



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI  
DI PADOVA

## **Università degli Studi di Padova**

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in  
Lingue e Letterature Europee e Americane  
Classe LM-37

Unleashing the power of improvisation: adapting a television game  
show for the foreign language classroom

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Anno Accademico 2022 / 2023

Tesi di Laurea

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS – RINGRAZIAMENTI

*I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Dalziel, who believed in my idea from the beginning and exposed me to the world of drama in education. Thank you for your support, encouragement, and valuable feedback every step of the way.*

*I also would like to thank my school Amedici Italiano and all participants of my case studies. Sofia, Anna, Daria, Polina, Nina, Nastya, Svetlana, Marina, and Ann, your*

*trust in my experiments, your participation, and your valuable feedback have allowed this work to have a life on its own.*

*I would like to thank the cast and crew of Improvisation (2016 – 2022) and Improvisers (2023 – present) for their infinite inspiration. Especially, Anton, Arseniy, Dima, and Sergey, for making the lives of millions of people better every day.*

*Special gratitude goes to Anton Zacharin who opened me to the world of improv in practice e grazie a Eugenio Galli che continua a farlo ogni mercoledì.*

*I thank very much my family and friends who believed in me and my idea. I feel your support even from a distance.*

*Vorrei ringraziare anche Silvia Tomaino per il sostegno e la motivazione di cui avevo bisogno in questo periodo.*

*Infine, un infinito grazie va a Lorenzo che mi ha sostenuto in ogni passo di questo percorso sfidante ma affascinante.*



## Introduction

*Life is nothing more than  
a grand series of improvisations*

*Price (1980:15)*

Language learning and teaching have undergone a significant transformation, driven by the relentless pursuit of innovative pedagogical approaches that can captivate students and foster their proficiency in foreign languages. Modern teachers are entrusted with a mission that transcends the mere imparting of linguistic competence. In addition to nurturing language skills, their role extends to cultivating cultural awareness, nurturing critical thinking, and fostering creativity among our students. The adoption of a drama approach, including the art of improvisation, may play a pivotal role in achieving these broader educational objectives. Incorporating dramatic elements into language education introduces students to real-life and fantasy scenarios, encouraging them to engage with the language in meaningful ways. As Ausubel (1963) aptly demonstrates, language learning becomes most efficient when situated in authentic contexts that resonate with learners. A drama approach in general and improvisation in particular have the potential to provide precisely this, creating a bridge between language competence and extralinguistic skills.

My motivation to explore this particular subject is deeply personal. From a young age, I have had a profound fascination for the world of theatre. In August 2019, I embarked on a journey that further fuelled this passion when I enrolled in an improvisation workshop conducted by British director Katie-Ann McDonough. This workshop ignited my interest in improvisation and furnished me with a fundamental understanding of this captivating form of theatre. My interest in improvisation deepened even further when I encountered the Russian TV show *Improvisation* (2016 – 2022) in late 2021. Studying disciplines such as Learning English Through Drama and Performative Learning and Communication transformed my interest into a professional one. Passion for the show and acquirement of theoretical knowledge and practical skills have caused improvisation to become the field of my research and to implement improvisation activities into my teaching practice. In the framework of a final project for Learning English Through Drama, I conducted my first case study, adapting four games from the show. This experience made me realize that there is great potential in adapting these games, both for students and for large-scale scientific work. Furthermore, as I conducted my first case study during the Learning English Through Drama course, adapting four games from the show, it became abundantly clear that there was substantial untapped potential in these



adaptations. It was this revelatory experience that impelled me to embark on a larger scientific endeavour.

As Csikszentmihalyi (2014) notes, every innovation has its roots in that which has preceded it. Therefore, before moving to the adaptation of game shows, it is important to build a strong theoretical background. This thesis, comprising five distinct chapters, represents my endeavor to delve into the key dimensions of language learning and teaching, drama and play in language education, and improvisation, both as an art form and as an educational tool. It also aims to adapt improv games from the show for their application to language classrooms and examine through case studies the extent of their adaptability and benefits and the teacher's role in this process. In pursuit of this effort, this study is guided by the following research questions:

- Is it possible to transfer improvisation activities from the comedy show to the language classroom?
- If so, how could it be done?
- If not, what are the possible limits and impediments?
- To what extent can the games relate to core language learning variables and drama approaches?
- How could students benefit from these activities?
- Are the games equally beneficial to students both within and outside of the show's fandom?
- What is the role of the teacher in conducting improvisation activities?
- How do improvisation activities prepare learners for language use outside the classroom?

The opening chapter provides the first part of the background to the topic of this work by offering a brief overview of previous research in the field of core dimensions of language learning and teaching. First, it will define the main dimensions that are relevant to my study, and then introduce them into separate sections, analyzing the extent to which they are relevant to my research objectives. After that, the chapter will also explore the teacher's role in different approaches to foreign language teaching (FLT).

Chapter Two is based on the premise that improvisation games represent a combination of play and drama approaches. Therefore, both drama and play will be explored in this chapter with a particular focus on their definitions, benefits, and implementation in classrooms. Moreover, this chapter will consider different variations of play and drama through the prism of relevance for further adaptations of games. After that, the chapter will explore the teacher's role in conducting drama activities.

The purpose of the third chapter is to build another part of background for the following case studies by exploring the theory of improvisation. It will first discuss previous research conducted by improv pioneers to understand the foundation of improv, its rules, types, and principles. After, this dissertation will also consider the sphere of influence of improvisation on the field of education in general, and then narrow it down to the field of language learning and teaching. Afterwards, it will focus on the benefits of improv and teacher's role in the FLT classroom.

Chapter Four is dedicated to a comprehensive listing and evaluation of games featured in the television show *Improvisation* (2016-2022). It will classify these games based on the skills they foster, taking into account various parameters such as students' age, proficiency level, and the specific educational context in which they can be used. The primary aim is to illustrate how games derived from an entertainment show can be thoughtfully adapted for the purpose of language education.

To this end, three case studies will be conducted to verify the effectiveness of the adapted activities in practice with learners of English and the Italian language, some of whom are fans of the television show and others who are not familiar with it. The task of the fifth chapter, therefore, is to illustrate the details of this study, which was partially designed for this dissertation. To be precise, it will provide relevant information about the research questions, a description of the setting and participants, and the instruments used for the study. The process of improv sessions and the findings will be reported, discussed, and compared by relating them to the previously mentioned theories. Subsequently, the possible implications of the results will be discussed to outline some practical suggestions and solutions to be applied within the language learning and teaching context. To conclude, the weaknesses and limitations of this work will be commented on, and valuable input for further research will be provided.



## Chapter 1

### Comprehensive Language Learning and Teaching Dimensions

Mastering the ability to be proficient in the use and knowledge of foreign languages is among the most essential skills for life in the 21st century. As stated by MacIntyre and Mercer (2014), the importance of enhancing each learner's experience of language learning by supporting the growth and maintenance of their motivation, perseverance, and resilience, as well as the positive emotions required for the long-term endeavor of learning a foreign language, should be recognized by language educators. Additionally, teachers should be well aware of the critical role that good student-teacher relationships play in the classroom, particularly in environments where interpersonal connection and communication are prioritized. This leads to the idea that certain core elements have an impact on the effectiveness of language teaching. Language learning involves a multifaceted approach that goes beyond particular skills or strategies and incorporates various dimensions for a more complete and effective learning experience.

In the book “Lessons from Good Language Learners” (2008), Griffiths presents more than twenty learner and learning variables contributed by different scholars. It is not within the scope of this paper to examine them all. I have selected variables such as affective space, authenticity, autonomy, collaboration, culture, motivation, non-verbal communication and oral skills, learning styles and strategies, which are relevant for adapting and conducting my improvisation activities as goal of the current study is to modify improvisation games for use in a foreign language classroom. The study will also identify the possible role of the teacher in managing and conducting these activities.

#### 1.1 Affective filter and space. Language anxiety in second language acquisition

Emotions are the most important aspect of human mental and social life. In the context of language learning, they are an essential part of the experience for both teachers and language learners. However, as Richards (2020) states, the role of emotions has often been overshadowed by a focus on the cognitive rather than affective aspects of language learning within the discipline of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The major development on this issue has been Krashen's elaboration of the affective filter (1982), which suggests that affective variables such as anxiety and low self-esteem may have an impact on language learning ability. Affective filter theory has gained broad acceptance in language education institutions and has formed the basis for the planning and conduct

of foreign language classes. Indeed, as Piazzoli (2011) admits, in foreign language instruction since the 1980s, the focus has been placed on creating a stress-free atmosphere to lower the affective filter, which is a barrier to language acquisition.

Every student has an affective filter that determines the “degree of 'openness' of the student” as affirmed by Krashen (1982). He argues that negative emotions cause students to increase the level of filtering, which reduces the level of understanding and processing of language material. To decrease the level of filtering, teachers should try to stimulate interest, create an environment of low anxiety, and increase students' self-esteem. This environment has been called the “affective space”. Affective space is a more inclusive concept that encompasses the emotional environment in which learning takes place. Drawing from Boal's concept of the “affective dimension” (1995) within the dramatic space, affective space encompasses both the emotional aspects of the physical environment (classroom design, materials) and the socio-emotional dynamics between learners and educators.

In language education, the idea of affective space is aligned with the broader “affective turn” in applied linguistics. Such researchers as Dornyei (2005), Arnold (2009), and McIntyre (2014) have contributed to our understanding of the affective aspects of language learning, and their work often involves looking at the emotional environment in which learning takes place. According to Arnold (2009), an affective-positive environment places the brain in an optimal state for learning, which results in minimal stress and maximum engagement with the content being mastered. She distinguishes the following feelings associated with exposure to a foreign language learning environment: learners' feelings about themselves, their instructors, about their peers, about using a foreign language in class, the teachers' command of it, the learning methods, and the teaching resources, such as textbooks or the internet. If these factors evoke negative emotions in students, this may be the cause of the appearance of foreign language anxiety (FLA). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) defined foreign language (classroom) anxiety as: “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986: p. 128). The scholars pointed out that because anxiety may have a significantly negative impact on learning, teachers therefore should be able to identify particularly anxious students in a foreign language classroom and find ways to help them. Otherwise, FLA may strongly inhibit the learning process.

Horowitz, Horowitz, and Cope (1991) identified three types of anxieties: communication anxiety, textual anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation from others. They strongly argued that these anxi-

eties have a negative impact on language learning. One of the ways to cope with FLA may be with process drama as it is able to generate “affective space”. When an affective space is created, a supportive atmosphere allows participants to take risks within the drama that might spark an experiential learning experience. I consider this important for me because improvisational games can be considered experiential for the participants of my future case study sessions. Accordingly, relying on and considering the experience of researchers, I will have to create an affective space for my participants to lower their affective filter and enable a positive and beneficial experience. Moreover, Nicholson (2002) highlights a cooperative and trusting environment as an important condition for establishing affective space in process drama. Therefore, I will work towards creating a supportive and non-threatening environment for participants to engage in their self-expression by encouraging students to channel negative constricting emotions into positive expanding ones. For this purpose, I intend to use activities that I expect to be enjoyable and thought-provoking for students.

In addition to the ideas and theories already presented, the following considerations will also be my reference when planning and conducting my case studies. MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) stated that exposure to positive emotions can empower students to take some risks, explore, and play, which may strengthen social cohesion as a result. Other researchers (e.g., Dewaele et al., 2017; Fredrickson and Losada 2005) claim that positive emotions promote curiosity, risk-taking, experimentation, and a willingness to interact and communicate in a target language and support autonomous learning. These can be motivating for students when they result in feelings of success and achievement, boost self-esteem, inspire further effort in learning, and encourage them to take up a variety of learning opportunities available through media or the Internet, or opportunities to use a foreign language outside of class. However, on the other hand, negative emotions can be demotivating because learners experience frustration and disappointment when they do not achieve their goals, lose confidence in their ability to succeed, and do not want to invest time and effort in language learning. Thus, through elaborate practices, educators need to reduce or eliminate negative emotions by lowering students' affective filters and creating an affective space. This implies not only understanding the affective dimensions but also actively fostering an emotional environment that facilitates optimized language acquisition.

## 1.2 Authenticity

Authenticity, as noted by Gilmore (2007) is a multidimensional concept and all its different manifestations have important implications for the development of materials for teaching foreign languages. However, it is not the purpose of this study to examine all aspects of this phenomenon. I in-

tend to consider its main features, which will be beneficial to me for the development of my improvisational activities. The term “authenticity” refers to materials made for native speakers rather than only language learners (Gilmore 2007). The problem of who can be considered a native speaker, especially in English, may arise here, but this lies beyond the scope of our study, so the earlier definition of Morrow seems to be more accurate and mitigates this argument. Morrow (1977) defined an authentic text as “a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message” (Morrow 1977:13). In other words, an authentic text is not specifically created for language learning reasons and was produced by a real speaker or writer with a real message and intentional receiver.

The idea of authenticity in foreign language teaching materials first surfaced in 1899 (Gilmore 2007). Nevertheless, authentic materials have become particularly relevant since the origin of the communicative approach to foreign language teaching. In contrast to its predecessors, the communicative approach emphasizes the use of “authentic” resources in the classroom. As the communicative concept has grown, educators have worked to simulate the actual world in the classroom by recognizing the need to develop students' real-world competencies. Incorporating authentic resources, as described by Little et al. (1988), is one strategy to achieve this goal because it allows students to develop effective receptive proficiency in the target language. In other words, using authentic texts that represent both written and spoken language, as Wilkins (1976) claims, contributes to bridging the knowledge gap between the classroom and the capacity of learners to engage in actual events.

Guariento and Morley (2001) confirm that a common approach for sustaining or enhancing students' drive to learn is the usage of authentic texts. They offer the students the impression that they are studying a “real” language and are interacting with the target language the way it is used in everyday life. Brumfit and Johnson (1979) believed that using authentic materials in language instruction could help students feel more motivated by imitating the “real world”. It is acknowledged that an essential aspect of language acquisition is that learners need to be exposed to a vast amount of comprehensible material (Krashen 2009), and authentic materials are certainly capable of providing such input, as they represent all the complexities of language and target culture. According to Gilmore's research (2011), using authentic materials helped learners be exposed to richer input and subsequently helped them notice more qualities of that input, which helped them enhance a wider range of communicative competence.

Some research has proven that textbooks do not always offer a realistic model of spoken language in terms of its forms and discourse features. Therefore, authentic materials could bridge that gap. However, as Gilmore (2004), Timmis (2005, 2018) and Tomlinson (2017) noted, it seems crucial not to assume that an authentic text is automatically more interesting than something from a textbook. Thus, when selecting authentic texts, teachers should consider students' interests, age, and proficiency levels, as well as the context in which learning takes place. The same applies to me as I need to consider these factors while planning my improvisation activities. Moreover, Jones (2022) provides three significant key recommendations for implementing authentic materials in the language classroom which I find beneficial for me as well. The first suggestion is to rely on the knowledge of the classroom to choose engaging authentic texts. Knowing the class and its interests is crucial, according to Breen (1985), as this can help us identify a text's "access point" (Jones & Carter 2011), which enables us to connect it to the knowledge and interests of the students. Yet, in my case of conducting case studies in an unknown group of people, not knowing their interests can present a challenge. However, I intend to find out their interests before the event and get to know them at least minimally to create activities that will be worth engaging with. This leads to a second consideration which is ensuring that authentic texts contain useful language for a particular group of students. Jones (2022) underlines that "much as it is important for learners to engage with a text, it is also important that it is worth engaging with" (Jones 2022). The last concern relates to the design of activities and tasks reflecting authentic interaction. Jones (2022) states that although teachers should not give up useful pedagogical activities, they should try to replicate real-world interactions as much as possible. The same thing I intend to implement with participants of my case studies.

