboni and Caon 2015:157) also expresses the advantage of intercultural communication: “guardare meglio gli altri grazie ad uno sguardo più attento, ma prima ancora guardare meglio noi stessi attraverso gli altri, potendo disporre di angolazioni plurali e inaspettate, valorizzando il maggior potenziale di differenze rappresentate da lingue e linguaggi diversi”¹⁴.

¹⁴ To learn to look at others in a more attentive way, but furthermore to learn to look at ourselves through others, having more than one point of view available, giving value to differences represented by various languages and codes.

CHAPTER 6

There are some parts of the world that, once visited, get into your heart and won't go. For me, India is such a place. When I first visited, I was stunned by the richness of the land, by its lush beauty and exotic architecture, by its ability to overload the senses with the pure, concentrated intensity of its colors, smells, tastes, and sounds. It was as if all my life I had been seeing the world in black and white and, when brought face-to-face with India, experienced everything re-rendered in brilliant technicolor.

Keith Bellows

This chapter concludes the dissertation and tries to explain the academic situation I found in the International School in which I worked in India. The chapter opens with a presentation of the present linguistic situation in India, which languages are officially recognized by the government and what is instead the situation of dialects and second languages. I then focused my attention on International Schools, I reported their aims, their thoughts and which should be the environments in this kind of school. My personal opinions about it are also expressed, starting from my experience as an English teacher in Delhi. I then zoomed once more and framed on the school in which I worked for an in depth analysis. I reported the daily structure, the syllabus, a brief description of the staff and the general surroundings in which children were educated. I also explained how often, the promises made to parents in order to convince them to enrol their children are unfortunately not respected and I tried to find reasons for this unpleasant situation.

6.1 LINGUISTIC SITUATION IN INDIA

Mark Twain (1996) describes India as: “The land of dreams and romance, of fabulous wealth and fabulous poverty, of splendour and rags, of palaces and hovels, of famine and pestilence, of genii and giants and Aladdin lamps, of tigers and elephants, the cobra and the jungle, the country of

hundred tongues, of a thousand religions and two million gods, cradle of the human race, birthplace of human speech, mother of history, grandmother of legend (...). There is indeed some truth in this romantic quotation. India is linguistically one of the most varied countries in the world: according to the 2001 Indian Census there are 122 languages and 234 mother tongues. When India gained independence in 1947 the government has to put together a constitution that, not only preserved political unity, but also promoted cultural and linguistic diversity: the “Eight Schedule”. After gaining independence from Britain, India saw a good opportunity for uniting India under a common language, consequently two groups emerged, one which supported Hindi as a national language and another one which didn’t agree with this. “Assembly members believed that India should, ideally have an indigenous national language, Hindi was the most suitable, so it was named for the role. Yet for Hindi to be in practice the national language was impossible, for the only language in national use was English. Hence the constitution makes clear what the national ideal is and then, realistically compromises, laying down how the nation is to function, linguistically speaking, until the deal is achieved” (Austin 2009 in Vanishree 2011). “The educational system has to deal with mass illiteracy (currently about 50%) as well as space age technology; it has to reconcile the understandable nationalistic pull towards the indigenous languages with the realistic need for continued reliance on the colonial language, it has to ensure national mobility without offending regional linguistic interests.” (Sridhar 1996:344)

It was then decided that English would continue as an Associate Official Language for a period of 15 years or until parliament decided otherwise. The idea to adopt Hindi as a national language wasn’t accepted and the situation nowadays is the one in which 22 languages are listed under the Eight Schedule document which allow them dominance over other minority languages. Even though the Indian Constitution tries to safeguard linguistic minorities a recent UNESCO report identified 196 languages that are in danger of becoming obsolete in the whole country. (Vanishree 2011).

Mackey (1977:111) describes India’s situation as a “chaotic state”: “in this land of overwhelming linguistic diversity and fourteen official state languages an enormous amount of writing and verbal exposition continues to deal with the subject Hindi, but it must be said that few issues have been settled. Throughout, there is little agreement about how many speakers of Hindi there are, who actually speaks “true” Hindi, how well and to whom, how much and what sort of bilingualism and multilingualism exist, what dialects are dominant in what ways (...).”

This brief introduction shows how complicated the linguistic situation was and still is: in the past the main concern was to identify the national languages, nowadays on the other hand, it is to preserve minority languages.

An important foreword is here mandatory: due to the geographical extension of the country and to the diversification which is visible within it, all the data collected and my personal opinion about Indian education might not apply to every city or situation. Almost 30% of the population in India is still considered illiterate and level of poverty is still as high as 27% (Wikipedia) which leads to huge differences throughout the country.

Nowadays the situation in India can be described as follow: in the majority of the cities Hindi is used as the mother tongue (L1) and English coexists with it as an associate official language (L2). Moreover, a third language is usually present and most of the time that is the dialect typical of the region of birth of the child: “In the African and Indian continents children learn to speak a local vernacular language at home and an official regional language at school and finally an international/global language at around age 10 at school” (Pinter 2011:84). Most of the time then, the Indian situation is a situation of *multilingualism*, not simply bilingualism. According to Cenoz (2000 in Pinter 2011:84): “multilingualism presents more diversity and more complexity, with different possible acquisition orders among the three languages. There is more variation within each individual about which language might become dominant, what process of transfer take place and what eventual proficiency levels are achieved”; and again “Language is one of the most debated topics in Indian education. Being a democratic, multilingual country, India and its educators are constantly grappling with the issue of what languages should be the media of instruction, particularly with reference to speakers of minority languages.” (Sridhar 1996:328). It does not seem to be possible then to describe in details how things, from a linguist point of view, go in this eclectic country.

English in India, as I hinted at in chapter 5.2, is different from British English, not only linguistically speaking but also because it has been completely drained of its cultural characteristics: it is now used only as *lingua franca*.

Balboni (2006B) describes what happens to English when it is used as *lingua franca*:

- Links with British or American culture disappear, students of English as a *lingua franca* get the language not the culture,
- The aim is not to be able to speak with a pronunciation resembling that of a native speaker but to be understood by everybody,

- The lexis is reduced and synonyms lost. The aim is a successful communication and it is far more important than accuracy.

The linguistic situation in India is chaotic even within the dominant language, “even Hindi, the single largest linguistic group, is spoken and understood by only the 45% of the population” (Sridhar 1996:329). “A further complication is added by the prestige accorded to English, English language enjoys “power” and “prestige”. Since English continue to be used in both national and state-level instruction, and it is the medium of instruction in most subjects at the university level, most parents are anxious to send their children to English-medium schools. All these factors have compounded to create a situation where the mother tongue is not perceived as the most viable medium of instruction” (Sridhar 1996:336).

Trying now to focus only on what I saw in Delhi, the capital of the state, the situation can be summed up in this way: the part of the population which doesn't have access to instruction is still mostly illiterate, the language used is dialect or impure forms of Hindi. Adults do not speak English at all while children are starting to grasp some English words in their routines especially those who are somehow in contact with tourists: “hi”, “thanks”, “please”. The government is working hard for these children, promoting the development of new NGOs every year which help in the spread of education among the poorest groups. During my first experience in India I worked as a volunteer teacher for two months in a school for street-children where poor families used to send their children so that they could have food and some basic instruction. Everything was free and the whole organisation was self-sustained thanks to the help of mothers who work as seamstresses in the building in front of the school while children study. Realities like these are growing day by day assuring a future for all those children who would otherwise be destined to beg and struggle.