### 1.3 Autonomy

The concept of language learner autonomy originated in the 1970s and 1980s in a few classes in Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Since the 1980s, foreign language teachers and educators from these countries have gathered for biennial seminars that have gradually included language practitioners from other countries. This has resulted in the shift of the focus of foreign language instruction in the twenty-first century to include more emphasis on assisting students in learning independently (Little 1995).

Benson (2016) distinguishes three types of autonomy: personal (autonomy in life), learner autonomy (autonomy in learning), and language learner autonomy (autonomy in language learning). The latter is of most interest to me, since this research is specifically concerned with the foreign language teaching field. However, Benson considers all types of autonomies interrelated. In Benson's



view, personal autonomy entails autonomy in language learning, and autonomy in learning assumes autonomy in language acquisition in circumstances where learning a foreign language has an important effect on learners' lives. Young (1986) asserts that by achieving autonomy, we take control of our lives. This understanding of autonomy as a process of “creating” or “shaping” one's own life implies that while the potential for autonomy may be inherent in an individual, autonomy itself is something that must be acquired and maintained throughout life.

According to Ushioda (2011), teachers may help students become the people they want to be by encouraging them to speak as themselves today and fostering autonomy. This will allow students to harness their motivation and sense of self to accomplish their goals while using the language. Little (1995, 2017) made an important observation about teachers of autonomous classrooms. She supposes that if teachers do not understand autonomous language acquisition from personal experience, it is unreasonable to expect them to adhere to its principles in their classrooms and states that student teachers need to learn how to manage and document their learning and engage in peer and self-evaluation, and their learning should be engaged in a dialogue, partly conducted in the language(s) they will be teaching. This notion is significant for me as a foreign language instructor in general and for my case studies in particular. Benson (2016) claims that educators should foster not only language learner autonomy but a personal one too because, according to him, personal autonomy involves learning, and also because it is teachers' shared responsibility to provide that learning. Boud (1988) argues that instead of imparting knowledge, skills, or ideals, instruction should instead give students genuine opportunities for autonomy. In Holec's (1981) vision, students define objectives, select learning activities and design learning materials, monitor progress, and evaluate results. King (1993) claimed that altering the teacher's role from “the sage on the stage to ‘the guide on the side’” – is necessary for the effective implementation of learner autonomy. Yet, this is not entirely true and provides a very simplistic and generalized definition of the teacher's role in creating an autonomous classroom. Dam's (1995) practice can be considered as one of the model references to follow and create a successful autonomous environment for the students. While remaining in control of the class, she initiated and facilitated communication in the target language ensuring that students understand where the goals of the curriculum are guiding them, what questions they need to ask to make reasoned decisions, and what activities and assignments should follow from their decisions. She taught her students reflective habits and the skills of self- and peer assessment, simultaneously, monitoring the progress of each student and the class as a whole. Creating and sustaining a community where language use is necessary for language learning is, in essence, the teacher's responsibility. According to Little (1995), regardless of age or language profi-

ciency level, when learners enter an autonomous classroom, they must enter a world of discourse that is partly of their own making and whose purpose is to engage their identity in language learning. Alexander (2020) identifies five principles that should serve as a roadmap for organizing and carrying out class discussions and should accurately describe the instructional dialogue that underpins student autonomy: the environment of the classroom should be collective, supportive, reciprocal, cumulative, and purposeful to ensure its autonomy. I will adhere to these principles to create an autonomous classroom in my work and case studies.

#### 1.4 Collaboration

Interdisciplinary collaborative work in research and teaching is increasingly prevalent today due to the complexity of the challenges faced and the vast amount of information available. It is important to take into account that collaboration in foreign language classrooms can take different forms: collaboration between teachers, teachers and students, teachers and administrators or parents, and community collaboration. However, in the framework of this dissertation, the focus is placed on the students' interaction with each other. In the research literature concerned with second language acquisition, Philip, Adams, and Iwashita (2014) defined peer interaction as “any communicative activity carried out between learners, where there is minimal or no participation from the teacher” (Philip, Adams, & Iwashita, 2014:3). Peer contact can involve two or more people, and during such interactions, participants cooperate to achieve a common objective. The definition of “peer” may depend on the learners' similarity in one or more aspects (such as age or skill). The kind of activities that call for collaboration can vary. For instance, peer tutoring, cooperative learning, and collaborative learning are the most popular in language classrooms. According to Philip, Adams, and Iwashita (2014), collaborative learning involves a strong essence of cooperation and mutual benefit. In other words, learners must rely on one another to perform the task at hand. Cooperative learning and collaborative learning are occasionally used interchangeably.

It is believed that discussions about meaning help the learner understand input better. Tajino and Tajino (2002) claim that an ideal language lesson entails intense communication between all students. According to Tajino's findings, the success of team learning depends greatly on the students' active participation. Tavares (2019) adds that through socialization and interaction, students can improve their oral proficiency. He asserts that one of the main components of classroom activities that aim to increase students' interest in learning involves an oral discussion between peers. Students collaborate in the co-construction of meaning through spoken communication. Kohn and Vajda (1975) believe that because group contact necessitates “greater self-expression, real self-expres-

sion” to acquire meaning, students can help one another and learn from one another. Along with language advantages, Kohn and Vajda suggested that group contact can assist the students in overcoming their feelings of inferiority and forming a more positive self-image and identity. As a result, when interactions are promoted in the classroom, students may perform more effectively because peer interaction has been related to both linguistic and psychological advantages. Interaction is viewed as an important component of language acquisition as stated by Long (2015). His interaction hypothesis is reinforced by the communication, meaningful negotiation, and response that students experience while performing tasks. According to Bygate (2016), tasks pervade many facets of language teaching research and practice, but they can take different forms and be used under different names, i.e. real tasks that promote situational authenticity or pedagogical tasks that promote interactive authenticity in the classroom.

When discussing the concept of the task, it seems necessary not to mention the task-based language teaching approach (TBLT) which appeared as a response to the limitations of grammar-translation and audio-lingual approaches and it gained prominence in the 1980s as a popular alternative approach to language learning. One of the major milestones in the history of TBLT was the work of Prabhu, an Indian foreign language teacher who in the late 1980s introduced the concept of “task” in language teaching. Prabhu (1980) emphasized the significance of meaningful and purposeful activities in language classes, highlighting how tasks provide students with authentic opportunities to use language in real-life contexts, which closely aligns with my objectives as a language teacher focusing on improvisation. Building on Prabhu's work, Skehan in the 1990s highlighted the role of tasks in promoting language acquisition and fluency. Later, Willis (2003) emphasized the need for tasks to be authentic, learner-centered, and relevant to learners' needs and interests. These principles resonate with my teaching approach. The task-based language teaching approach places a strong emphasis on fostering effective communication, with students engaging in interactive activities and tasks that require negotiation of meaning, collaboration, and information exchange. Unlike structuralist approaches, where language is often seen as an object to be memorized, this approach treats language as a tool for communication. The tasks are designed to gradually increase in complexity, allowing students to acquire and integrate linguistic skills as they progress through simpler to more advanced tasks. This concept makes me consider whether I should evaluate my future improv game in terms of sophistication.

Notably, the task-based language teaching approach strikes a balance between fluency and accuracy. While other approaches may focus primarily on one aspect, this one acknowledges the impor-

tance of both in language learning. Additionally, this approach encourages language awareness by enabling students to reflect on language structures rather than merely memorizing them. Furthermore, it covers all essential language skills, although supplementary activities may be necessary to provide more extensive practice in reading and writing, as these skills receive less focus in a purely task-based approach (Sanchez 2004).

### 1.5 Culture

Foreign language instructors have noted that language learning inevitably introduces learners to a particular culture because “language does not exist outside of a cultural context” (Perkins 1988:359). Therefore, teaching language without an appreciation of culture seems to be inaccurate and insufficient because language tends to be a tool for a culture's creation, transmission, and internal communication. Language learners are unable to master a language to the same degree as their native speakers without cultural knowledge (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003).

The interrelationship between language and culture is outlined by Kramsch, (1993) who states that language is the primary means by which we enact our social life. When used in the context of communication, it is linked to culture in numerous and complex ways. Concurrently with the development of the communicative approach in language teaching and learning, the essential role of culture as an interdependent part of language and the need to incorporate culture into language teaching and learning are being acknowledged worldwide. Rodriques (2000) and Omaggio and Hadley (1986) acknowledge that the ability to communicate in a language involves knowledge of how to observe, explain, and behave in accordance with the culture associated with that language, resulting in language competency and culture being intricately and dynamically linked. Although there is a considerable amount of research devoted to defining the essence, meaning, and place of culture in foreign language learning (see, for example, Byrnes, 2002; Kramsch 1993, 1997, 1998; Lange & Paige, 2003; Risager, 2006, 2007), culture remains a subject of intense debate in foreign language teaching around the world. The culture debate is about what kind of culture should be taught: the specific lifestyles of particular native speakers or the more general humanist fund of wisdom conveyed through literature and art? One of the classifications of culture seems to be of particular interest as a response to this debate. Williams (1995), a sociologist and cultural theorist, popularized the notions of “big C” and “small c” culture. According to him, big culture refers to high culture or those cultural achievements that are considered classical, elitist, and often associated with institutions such as museums, universities, and established artistic traditions. Little culture, on the other hand, concerns the everyday, popular, or informal aspects of culture that are often linked to

the everyday lives of ordinary people. It comprises customs, traditions, and practices that may not be officially recognized in high culture but are integral to people's everyday experiences. I would propose both types of culture in my classroom, emphasizing the second one which seems to be more present in language teaching since the 80s.

Expanding on this holistic approach to language education, Kim (2020) introduces the concept of educating the "whole person." This notion recommends a strategy that goes beyond the simple development of verbal proficiency. It suggests that language instruction should involve a greater understanding of the social and cultural context in which it is situated. Concerning cultural knowledge, Stainer (1971) believes that learning a second language is significant when combined with culture. Supporting this notion, Brown (2001) states that learners who are exposed to the language's culture are better able to utilize the language in real and practical ways for beneficial purposes. Crozet and Liddicoat (1997) claim that culture must be integrated into the teaching of language knowledge and skills allowing learners to speak and write in a culturally appropriate way. It can be done in various ways. For example, Rucinski-Hatch (1995-1996) proposed utilizing artwork with ESL students of different ages. According to her, pieces of art can teach the history and culture of the target language, helping to investigate students' cultural perceptions, serve as a bridge between left-hemispheric and right-hemispheric activities, and provide a basis for different levels of oral and written speech in the target languages.

Another way of implementing cultural immersion in language teaching is a process drama. Through her process drama sessions, Piazzoli (2010) identified two strategies for increasing intercultural awareness such as manipulation of aesthetic distance and communicative forums. Through the former, participants were able to distance themselves from and/or empathize with characters and situations while the latter allowed participants to conceptualize and negotiate meaning. I intend to incorporate culture into my improv activities too. Approaches to integrating culture into language teaching, distinguished by Piątkowska (2015), might be helpful to me in accomplishing this goal. The knowledge approach aims at familiarizing learners with facts and information about the culture of the target language, such as customs, habits, folklore of everyday life, literature, or art. The contrastive approach helps learners to recognize the similitudes and distinctions between their own culture and the culture of the target language and makes them look for the relationship between the two cultures (Thanasoulas 2001). The intercultural communicative competence approach involves developing

learners' communicative skills that equip them to engage in interactions outside the context of their own culture and the culture of the target language (Marczak 2010).

In terms of assessing student outcomes in acquiring cultural competence, Nguyen (2017) proposes a three-level framework of student outcomes in learning culture: cultural knowledge, cultural awareness, and cultural competence. The latter is achieved by acquiring broad cultural knowledge and creating deep cultural awareness, enabling students to comprehend intercultural contexts and participate effectively in them, as well as to develop a strong sense of cultural identity and the ability to critically evaluate, discuss, and self-reflect on a range of cultural concerns. This framework seems to be a great resource for establishing pedagogical goals for teaching culture in language classes and assessing the benefits of cultural learning for language learners.

#### 1.6. Non-verbal communication

Research has shown that learning language in the form of the human body may increase student achievement based on the embodied cognition theory (Kuo, Hsu, Fang, & Chen, 2014) Supporting that thought, Surkamp (2014) claims that no language student can reach communicative competence without having some knowledge of the nonverbal phenomena that enable communication to be authentic and that fulfill the multiple functions necessary for communicative success. However, Knabe (2007) and Eßer (2007) noted that non-verbal phenomena in language teaching have not received enough attention as most foreign language teaching textbooks do not include materials and exercises that focus on nonverbal forms of communication. Surkamp (2014) underlines that failure to take into account the non-verbal aspect of communication in teaching a foreign language leads to the creation of artificial situations that do not reflect real situations of communication between speakers of a foreign language. Therefore, it seems important to apply non-verbal communication in language classrooms which can be conducted through a wide range of techniques. These include the use of visuals, audiovisual resources, and methods that involve action, such as role-playing, videoconferencing with speakers of the target language, or face-to-face interactions during school exchanges. Educational drama potentially provides special opportunities for the development of nonverbal communicative competence because it involves movement and requires the holistic implementation of verbal interactions. Matthias (2007) claims that by assisting learners in letting go of inhibitions, nonverbal modes of communication utilized in acting can help them become more fluent in verbal communication in a foreign language. I intend to focus on this aspect with some of my improv activities too.

Returning to the concept of culture in language teaching, it is essential to admit the teaching of intercultural communicative competence should include non-verbal communication. Surkamp (2014) believes that the biggest barriers to effective cross-cultural communication are frequently not linguistic errors. Grammar and vocabulary mistakes can make speaking challenging, but they rarely prevent dialogue. Culham (2002) states that when nonverbal conduct is violated, the repercussions are typically more severe: this is why there are so many intercultural misunderstandings and even communication breakdowns when one culture's behavior is 'inappropriately' viewed, interpreted, and responded to by another culture. Beyond non-verbal intercultural differences, which are crucial to take into account, nonverbal communication elements can be employed to ease tensions between speakers, for example, by displaying an open and receptive attitude toward one's conversation partner through facial expressions or a certain bodily position. Strasser (2008) acknowledges that using nonverbal communication to promote mutual understanding is supported by the fact that, in addition to culturally distinctive indicators, some physical gestures are devoured in the same manner in every culture.

According to McCroskey, Richmond, and McCroskey (2006), students' affective domain toward the subject is stimulated through greater nonverbal communication, which accounts for ninety-three percent of all communication. Therefore, it appears crucial that all teachers pay attention to their external nonverbal projection as well as take note of students' nonverbal cues given the possible impact of nonverbal communication on student learning. This emphasis on nonverbal communication finds a meaningful connection with Total Physical Response (TPR) in language teaching, particularly in the context of language acquisition and instruction. The language teaching approach emphasizes the use of physical movement to enhance language comprehension and production. Designed by Dr. Asher in the 1960s, TPR derives its roots from the natural process of language acquisition seen in young children. Usher (1988) incorporated these observations into this method based on his observations of children acquiring their first language and demonstrated that this method is particularly beneficial for kinesthetic learners. These learners thrive when engaged through physical movement, making TPR an exceptional tool to cater to their learning preferences. By incorporating bodily actions and gestures into language instruction, this approach capitalizes on the inherent connection between movement and memory, enhancing both the comprehension and recall of linguistic elements.

Moreover, TPR could assist in decreasing student anxiety, especially for beginners or those learners who lack the confidence to use the target language and create a framework-rich learning environ-

ment in which language is both learned and practiced in contextually meaningful situations. Similarly, with my improvisation games, I would like to create a relaxed and non-threatening environment where learners can experiment with language use, helping to alleviate apprehension about making mistakes. Furthermore, TPR establishes a contextually enriched learning environment where language is not only learned but practiced in situations that hold contextual meaning. This contextualization fosters a deeper understanding of language usage within real-life scenarios, making the learning experience more dynamic and engaging.

### 1.7. Motivation

The process of learning a language is long-lasting, challenging, and full of short-term ups and downs. Therefore, the learner's motivation to master the language is one of the most crucial factors. Experience and research (see Dornyei 2009, Pham 2021, Hennebry-Leung & Xiao 2023) demonstrate that motivated students can succeed in a wide range of situations. Hence, this section discusses the importance of motivation, the different types of motivation, and the ways of promoting learner motivation and interest. The term itself is frequently used in both education and research fields. As the author of an award – winning study of high school students' ways of motivation (2018), I feel confident in saying that there are many definitions of motivation based on a variety of psychological theories on how people behave. However, a discussion of these definitions is beyond the scope of this study. I will rely on Gardner's definition. He defined motivation as “effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language” (Gardner, 1985:10). Correspondingly, Dornyei (1994) identified three components of language learning motivation: motivational intensity, a desire to learn the language, and an attitude toward the process of learning the language.

Several distinctions are made in research on motivation in second language learning. The first one was made by Gardner and Lambert (1959), outstanding Canadian psychologists, who made a distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation. According to the former, some students are motivated to learn the language because of their desire to be integrated into the society of the target language. As for the latter, learners are driven by their pursuit of personal goals. The next distinction was Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory which was divided into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation means the motivation to perform an activity only for the enjoyment and satisfaction that accompanies the action and is considered highly self-determined in the sense that the reason for performing the activity is related solely to the individual's positive feelings while performing the task (Noels et al. 1999). In contrast, extrinsic motivation is



regulated by an external source. The third important distinction concerning motivation has been made by Brown (1987). He identified three types of motivation: global, situational, and task motivation. The first one speaks to how students are generally oriented toward their goals of learning a foreign language, while the second one depends on the situation in which learning takes place and the third one is the driving force behind a learner's decision to complete a task.

Rahman et al. (2017) divide extrinsic motivation into parental and teacher influence. The results of their study demonstrated that parents moderately impact students' motivation to learn a foreign language because they are also engaged in their children's language education. Although in this study parents did practice foreign languages much with their children, they encouraged kids to practice speaking the target language even at home. As for teachers' impact, the majority of students agreed that a teacher's impact is crucial because most teachers influence their language learning. It has been acknowledged that not all learners in a class share the same type and level of motivation (Daskalovska 2012). Some learners may have very strong motivation to learn a language, others may have weaker motivation, and others may have no motivation at all. However, motivation is not static and may change in either direction. Since motivation is one of the most important factors in language learning, one of the teacher's tasks is to stimulate, support, and reinforce the learner's motivation. AbdAlgene Mohammed (2020) supports this thought by saying that teachers can help students become motivated and interested in studying the language, even though they cannot control all sorts and dimensions of motivation.

To increase my students' motivation I would like to use recommendations provided by Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011). First, it seems important to develop a safe and comfortable setting in which everyone feels part of the whole even if it may take time for students to adjust themselves to a new setting. It is about creating an affective space, the concept of which has been discussed earlier. Moreover, it is crucial to establish situations in which students would feel a sense of accomplishment which is a great factor in motivating our language learners. Hence, I need to remember to give positive feedback and reinforcement to increase students' satisfaction and encourage positive self-evaluation. Another important issue is enabling students to create their short-term objectives. Setting their objectives and focusing on their expectations can help language learners succeed. Teachers should encourage students to set specific short-term goals, such as communicating and helping to achieve them, no matter what those goals are. Another source of motivation is classroom activities in small groups and pairs. This type of work increases students' motivation and curiosity and leads to a higher attitude toward language learning. The effectiveness

of class discussion as an educational opportunity is influenced by students' enthusiasm, involvement, and eagerness to participate. The final recommendation suggested by the academics is to make language learning relevant by encouraging students to connect their classroom experiences to extracurricular pursuits and activities. Additionally, Wang (2009) suggests developing students cultural empathy. According to the researcher, the formation of a positive attitude towards the culture and speakers of the language being taught turns into an integrative motivation to learn the language.

To sum up, the notion that student motivation is a personality trait and that students are either motivated or unmotivated is a misconception. Studies have proved that even students with extraordinary abilities cannot accomplish their long-term goals without appropriate motivation. Therefore, as a language instructor, my actions may be the most important factor in influencing my students' motivation, which is one of the crucial elements in the language acquisition process.

### 1.8 Speaking skills

Speaking is probably the most difficult language ability to evaluate among all the language's macro skills due to its complex nature, especially when it comes to foreign languages. According to Nunan (2001), students' success is assessed in terms of their achievements in oral communication. Therefore, it is important to define oral proficiency but it is not as simple as it may seem. For instance, Bachman (1990) stated that organizational and pragmatic skills are the two fundamental parts of oral communicative ability. Grammatical proficiency also involves textual proficiency (such as discourse genres) and textual skills (such as vocabulary, morphology, and syntax). Illocutionary competence (such as requests, promises, and offers) and sociolinguistic competence (such as sensitivity to language register, and dialect) make up pragmatic competence. In turn, Brown (2001) identifies the micro-skills of oral communication of which there are more than fifteen (see Brown, 2001). However, this section will not explore all the possible components of communicative competence, emphasizing speaking and pronunciation.

Beyond defining oral proficiency, it is imperative to consider the context of the classroom when discussing "best practices" for L2 oral language instruction. In particular, in immersive learning contexts, L2 learners require not only the development of spoken language but also the development of language skills necessary for academic performance. Cummins (1980) uses the term Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) to refer to the language needed for basic oral communication and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) to refer to the language of classroom instruction. In immersive classrooms and in settings where L2 is the language of instruction, students

are not only required to master the language of communication but also to learn the subject matter being taught. Recognizing the importance of academic language development makes clear to us that academic oral language requires specific instructional strategies. With my improv activities, I intend to practice both types of languages although giving preference to conversational discourse.

Speaking is defined by Bums (1997) as “an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information” (Bums 1997:14). Additionally, Bygate (2002) suggests that speaking is a multi-layered, hierarchical skill in which an individual must shape and frame thought processes in a large range of contexts. Lazaraton (2001) and Grove (1999) stated that speaking is the most complex of the four language skills because it includes such components as slang and idioms used in colloquial speech, abbreviated forms of words and phrases, the pressure to communicate directly with the other person and express thoughts in actual time, the spontaneous nature of speech, the sociolinguistics of the message, and the concurrent requirements placed on the speaker. Furthermore, Masuram (2020) underlines how challenging it is to teach communication as interaction because it is such a complex phenomenon that operates under unwritten rules. Therefore, it is best to teach these by using examples that are incorporated into authentic dialogues that include elements like beginning and concluding discourse, discussing personal events, and reacting to other people.

Clear pronunciation is an essential component of communication competency and learners who lack perfect pronunciation abilities are unable to speak effectively (Morley 1991). Therefore, it is among the most crucial components of language instruction. Pronunciation can be defined as the process of creating sounds that convey meaning. (Yates 2002). Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2011) observed that many instructors try to teach their students grammar, vocabulary, and the four language skills without including pronunciation in the curriculum. This approach seems to be incorrect because pronunciation is an essential part of communication, and without correct pronunciation, no one could say that they have a perfect command of a foreign language (Gilakjani 2012). The researcher also claims that good pronunciation facilitates learning, while poor pronunciation causes significant challenges in it. The importance of correct pronunciation in ensuring communicative efficiency is underscored by Morley (1991), who posits that teachers play a facilitative role in learners' pronunciation development. Acting as coaches, teachers guide learners in modifying spoken foreign language at both the levels of speech production and speech performance.

In the realm of teaching speaking, pronunciation emerges as an inevitable and fundamental issue. Its significance lies in the fact that mispronunciation can lead to misinterpretation or misunderstanding of words. Learners benefit from diverse activities for practice, and authentic practice is initially available through classroom interactions, discussions, and peer engagement (Lazaraton 2001). Although mastering pronunciation is not on the list of goals for my case studies, I should learn to recognize the specific needs and challenges of their learners in pronunciation and should tailor materials accordingly to address these issues as recommended by Shahzada (2012).

In regard to oral proficiency, it is important to have a look at oral and communicative approaches to foreign language teaching. Along with the other communicative approaches, the oral approach favors a minimization of the use of learners' mother tongue (L1) in class. The focus is on creating an immersive environment in which learners are constantly exposed to the target language and encouraged to use it. I tend to maintain the same line of argument, with a reference to the level of the students. Nevertheless, I recognize the importance of adapting instruction to the student's proficiency level, and in my experience, providing instructions in the target language for higher-level students can be more feasible, whereas for beginner-level students, using the L1 might be more appropriate initially to reduce anxiety and avoid possible confusion. Another significant part of the oral approach is error correction. The emphasis is on accuracy, but fluency is also encouraged through practice. However, my vision for the improvisation activities focuses on prioritizing fluency over accuracy, providing learners with the opportunity to express themselves spontaneously and creatively without excessive correction.

As for the communicative approach (CLT), one of its cornerstones is the creation of numerous opportunities for meaningful communication. This resonates deeply with the goals of my improvisation activities, which seek to provide a platform for learners to engage in authentic language use through interactive scenarios. Drawing from individual experiences, a common practice in CLT classrooms enriches language lessons and brings a personal touch to the learning journey. A distinctive strength of the method lies in its integration of the four language skills — listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Rather than compartmentalizing these skills, the approach encourages learners to develop them simultaneously, echoing the interconnected nature of genuine communication. Reflecting on my own experiences in both teaching and learning foreign languages, I can confirm the efficacy of this approach in fostering holistic language competence.

## 1.9 Learning styles and learning strategies

Due to their apparent similarity, learning styles and learning strategies are two individual differences (ID) characteristics that may be utilized interchangeably (Samaraweera 2023). To understand their function in second language acquisition, it is crucial to carefully identify them and examine their idiosyncrasies. I will start with learning styles that are essential for how students acquire new information. They refer to the specific ways students acquire new knowledge they encounter during the learning process and can be defined as an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred way(s) of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills (Dornyei 2005).

The classification of learning styles is a complex and multifaceted field, with scholars recognizing the multitude of models that reflect individuals' different styles of learning. This landscape is quite vast according to Xu (2011), and includes more than seventy different models of learning styles. Christison (2003) contributes to this understanding by dividing classifications into three broad categories: personality styles, sensory styles, and cognitive styles. Personality styles include factors such as tolerance for ambiguity and the interplay between right and left brain hemisphere dominance. Sensory styles encompass features of information perception, including visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic preferences. Cognitive styles look at differences in information processing, examining concepts such as visual field dependence and independence, analytical and global thinking, and reflective and impulsive learning tendencies.

Willing (1994) offers a brief but comprehensive classification, identifying four main styles of language learning. The communicative style emphasizes interaction and the use of language in real-life situations. Analytical learners prefer a structured and logical approach to language learning, breaking it down into components for better understanding. Authority-oriented learners work in environments where they are given clear directives and instructions. Concrete learners work best with the tangible and practical aspects of language, seeking hands-on experience. This set of classifications highlights the diversity of learning styles and provides teachers and learners with valuable information for effectively adapting learning approaches. Hence, understanding my students' learning styles and aptitudes in terms of their personality, sensory perception, and cognitive approaches will allow me to adapt my teaching methods to increase their engagement and comprehension. Considering the impact of various factors on learning styles, such as educational specialization and gender, is crucial, as highlighted by Chen (2023). As for the former aspect, it concerns the influence of career choices on learning styles. Learning how to learn and cultivating positive attitudes toward specific sets of learning skills may foster early learning styles in students. Meanwhile, the latter aspect re-

gards gender differences in learning styles. For instance, the research of Hu (2007) found that compared to female participants, male participants had a larger propensity to employ motivation, visual, extroversion, tactile sensory, and right brain dominance learning styles while women tended to have introverted learning styles.

Not only are learning strategies and learning styles closely related but they are frequently used interchangeably in explanations. Ehrman et al. (2003) underline the interrelated nature of these concepts. As defined by Chamot (2005) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990), learning strategies are the specific mental and communicative processes that learners apply as they learn a language. Although most students are unaware of these strategies in the classroom, every assignment and exercise will be accompanied by at least one strategy. Therefore, it is a teacher's goal to make their students aware of the presence and nature of strategies and consciously apply them for better performance in foreign language learning.

Oxford (1990) focuses extensively on learning strategies for foreign languages and outlines six categories of learning strategies: cognitive, metacognitive, memory-related, compensatory, affective, and social. She separates direct and indirect methods. Memorization, analysis, rationale, and educated guessing are examples of direct strategies. These are particular steps that language learners might take to further develop their language abilities. On the contrary, indirect strategies include things like assessing one's learning and collaborating with others. This taxonomy has received the most attention generally as it has made an effort to cover the majority of a person's learning process, from social contact to higher cognitive processes, therefore instructors must use it for better comprehending their students.

As stated by Gharbavi and Mousavi (2012) and Pei-Shi (2012), students may achieve at higher levels by choosing to apply more styles and strategies. Intending to increase a learner's level of competency, language learning strategies make learning circumstances more active, entertaining, and learner-focused (Bromley, 2013). However, there are some important issues, highlighted by Dornyei (2005), that should be taken into consideration for a more productive learning process. Firstly, major communication and comprehension conflicts between the teacher and the student may result from a mismatch between the student's learning habits and the educator's instructional strategies. Hence, the teacher needs to act quickly to notice this circumstance and reduce the issue to ensure that the student is not negatively impacted and can easily continue the learning process. Secondly, one of the significant issues in the current educational environment is the mismatch between

the students' learning styles and the curriculum. The fact that a syllabus is a set, time-limited, and goal-oriented curriculum that the authorities impose on the learner and the teacher is a significant obstacle to learning since it prevents the student from matching the curriculum to their preferred learning style. After discussing the issue with the student, the teacher can carefully fix the situation, making studying more enjoyable for the learner. A mismatch between the students' learning preferences and the language task is the following potential issue. Learners respond to learning activities according to their chosen learning style, therefore if a teacher frequently chooses learning experiences that do not fit a particular student's learning style, that learner will find training unpleasant and not be able to cope. The teacher may be more capable of bringing variation to the teaching process for the benefit of the students if they are more aware of their students' learning preferences.

Another concern is the mismatch between learning styles and students' abilities. This could provide a serious obstacle for a student learning a second language. Their aptitudes in a second language that they may have started studying later in life may not match their learning patterns, which may work well for learning other topics. When this occurs, a capable instructor should be able to recognize the problem and fix it so that the student quickly develops the skills needed to match the learning styles. Last but not least, there is a mismatch between the learning styles and strategies used. To improve learning outcomes, learning styles, and learning strategies should be matched. A learner will experience tension during the learning process if this synchronization fails in them, which could hinder learning. To make learning enjoyable for the student, a professional teacher's job in this situation is to determine the student's style of learning and guide them toward an effective learning technique. While it might be challenging to consider it for case studies, it seems possible to consider these factors for my teaching classroom.

## 1.2 The role of a teacher in the language learning process

It is important to define the extent to which the teacher impacts the learning process and the interaction between teacher and students. As one of my research questions is to establish the teacher's role in improvisation games, it appears important to examine the teacher's role in a separate section. It appears to be reasonable to examine the role of the teacher concerning different approaches to teaching foreign languages as some functions of a teacher's role are common for all methods, but others might differ. In the grammar-translation approach, a teacher plays an authoritarian role in the classroom and the predominant interaction happens between the teacher and student (Rao 2007). This does not appear right for me as during improvisation games students should predominantly interact with each other and the teacher undertakes the role of a guide. In contrast, the oral approach

designates the teacher as a facilitator, model, and guide, fostering active engagement, feedback exchange, and oral skills advancement. This parallels the desired role in my improvisation games.