Considering instead that part of the population living in Delhi for work and who can, in that case, send their children to school, things are completely different. As in any other country, a distinction among these people has to be made: the majority of the population lives a common life, children can study and parents have average jobs, life style is higher compared to the group previously described and they can be considered as middle-class. A further group is present in this city though, the group of people who can be described as “wealthy”: parents coming from rich families, they had the possibility to study, or to run a family business and they managed to become richer and richer with the years. Children of these families have of course different possibilities to the previous ones: while middle-class children would probably attend state schools, free of costs, the well-off ones can have access to private schools, especially in big cities like Delhi.

6.2 INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Social differences in India are visible in every corner, but they are even more visible in metropolises like Delhi where these three groups of people coexist side by side.

I will focus my attention on the third group because my second period of work in India was precisely with these children. Parents belonging to this category usually want their children to receive a good education in order to assure them of a good future. Various the possibilities available to these families, from private schools, to boarding schools and in countries like India where bilingualism, or as we saw multilingualism, is widely spread, a third choice has to be taken into account: international schools.

The mind-set international schools aspire to is “to create an educational environment in which students can take pride in their own cultural roots, whilst developing an appreciation of, and sensitivity to, other cultures.” (Sears 1988:7) Moreover, “Parents who send their children to international schools usually have a strong motivation for ensuring that their children maintain their home language and home culture. Such families have an unforced pride in their home language and traditions” (Sears 1988:49). The mind-set is different; parents’ aims are different but also children themselves are in a way different. Children in international schools are different from children in national systems in various ways, Sears (1998) points out the main characteristics of these students:

- I. Mobility: students in international schools are most of the time children of parents who often tend to be relocated due to their jobs. Children might move every year, sometimes even more than once a year and the choice of an international school might be a way for the parents to try to minimise the disruption since international schools usually share the syllabus all around the world;
- II. Parents, moreover, might be interested in enrolling their children in international schools attracted by the use of the English language itself. English is not the most widely-spoken language in the world but it is the language of business, international diplomacy and a vast number of technical areas: parents who work in these sectors might want the same future for their children and might be interested for these reasons in this kind of education.

International schools nowadays can be found in different parts of the world; they were originally set up in order to facilitate the educational needs of children in those families who worked outside their countries of origin. Businessmen, diplomats, and other expatriates in general were sent abroad to work on a temporary basis, over the years the numbers of national enrolling decreased and these schools started accepting non-nationals as well. Wealthy parents began enrolling their children in these schools primarily because they wanted them to learn English: they were prepared to pay

higher fees in order to have their children educated in what was seen as a prestigious school. (Carder 2007)

These parents desire the best and by looking at these schools without a correct knowledge of the educational world, its characteristics and all the principles that should be followed in order to provide the best instruction possible (see previous chapters), parents can actually opt for it without taking into account the probable long-term outcomes.

Carder (2007) lists three things that parents interested in enrolling their children in an international school should check beforehand:

- I. What sort of programme the school offers for educating their children in English (whereas this is not the child's first language);
- II. What programmes the school offers for maintaining children's mother tongues,
- III. And how the school has trained its teachers to educate bilingual children.

It is mandatory to discuss these three golden principles because by following the right programmes international schools could lead to benefits and provide children with an *additive bilingualism* but without them there might be disadvantages which might lead to *subtractive bilingualism* or *semilingualism*. (see chapter 1.2).

This is how Carder (2007:27) describes the ideal world which should take place in an International School: "International schools are perhaps the luckiest places to be if your best language is not English; you will be just like many others. There will be students from many languages and cultures, and they will be given equal consideration. Teachers will be all trained in understanding your situation. There will be a well-designed programme to develop your English language skills in all areas, social and academic. You will have lessons in your mother tongue, and you will keep in touch with your home culture. You will probably spend quite a lot of time speaking your mother tongue to other students from your country at school. In class most of the work takes place in English but teachers will always be on the lookout for ways to include you and your culture in the current theme."

"Classes are generally quite small and each individual can get quite a bit of attention. The job of teaching is not very bureaucratic, so teachers can actually devote most of their time to the learning process" (Carder 2007:6).

Characteristics of a good ESL (English as a second language) and mother tongue department, among others are described by Carder (2007):

- It will have an experienced and qualified department head (applied linguistics\bilingualism, preferably with fluent ability in at least one other language),
- It will be staffed with qualified teachers, with similar backgrounds,
- These teachers may well be bilingual, or themselves be learners of English as a second language,
- It will need a clear plan of age-appropriate English instruction.

As Carder himself points out, there are no reasons why all this cannot become reality, but unfortunately there are still places where the most powerful language prevails and other languages\cultures are ignored and belittled damaging children’s language, identity, academic and cultural growth.

“The aim of the school must be examined carefully, in terms of language preservation and second language competence. School teachers are language planners, even if subconsciously. If the children’s minority language is to be prevented, then separation may be a central policy element. When teachers are more enthusiastic about majority (second language) competence, then different practices and outcomes, in terms of language allocation, will be desired” (Baker 2000:101).

Carder and Baker describe what are the main things parents have to check before enrolling children in an International school and according to them there are two key-factors: the relationship between the first and second language, what is the aim of the school towards them and how they plan to reach these goals, and secondly the staff, how qualified they are and their linguistic background.

I will focus my attention on the same topics pointing out the features of the school I was working in and explaining the main negative results which wrong academic decisions can lead to.

6.2.1 FOREIGN AND SECOND LANGUAGES

A technical distinction between Foreign Language and Second Language must be made since it greatly modifies the school approach to languages as well.

Balboni (2006B) offers a definition of both foreign and second language:

	FOREIGN LANGUAGE	SECOND LANGUAGE
PRESENCE IN THE ENVIRONMENT	It is not present in the environment in which it is studied.	It is present in the environment.

SELECTION AND GRADING OF INPUT	The teacher controls this; he\she chooses the materials, knows what has been already presented and what has been acquired.	The pupil is immersed in the second language, which means that the teacher has no control of the input, nor of what and how much the pupils has acquired spontaneously (and sometimes with errors) in daily life.
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Pinter (2011:87) adds more characteristics to this description:

FOREIGN LANGUAGE	SECOND LANGUAGE
Low level of input: typically 1-3 hours a week timetabled lessons.	Higher level of input: more than just a timetabled lesson.
No\restricted opportunities outside class to use the target language.	Regular opportunities to use the target language outside the class.
Focus is on language as a formal system and as a subject.	Focus is on context and language integrated across the curriculum.

Since English is present in India also outside the school we consider English in India as a Second Language.

The basic idea for an International School is to promote both the mother tongue and an L2, in the case of India this is English. There are different possibilities for using two languages at school, from teaching entirely in the L1 or, on the contrary, solely in the L2. Language separation according to Baker (2000) can happen in seven different ways:

- I. Subject or topic: different curricular areas could be taught in separate languages; music and art in one language and math and social studies in another one for example,
- II. Person: languages might be separated following the OPOL method (see chapter 1.2), one teacher speaks only one language while a different one focuses on another one,
- III. Time: different languages could be used in different school times, half of the day students use the L1, the other half they use the L2,
- IV. Place: different physical locations can be connected to different languages. Laboratories might involve one language, cafeterias another one and maybe the garden a third one,

- V. Medium of activity: making a distinction between listening, speaking, reading and writing can be another way of separating languages. The teacher might give oral explanations in one language but then use a different one at the end of the class during the summing up or again while reading a book,
- VI. Curriculum material: textbooks can be in one language while the whole lesson can be carried on in a different one,
- VII. Function: the real explanations can be done in one language while the mother tongue can be used for classroom management or while talking informally.