The learning process in the audiolingual approach is more teacher-directed as noted by Munawar (2018). He claims that the teacher controls every aspect of this approach as a modeler, pace controller, regulator of direction, supervisor, corrector, etc. And also plays a key role in delivering immediate and accurate feedback on the student's oral production. They are correcting errors in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary to strengthen precise language patterns. Through constant monitoring, the teacher helps students develop habits of accuracy and avoid fossilizing errors.

In the task-based learning language approach the role of the teacher changes from that of an instructor and indicator of errors to that of a supporter and the inventor of tasks that their students' learners can have fun doing (Ellis 2003). It resonates with my vision of future case studies. In the total physical response approach, the teacher plays an active and leading role as the trainer acts as the director of a play in which the students are the actors. In improv activities, students are actors too but the teacher's role is less active (Mixon 2006). It is more similar to the role in the communicative approach where educators have to assume the role of facilitator and have to develop a different view of learners' errors and of their role in facilitating language learning.

In the natural approach (Krashen & Terrell 1983), the teacher's role is predominantly that of a mediator and language model. The teacher's responsibilities center around creating a supportive and engaging environment for natural language acquisition. It might require hard work from teachers as they are not allowed to speak their mother tongue. A teacher who is a native speaker or who has the same skills as a native speaker can be more suitable to fulfill the role. In the content and language integrated method (Marsh (2012)), the teacher's role in language and content learning is to foster the integration of language and content, provide language assistance, differentiate instruction, assess learning outcomes, nurture collaboration and communication, and facilitate a culturally rich learning environment. The teacher guides students to develop both language proficiency and content knowledge, preparing them for academic achievement and implementation of language skills in a real-life setting.

The role of the teacher in improvisation activities is yet to be defined. Each language instructor may choose from a variety of methods according to the goals, levels, needs, and learning styles of their students. However, having the idea in mind, I will rely mostly on ideas of the communicative ap-



proach, bolstered by elements of the oral approach, the task-based language learning method, and Content and Language Integrated Learning.

### 1.3 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I intended to select and analyze the key elements of integrated language learning and teaching. Through this research, I aimed to identify concepts and ideas that align most effectively with my future work and goals. The dimensions considered, such as authenticity, autonomy, affective filter and affective space, motivation, learning styles and strategies, non-verbal communication and oral skills, and collaboration, provided a foundation for understanding the multifaceted nature of language education. As I explore deeper into the integration of theatrical and improvisational techniques in language teaching, these key elements emerge as essential in shaping the pedagogical framework. For example, authenticity takes on a dynamic role as the dramatization of the process inherently incorporates real communication scenarios, allowing learners to work with language in context and in an authentic way. Autonomy, a cornerstone of language learning, resonates in the participatory nature of drama, allowing learners to take responsibility for their own language development. The affective filter and affective space, central concepts in language acquisition, find application in the emotionally rich environment that theater activities create. By establishing a supportive and non-threatening atmosphere, drama serves as a catalyst that lowers the affective filter, encourages risk-taking, and promotes positive language experiences. Motivation, an indispensable factor in learning, is naturally enhanced by the engaging and enjoyable nature of the drama activities that foster curiosity, exploration, and a desire to interact. Learning styles and strategies, which are critical factors in meeting the diverse needs of learners, come to the forefront as drama activities allow for a variety of learning styles, whether visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or others. The integration of non-verbal communication and oral skills combines organically with the expressive nature of drama to offer a holistic approach to language acquisition. Collaboration, a skill highly valued in language education, is a fundamental aspect of drama in which participants work together to create narratives, solve problems, and express ideas. Through collaborative improvisation, learners not only improve their language competence but also develop interpersonal and intercultural communication skills.



## Chapter 2

### Drama and Play in Foreign Language Classroom

This chapter attempts to investigate the drama approach in foreign language classrooms as improvisation is one of the drama's approaches. To this end, the present chapter is divided into multiple sections. The initial section offers a broad overview of the concept of play, shedding light on its multifaceted benefits and unique attributes. By delving into the transformative potential of play in the learning process, this section aims to lay the groundwork for understanding its significant role in foreign language instruction. Subsequently, the focus shifts towards the drama approach, delving into its specificities and inherent qualities. A nuanced exploration of the drama approach sets the stage for a deeper understanding of how improvisation, as a key element of drama, contributes to language learning. Emphasis is placed on the intricate interplay between drama activities and the dynamics of student-teacher relationships. Crucially, the discussion extends to the pivotal role of the teacher in implementing drama activities effectively. The potential for heightened enthusiasm in both teaching and learning processes is highlighted as a direct outcome of the successful integration of drama activities. Through an in-depth exploration of play, drama, and the teacher's role, I would like to gain insights into the transformative potential of these methodologies, fostering a more dynamic and engaging language education environment. If effectively implemented, drama activities may improve the quality of student-teacher relationships, and the benefit of foreign language instruction, and ultimately lead to greater enthusiasm and engagement both in teaching and in learning.

#### 2.1 Games and Play in Language Teaching

Learning a language might be very demanding for students if it is not taught in an engaging way, using appropriate learning resources. As captured by the Chinese proverb, "Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I might remember. Involve me and I will understand", the essence of active involvement holds the key to effective language instruction. In this light, the integration of games and play into language classrooms emerges as a powerful pedagogical tool. In 1984 Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby published the book "Games for Language Learning", confirming the benefits of games: "Language learning is hard work... The effort is required at every moment and must be sustained over a long time. Games help and encourage many learners to maintain their interest and work" (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby 1984:2).

More recently, language teaching has focused on the development of learners' communicative competence, which encourages educators to favor task-oriented activities that engage learners in creative and realistic use of language (Sanako 2022). Games fit well into this approach and have a goal beyond the language production. As noted by Saricoban and Metin (2000), games transcend their entertainment value, evolving into dynamic communicative exercises that enrich language acquisition. Currently, there is an unlimited number of games in the educational context, but for the purpose of this discussion, the focus will be narrowed down to games within the ambit of foreign language learning. This section will focus on the benefits of games in a language classroom, take a look at their effective use, provide some examples of them, and consider a teacher's role in their conduct in a framework of my research question posed about the role of the teacher in managing improvisation activities in language classroom.

There is a general assumption that all instruction must be serious and formal, and to have fun and laugh is not a proper learning experience. This perception, however, is misleading. Numerous studies have indicated that it is feasible to learn a language and have fun simultaneously (see e.g. Uberman 1998, Akkaya 2016, Liu 2021 ). Utilizing games is one of the best methods. According to Chen (2023), game-based activities usually elicit favorable responses from students, giving a different perspective on their educational efficacy. First of all, games require students to use the target language to participate, interact, be persuasive, and negotiate with the other participants. This thorough engagement requires the use of both productive and receptive language abilities, enhancing the experience of learning a foreign language. Moreover, a study by Huyen and Nga (2003) revealed that students like «the relaxed atmosphere, competitiveness, and motivation that games bring to the classroom». Consequently, an environment that encourages active learning is created. Such a setting acts as a catalyst for engagement, especially for students who may have earlier been disinterested due to a lack of motivation. In contrast to traditional learning methods, their study highlights how games promote quicker learning and increased retention.

Ersöz (2011) has echoed Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (1984) in remarking that games can provide a necessary and legitimate break in the challenging process of language learning. He states that well-selected games are of inestimable value as they allow students to relax and work on their language skills at the same time. Games are strongly motivating since they are fun and challenging at the same time. They also foster cooperation. Langran and Purcell claim that games increase students' independence letting them do more on their own which later might result in a boost of their level of confidence (Langran & Purcell 1994). Further support can be found in Zdybijewska's

work (1994), suggesting that games are a useful way to practice language because they offer a model of what learners will use language for in real life in the future. Further underscoring the value of games, Albano (2021) posits that games bestow players with the freedom to create and interact within diverse contexts, fostering both creativity and engagement. Additionally, McCallum (1980) identifies the following advantages of games in language classrooms: focusing learners' attention on certain structures, grammatical patterns, and lexical items; fulfillment of the functions of reinforcement, revision, and enrichment; involving equal engagement of the learners; requiring equal participation of both slow and fast learners; promoting an atmosphere of healthy competition by providing an opportunity for creative use of natural language in a stress-free situation. Moreover, she believes that games need to be organized according to the students' age and linguistic characteristics, a topic that leads into the following section that explores the crucial prerequisites for successful game adaptation in the classroom.

### 2.1.1 Effective Use of games in the language classroom

As regards the incorporation of games into the educational process, Silvers (1982) emphasizes that while many educators tend to be enthusiastic about it, there is a tendency to view games as mere time fillers or a means to break the monotony of learning, rather than recognizing them as valuable learning tools. To ensure that games are not seen as mere diversions and are effective for students, it is crucial that games align with students' proficiency levels, interests, and the specific objectives of the lesson. This notion is supported by the thoughts of Nedomová (2007), who underlines that in the selection of a game, teachers should consider whether the play activity for children is only meant to make the lesson more attractive and protect them from feeling bored, or whether they are aiming at repeating and practicing a specific unit of grammar-, vocabulary item and so on. The duration of the games should also be carefully taken into account.

Huyen and Nga (2003) provide more factors for the effective use of games in FL classrooms: the number of students, proficiency level, cultural context, timing, learning topic, and classroom setting. For instance, younger learners like games with a great deal of movement around the classroom, while older learners may prefer to sit still. It seems insightful and significant to take into consideration these factors for my future activities. Depending on the goals, games could be used at various stages of the lesson (such as warmers or ice-breakers at the beginning, for assessment, and review-revision) (Albano, 2021). To deepen the learning experience, Langran and Purcell (1994) suggest having a follow-up activity after the game to give students time and space for further reflection. According to Sugar (1998), the formula for a good educational game is a combination of

both fun and challenge. Thus, lessons should not be turned into eternal “game fests” but should be considered as an integral part of the instructional repertoire. Therefore, it is important to integrate them into the regular syllabus and curriculum (Deesri, 2002).

### 2.1.2 Types of games and their introduction

This study is unable to encompass the entire variety of games for language learning as it goes beyond the scope of the study. In the subsequent subsection, a general overview of various types of language games will be provided, along with some illustrative examples. Categorizing games can be challenging because the categories frequently overlap. Some games tend to fall into several categories, which may render the categorization of them a complex task. Hadfield (1990) proposes two ways to classify games. He divides language games into two types: language games and communicative games. Language games focus on accuracy, such as in giving the correct antonym. Communicative games assume the successful sharing of information and ideas. The researcher suggests further classification into smaller categories: sorting games, arrangement games, information gap games, guessing games, search games, matching games, labeling games, exchange games; board games, and role-playing games. Lee’s classification (1979) only partially coincides with Hadfield’s. The former divides games into ten categories: structure games which provide the experience of the use of particular patterns of syntax in communication; vocabulary games in which the learners’ attention is focused mainly on words; spelling, and pronunciation games; number games; listen-and-do games; games and writing; miming and role play; discussion games.

Common vocabulary games such as Pictionary, Charades, and Hangman are often adapted for vocabulary practice. Pictionary proves effective with concrete nouns, prompting students to draw and memorize, aiding visual memorization. I personally use Hangman to assess vocabulary comprehension, particularly spelling. Activities such as Simon Says are part of TPR method, in which languages are taught by enabling students to observe and take their time to understand the language before they have to speak it. Therefore, students must listen carefully to understand when to follow Simon's directions and when to ignore them. This game can also be used to practice necessary vocabulary. According to the Aðalnámskrá grunnskóla. Erlend mál (2007), games could be a proper teaching method and games such as role-playing, imitation games, theatrical expression, and problem-solving activities are particularly appropriate for all phases of language acquisition. The dramatic nature of these games will be explored further in the subsequent section.

### 2.1.3 The teacher's role in conducting games

One of the successful elements of the implementation of games into language classrooms is how these are conducted by the teacher. Games are learner-centered activities because students are very active during the game, and they may take on the role of leaders, with instructors having the roles of facilitators. Educators ought to be well conscious of their role in the use of games in their classrooms. While it can be challenging to find a game that perfectly suits all students' needs, thorough preparation on the teacher's part is crucial. In some cases, teachers might require additional equipment or materials that are not readily available in the classroom. Consequently, following McCallum's advice (1980), teachers should arrange the game well in advance of the lesson. Before the rules are explained to the class, the teacher must have an understanding of how the game is played. Particularly when working with children, the instructor should always be willing to adjust the game to the particular characteristics of the class. Then, teachers have to ensure that they explain the rules of the game in a detailed manner and that all instructions are made clear before starting the game. This issue concerns me as I am afraid of not being clear enough in my explanations in my future case studies. For the younger students especially, it may be necessary to use the first language, because if these students do not understand how to play the game, there is no educational purpose in engaging in it. Therefore, demonstrations have the potential to be useful because they can help younger students comprehend the rules in a plain and clear way. Moreover, it is essential to clarify the purpose of the game to the students in the classroom. They should realize the value of the activity. Lacking this step, students might erroneously think it is just a waste of time or a funny activity without educational value. I faced this in my teaching practice where I needed to explain the real reasons for playing interactive online language games to my younger students who always wanted to play without differentiating what exactly we were aiming to do and why.

While playing the game, teachers are expected to observe and be ready to help, but without unnecessarily interrupting the flow of the game, as this could affect fluency, leading to discouraging students from participation. According to Celce-Murcia (1979), "interruptions should be as infrequent as possible so as not to divert the student's interest from the game. An alternative to immediate correction is to note errors and discuss them when the game is over". To put it in another way, as sudden interruptions can distract students' attention, it is better to wait until the end of the game to discuss and correct students' mistakes. Thus, language games can function as a natural introduction to dramatic activities and as preparation for role-playing, improvisation, and other theatrical activities (Davies 1990). They are intended to create immediate motivation as well as physical and/or mental stimulation that engages or supports students in active learning centered on

authentic/active communication in the target language (Stoate 1984, Dougill 1987). In the following section, the focus will shift to drama in language learning, exploring activity types, benefits, and an endeavor to further define the teacher's role.

## 2.2 Drama in Language Learning

The integration of drama into foreign language teaching is not a recent development; its historical roots can be traced back to the nineteenth century (Schewe 2007). From the late 1970s, when the communicative approach gained prominence, this method became an integral part of foreign language education. Stone McNeece (1983) states that the role of drama in connection with academic curriculum of foreign languages has undergone some major changes in the past fifty years. Traditionally, drama was regarded as an extracurricular pursuit, often focused on performance and confined in its application to the broader curriculum. Theater groups from abroad were brought in to perform for foreign language students, but mainly as examples of a limited concept of cultural excellence. If it happened that theater was included in the curriculum, it was studied for its literary worth or to teach students the fundamentals of dramatic form or cultural values from a more historical perspective. Only recently has drama entered the classroom as a learning tool, as a technique instead of a subject and has been recognized for its pedagogical contributions to learning by a number of scholars in the fields of drama/theatre in education (Heathcote & Bolton 1995; Wagner 1998; Neelands 2000; O'Connor 2010; Nicholson 2011; Anderson 2012), process drama, role drama and story drama (O'Toole 1992; O'Neill 1995; Howell & Heap 2001, 2005; Miller & Saxton 2004; Booth 2005; Fels & Belliveau 2008; Eriksson 2009) as well as drama and literacy (Grady 2000; Baldwin & Fleming 2003). By utilizing a variety of teaching and learning approaches, these scholars offer aesthetic, creative, imaginative, and educational experiences for participants to some extent, and show the change in perspective which is especially important for the teaching of foreign languages and cultures since drama in FLT has numerous benefits. The theater approach strengthens language instruction while also offering an engaging environment for cultural immersion. The complexity of this drama technique will be further explored in the segment that comes next, along with its variety and benefits.

### 2.2.1 Definition of drama and types of drama activities

Drama is a term that can be described in a variety of ways. Hubbard et al. (1986) define drama as an umbrella term encompassing "a wide range of oral activities that have an element of creativity present" (Hubbard et al, 1986: 318). Holden refers to any activity in which students are asked to personify themselves or someone else in an imaginary situation. However, this limited viewpoint



fails to capture the diverse ways and contexts in which drama functions, including situations closely resembling reality. O'Neill (1985:118) offers a more comprehensive definition, portraying drama in foreign language teaching as “an approach that integrates the study of language with the production and performance of original, improvised scenes and plays”. She highlights the interactive and experiential essence of drama, where students actively use a target language to interact, express ideas, and solve problems in a dramatic context. However, this approach uses not only original ideas but also accomplished artworks such as, for example, Shakespeare's sonnets (see Giebert 2014). Another well-known drama in education researcher, Bolton (1985) considers drama in FLT to be a disciplined, intentional process of meaning-making through aesthetic experience, which seems to be too extensive as a definition. According to him, drama goes beyond language practice and involves a deeper exploration of emotion, imagination, and personal connections to language and cultural content.

Piazzoli (2011) describes drama in language teaching as an embodied, multimodal approach to language learning that engages students in physical, vocal, and emotional exploration. She highlights the role of body, gesture, voice, and nonverbal communication in enhancing language learning and promoting a coherent understanding of language and culture. This definition showcases the complexity of the term. Ackroyd (2000) and Dillon (2006) underline the role of drama in creating a meaningful and authentic context for language use, communicative skill development, and understanding of culture. They defined drama in FLT as a pedagogical approach that integrates language learning with dramatic activities such as role-playing, improvisation, and performance. I will adopt this definition as a “working” one for my research.

In the following, a brief review of the main types of dramatization will show that it can be applied in various forms at foreign language classes. These include tableaux, mime, role-playing games, process drama interactive tasks like dialogues, and theatricalized stories. Improvisation will not be considered here, as the next chapter will focus on this aspect. However, this classification is not the only one as drama, itself, is not a static entity. Throughout history, drama has not only had its own evolutions, styles, and approaches but has also been used in tandem with other disciplines to accomplish various goals. Among the approaches to drama in L2 learning are the following: drama and theater, process and product, and small and large forms. In regards to the first distinction, the term “drama” is used to describe activities in which students write plays, scenes, or take part in dramatic play, whereas the term “theater” refers to manifestations of drama in performance (O'Toole & O'Mara 2007). Between “product-based” and “process-based” methods, yet another

distinction is made. The selection, study, and rehearsing of a text along with a final performance, frequently in front of an audience, are all considered to be components of a product approach (Wagner 2002; Liu 2002; Moody 2002). Contrarily, a process-based approach emphasizes the creation of a dramatic piece through in-class improvisations and theater activities; these student-generated works may or may not be written down or presented to an audience. As for the third distinction, Schewe's (2013) model of "Small-Scale Forms and Large-Scale Forms" of performative language pedagogy presents a more nuanced view of drama than either of the previous dichotomous conceptualizations. For Schewe, Small-Scale forms include in-class improvisations that unfold in a shorter time frame (one class or one unit) and do not typically result in a staged performance (such as process drama). Large-scale forms include both script-based and devised theatre, which requires more time. He asserts that Large-Scale Forms demand high motivation and dedication and can only be materialized in extra-curricular contexts. Due to these classifications, my future improvisation activities can be defined as drama process-based small-scale forms.

#### 2.2.1.1 Frozen images (tableaux vivant)

The creation of statues or sculptures is one of the basic theatrical techniques that was devised by Brazilian theater director and writer Boal in 1980. It is a drama training technique that is described by Schewe and Woodhouse (2018) as the vision of an action that occurred, is occurring, or will occur at a certain point in time. Various poses that have been taken, are being taken, or will be taken by characters at this same moment are demonstrated. Characters in still images have a precise posture, which includes particular motions and facial expressions, just like in a photograph or paused film frame. Sculptures or statues can also be termed frozen or still images. Often referred to as frozen or still images, these sculptures share similarities with pantomimes, as both rely on nonverbal expression - employing the body rather than language. Unlike miming, however, statues and sculptures generally involve no movement during their formation, resembling photographs or static frames from a video. It is a very controlled and simple style of expression, and due to its formal clarity and accuracy, it has the potential to have an incredibly significant effect on the audience.

This technique proves exceptionally effective within language classes because it allows participants to work with other team members to create their images. Second-language learners would definitely gain more confidence when they have been encouraged to share ideas and work in groups (Athimoolam, et al., 2004). L2 learners who are not confident enough to communicate in the target language can be gradually introduced to language use by first letting them create still images and

then adding words to their presentations (Athimoolam, et al., 2004). The still image encourages guessing and multiple semantic interpretations, which helps learners produce language without anxiety. This makes it possible for teachers to identify the forms that students have already mastered as well as those that they still need to learn in order to communicate their ideas and thoughts clearly and idiomatically, and to introduce and enforce these forms in accordance with the demands of communication (Liu 2002).

It seems to be quick and simple to learn the skill of creating a still image. Ronke (2005) asserts that the incorporation of statues and sculptures is accessible even for educators with limited theater experience—an observation supported by my own encounters in teaching. The task of creating a still image is manageable and learners tend to enjoy working towards a visible product. As the competence of the learner increases, the still images become more precise, more accurate, and coherent and contain fewer redundant elements. As noted by Schewe and Woodhouse (2018), by mastering the skill, students will be able to demonstrate and understand abstract concepts through still images as the main function of still images is to symbolically concentrate the meaning that a student or a group of students attribute to actions and poses.

#### 2.2.1.2 Mime

Mime, as defined by Dugill (1987), involves the nonverbal portrayal of an idea or narrative through gestures, bodily movements, and expressions. This drama technique highlights the paralinguistic aspects of communication. From a teacher's point of view, mime appears to be a good method of inclusion even for those students whose speaking abilities are not the best, and most of the time they wish not to participate (Khilova 2008). Sauvignon (Savignon, et al., 1983) stated that pantomime helps students get used to the idea of speaking in front of peers without worrying and that while language is not used during pantomime, it can provide an incentive to use it. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations of mime. According to Long and Castonias (1976), while mime offers certain benefits, it has its constraints when it comes to conveying intricate linguistic units, and hence should not be solely relied upon for teaching such components. Another issue with mime is the difficulty of completely removing the personality aspect from it. Learners who enjoy watching a pantomime may not want to perform it. The teacher should be considerate of it and not insist on participation and at the same time encourage students to perform. (Gaudert et al. 1990).

### 2.2.1.3 Role-play

In the view of Blatner (2002), role-playing is a method of exploring problems that emerge in socially complex situations. MacCaslin (1990) aligns with this view, claiming that the emphasis is on the value of role adoption for the participant rather than the development of the art. In role-playing, students are assigned roles, which they perform according to a given scenario. According to Kodochigova (2001), role play prepares learners to communicate in L2 in a variety of social and cultural contexts. This educational approach, as opposed to therapeutic, addresses situations that are universally relevant.

Role-playing facilitates a deeper engagement with previous experiences as participants embody characters within the narrative, as noted by Wrentschur and Altman (2002). They observed that this practice allows individuals to take on roles that might be unfamiliar to them, cultivating empathy for different perspectives. Role-playing is also helpful in recreating the language used by students in different situations, the kind of language that students are likely to need outside the classroom (Livingstone 1983). My improv activities will have the same focus. Livingstone (1983) sees role-playing as an activity that gives students the opportunity to practice the linguistic aspects of role-playing behavior, a real role they may need outside the classroom.

Adopting a role is a crucial element of dramatization and Heathcote (1984) agrees that role-playing is so versatile that it is suitable for all personalities and learning environments when applied in education. In the broad sense, role-playing involves playing the role of an imaginary person, usually in a hypothetical and sometimes in a real situation (Venugopal 1986). Ideas for role-playing can be taken from the situations that teachers and students face in their lives, from books, television programs, and movies. From Richards' (1985) perspective, role-playing requires the creation of a situation that describes the setting, the participants, and the target problem. Students should perform the assigned task using all the language resources at their disposal. Various types of role plays exist, ranging from dramatic plays, story dramas, and socio-dramas to seminar-style presentations, debates, and interviews. These range from simpler role plays suitable for less proficient students to more complex ones suited for advanced learners. Different role-play types demand distinct approaches, affecting the introduction, role descriptions, facilitation, and wrap-up techniques. However, the specifics of these variations are beyond the scope of this research.

#### 2.2.1.4 Storytelling

Storytelling, one of the oldest methods of learning and transmitting oral tradition, continues to serve as a means of conveying the culture, traditions, and heritage of past generations. Storytelling is considered to be mainly based on imitation and repetition, however, there are many creativity activities that can be conducted in the classroom because this technique directs students to use their imagination. Wright (1997) pointed out that storytelling is much more reliant on vocabulary and ensures a range and stability of language experiences for students.

Storytelling is subdivided into three stages: the pre-test stage, which consists of a warm-up that enables learners to prepare for listening comprehension by presenting the target vocabulary and utilizing some visual realia, such as posters, to draw learners' attention to the story. The second stage is the intra-story part, which helps learners to understand the context without anxiety thanks to a pleasant atmosphere. The final phase is the post-storytelling part, which includes follow-up activities or storytelling to promote learners' anticipation or creativity skills (Ying-Li 2010). The most important materials for storytelling are sounds, words, and language patterns. Storytellers use their voice, face, hands, i.e. facial expressions and gestures (Dujmovic, 2006). Dujmovic (2006) also highlights teachers' role in storytelling claiming that due to storytelling techniques, they have the opportunity to introduce or review new vocabulary or sentence structures in a more varied, memorable, and familiar context. Therefore, it could be stated that storytelling engages learners in the context of meaningful, interactive communication, creates a comforting atmosphere, and prepares them for natural learning of the target language. Some research has shown that storytelling promotes the development of lexical skills, so teachers should render and attempt to interest students in listening to storytelling (Huang, 2006). Furthermore, storytelling can be regarded as an important element of presenting grammatical and syntactic features in an intriguing and meaningful context. In addition, according to Dalziel and Pennacchi (2012), storytelling not only develops narrative skills but also fosters active listening. In many instances of pair or group work in foreign language classes, learners may be so absorbed in their own contributions that they unwittingly overlook their fellow learners. Such an oversight can undermine the authenticity of the communicative event. Therefore, to achieve the best learning outcome for students, it is important to facilitate both listening and narrative acquisition.

#### 2.2.1.5 Process Drama

Process Drama occupies a significant space in the drama world today and is unique among interactive theatre genres in theater tradition. The method was developed by Heathcote in the 1960s

and was formerly known as “educational drama” or “drama in education,” yet it is now known as “process drama” (O’Toole & O’Mara 2007) and can be defined as a genre of applied theatre in which participants, together with the facilitator, engage in the co-construction of a dramatic world (Bowell and Heap 2001). Its primary attributes, according to O’Toole and O’Mara (2007), include being spontaneous in style, excluding an outside audience, and requiring learners to reflect through a discussion. As regards the form of process drama, Wang (2017) states that is a unique way of learning which comes with stories, role-play, dramatic tension, imagination, and other artistic elements. Process drama does not provide evaluations, in contrast to the regular education of the curriculum. It is more likely to place emphasis on the things that learners were reflecting on and contemplating during the process. Process drama encourages natural interaction between students and teachers, allowing for the exploration of a wider variety of registers (Kao et al. 2011), increases student engagement and participation (To et al. 2011), lowers affective barriers like anxiety (Piazzoli 2011), and produces embodied, multi-modal interaction (Rothwell 2011). More recent scholars of process drama for language education focus on how process drama is utilised in embodying language in action (Piazzoli 2018; Morris 2017; Spitale 2016; Anumudu 2017; Ashley 2016), playbuilding (Webb 2016; Labadie 2017; McGovern 2016), role-play (Tran 2016; St. Peter 2017; Hwang 2016), enhancing student agency (Weber 2018), playwriting (Trujillo 2018), improving retention rates (Weitkamp 2017), rehearsal techniques (Maxfield 2017; Syler 2016) and creative reading and writing (Hellman 2017; Eyerly 2017). This denotes a general shift in process drama for language education toward concentrating on the participant's greater context and taking into account the influence of outside variables on outcomes. Furthermore, in the last decade, research has examined how process drama facilitates the acquisition of spoken language in the setting of language instruction (Carroll and Cameron 2009; O’Connor, Anderson, and Mullen 2014). Students are exposed to new circumstances that they would not have encountered in the actual world. The roles, attitudes, and views that students and teachers adopt can vary, as can the language requirements. According to Gallagher, Freeman, and Wessells (2010), process drama fosters unusual and potentially more democratic relationships in the classroom by frequently reversing the imbalances of power between teachers and students.

In terms of the framework of process drama, Piazzoli (2009) describes a structured sequence consisting of four inherent stages essential for achieving educational goals. The initial stage, called pre-text, introduces a stimulus, such as a picture, story, movie scene, or poem, which serves as a starting point for the subsequent process drama. Following the pre-text is the initiation phase, which encourages participants to adopt roles within the defined context. Next comes the experiencing

phase, which allows participants to immerse themselves in the reality of the established context. Finally, the reflective phase allows students to engage in discussion, promoting the development of valuable linguistic and cultural knowledge gained in the process. The process drama approach appears to me to be particularly important because of its semi-improvisational nature, in that the drama is constantly improvised, creating the learning context on the spot in the classroom, with the students all involved as participants in the creation of the drama and as characters within it-which unfold as it goes along, rarely complete, and never completely preordained. According to Caplan (2011) and Neelands and Goode (2000), process drama takes use of essential conventions including teacher-in-role, freeze frames, tableau, hotseat, soundscape, mantle of the expert, and improvisation.

### 2.3.1 Benefits of drama in the language classroom

Based on numerous studies conducted around the world, the utilization of drama in foreign language classrooms has mostly shown only positive outcomes. Bolton (1984) and Heathcote (1984) were the first academics to recognize the importance of the presence of theater in the first language classroom and to encourage teachers to incorporate it into their lessons. In response to their encouragement, second and foreign language teachers began to devise new approaches to integrate this potential instrument into foreign language lessons because, according to them, theater is able to effectively affect the four basic skills: reading, speaking, writing, and listening (Dodson 2000; Dundar 2013; Aldavero 2008). Numerous studies, including works by Maley and Duff (2001), Brumfit (1991), and Philips (2003), have provided support for the advantages of incorporating drama in foreign language learning. Zyoud (2010) asserts that drama transcends cognitive development, also nurturing emotional and personal growth in ways that conventional methods cannot achieve. Drama appears to be an excellent method of developing students' self-confidence. In this connection, Pietro (1987) notes that less talkative learners are often more willing to engage in discussion when they realize that they are not being dominated by the figure of the teacher.

Ronke (2005) asserts that drama provides a framework context for practicing pronunciation and intonation as students deal with communicative situations set in a given context. Thus, these situations involve a broad spectrum of various forms of speech (formal or colloquial), and differences in pronunciation related to emotional tension, the speaker's area of residence, or the register used. They also incorporate different speech patterns (tempo and rhythm) and other linguistic features. Schewe and Shaw (1993) claim these situations to be an experimental context

for a foreign language i.e. ideal settings in which the learner could recognize, experience, and acquire a much broader range of pronunciation and prosodic features than when reading texts in student textbooks.