Regrettably, due to the power of English most of the schools nowadays tend to leave aside mother tongues and focus only on the development of the L2: “English is currently the world’s lingua franca, and also the language of world’s most powerful states. Many school leaders and educators in international schools take for granted, therefore that English will be the language of the school curriculum, and that all students will need to become fluent in it in order to succeed.” (Carder 2007:4)

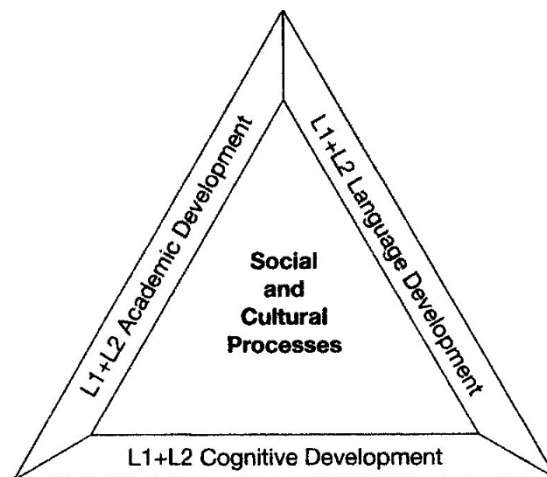
Sears though, points out what this fact can lead to and how things usually work: “During the early phases of learning English in an international school, even with the aid of teacher’s modifications, students are unlikely to benefit fully from instructions given in English. The continuation of linguistic and cognitive development in the first language contributes to a seamless continuum of learning.” (Sears 1988:49), Carder adds: “Without an educational programme that builds on and enriches students’ mother tongues, educators may be abusing students’ inner sanctum- their cognitive, academic and linguistic centre, which makes up much of their personality and character. This can have obvious deleterious effects both emotionally and academically” (Carder 2007:29).

Huge differences then compared to the ideal model proposed by Baker and Carder, where both languages were respected and where an idea of additive bilingualism (see chapter 1.2) was spread. Most of the time though what happens is the complete opposite and Fillmore and Snow (2000:12) reveal: “children who enter school with no English are expected to learn the school’s language of instruction as quickly as possible, often with minimal help. (...) The messages that are convey to children and their parents are that the home language has no value in the school if it is not English, and that parents who want to help their children should switch to English for communication at home.” Fillmore remind us that “Bilingual education is provided for only a fraction of the students who need it, and even then, most of the available programs place greater emphasis on the learning of English than they do on the use and retention of the students’ primary languages.” (1991:324)

She also adds that: “for language-minority children, any program that emphasizes English at the expenses of the primary language is a potential disaster. Children learn English and they drop their primary languages” (1991:325).

6.2.2 THE PRISM MODEL

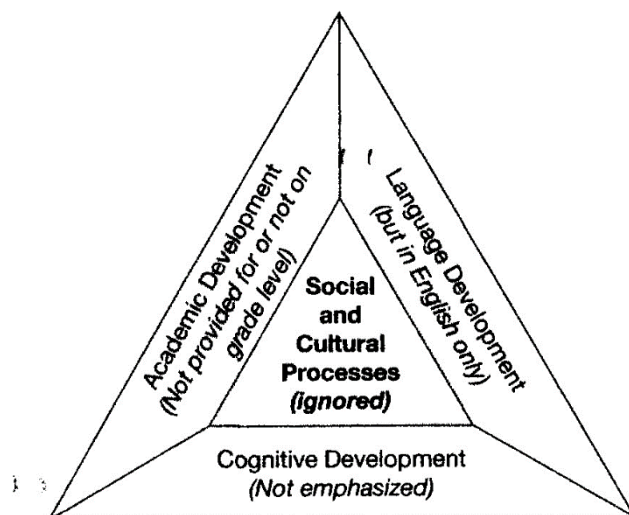
Baker and Carder’s ideal thought about International Schools is well represented in Thomas and Collier model, the so-called *Prism model* (1997:42 in Carder 2007:35).



The Prism Model by Thomas and Collier (1997:42)

It is a triangle, with a central area in the middle which represents the social and cultural development children go through in their daily lives, on the three sides of the prism on the other hand, we can see the different areas in L1 and L2 which children have to develop: language, cognitive and academic. All these aspects are considered equally important and all of them involve the use of both L1 and L2. We saw in chapter 1.2 the idea of *additive bilingualism* and the benefits of it and Carder (2007:36) also points out that “all four of the above components are crucial for the success of second language students; omitting one of them, or emphasizing one at the expense of another, could negatively influence students’ overall growth and future success”. Krashen (1985:18) moreover, adds that: “programmes that provide good instructions in the first language together with comprehensible input in English succeed in teaching English as well, and often better than, all-day English programmes.”

Unfortunately, the Prism model is rarely used and the wider spread model is the so-called “English-Only Perspective”.



The English-only perspective by Thomas and Collier (1997:44)

Differences among the models are evident: cultural and social processes are usually ignored in school, cognitive development is not the main focus of education, academic development is usually not on grade\age level and language development doesn't take into account the L1: the school works on the development of English leaving aside the mother tongue. In the previous chapters we introduced the importance of a harmonious general development of the child and we talked about some options available to schools who aspire to the student-centred model. However, it is important for the aim of this paper to explicit the outcomes that can result from the choice towards wrong programmes.

“Ineffective bilingual programmes use the first language in such a way as to block comprehensible input. This occurs when techniques such as current translation are used, in which a message is convey to students in one language and then translated into the other. When this is done there is no need to negotiate meaning, the child does not have to listen to the message in the second language since he knows it will be repeated in his first language, and the teacher does not have to make an effort to make English input comprehensible.” Krashen (1985:18) here explains one of the main issues children might have to face in these cases: input is not comprehensible so no acquisition is taking place in class.

Going back to the specific case of India it is important to highlight that even though English is widely used throughout the country, the government, following the Eight Schedule rules, promised to safeguard all the other minority languages as well: “It is the duty of the Union to promote the spread of Hindi language, to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India and to secure its enrichment by assimilating without interfering with its genius, the forms, style and expressions used in Hindustani and in the other languages of India specified in the Eight Schedule” (Government National Portal of India 2010 in Vanishree 2011:326);

Mahajan (2010 in Vanishree 2011:310) asserts that India stands for “unity in diversity” and that “India can be a strong and unified country while simultaneously affirming its cultural diversity”. Unfortunately, the efforts the govern is putting into saving minority languages does not seem to be enough: Fishman (1990 in Baker 2011) created a scale for Threatened Language which goes from stage 1 (some use of minority language available in higher education, central government and nation) to stage 8 (social isolation of the few remaining speakers of the minority language. Need to record the language for later possible reconstruction). Hindi nowadays can be put on stage 6: minority language is passed on from generation to generation and used in community; need to support the family in intergenerational continuity. This situation is dangerous not only from a cultural point of view, because it shows that with the next generations Hindi and all the dialects nowadays used could be lost, but also because in their daily life children, even the ones who belong to the richer “castes”, need Hindi, and at times a good knowledge of dialects might be extremely useful as well due to the high level of *diglossia*¹⁵ present in the country.