Sarıçoban (2004) contends that drama deepens learners' grasp of the target language and culture, enabling them to interpret life experiences and comprehend specific circumstances with greater insight. Belliveau and Kim (2013) develop the idea of promoting intercultural communicative competence through drama activities. Piazzoli (2022) offers a new angle to the issue making it clear that drama assists in representing and understanding the untranslatable words found in different languages. This demonstrates another power and benefit of drama. Another important advantage of drama is its ability to impact on reducing stress in the classroom. Regularly scheduled activities (e.g., drama/theater training and performances) have the potential to relieve students' speech-related anxiety by allowing them to continually explore and experience target language in a variety of meaningful, realistic contexts (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson & Soler, 2002). Moreover, Medina and Campano (2006: 133) claim that drama “can open critical spaces within which students negotiate diverse perspectives and generate knowledge” and affords students a “safe space to fictionalize reality and enact more empowering individual and collective representations from which others might learn.”

Additionally, Maley (2005) enumerates multiple benefits of drama, including its natural integration of language skills and its harmonious blend of verbal and nonverbal communication. He also states that by contextualizing language completely, the drama brings learning interactions to life through an intense focus on meaning and it promotes an open, exploratory learning style in which creativity and imagination are given an extensive development. This, however, fosters risk-taking, which is an essential element of effective language learning that positively affects the dynamics and atmosphere of the classroom, contributing to the formation of a cooperative group learning experience. It is important to note that the value of drama lies not in performance but in the present moment, where students engage in “acting work” for language exploration and imagery rather than for public exhibition (Maley and Duff 1984). This remark seems to mean that students do their “acting work” for language and imagery rather than for show. Gaudert (1990) confirms the significance of not having an audience for all drama activities in the classroom. For a better perception of the information, I have placed the main benefits of the drama in the following table 1.



Benefits	Sources
Drama transcends cognitive development, also nurturing emotional and personal growth	Zyoud (2010)
Drama appears to be an excellent method of developing students' self-confidence	Pietro (1987)
Drama provides a framework context for practicing pronunciation and intonation	Ronke (2005)
Drama deepens learners' grasp of the target language and culture,	Sarıçoban (2004), Belliveau & Kim (2013), Piazoli (2022)
Drama impacts on reducing stress and anxiety in the classroom	Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson & Soler (2002), Medina & Campano (2006)
Drama brings learning interactions to life through an intense focus on meaning and it promotes an open, exploratory learning style in which creativity and imagination are given an extensive development	Maley (2005)

Table 1. Benefits of drama

### 2.3.2 Effective Implementation of Drama in the FL Classroom

Fels and McGivern (2002) believe that not all dramatic approaches are useful to second language learners and some might be harmful. While drama holds immense potential in the FL classroom, there are some prerequisites to address before its integration. Firstly, the teacher should be well-prepared for the lesson. It is essential for them to define the objectives of the lesson beforehand and select the type of activity according to the language skills and interests of their students. The instructor should also be attuned to social or religious taboos that could influence the group dynamics, thereby establishing a safe and respectful learning environment. I should take all this into account for my future case studies.

Acknowledging potential challenges seems to be extremely important. These difficulties could include students feeling anxious when speaking in front of their peers, potential behavioral problems,

or difficulties with fluency for students with not sufficient foreign language skills. Therefore, teachers should try to prepare for these situations to enable a successful drama lesson. Furthermore, the justification for including theatrical activities requires thoughtful consideration. The reasons for implementing drama may lie in its alignment with the curriculum, the possibility of raising awareness of paralinguistic features, linguistic accessibility, intrinsic interest, the appropriateness in terms of timing of the lesson, the number of students and space, and the potential for drama activities to be used in the future. This argument emphasizes that I should be more specific in describing the motivations behind my improvisational actions, driven not just by my individual and research interests but also by the fundamental and numerous practical advantages for the participants of my case studies.

#### 2.4 Teacher's Role in Drama Activities

Most language teachers, as noted by Beaven and Álvarez (2014), have no training in drama. Dramatic activities are frequently not an expected part of the foreign language instruction program but rather depend on the particular teacher's specific interests and background. As improvisation is one of the most prominent drama activities, it seems even more important for me to explore the teacher's role in conducting drama activities. Understanding and defining of it will serve as a guiding compass for my behavior and teaching approach during the case study sessions.

Bessadet (2022) claims that teachers should act as facilitators and supervisors. For facilitators it is important to make sure that all students are able to speak freely during facilitation sessions. Some students may be more active than others and their role is to assure that everyone has an equal voice. Rivers (1972) emphasizes that effective FL teachers should embody a dynamic presence in the classroom, even though professional acting expertise is not required. This viewpoint resonates with my approach, as I recognize the teacher's role as a facilitator of engagement and interaction. Ronke (2005) underlines the importance of the teacher's contribution in reducing or eliminating pressures, so students may be able to enjoy the new language and culture and feel encouraged to experiment with them in the presence of their peers. Maley (2005) states that there is a shift of responsibility for learning from the teacher to the students as the drama method fosters student-centered learning. Therefore, the teacher acts as an initiator, organizer, and communicative partner, and only at the beginning of the FL learning process – in the role of the information specialist. I am going to act as a source of information before the beginning of every game, and in other cases, I ought to be a mediator and will involve in games as a “teacher-in-role” only if needed. This technique was devised by Heathcote. The teacher adopts a role in the fictional context of an improvised scene. The teacher

may assume this role, such as that of a school principal or conference leader, completely spontaneously. The purpose is to create “the dramatic tension of the theater” (Bolton 1993) and to provoke students' reactions to the topic at hand. However, since the activity demands full student involvement and minimal teacher engagement, the teacher may fear that they may lose control of the class and students. Therefore, it appears important to be aware of possible challenges and try to prepare beforehand.

Returning to process drama, the teacher's role in it is complex because a teacher simultaneously covers four functions: playwright, director, actor, and educator. Speaking about a teacher's role as an artist, it is important to pay attention to a fundamental difference between the teacher as an artist, and the teacher entertainer, as pointed out by O'Neill (2006). While the former involves students as active co-artists, the latter sees students as passive audiences. According to the scholar, the model of entertainer is not the most relevant one for a teacher, because it will not provide an active response. The teacher-artist, on the other hand, creates an active, spontaneous reaction.

Another possible role of the teacher is of formmeister. Schewe and Woodhouse (2018), based on Bauhaus's ideas, stated that the basic concept of a Formmeister (Form Master) might have potential within the drama approach to foreign language teaching. This implies that the language teacher should aim to become as proficient as possible in the many “art forms” through which the aesthetic experience is achieved. Following this notion, I pursue improvisation not only in theory in the context of research but also in practice online and offline believing it will help me be a better formmeister for my case study participants and students.

## 2.5 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I looked at games and drama in language education. Both are important for my further work as I realized that improvisation games represent a combination of both play and drama approaches. These two facets, drama and play, can be harnessed as potent teaching tools within language instruction when structured and explored proficiently. Their utility extends across various foreign language classes, adeptly integrating the four foundational language skills, vocabulary, and grammatical structures. Moreover, drama and play have a transformative ability to propel students beyond the confines of traditional educational frameworks. Games and drama activities ensure that language learners get paralinguistic practice and will lead them to develop fluency, maturity, motivation, bodily activity, and interpersonal relationships. Within this, the drama approach shines with its socially oriented learning structures and emotive exercises, nurturing positive group dynamics

that are pivotal for both effective language acquisition and the students' forthcoming professional journey. Moreover, drama possesses the unique ability to engage many different learning styles, which fosters connections with students and keeps modern students motivated and engages all students during the entire lesson. It evokes excitement, fun, and laughter in the language classroom and stimulates cooperation and collaboration in a creative context. I plan to achieve the same effect with my improv activities as I will start to adapt improvisational games in Chapter 4, I will take these realizations into account to design enlightening and effective learning activities. However, first I need a strong theoretical foundation in improvisation, which is what the following chapter will focus on.



## Chapter 3

### Improvisation in Theatre, Education, and Foreign Language Teaching

My favorite quote, which is a good description for both the topic of my thesis and life in general, is the following statement by Price: “Life is nothing more than a grand series of improvisations” (Price 1980:15). Every day, we engage in acts of improvisation, also referred to as improv, which span numerous facets of our lives, frequently without realizing it. Musicians, composers, visual artists, choreographers, and dancers have used improvisation in a variety of ways throughout history to warm up their bodies and instruments, improve their technique, get past creative roadblocks, and release original, spontaneous ideas in project development. Having its roots in artistic traditions, improvisation has evolved into a subject of inquiry extending beyond the realm of the arts. It is now a subject of study in various domains, including entrepreneurship, education, change management, organizational strategy, psychology, psychotherapy, sports, humanitarian aid, and more. However, this chapter will focus on improvisation as a drama approach and its implementation in education in general and language teaching in particular. As I am proposing to adapt effective improvisation activities in the next chapter, this chapter is the essential theoretical foundation for it.

To this end, the present chapter is divided into multiple sections: it first will examine the fundamentals of improv, starting with the legacy of the pioneers of improvisation - Spolin and Johnstone, as documented in and supported by their seminal works - *“Improvisation for the Theater”* - (1999) and *“Improv: Improvisation and the Theatre”* - (1979). These works laid the foundation for improvisational theater techniques and remain classics in the field. Together, these texts and a wide range of other studies will provide a thorough understanding of improv theory and practice, helping me to develop my improv vocabulary and gain awareness of how to apply the form so that I can adapt and conduct my improv games. To present the art of improvisation as an approach to learning foreign and second languages, the subsequent section will give a brief overview of the principles and application of improvisational theater in both theatrical and non-theatrical contexts. Finally, the last section will explore the benefits of the approach and the teacher’s role.

#### 3.1 The fundamentals of improvisation

The term ‘improvisation’ is etymologically derived from the Latin ‘improvisus’,

meaning ‘unforeseen’ or ‘unexpected’ (Montuori 2003: 24; Dehlin 2008: 25). Although improvisation has ancient roots, this research does not concentrate on where it came from. Instead, it explores the phenomenon’s many facets and reveals how deeply it has impacted fields ranging from theater to language instruction. When it comes to improvisation, McNeece (1983) describes it as a technique designed to free people from the intellectual constraints and limitations of traditional rationality. This liberation, in turn, unleashes the boundless energy of the imagination with the aim of not simply adapting to existing circumstances, but rather transforming them. Landy (1982) offers a more operational definition, identifying improvisation as an unscripted, unrehearsed, and spontaneous series of actions. These actions are initiated by minimal directives from a leader, usually accompanied by statements identifying the person’s identity, place, and purpose at the moment.

Generally, all practitioners in contemporary theater use improvisation to some degree, both in preparing performances and in presenting them. Chacra, Artaud, Meyerhold, Brecht, Stanislavsky, and Boal are some examples of those who made theater a language of improvisation, breaking with formality. One central aspect of research on theatrical improvisation is spontaneity (Moreno 1977; Spolin 1970; Johnstone 1979; Boal 2003; Chacra 1983; Meyerhold 1968; Hauser 1972; Berthold 2001; Roubine 2003; Moussinac 1957), which liberates individuals from the more mechanized patterns stopping the stimulation of feelings and observations of the world (Moreno 1977). Spontaneity, creativity, and reflexivity are characteristics individuals tend to possess, according to Boal (1975). Yet, in some cases, they need to be activated because adulthood wrongly implies the withdrawal of these essential principles in any professional activity (Moreno 1977; Spolin 1970; Johnstone 1979). Although they are related, spontaneity and creativity are not interchangeable. According to Chacra (1983), spontaneity is a mental condition that combines processes of action that let go of suppressed emotions, feelings, and tensions. To create and construct new ways of existing in the environment, creativity is awakened (Vera & Crossan 2004, 2005). To engage and relax students, playing is demonstrated when spontaneity and creativity are practiced in the classroom (Mainemelis & Ronson 2006). The relationship between spontaneity and creativity is stimulated by improvisation, which also brings people closer to their internal and external issues and gives them a chance to reevaluate their relationships and worldviews to change them (Berthold 2001; Roubine 2003). Reflexivity is complicated thinking or experience that brings inconsistencies, skepticism, problems, and opportunities to light. Reflexivity and aesthetics are linked to everyday experience (Sutherland 2013).

The theory of improvisation may be visualized as a continuum-based framework. It was developed by DeMarco (2012) and later refined by Seppänen (2022) to examine theatrical improvisation at the nexus of performance and practical theater (see Figure 1). The non-artistic end of the continuum represents how humans live in the real world, responding quickly and consistently to changing circumstances. Improvisation is referred to as an art form at the artistic end of the continuum. Figure 1 depicts improvisation in the context of performance theater as both on-stage improvised pieces and as a method of actor development that cultivates skills like creativity and stage presence (Frost & Yarrow 2015).

Applied improvisation is an umbrella term, referring to an approach of using theater improvisation techniques in non-artistic contexts as a tool to pursue specific goals (Tint & Froerer 2014) - the area to which my improvisational activities belong. By exploring this side of the continuum, I realized that theatrical techniques and principles are occasionally applied in non-theatrical contexts to achieve goals beyond the artistic experience itself (Baldwin 2009; Taylor 2003). Frost and Yarrow (2015) advise focusing on the “meta-skills” at work, such as accepting uncertainty, taking risks, being present, and using signals and impulses within oneself and in the environment, rather than just the technical skills of improvisation (games and drills that can be taught and learned). Nevertheless, I am going to take the games into account, too, by exploring their nature, essence, and application among other practitioners.

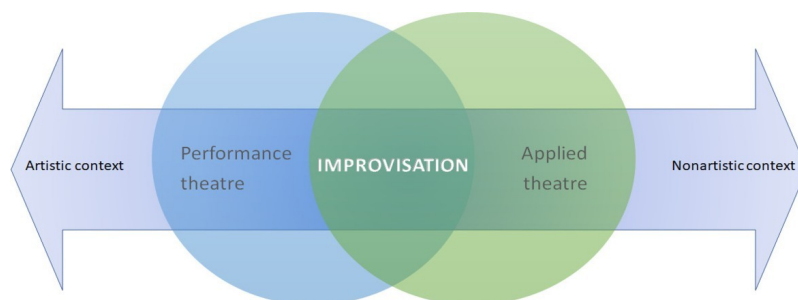


Figure 1 The continuum model of theatre improvisation (Seppänen, 2022) adapted from DeMarco (2012)

Source: Seppänen & Toivanen (2023)

In the previous chapter, I explored the issue of play, the value of which is a crucial element of improvisation. As observed by Hodgson and Richards (1974), dramatic improvisation can be witnessed by watching children play. Watching the long-form improvisation show *Improvisation: sto-*



ries (2021 – present), I had a similar thought, that actors on stage behave very similarly to how children act when they invent games and participate in them. Although popular literature tends to equate improvisation with play (see Nachmanovitch 1990), improvisation is by far not always “playful”. It can be conceptualized and practiced as a serious activity (Turner 1982). Both Spolin and Johnstone, as Dudek (2007) mentions, selected the game format to serve the theatrical process: to train actors, to solve directorial problems during rehearsals, and to create original characters and stage material for writers and ensemble acting companies. In the next section, I will take a closer look at the principles of their games and work.

### 3.1.1 Spolin and Johnstone

From the work of Spolin and Johnstone, improvisation has developed into a professionally performed art form in its own right. Both teachers were inspired to develop structured games as a way to address issues that arose during the formal theatrical process, even though Spolin laid the groundwork for The Second City, known for its renowned sketch comedy, and Johnstone created Theatresports, the most popular comedy improv form globally. McLaughlin (2022) observed that there is a great resonance between Spolin and Johnstone. He noted that both were educators working first with youth before their methodology was applied to adults; both considered engagement with reality in the moment to be the key to liberating the creative imagination; both saw games as the key to entering this state of interaction with the world and others; and both believed that discipline imposed by authority was the greatest obstacle to this liberation.

Johnstone believed that anxiety prevents most players from improvising completely spontaneously, in line with Spolin’s theory. Players were concerned about the information their responses might expose, about being unable to come off as clever or witty enough, about making mistakes, or about a mixture of these anxieties.