The number of people with an extremely poor level of English knowledge is still so high that everybody uses Hindi on a daily basis; schools cannot close their eyes to this reality: to protect Hindi is as important as the spreading of English, because the two languages are indelibly linked together.

The European Commission rightly asserted that it is not only the duty of the school to maintain and develop the L1, but also, and in the first place, of the family itself: “Language acquisition in young children is influenced by all the environments that they experience. However, what happens in the home environment is as important, if not more important, than activity which takes place outside

¹⁵ Diglossia is the idea according to which languages are used in different situations, with the minority language more likely to be used in informal, personal situations; the majority language being more used in formal and official communication contexts (Baker 2011:68).

the home, in a pre-primary setting for example. The role and engagement of parents are critical in supporting young children learning the first language and the language of instruction in school.” (2011:24)

Sears explains that “parents have a unique role to play in maintaining the home language. They are likely to be the major source of informal input for the child They are also the managers of their children’s continuing formal learning in their home language” (1988:50)

Due to the extreme power of the English language and the idea of Hindi as a language connected only to the past and in a way to a backward country, parents who decide to send their children to International Schools tend, at times, to be ashamed of their Indian origins aspiring to a more and more globalized life style. The decision of using only English at home is nowadays the most adopted one, furthermore most of the time it is the teachers themselves who advise parents to leave aside minority languages and to stick to the English-Only model.

It is dismaying how this situation resembles the one we expressed in chapter 1.7.1 talking about the “negative phase” of bilingualism: in the past bilingualism was considered dangerous for the child, the idea that a second language (most of the time English) could be an obstacle to the proper development of the L1 was enough to convince parents against it. Nowadays the same situation, but in the opposite way, is happening again: parents are embracing English, leaving aside Hindi which is considered the real stumbling block toward the aspired aim of the new global India.

We have discussed up to now the fact that parents who desire a bilingual education for their children must be aware of the model which is actually applied in the school regarding the two languages. Another aspect Baker and Carder point out in their idyllic idea of the International School is that teachers have to be adequately trained since their importance and the relevance of their job in the school is extreme. Pinter (2011:37) explains this crucial point: second language teachers should be first of all aware of the developmental situation of the L1 in every single child, this is not only due to the *processability theory* (see chapter 4.2) but also to the *iceberg theory* (see chapter 1.5) which shows us how all the languages in children’s brains are connected. “In order to make your teaching effective you will need to familiarise yourself with the linguistic backgrounds of your pupil. How far have the children progressed in the acquisition of their L1? What vocabulary might still be unfamiliar in L1?” (Fillmore and Snow 2000).

Fillmore and Snow (2000:11) highlight the importance of teachers not only from the academic point of view but also from the personal development one: “what teachers say and do can determine how successfully children make the crucial transition from home to school. It can determine whether

children move successfully into the world of the school and larger society as fully participating members or get shunted onto side-tracks that distance them from family, society and the world of learning.”. The European Commission (2011:18) described “the qualification profile of staff working with young children as a critical factor for the quality of both the pre-primary settings and children’s experiences. (...) In case of language exposure, staff should be sufficiently confident and fluent in the target language to talk spontaneously and correctly to the child, reproducing the pronunciation and intonation of native speakers to a reasonable degree. They should be able to use an age-appropriate level of communicative competence to serve as a model.” And again: “Teachers at this level are clearly involved in the very important business of child-rearing. The passing down of manners, customs, social attitudes understandings, songs and stories all done through stories used to be the basic responsibility of parents. In international schools, however, now admitting children as young as 2, this is done by teachers though the content and the language are different and completely unknown to many of the children upon entering the school. Teachers should promote among parents the idea that mother tongue exposure is necessary in order to prevent subtractive bilingualism.” (Carder 2009:41)

6.3 MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

I had the opportunity of working as a pre-school teacher in one of the most famous international schools in Delhi. By having a look at the website, during a meeting with the principal and having a walk around the school both the setting and the environment seem perfect and it is not surprising the fact that so many parents decide to enrol their children in this school. Unfortunately, by working in it, things appear differently from what is usually shown to parents and the next paragraphs will describe my personal experience and how different things really are from the perfect learning situation that I described in the first 4 chapters.

6.3.1 THE SCHOOL

The vision and the programme of the school is described by the principal in this way: “the age appropriate curriculum facilitates the individual development of each child. The curriculum allows children to explore ideas and inquire through structured inquiries. Values such as respect,

cooperation, honesty, concern for the others feelings are inculcated throughout the day-to-day activities at the school”.

The school is divided into different branches; I was put in the newest one which opened only 6 months before my arrival. There was a total of 28 students, and they were divided by age in different groups: crawlers (12-18 months), tiny tots (18-24 months), discoverers (2-2.5 years), explorers (2.5-3) and then nursery and kindergarten for the older ones up to 1st class. In the branch where I was working classes were quite small, only two children were in the crawlers’ section, eight in the tiny tots, the two groups of discoverers and explorers were united (13 students in all) and 5 in the pre-nursery\KG section, which were joint as well. Six more children then, used to join the school for the day care activities.

On the Parents Welcome Kit offered to the families interested in joining the school the following description of the staff is given: “Each teacher is a government certified early childhood educator. The school has full time specialists in music, dance, drama, visual arts and also a full time child psychologist. Our staff members are sensitive to the needs of the children in their class and ensure that the environment they work in is safe and contributes fully towards the child’s personal and academic growth”.

It is not the aim of this paper to denigrate the school’s reputation, the final aim is to indicate how things should work in order to facilitate early language acquisition and how, on the other hand, what actually takes place in classrooms is the complete opposite.

The school staff was composed of three teachers, the principal, a group of *Didis* who played the role of both janitors and nannies, and me. I had been hired as a teacher for the group of tiny tots so I was an assistant teacher in the class of the youngest children. The three teachers were each responsible for one class, while the principal used to take care of new admissions and bureaucratic matters. Qualification of teachers wasn’t the one described on the Welcome Kit, only one of them had some competence regarding early childhood education while the others didn’t. One of them had some previous experience in high-schools while my colleague, the one who used to share with me the class, was at her first experience with only a bachelor degree in education. Knowledge about infant education was basically absent, not only for the generic areas such as linguistics, child development and psychology but also for what concerns specific factors like, for example, disabilities and special needs. Being a private school, it was one of the reasons that convinced parents of children with disabilities to admit them to that particular school. Three children with special needs were present, a child on the autistic spectrum in the tiny tots group, another one in the explorers and discoverers’ and a child who showed signs of generic mental retardation in the group of pre-nursery. Teachers

unfortunately, were completely unaware of the strategies that have to be used with children with special needs and the consequences were felt by whole class with frequent episodes of meltdowns both of teachers and children and never a serene atmosphere in the classroom due to the underlying differences between students. The fact of not being ready to face the educational challenges with these children lead to problems among the whole group of students: the children who would have needed a higher degree of attention due to their special needs were often left aside, while the others, who needed a positive surrounding, had to deal with incessant interruptions from their peers who were simply needing specific attention. The environment in general was negative: the two girls belonging to the crawlers' group were usually left in the classroom with the tiny tots. These girls (one was 13 months and the other one was 9 months at that time) couldn't of course be left alone for that reason it was decided to keep one of the janitor in the class as a baby sitter. Problems in this situation are obvious on both sides; the older children, the tiny tots, were continuously bothered by the younger ones who, in turn, were not getting proper attention for two main reasons: janitors didn't of course have any kind of instructions about childhood education, their main job was to take care of the kitchen and take children to the washrooms, crawlers on the other hand weren't doing any kind of activity specifically planned for them since no teachers were responsible for them. The Welcome Parents Kit describes the programme for crawlers' as follow: "children in in the Crawlers class will be first taught how to overcome their anxiety caused by the separation from the comfort and familiar surroundings of their home. The learning environment will focus on providing infants with a secure avenue to explore and develop their gross motor skills, responsive caregiving and early language support". An important note on "early language support" has to be given here: janitors were from humble and illiterate backgrounds, none of them spoke English. Discrepancy between what was promised to parents and what was actually happening in class is here visible.