Johnstone and Spolin both strived to be as straightforward as they could with their students. The only area where they diverge is concerning rewarding behavior. Spolin adopted a rigid assessment philosophy. Whether something is excellent or awful, a teacher has to continue to be neutral. Spolin insisted on simply reviewing what truly occurred after each workout. Johnstone’s use of positive reinforcement tended to stimulate a group and empower students to take chances. Johnstone and Spolin both used side-coaching while playing games. Spolin provided the teacher or director with specific side-coaching language for each game. Johnstone also gave examples of side-coaching that he has used in the past to address difficulties, but he did not constantly use it as regularly or as consistently as Spolin did. Based on Spolin, the

Who (connection), What (mutual activity), and Where (the setting and its contents) served as the foundation for creating a scene. This did not preclude the possibility that specific circumstances could arise or change as the game was being played. Simply put, it meant that the actor in a conventional play and the improvisation both value attention to detail. Johnstone developed an individual answer to the question of Who (interactions) through his study of and work on “status transactions”, and from those relationships the Where and What frequently came to him naturally. Overall, Spolin and Johnstone employed various strategies to deal with the same issues.

Moving from the similarities to the differences, it should be mentioned that the Spolin methodology (1983), originally designed to encourage peer social interaction, places a strong emphasis on spontaneity and intuition (McKnight & Scruggs 2008), whereas Johnstone (1999) initially developed improvisation games and exercises that made it easier to develop storylines for the theater. The terms physicalization (“showing and not telling”), spontaneity (“a moment of explosion”), intuition (“unhampered knowledge beyond the sensory equipment — physical and mental”), audience (“part of the game, not the lonely looker-owners”), and transformation (“actors and audience alike receive... the appearance of a new reality”) were crucial to the Spolin (1999) games’ classification. As noticed by Schwartz (2018), instead of focusing on the lines the students were delivering, Spolin focused on what they were doing on stage. She never gave instructions to her students; instead, she used cooperative activities that were open – ended. The decisions students made in their artistic endeavors were never “right” or “wrong”. Spolin prioritized what the students were doing on stage, rather than on the lines they were saying. Using open-ended, cooperative games, she never would tell students how to do something.

Whatever creative choice a student made was never “right” or “wrong.” On the contrary, it was about getting the attention off of themselves and expressing themselves, always intending to provide the students with a fresh experience and a chance to follow their intuition. Spolin’s improv has applications outside of theater education. It develops powerful, cohesive teams made up of dynamic individuals who are all working for success for the sake of remaining present, enthusiastic and committed to any endeavor. It demands being present, prepared for full engagement as a component of the whole, and provides a possibility to be completely real. Playing becomes a goal in and of itself, eliminating the fear of criticism. Everybody who takes part changes it, being freed from the reward-seeking, failure-averse, anxious, and self-conscious culture to which they are conditioned and adapted. I would like to accomplish the same level of transforma-

tion with my case studies. Although I realize that it is impossible in a one-time event, I still intend to establish the foundations for these changes.

Johnstone prioritizes games in his training even more than Spolin does. According to Johnstone (1999: 130), “Games are an expression of theory”. This explanation of how games can be helpful in the training studio is exceptionally precise. Through games, players can examine theoretical concepts in practice. It coincides with what I want to accomplish with my improv activities. The foci of Johnstone’s improvisation teaching were status, spontaneity, narrative, and masks and trance. As noted by Drinko (2013), in terms of Johnstone’s theory, scenarios that are played sensitively toward the status of the characters create scenes that resemble natural social interactions. Also, Johnstone believed that everyone is naturally spontaneous. By fostering an atmosphere free of fear, he encouraged his students to express themselves freely. Additionally, he continuously exhorted them to stop trying to be good. Many of his games also demanded learners to avoid attention. In his view, students benefit from focus splitting because it frees up the areas of the brain that are used for inhibition. This enables the participant to speak more spontaneously and without being forced to “think” about their next move. The learners’ inability to anticipate future events is another essential feature in maintaining spontaneity. They are instructed to concentrate on what is happening right now or what has already happened in that scene or game.

This is a very important point that I would like to deliver to my students and case study participants. This focus on what has previously occurred in a scene falls under Johnstone’s next category, narrative. He advocates the idea that one should not care about the ending when writing a story. Instead, by adding “obvious” elements to what has already been expressed and also by bringing back information that is part of the “circle” of the story, stories can be spontaneously generated. The final notion, the mask, is the result of Johnstone’s research as well as his understanding of other mask customs. He claimed that using a mask during improvisations might help performers feel even less nervous when performing and can even cause trance states.

As stated by Frost and Yanow (1989), Spolin’s work is highly systematized and, at first glance, can hardly be related to the pure spontaneity of Johnstone’s response. However, she strives to keep the individual performer very tightly focused on the work at any given moment of training, not only to release but also to channel that spontaneity.

### 3.1.2 Types of Improvisation

Improvisation is not a homogenous phenomenon. Several types of improv can be identified. Ronke (2005) distinguishes between free and guided improvisation. She states that free improvisations take place in an open environment with few rules. The situation, setting, time, and people are all up to the players to develop. With relation to the initial scene, the characters, and the process, the teacher offers additional assistance during guided improvisations. If the scene shifts from course, the teacher may make some adjustments or even adopt a role and step in to intercede. Participants feel secure and confident as they perform activities and depict characters thanks to this instruction. Guided improvisations are anticipatory in that the actor has a concept of what might occur as a result of the knowledge they have learned, but their actions are still spontaneous and original. The group's improvisations will be more directed the less experienced they are, which will be the case for my sessions.

Moreover, improvisation can be classified as short- and long-formed. Short-form improvisation, according to Leep (2008), focuses on building a scene within the rules of the game. A short-form improv show, according to Veenstra (2009), consists of “typically several short scenes, each based on a different suggestion, each based on a different game structure, and each with predetermined improvisers” (Veenstra 2009:10). One well-known example of this is the British and American television shows *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* and the Russian television show *Improvisation* and *Improvisators*. As for a long-form, it was created by Del Close (1993) and named *Harold*. Del Close was instrumental in taking Spolin's games and turning them into “*Harold*”. As Drinko (2013) asserts, “*Harold*” is a long- form improvisation, that is usually twenty minutes to ninety minutes long, consisting of vignettes and patterns of short improvisations with thematic, narrative, loose, or direct connections between the scenes. Although I am fond of long-formed improvisation and would like to explore and practice it, my case studies will aim at short-form improv activities.

### 3.1.3 Principles and Rules of Improvisation

It might be thought that since improvisation is something that is performed without preparation, it has no rules or principles, but this is not true. This notion is supported by Duranti and Black (2011), who state that improvisation does not usually refer to random behavior. On the contrary, it entails the creation of meaningful actions that adhere to patterns or principles, or what Pressing (1984) implies as “the referent”, which are sufficiently specific to serve as guidelines and constraints on what to do (and what to expect), and sufficiently generic to permit both individual and group creativity

(Berliner 1997). According to Kobayashi (2013), actors begin, manage, and develop improvised drama by following the improv rules. Although there is not a consensus on all the improvisational theatrical principles, certain concepts are commonly accepted. Some rules and principles may vary depending on the theatrical company and practitioner. Three main rules were derived from Spolin's theory by Close et al. (1994): always accept reality ("Yes, and"); make an active decision (be present); defend what occurs on stage. According to different improvisers, the "yes-and" principle is the basis of improvisation and indeed in rule sets, this rule often comes first (see Del Close 1994, Goodman 2008, Fey 2011, Perone 2011 in Sawyer 2011, Zakharyin 2022). Participants are encouraged to accept and expand upon the ideas put forth by others. Del Close (1994) notes that denials are not permitted in improvisation and that having ethics is a necessary component of a competent team member.

A relatively less universally recognized set of rules, which tends to be similar among different practitioners, includes the rules of focusing on the present moment, active listening, supporting a scene partner – ("be your partner's spotlight" (Zakharyin2022:48) –, using a body and physical movements to express ideas and emotions, avoiding blocks, engaging all senses, playing with status and power dynamics. Moreover, Spolin (1999) recommends avoiding asking questions during scenes since they are sometimes interpreted as an attempt to put the responsibility back on the other person. Instead, participants should offer details to allow the action to progress. The final but not least important rule addresses mistakes. Improvisation teaches students not to be afraid of making mistakes. Spolin (1999) believed that mistakes could result in unexpected and innovative moments. Fey (2011) adds that mistakes should be seen as opportunities, not as failures. Berk and Trieber (2009) consider trust, acceptance, attentive listening, spontaneity, storytelling, and nonverbal communication to be the essential principles of improv as they provide a necessary framework for communication and interaction. Criess (2015) in Flanagan 2015) follows a set of principles called the four Cs of improv: creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication.

As opposed to his colleagues, Johnstone (1979) argued against rules in improvisation, stating that every time somebody makes a rule, it is possible to find an instance where the contrary is perfectly appropriate. Jain (2021) remarks that the very idea of rules may often depress improvisers, who become so worried about not breaking them that they hinder their ability to improvise. He argues that having rules may make improvisers feel safer jumping into the unknown on stage, but improv is not about safety, but rather risk. Once students realize that there are tools, not rules, they are liberated. They are empowered to choose the tools they want to apply, rather than

having their performance dictated by a set of unbreakable “rules”. Although I find rules valuable for understanding the mechanisms of improvisation development, this thought resonates strongly with me. Kobayashi (2013) notes that improvisation rules are of interest to foreign language teachers because they can also be applied to speaking in the classroom. Since there is no time to prepare, actors have to rely on their instincts and impulses, skills that foreign language teachers aim to develop in their learners.

### 3.2 Improvisation in education

Before proceeding to a reflection on improvisation in education, it is important to note that it is not an unambiguous concept that can refer to both a style of teaching as opposed to planning and a drama approach. My research is particularly concerned with the latter. Improvisational theater requires active engagement without prior knowledge and can be included in conventional programs to improve educational environments. It is not a new concept. For instance, Heathcote (1967) argued that improvisation was not just a subject but also a tool for art instructors and science teachers. Similarly, Zmen (2010) and Aadland et al. (2017) support the inclusion of theatre-acting theories in teacher education by arguing that some aspects of actor training may benefit teacher education and the formation of teacher identity. More and more educational institutions, as noted by Patel (2014) are seeing the value of adding improvisational skills programs or workshops that encourage teachers and students to accept the unknowable and think quickly when presenting their research and lectures.

A variety of subjects, including history (Taylor 2008), maths (Smith 1998), civic education (Pellegrino et al. 2010), social sciences (Gravey et al. 2017), archaeology (Trimmis & Kalogirou 2018), and medicine (Hooker & Dalton 2019), have been taught through theatre, music, and improvisation. In the studies I have researched, I have found many various applications of improvisation in different spheres of science and education, and I will consider a few examples. Collective Creation: Improvised Arts and Engineering (also known as “improengineering”) is a new course that Henein (Kloetzer et al. 2020) launched in 2017 at the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, combining the engineering and humanities. The creative processes used in science, engineering, and the performing arts were examined in the course. The strategy consisted of teaching students various improvisational methods used in the performing arts (dance, music, theater), and connecting them to engineering design methods, echoing the CLIL method in some way. Haroldson (2022) implemented improvisation in geoscience courses of Mineralogy and Petrology: students consequently gained transferable abilities that enabled them to adjust to a changing environment, preparing future

scientists to address social issues. Regarding business education, Huffaker and West (2005) introduced business students to improv. The course helped foster community and encouraged risk-taking to create a supportive learning environment, promote experiential learning of key course topics, and provide a dynamic alternative to traditional classroom discussion through creative, non-linear expression and exchange of ideas.

Aylesworth's (2008:114) inclusion of an "improv mindset" in his graduate-level business communication course serves as another illustration of improv being incorporated into the curriculum. He found out that the overly aggressive student learned, while the timid learners gained self-assurance and came to appreciate the value of every effort, and errors were acknowledged as chances to push the conversation in new directions. Phelps et al. (2021) focus on the ways that theatre improvisation has been incorporated into medical school curricula, such as by incorporating more focused "medical improvisation" or "applied improvisation theater" into traditional coursework or by providing instructors and students with independent workshops to enhance the skills necessary for successfully navigating uncertainties encountered in the clinical setting. As regards tourism and hospitality studies, Benjamin and Kline (2019) believe that incorporating improvisational workshops or courses can potentially help students learn to "think on their feet" and become confident in dealing with high-stress or intense situations with customers/visitors once they graduate and enter the workforce. Kloetzer et al. (2020) note that performing arts can be applied in education in different ways: as an artistic tool in addition to a traditional curriculum or more radical performing arts might be the core of the activities. The researchers acknowledged the potential for identifying a continuum containing intermediary solutions, which would appear to be the perfect fit for my case studies.

### 3.3 Improvisation in Language Teaching

While dramatization, with its emphasis on textual interpretation and performance, is well established as a useful method for foreign language learning (Kao & O'Neill 1998; Maley & Duff 2005; Manuel 2008; Stinson 2008; Winston & Stinson, 2014), according to Kurtz (2011), not much research has explored the potential of improvisational activities within foreign language learning. Goodnight et. Al (2021) clarify the title of improv activities calling them improvisational drama techniques (IDTs) because they contain elements of both drama and improvisation. According to Weber (2019), the exercises should have a dramatic component, which entails that participants play parts in invented scenarios. This is based on the idea that the initial safety of engaging behind a metaphorical mask might serve as a first step toward communicating honestly. In addition, the exercises must generate spontaneous speech since this element of improvisation can prepare language

learners for the spontaneous nature of real-world communication. I would agree with this refinement of the term, but for clarity, I tend to adhere to the common term improvisational activities or games.

Regarding the link between improvisation and foreign language learning, Berk and Trieber (2009) argue that the storytelling side is of utmost importance. In accordance with this, Spolin claims that “theater technique is a technique of communication” (1999: 3), and improvisational techniques, embedded in a particular structure of an exercise or game, can promote spontaneous and intuitive communication as well as personal and creative responses to any linguistic content (Matthias 2009). In the context of foreign language teaching, Klinger (2000) notes that students need to apply the appropriate linguistic and non-linguistic tools they are familiar with to use in specially designed contexts where instantaneous responses to unforeseen inputs have to be produced naturally. This might prove challenging for foreign language learners, though, as their affective filters tend to rise and their shutters close. It is a method of motivating students to apply their language skills in spontaneous situations, regardless of how limited they may be. Even if there are evident structural and pronunciation errors in their speech, students gain significantly more speaking experience than they would with many conventional methods. The goals of the next sections are to understand the spectrum of benefits of the approach and the teacher’s role in its successful implementation.

### 3.3.1 Benefits of Improvisation in Language Classroom

Improvisation has the potential to be a fruitful learning strategy, providing a space for the creation of new knowledge by engaging the familiar with the unfamiliar (Graue et. Al 2015). The use of improvisation in arts, education, and foreign language courses has largely produced only positive results, according to various research carried out worldwide (see Berk & Trieber 2009; Crossan & Sorrenti 1997; Moshavi 2001; Sawyer 2004; Spolin 1999). Through improvisation activities, students may experience learning on intellectual, physical, and emotional levels.

As previously pointed out, one of the most significant variables in successful language learning is motivation (see Gardner 1985, Dornyei 2009, Pham 2021, Hennebry-Leung & Xiao 2023), and improv brings together all key motivating factors (De Michele 2019). It satisfies students’ needs for the following: belonging, by offering them the chance to collaborate with others; autonomy, by allowing for self-expression, choice, and creativity; power/competence, because of the straightforward guiding frameworks within each game and because students draw upon their own experience; and



fun, by allowing for self-expression and creativity. Being student-centered instead of a teacher-centered activity, improvisation fosters motivation and self-esteem (Ronke 2005). De Michele (2019) also notes that improv renders abstract and complicated ideas, concepts, or processes more concrete. The course on “improengineering” discussed above is a good example of this notion. Berlinger (2000) adds that improvisation motivates students to generate imaginative and detailed ideas, significantly expand vocabulary, actively practice language skills and achieve much greater fluency, as well as creating conditions for learning the social values of another culture, and engaging in this kind of activity builds students’ confidence in their academic abilities, which is an important component of successful language acquisition.