6.3.2 DAY STRUCTURE

Another salient inconsistency between the Welcome Kit promises and reality is in the daily time structure. I will now present some of the promises made to parents by the principle (which could be found in the Welcome Kit) and compare them to what actually happened in reality:

Daily assembly (Welcome Kit promises)

"Every morning the children are welcomed with warm smiles and greetings. The children spend their first fifteen minutes in school singing and dancing at the Assembly area. This time gives

opportunity for them to meet children from different classes and enjoy music as they develop their body coordination. Special activities are added to the program, during special events such as event-related songs, special class performances and parents' involvement."

Daily assembly (reality)

Only two teachers out of four were present in the morning during welcome time, one was at the reception welcoming parents and children and the other one in one of the classes checking on the children. No activities were planned for this period of time since all the children were together and didn't arrive at the same time. The period from 8.10 to 9.30 it was time wasted; children were not involved in any particular activities and the teacher was usually busy preparing the class for the following hours. Singing and dancing were not activities used by all teachers and no Assembly area existed. Before some particular event (sports day, end of the term\year celebration) this time was used as a rehearsal for the show children had to perform on those particular days.

Circle time (Welcome Kit promises)

"Children begin their activities in the classroom with Circle Time. The children are constantly exposed to the days of the week, months of the year, and other time management routines."

Circle time (reality)

No Circle time was present. Children were divided according to the age at around 9.30 but only two teachers were still present. One used to be with Crawlers and Tiny Tots while the other used to take care of the other two groups. As we said before, due to the differences among these groups, both developmental and needs wise, this distinction didn't work. The rest of the staff arrived at 10.15 when the classes were finally all divided and activities of the day started. The idea of introducing children to days, months and other time management routines is good but it doesn't take into account differences among groups and developmental readiness. Topics introduced during Circle Time should be age appropriate not the same for all classes. Routines were generally not used, due to the lack of specific knowledge on early childhood education, teachers were not aware of the importance of input (see chapter 3.4) and they never adopted the concept of routines since they hadn't any sort of background on memory processes or language development. Pinter gives us a reason for teachers' incompetence: "Another problem is the uneven provision of professional development for teachers. Schools especially in remote areas, often employ teachers who are not fully qualified and\or whose own foreign language competence is not satisfactory" (2011:91)

Show and Tell Fridays (Welcome Kit promises)

“On Fridays, the children have a “show and tell” and bring their special toy, book picture and so on to share in class. This activity is regularly done to boost children’s self-esteem and confidence.”

Show and Tell Fridays (reality)

Show and Tell took place only twice in six months and even during those sporadic occasions it was a complete flop. The main cause can be found in the fact that the student was not at the centre of the process: an activity where children have to talk, in front of the rest of the class can be done with older children but not with the younger ones. This is not only true because of the fact that Tiny Tots barely talked but also because the idea of *silent period* wasn’t respected at all. At the end of the day, when parents used to come to pick up their children, parents of younger children were told that the child didn’t want to participate in the Show and Tell activity putting the student in a position of conflict between what parents and teachers wanted and what was actually natural for him\her.

The main problems in school can be summed up as follow: the student wasn’t the focus of the learning experience, the staff weren’t properly trained and what was transmitted to parents wasn’t what really happened on a daily basis.

The focus wasn’t on the students but rather on the reputation of the school. Private schools in India have amazingly high fees and new admissions mean new income for the school. Unfortunately, most of the private educational world in India is nothing more than a business: anybody can open a school since no legal restrictions are present. Wealthy parents are always looking for the best choice so schools tend to invest money and time in creating the best appearance so that parents will be interested in enrolling their children. Knowledge about early education is not widely diffused, teachers are usually mothers who are hired by the schools but who aren’t usually ready to face school problems and neither are they aware of their responsibility. The generation which is currently attending pre-schools can be considered the first generation of children who were born after the beginning of the developmental phase in India and whose parents actually had the possibility of receiving an education themselves. Parents want the best but schools, most of the time, are more interested in money rather than in life-long education.

Being part of the wealthy elite moreover, made parents become really protective towards their children who are growing up pampered and spoilt. Even if some schools have good programmes and develop student-centred syllabuses parents at times go against this convinced of the fact that infants aren’t ready for certain activity and taking away any kind of responsibility and independence from children. On the Guidelines for teachers, which is distributed to all teachers at the beginning of

the year, we can find sentences like: “children are to be encouraged to be independent (i.e going to toilets, wearing their clothes, shoes, eating by themselves, serving and setting tables, tidying up their work, etc)”. None of these actions were actually carried out by the children but rather by the janitors who had to take care of all the physical necessities of children. Teachers, moreover, weren’t allowed to help janitors and this leads to turbulence and chaos at the beginning or the end of particular activities like lunch time, painting class or swimming class when 28 children had to be prepared and only three janitors could do the job.

The absence of daily routines leads children to a state of permanent confusion, no daily routine was present and the effort of creating an increasingly interesting school, in order to attract new admissions produced continual changes in the school: lots of extra-curricular activities were added, from chess class to skating, carnivals and annual days were organized stealing precious time from the daily life of children who were looking for stability and repetitions. The same was true for language.

6.3.3 LANGUAGES IN SCHOOL

By scrolling the school website, we can read: “L. International School strongly encourages the use of mother tongue. We actively support the development of the mother tongue language of our students, as it is important for maintaining cultural identity and emotional stability. The maintenance of each student’s mother tongue lays the foundation of linguistic understanding upon which second and further language learning takes place. Children learn a second language more quickly and effectively if they maintain and develop their proficiency in their mother tongue. The level of development of a child’s mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development (Jim Cummins). When children are able to develop their mother tongue vocabulary and concepts, they come to school well-prepared to learn and succeed educationally. The following measures are in place to support mother tongue development: our Primary Years Programme library undertakes to include literature in a range of languages representative of the school population. Opportunities are provided for students to make presentations, including story-telling and singing in their own language. One of the aims of such activities is to reinforce awareness that although these students may have difficulties using English, they are fluent in their native language. It is also a way of sharing culture and of making explicit the fact that language is a part of culture.”

If this were actually true everything I suggested in the first chapters of this thesis would be respected, sadly though this doesn't happen. The third rule in the "teacher's conduct" section in the Guidelines for teachers reports as follow: "teachers must speak ONLY in English, to all children, their colleagues and parents at all times". According to the rule of the school, teachers couldn't use any other language apart from English at any time, with anybody. This is intrinsically opposite to what is declared in the presentation to parents and exhibits, once again, how internal structures are different from the ones available to outsiders. The English-only rule in any case, wasn't strictly applied, at times positively, others negatively. Due to the different backgrounds of parents in fact, communications at times had to be held in Hindi, since the level of English of parents wasn't high enough to allow any other type of conversation. As we said before in addition to this, even conversation with janitors was in Hindi and most of the time even among teachers themselves since Hindi was considered to be the mother tongue and they felt more confident in addressing each other in that language. The language competence of the teachers was barely enough for the daily necessities and many times they preferred to switch to Hindi even during formal meetings or PTM (Parents-Teachers meetings). The fact that no rigid rule existed about which language could\should be used didn't help children set their minds: if the Tiny Tots' teacher should have followed the guideline strictly she should have used English from day one leaving aside Hindi both during classes and as a comfort medium. Children in the Discovers and Explorers group were eager to experience new activities in English, but, at the same time, having Hindi as home language they tried many times to interact with the school staff in their mother tongue receiving the most confusing feedbacks. Depending on the occasion, teachers communicated in English or in Hindi with students but didn't accept the consequences of it. Code-mixing was banished, children were "forced" to produce in English even if they received input in both languages at times. Janitors have been reprimanded many times because they were addressing the younger ones in Hindi. This fact though, wasn't really a choice, janitors didn't speak English and the only language available to them was Hindi. When they were taking care of the crawlers then, their choice couldn't be anything else but Hindi but once again, results weren't approved by the principal who didn't appreciate when A. (13 months) started singing lullabies in Hindi rather than in English. The older children on the other hand, having good basis in both languages would have need wide and correct input from their teacher in order to keep developing their competence. Unfortunately, teacher's competence wasn't sufficiently developed leading to the block of the improvement after a certain point.

6.3.4 SYLLABUS and EVALUATION

The school follows a Theme Based approach (see chapter 4.3) which works really well with young children and gives them the possibility to explore the same topic from different points of view using different methodologies. A variety of themes were available to teachers who, at the beginning of each term had to pick a topic that would be the central idea for the whole period. Themes available were numerous: from pet and farm animals to Winter, from transport to the garden, from Christmas to objects in the sky to name only a few. For every topic a selection of ideas is given, not only concerning vocabulary and literacy but also extra-curricular ideas:

I.e: UNITY TITLE: FRUITS

THEME	Discussion and introduction to different fruits
LANGUAGE	Mango, banana, strawberry, guava, papaya, litchi, grapes
STORY	“Who took my strawberries?”
NUMERACY	Introduction to opposites: big\small
ARTS AND CRAFTS	Fruits garland. Fruit stamping, collage
FINE MOTOR SKILLS	Tearing of paper, drawing and colouring fruits
COOKING ACTIVITIES	Fruit custard, mango milkshake
DANCE	“My whole body can move”
MUSIC	“Way up on the apple tree”
PSE	Brush teeth twice a day, always wash hands before eating.

The development of curriculum units was a strong point of the school, children loved the way in which all classes were connected to each other and taking advantage of repetition teachers were able to reach good results at the end of the term. Regrettably though, once again, it is clear how the specific characteristics of the children, in relation to age, weren't taken into account in the planning of these units. The list of curriculum units wasn't divided according to age groups, but simply according to themes: it is of course understandable that 2-year-old children do not have the same developmental readiness of a 4-year-old. Teachers did a good job in this field by trying to adapt activities to their students' needs.

There was no focus on the idea of *intercultural communication* (see chapter 5.1): being such a newly opened branch no international students were yet enrolled and the only ethnic group present

was the Indian one. The idea of International Schools wasn't for this reason respected, children should have been aware of the existence of other populations since this is one of the aims of this kind of school: to know about differences between countries, people, religions and to respect them all. The staff itself wasn't trained at all for this job and communications problems appeared also among my colleagues and I due to the tendency of Indians not to be informed about the fact that not everybody acts or thinks in the same way around the world. From this point of view my insert as a part of the staff helped: both teachers and the principal started looking at things from a different perspective and few activities developed in order to improve intercultural competence. The school planned a whole "international week" during which, every day, several different countries were presented to children through videos and different worksheets. Songs in foreign languages were introduced and at the end of the week a party, with parents as well, was organized where children were wearing clothes representing all the different populations and food from different countries had been served. Children loved getting to know about particular monuments like the Colosseums and the pyramids, they played with the Mexican piñata and they tasted Italian food. From that day on the school started talking about foreign countries more and more, including a short class of intercultural competence in the regular syllabus.

The school was really advanced as regards technology: children were introduced to IT classes from the age of 3 through Ipad and a projector where videos about the topics they were studying were presented once a week. Age-appropriate software were used on the Ipad where they could colour, develop their problem solving abilities and play educational games in the IT Lab.

Parent communication worked really well in the school, apart from quarterly parent-teacher meetings three other ways to connect with parents were used: weekly "peek at the week", review sheets at the end of each term and a final year progress report. "Peek at the week" consisted in a weekly email addressed to parents where a sum up of the weekly activities proposed in class was offered. Teachers had to prepare this documents every Friday and sent it to the parents so that they could be aware of the development of their child. All the activities were listed, photos were attached and links to songs or rhymes proposed in school that week were given so that parents could revise them during the weekend helping the child in the learning process. A review sheet was also given to parents at the end of each term, when, according to the theme based method adopted by the school, a new theme would be introduced and it was important to see what children actually had learnt about the previous one. A list of questions was given to parents and their job was to check

children's knowledge so that evaluation could be done at home, without the activation of the *affective filter* and by one of the parents, who could, by doing that, evaluate the school itself by checking on the child's progress. At the same time, moreover, teachers had a feedback not only about what had actually been learnt but also about the personal opinion of the child who was asked questions like "According to your child the best part of the unit was: colour concept, number concept, alphabet concept or rhymes?". According to the results of the review sheets teachers modified their next classes trying to improve their job term after term. The final year report was the document that had to certify the level of knowledge of the child at the end of the year. Four "marks" were used: exceeding expectations, meeting expectations, approaching expectations and needs improvement. A document for each child was prepared by the class teacher were linguistic learning, logical-mathematical learning, personal and social interaction, kinaesthetic and sports education, musical intelligence and visual spatial learning were marked. The document follows the *theory of multiple intelligences* by Gardner (1985) and highlights points of strength and weaknesses of all the children; furthermore, at the end of it, a comment by the teacher is given, were suggestions and solutions are reported. Parents loved how involved they were in the learning process of the children and apart from some rare cases of disinterested parents they were all extremely participant in the life of the school.

The thought underlying the whole school is amazingly good and it is summed up in the following lines: "The school mission is to provide an environment in which all younger students will become lifelong learners, who are responsible, disciplined, and ethical citizens of the world. Students will be understanding and respectful towards people of all races and cultures. We work towards developing each child socially, emotionally physically and intellectually. We provide an environment that maintains a healthy balance between academics and sports. We provide engaging learning experiences where each child develops a sense of self responsibility and strong values. Through differentiated learning guided by the multiple intelligence theory developed by Howard Gardner, the children are able to develop a positive image of themselves, their peers and everything around them. We are committed to providing best practices in early childhood education and having the finest preparations that will prepare young learners for their ongoing education."

Unfortunately though, most of the time economic goals took the place of didactic goals and the whole idea on which the school was based became a heap of lies and students became the victims of monetary plans.

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation had two different goals: first of all I tried to outline the characteristics a student-centred early language course should have, considering all the specific features a young learner has compared to older ones. I then took those golden rules and compared them with the situation I found in the Indian International School where I worked.

I started by explaining the definitions of bilingualism: “bilinguals are those who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their daily lives” as Grosjean (2010:4) asserts. I decided to focus my attention on the use people make of these languages rather than the competence they have because this is the situation I found in India as I reported in the last chapter: a chaotic state according to Mackey’s opinion (1977:111): “a land of overwhelming linguistic diversity and fourteen official state languages an enormous amount of writing and verbal exposition continues to deal with the subject Hindi, but it must be said that few issues have been settled. Throughout, there is little agreement about how many speakers of Hindi there are, who actually speaks “true” Hindi, how well and to whom, how much and what sort of bilingualism and multilingualism exist, what dialects are dominant in what ways (...)”. Bilingualism can develop for personal reasons or social needs and it gets the name of *elitist* or *folk* bilingualism respectively. In the case of elitist bilingualism parents decide to offer the child two different languages in order to ensure him\her of an easier future due to the benefits bilingualism can provide. Folk bilingualism is a different situation in which ethnic groups within a single State have to become bilingual involuntarily, in order to survive (Tosi 1982). Other numerous distinctions can be made looking at the bilingual status from different point of view: it can be *official* or *individual* (depending on whether the State declares more than one official language or if only a person is raised bilingual in a monolingual State), it can be *balanced* or show a situation of *dominance* (according to the level of competence in both languages, if it is the same or if one prevails over the other), it can lead to *complete* or *incomplete competence* (whereas all the abilities are developed or maybe the subject is only able to understand but not to produce any sentence in that language) finishing with the idea of Harding-Esch and Riley (1986) who point out that “bilingualism is not a black-and-white, all-or-nothing phenomenon; it’s more-or-less one”.

An age-wise distinction was mandatory for the aim of this dissertation. Bilingualism can indeed be divided into three more groups: *infant*, *child* and *later* ones. Only the first category has been

considered in this paper and it is characterized by specific qualities that I presented in the following chapters. I then introduced the concept of *biculturalism* which cannot be ignored: children who grow up talking two different languages because sons of parents belonging to two different cultures should develop a bicultural mind-set. Bicultural and bilingual people can not only take advantage of the knowledge from two languages but they will also benefit from of knowledge in two cultures, making them perfect contact points between different societies. Biculturalism though, is not always present in the case of bilingualism: when the second language is used as *lingua franca*, a language completely drained of its cultural characteristics, children will acquire only its linguistic features leaving aside any link with the original culture. On the other hand, then, if two cultures are present in the same person, they are not always in a balanced relationship and some kind of *cultural dominance* can exist exactly as happens with languages. Language and culture are indissolubly linked together, language comes from culture and culture modifies language. Culture, and the society's opinion in particular can influence bilingualism as well. Baker (2006:74) asserts that: "there are two opposite categories. Additive bilingualism is a positive term suggesting that the learner is unlikely to replace or threaten his or her first language while learning a second one. He or she will simply add another language to the first one. In contrast to this, if the first language and\or culture of the learner is undermined during the process of learning a second language, this leads to rather negative outcomes in that the L1 may be replaced, or subtracted." Contento (2010) sums it up by saying that *additive* bilingualism is the one in which the culture accepts and supports the bilingual attitude and *subtractive* the one in which the society is against the bilingual ideology.

In order to see which possible advantages are available for people who grow up with two languages I had to start from neurological studies: indeed languages modify the internal structure of the brain. If these two languages are acquired in early childhood they will develop in the same area of the brain, if acquired after the age of eight, on the other hand, they will be stored in two different zones. This will lead to differences in the activation of the brain when these languages are needed, the bigger the area used by the languages, the more difficult will be the job done by the brain, causing a bigger effort to the speaker.

The aim of this dissertation then, was to highlight those methodologies which can be used in order to facilitate the learning process of young students, so that they can develop just one unique storage for both languages and be facilitated in the task.

Bilingualism in the past has often been seen as dangerous and risky, and for this reason doctors and teachers used to suggest that parents avoid bilingual education for their children as Laurie reports:

“If it were possible for a child or boy to live in two languages at once equally well, so much the worse. His intellectual and spiritual growth would not thereby be doubled but halved. Unity of mind and of character would have great difficulty in asserting itself in such circumstances” (Laurie 1890 in Grosjean 2010). Starting from these old misbeliefs I described the recent studies about bilingual advantages which show exactly the opposite: how two languages can actually benefit the child. Starting from Cummin’s (1983) *iceberg theory*, I put emphasis on how all the languages, the mother tongue as well, collaborate with each other creating a common underlying proficiency which actually helps in the development of every single language. The wider this proficiency, the higher the knowledge in the single language. The same is visible by looking at Cummins and Swain’s CPU model. They explain that things in reality are very different compared to old beliefs about the distribution of languages in the brain: they are not isolated in the brain of the speaker (as the SUP Separated Underlying Proficiency used to report) but rather all connected, as is clear from the Common Underlying Proficiency. They then modify and reshape each other leading to a much more productive brain compared to a monolingual one. Cultural and communicative competence are indeed more developed in bilingual brains, exactly as their metalinguistic awareness and their divergent thinking skills which seem to be connected to the fact that bilingualism, by having access to two different mind-sets develop faster and improve the capacity to solve problems and find creative answers to questions.

Cummins (2000) though, warns us by saying that advantages of bilingualism get real only if the level of competence is high enough: if none of the two languages is properly developed this can lead to cases of *subtractive bilingualism* well described in his Thresholds theory.

I then moved on to the specific characteristic of young learners, presenting the two main theories about child development, Piaget’s (1959) and Vygostkij’s (1978). They differ from each other in particular regarding the point of view they show: the first one describes children as unready people, unable to use any kind of logical thought and not willing to follow any sort of explicit instruction. Vygotskij on the other hand, does exactly the opposite. He highlights the huge potentialities a child can have if supported by the right people. He calls this theory the *zone of proximal development theory* (1978) and in it he describes how different the results can be if a child is asked to do a task by himself or with the help of a person who has higher competences. Results are stunning and they moved the attention for the first time to the extremely important role teachers have in children’s development.

After highlighting the main phases of children’s linguistic development, both in mono and bilinguals, I pointed out how small the differences are between these two groups and ended up by

saying that the aim of the school is to help children in acquiring a second language in a way as similar as possible to the one used with the first language. I used the two main theories about the origin of language capacity in order to explain the scientific reasons that brought me to those conclusions: Chomsky's (1965) and Vygotskij's (1978). Chomsky, declaring the existence of the LAD, an innate language acquisition device which is active in all human beings, tries to explain how children learn languages so fast and always following the same phases. Even though we still agree on the existence of the LAD and a Universal Grammar, Vygotskij's theory points out how the brain itself, without the right amount of stimuli and the help of the society is not able to activate and will end up, inevitably, with linguistic development delays (see Genie's case). Vygotskij then, thanks to his two most famous theories, describes how crucial the school is for children. Starting from the Penfield's children case, I explained the concept of *critical periods*: according to Penfield, the brain is designed differently depending on age: childhood is concentrated on language acquisition, on the contrary, after the age of ten, the brain becomes less capable of doing this and in fact decreases its capacity of learning and remembering notions, and by following Dalosio's scheme (2009) I pointed out how an early approach to foreign languages can actually make a big difference in the final results. The third critical period, from 9 years onward, can be signed by foreign accents, difficulties in syntax, and moreover by complications in learning functional words. Children, furthermore, have some specific advantages in language acquisition due to neurological differences compared to adults: Dalosio (2009) asserts that their way of learning is characterized by an innate capacity known as neurosensory receptivity which means that they not only use hearing when they acquire a language, but due to a natural curiosity and incentive towards what is new, they also use touch, taste and sense of smell. This great stimulus reaches the brain in a more significant way and helps children to learn faster and better. I then introduced the so called *Second Language Acquisition Theory* by Krashen (1981) and its five hypotheses: Acquisition vs Learning; Monitor hypothesis; Input hypothesis; Natural order and Affective filter because still nowadays it is considered true and valid when talking about second language acquisition. The *natural order*, the *i+1* concept and the notion of *affective filter* have been used in the next chapters as scientific bases for the validity of the methodologies presented. I then focused my attention on the aims an early approach to languages should have because these are greatly different according to the age of the students. Regarding pre-school students, the European Commission (2011:15) suggests aiming at *language awareness-raising or exposure*: "the main aim of language awareness-raising is to develop the perception and recognition of different sounds and concepts of one or more languages and the ability to understand and reproduce them in an interactive way. It is not meant to convey

knowledge of structures or vocabulary of one or more languages, it aims at preparing and helping children to learn a new language”: focus of fluency and communicative competence rather than accuracy and form. The whole syllabus has to be developed starting from the learner’s characteristics themselves, he\she must be the focus of the whole learning process while the teacher will play the role of director of the action but with an external point of view, leaving the student free to discover, play and acquire the language in a natural way. It is through the teacher’s input that children learn and for this reason it is mandatory for it to be meaningful, wide, and rich. Krashen (1985) asserts that: "people acquire second languages only if they obtain comprehensible input and if their affective filters are low enough to allow the input in. When the filter is down and appropriate comprehensible input is presented (and comprehended) *acquisition is inevitable.*". It is the final goal of teachers then to produce comprehensible input so that the whole learning process can take place. Considering the age of the learners in this dissertation a good solution for teachers could be the adoption of *teacher-talk* which is an emphatic way they can use in order to facilitate children in comprehension. Teacher-talk is characterized by formal adjustments (sentences are shorter, pauses are longer and the velocity slows down) but they also present a greater number of questions made by the adult so that he\she can check that the output is correct. Moreover, teacher-talk presents the concept of *scaffolding*: it is on adults’ production that children create their sentences, the adult offers a richer sentence, amplifying that of the child and on which the child him\herself will create the following answer.

After explaining the main features of children as students, I focused my attention on the various methodologies teachers can use in order to take advantage of those innate characteristics and create a programme ad hoc for them. The first option comes from the experience-based teaching which can be described in four sentences: experience comes first, immersion in the language, learning new knowledge through the language itself and integration of both L1 and L2. A practical way in which teachers can put all these characteristics together is by using theme-based instructions. According to the TBI method all the different activities conducted in class would be connected by a common path, a theme. Mumford in fact (2000:3) points out that: “integrating various subjects in the curriculum can contribute to a greater awareness of the relationship of school programs and make learning more relevant. Integration of subject content is intended to help students make sense of many dimensions of their world. Integration also enhances students’ ability to transfer the competencies and skills acquired in one context to the other appropriate situations”. I also explained the importance of Pienemann’s (1988) *Teachability Theory* which asserts how important it is to respect the natural order of the various steps in the linguistic developmental process and how

teachers have to create the syllabus starting from these fixed phases and not vice versa. An in depth analysis of the *motivation* topic has been given as well. Starting from Balboni's (1994) *tri-polar model*, I pointed out how teachers have to recreate a joyful, creative and interesting atmosphere in the class so that children become get motivated (intrinsic motivation).

A brief description of the three most famous methodologies which work particularly well with children is also reported: the *Total Physical Response*, the *Playful Methodology* and the *Task-Based Language Teaching*. The TPR is based on the idea of using the entire body during the process of language acquisition so that children can link together the vocal order expressed by the teacher and react to it with movements: "this method was designed to accelerate listening comprehension of a foreign language by having subjects give a physical response when they heard a foreign utterance" (Asher 1968). The playful methodology is deeply connected to the idea of *intrinsic motivation* because children find pleasure in playing and by using Krashen's *rule of forgetting* (1985) which explains how people learn better when they actually forget they are learning children can be helped in language acquisition. TBLT works with the same idea and explains how, using the language in order to find solutions to various problems or tasks the learning process can become smoother and faster. These three techniques, moreover, should always be used together with routinized speeches which are considered to be extremely helpful for children. Children start using this formulaic\routinized speech from the beginning and only later on, when their linguistic competence is higher, they will analyse the single blocks which form the sentence and start producing creative speech. Kersten et al. (2010:110) describe the benefits of daily routine situations by saying that "children will quickly understand these formulaic expressions or routine phrases (even if they do not necessarily understand the full literal meaning at the beginning) because they occur frequently in the input, and because they are contextualised in such a way that the children can infer the meaning from the situation." It is only later on that "larger units were broken into smaller units, routine became patterns, and parts of patterns were *freed* to recombine with other parts of patterns. This break-up of routines and patterns provided the basis for syntax...." as Fillmore (1976) asserts.

The last two chapters focus on intercultural communication and my experience in India respectively. A chapter on intercultural communication was mandatory since I myself had problems at the beginning in approaching Indians since we do not share the same mind-sets. I started my reasoning from Bennett's (2004) six stages of development from *ethnocentrism* to *ethnorelativism*. He asserts that it is natural to start from an ethnocentric point of view because culture is taught by parents from day one in the life of a child and we usually do not question our values. He also says,

moreover, that by leaving aside our own innate thoughts and by trying to be more open towards others we can move to a ethnorelative point of view. I used Balboni and Caon's (2015) model for intercultural competence as a model for this task. They indeed explain that since culture keeps changing every day and infinite types of culture exist, a model is necessary so that we can have a scheme through which to look at things. This scheme, in any case, is not stable, it has to be modified according to the culture we are looking at and we must be aware of what the cause of intercultural communication problems can be. I followed that scheme in order to create a short summary of the possible problems which may arise in a conversation between Italian and Indian speakers due to the differences between these two countries. In the last chapter, on the other hand, I focused my attention on the present day linguistic situation in India. I pointed out how the Indian government organized languages after gaining independence from Britain in 1947 and how Hindi and English coexisted till today. I then did some in depth research on International Schools and found out that the aims that these kind of schools should have, following the legal descriptions, are not actually true. International Schools should safeguard mother tongues, and children should have access to both languages for the same amount of time following Carder's (2007) definition and Thomas and Collier model, the so-called *Prism model* (1997). Unfortunately though, this is usually not true in Indian International Schools where students are learning English as a second language to the detriment of mother tongues. At the end of the chapter I then described how things functioned in the school where I worked, and I pointed out the fact that there was no respect for the L1 and the staff weren't sufficiently trained for all that concerns infant developmental needs.

The reasons underlying these facts according to me, can be seen in the fact that education in India is a business, and private schools, in particular International Schools, are usually characterized by extremely expensive fees. Moreover, it is important to remember that the generation of children who are currently enrolled in private schools is the first generation which had the possibility of access to this kind of school. Before them, the older generation had only State schools and the quality of them was even worse. India is developing fast, and parents who can actually pay this kind of fee enrol their children with the best intentions: to provide them with the best education and assure them of a stable future. Regrettably, not all the principals are aware yet of the importance of their jobs and they tend to see students as business concerns rather than as future citizens of the world.

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