As long as the educational content processed during the specific improv game is relevant (Ronke 2005), improv offers an instructional strategy that fosters intrinsic motivation (see Noels et al. 1999). Moreover, as stated by Jackson (2020), due to the vital life skills it teaches, improvisation is an outstanding instrument for developing leadership, whether it be self-leadership or leadership of others.

Another noteworthy benefit of improvisation is the development of speaking confidence. Improvisation has been shown to have the ability to produce affective states that are best for spoken interaction, such as engagement (Atas, 2015) and confidence (Dunn & Stinson, 2011). According to Stern (1981), the most significant feature of improvisation is that it enables students to let go of their inhibitions and self-consciousness. When acting spontaneously, learners have little time to consider grammar and syntax or what other people will think of them. Instead, they have to react right away and as a result, they can communicate more easily and naturally. De Michele (2019) claims that improv offers a secure environment for this since no single student is ever “on stage” for very long during any improv game, as they are able to practice in short periods and in an engaging, accepting, and frequently enjoyable setting.

In addition, Syamsurizal (2008) demonstrates how improvisational methods could enhance students’ speaking abilities. Additionally, Green (2012) suggests that improvisational techniques can improve communication skills, particularly interpersonal skills. They also can enable students to express themselves in a foreign language context before they may feel ready to respond in the target language. This shuts off the fear of approval or disapproval (Spolin, 1999) and frees them from a crippling concern for correct speech while preparing them to use speech in a real-world scenario

(McNeece 1983). Shimizu (1993) argues that “the learner’s acquisition of oral fluency in any language must build precisely on the creative process of improvising” (Shimizu 1993: 146). In addition to encouraging students to practice both verbal and nonverbal communication, improvisation gives them the chance to experience the extent to which their language works in various contexts, moods, and situations.

Students can use improvisation as a framework to let go of self-criticism and learn to trust their most creative, self-assured, and authentic selves (Hackbert 2010). Additionally, improvisation combines divergent and convergent thinking to assist individuals in controlling their activities and social relationships (Hadley 2015). Improvisation cultivates a light-hearted attitude which is not only fun, it is the a healthy way to live. According to a 2019 study by Felsman et. al., doing improv helped adolescents to reduce social anxiety. Kulhan (2020) contends that improvisation helps people with (learning) disability build a sense of play and allows individuals with intellectual disability to socialize more easily. A variety of scholars (see Atas 2015; Dunn & Stinson 2012; Galante 2018; Rothwell 2012; Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu 2013) also believe that improvisation lowers anxiety and promotes self-confidence. In another study by Felsman and his colleagues (2020), researchers found that doing just twenty minutes of improv a day can increase creativity, well-being, and ability to tolerate uncertainty, which seems to be a valid reason to implement improvisational activities into the traditional language curriculum.

Adebiyi and Adelabu (2013) conclude that improvisation increases adaptation, fluency, and communication competence and enables students to mobilize their vocabulary, respond to grammatical and syntactical precision, build cultural and social awareness, and gain confidence and fluency. Improvisation also has an impact on culture, which is one of the crucial aspects of language learning and instruction. Improvisation, according to Ronke (2005), encourages the growth of empathy for other people and helps students recognize the cultural norms and values of both the target culture and their own. She also addresses different learning styles by stating that improv activities can address the needs of various students.

Improvisation is a potent teaching tool, according to Berk and Trieber (2009), who back up their claim with strong justifications. They believe that improvisation makes use of students’ multiple and emotional intelligence, particularly verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, bodily/kinaesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal for problem-solving and active learning. Improvisation promotes collaborative learning by fostering trust, respect, listening, verbal and nonverbal communica-

tion, role-playing, and risk-taking through spontaneous storytelling. Palechorou (2012) and Reed and Seong (2013) also emphasize encouraging group bonding, while Ronke (2005) points out that social interaction caused by improv activities is especially beneficial in the modern technological world, where many students seem to be more comfortable with gadgets than with human beings. Through improvisation individuals may gain experience in problem-solving and conflict resolution in a peer group. Group improvisation may result in the formation of group flow and happy feelings, as claimed by Lage-Gómez and Cremades - Andreu (2019). Similarly, Granholt and Martensen (2021) recently concluded that “Looking past the performative aspect, the skills and mindset of improvisers are highly desirable in other contexts like collaboration, idea generation, being flexible, listening, and accepting failure” (Granholt & Martensen 2021:7).

Improvisation has, as a result, long been recognized as a useful means of promoting spontaneity, intuition, empathetic listening, nonverbal communication, ad-libbing, role-playing, risk-taking, team building, creativity, and critical thinking. As stated by Costa et al. (2014), improvisation is a multi-sensory experience that activates visual, auditory, motor, and social areas of the brain as we watch, listen, and act during games, rehearsals, or scenes. For a better perception of the information, I have placed the main benefits of the improvisation in the table 2.

Not only can students benefit from applying improv to language classrooms but so can teachers. Ronke (2005) argues that using improv regularly forces us to hear what our students create at the moment, and this can be a surprising experience. A short improv activity can provide us with more information about our students than a whole unit of instruction delivered a traditional way can. I would like to test that hypothesis in practice but before I can do that, I should understand the role of the teacher in terms of improvisational activities, which the next section will focus on.

Benefits	Sources
Improvisation fosters intrinsic motivation and self-esteem	Ronke (2005), De Michele (2019)
Improv renders abstract and complicated ideas, concepts, or processes more concrete	De Michele (2019)
Improvisation motivates students to generate	Berlinger (2000), Syamsurizal (2008), Shimizu

imaginative and detailed ideas, significantly expand vocabulary, actively practice language skills and achieve much greater fluency, as well as create conditions for learning the social values of another culture	(1993), Adebisi and Adelabu (2013), Ronke (2005)
Improvisation is an outstanding instrument for developing leadership	Jackson (2020)
Improvisation produces affective states that are best for spoken interaction, such as engagement and confidence	Atas (2015), Dunn & Stinson (2011)
Improvisation enables students to let go of their inhibitions and self-consciousness, self-criticism and learn to trust their most creative, self-assured, and authentic selves	Stern (1981), McNeece (1983), (Hackbert 2010)
Improvisational techniques can improve communication skills, particularly interpersonal skills	Green (2012)
Improvisation combines divergent and convergent thinking to assist individuals in controlling their activities and social relationships	Hadley (2015)
Improv helps to reduce social anxiety	Felsman et al. (2019), Atas (2015), Dunn & Stinson (2012), Galante (2018), Rothwell (2012), Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu (2013)
Improvisation helps people with learning disability build a sense of play and allows individuals with intellectual disability to socialize more easily.	Kulhan (2020)

### 3.3.2 The teacher's role in improvisational activities

The exploration of the teacher's role in different approaches to language teaching and drama activities in Chapter Two was very insightful and useful for my work. This section adds some improvisational specificity to what was already been explored. Matthias (2007) states that using improvisational theater techniques in the study of foreign languages does not require one to be an experienced educator in the theater field. When she conducts her workshops, Whitehurst (2022) always reminds language teachers that they do not need to be drama teachers, actors, or comedians to use performative techniques because the aim is to facilitate the exploration of communication in the target language through drama. In her view, being an expert in language teaching is enough and this knowledge should be combined with educators' understanding of their learners' specific needs when choosing improvisation games to incorporate into their lessons. Whitehurst advises starting with simple activities and gradually increasing the level of difficulty and explaining the possible benefits to students. Maples (2007) supports this idea because it can make the learning path an engaging and transformative learning journey. While improvisation is spontaneous, the teacher should provide some structure to guide the activities. Fauzan (2014) develops this notion by claiming that teachers should be well-prepared because their preparation will affect the implementation of activities. Among possible elements Fauzman names classroom properties usage, role-play cards, speaking aids, and the students' involvement. Sawyer (2011) contends that effective creative instruction involves finding a balance between structure and improvisation, which resembles my vision.

As already noted in previous chapters, a teacher should not act as a figure of authority. In Spolin's approach, the teacher is referred to as a "side coach", whose role is to sustain the stage reality for the student actor. In Spolin's view, students should feel completely free to play without the embarrassment of being judged by the instructor. I endorse this line of behavior because it helps students lower their affective filter. In her book "Improvisation for the Theatre", she (1999) offers almost one hundred reminders and pointers for students and teachers for conducting workshops. I will use some of those that appear especially important for organizing my case studies. Spolin (1999) recommends making sure that nobody is excluded, admitting that "the more blocked, the more opinionated the student, the longer the process. The more blocked and opinionated the teacher or group leader, the longer the process" (Spolin 1999:40). It makes me realize that I need to behave and feel as freely as possible and to pass this same feeling on to my case study participants and students. Returning to the subject of play and improvisation, Spolin (1999) asserts that a joyful and free-of-authority environment will help students to feel and engage in activities as children do in games.

### 3.4 Final considerations

The purpose of this chapter was to create a solid theoretical foundation for the use of improvisational methods in the teaching of foreign languages. These methods, which have a strong foundation in the long history of improvisational arts, act as an essential link between abstract ideas and real-world applications. They also serve as the basis for additional theoretical advancements, demonstrating their adaptability and versatility in numerous educational contexts. The wide range of uses of improvisational theatre provides a persuasive indication of the many potential applications that improvisational skills might have. These provide a transformative pedagogical approach for a variety of interests, needs, and demographic considerations, including the field of education and teaching foreign languages across all levels. The learner takes an active role in the learning process under this improvisational paradigm. This engagement transcends the realm of cognition, includes bodily expression, and extends beyond spoken discourse. The student also becomes aware of many aspects of themselves, which aids in personal development and self – awareness. In order to facilitate this transformative learning process, the teacher’s role is crucial. Teachers direct learners toward a wider range of possibilities for perception, contemplation, and action. This is consistent with Will’s viewpoint (2022), which places a strong emphasis on the teacher’s responsibility to give students the tools they need to improve their cognitive and expressive talents within an improvisational framework. Improvisational methods help to develop crucial communication abilities like empathy, attentive listening, and the capacity to interpret both verbal and nonverbal cues. This teaching method places a strong emphasis on group work and being open to considering many viewpoints. Alda (2017) emphasizes the significance of these communication skills and how theatre improvisation techniques can aid in their development.

Notably, practitioners such as Whiteburst (2022) and Perone, as mentioned in Sawyer’s work (2011), have successfully adapted improvisational activities from the theatre to foreign language classrooms. Their experiences, along with the variety of theoretical frameworks already explored, serve as the foundation for the following chapter, which will cover the adaptation of improvisation games designed for television screens for the language learning environment, along with a detailed explanation of how to use them and the advantages they offer to students.



## Chapter 4

### From TV Screen to Language Classroom: Adapting Improv Games

As a method for teaching foreign and second languages, improvisational theater can be adapted to meet various levels of proficiency, present and discuss a range of subjects, and be integrated with different instructional techniques. Having explored the essential facets of language teaching and learning, the characteristics and benefits of drama approaches, and the principles and advantages of incorporating improvisation into theatre, education, and language classrooms, it seems reasonable to delve into one of the central inquiries of this dissertation. Building upon this strong theoretical groundwork, I will address the following key question: Is it possible to transfer improvisation activities from the comedy show to the language classroom? If yes, to what extent?

On-screen we as spectators witness professional comedians, improvisators, and actors showcasing enormous skill and quick wit usually in their first language. With this in mind, implementing improv games in language classrooms might seem challenging for students. However, the process of implementation should be slow and gradual. As in Whitehurst's (2022) perspective, a more relaxed atmosphere and trust-building can be achieved by gradually introducing students to theatre and improvisation through fun and non-threatening warm-ups. Rather than merely copying the games, the aim is to modify and adjust them to correspond with the subjects and goals of the curriculum for foreign languages. Therefore, I will keep this in mind since this chapter will aim to analyze and then adapt games from the television show *Improvisation* (2016-2022), based on drama approaches and language learning variables discussed in the previous chapters. To achieve this goal I will list all the games from the show, create a table of criteria for my further evaluation and classification based on studies about the benefits of drama in general and improvisation in particular, and my previous research, define whether games are eligible or non-eligible for the language classroom, and then I will adapt eligible games.

#### 4.1 Improv shows on television

Improvisational theatre as a discipline has been present in the media via improvisational shows such as *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* UK (1988-1999) and US (1998-2023) versions, *Carey's Improv-A-Ganza* (2011), and *Thank God You're Here* (2006-2009). All the shows feature entertaining improvisational exercises and games, often involving celebrities. Although the improv genre was born and developed in the US and UK, my encounter with this genre mostly happened because of the Russian show *Improvisation*. Some of the games of this show grew out of the games of *Whose Line*



*Is It Anyway*, but I will not draw parallels between the shows as that is not the purpose of my research.

The genre of improvisation in Russia is young (no more than fifteen years old) and it owes its rise to the show which quickly became popular, attracting an audience of millions of people to the screen and contributing to the development and popularization of improvisation in Russia and the CIS (Zacharin 2022). Throughout the show's six-year run, two hundred and twenty-six episodes were filmed. In December 2022 the show was closed due to the new policy of a TV channel. However, in March of 2023, the show was reopened on another channel with the same cast but without a host and titled *Improvisers*. This dissertation will not take into consideration the games of the new show and will focus only on activities featured in the show *Improvisation*. Each episode of the show featured the same cast of four actors (Shastun, Popov, Matveenko, and Pozov), the host (Volya), and a guest star (or stars). The host sat at a table at the side of the large stage area, with the guest celebrity(s) seated next to him. The actors sat at the back of the stage on couches and only came on stage for the improvisations. The performers who were not involved in the play remained in their seats at the back of the stage. There was also a secondary set on stage, a specially hidden set that appeared at a certain moment. Each episode consisted of six to seven improvisation games, with guest stars taking part in most of them. There was a varying number of actors involved in the improvisations – from two to four. Overall, the show's heritage features approximately fifty games, ranging from simple warm-ups to more complex scenes that require more focus and concentration.

The main difference between the all-mentioned shows and similar comedy shows is the lack of a script. In other programs, acts and jokes are first invented, edited, rehearsed, edited again, and only then filmed. On the contrary, in shows like *Improvisation*, actors do not know in advance what or who they would have to play. The only scripts that exist are the rules of the games and the tasks for improvisation, which were developed by the project's writing team. These shows present harmonized professional teams after months or years of training who have as their main goal to surprise the audience and make them laugh. The format of the *Improvisation. Stories* (2021 – present) resembles a work of art. In the case of improv activities in language classrooms, a student's goal is not to generate jokes or create a work of art but to practice a foreign language. The subsequent sections of this chapter are designed to illustrate the practical implementation of this process.

## 4.2 Evaluation and classification criteria for improv games

The proposal of an improvisational session with students at the Italian language in May of 2022 in the framework of the drama project for the Learning English through Drama course enabled me to testify and verify the benefits of improvisational activities for students. Hence, I use them as a basis for my evaluation and further classification. In Appendix 1 I will include all eligible activities specifying how they are beneficial for students i.e. what skills they develop, for what language level of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001) they are suitable, and what groups of students they are targeted. If a game develops several skills, its full description will be given once, with the first mention, but all skills will be reflected in the table. To be considered eligible an activity should not provoke any physical or mental harm to students, and should not require complex equipment that is available for television studios but not language classrooms. Then it is my task to adapt the game following the curriculum, objectives, interests, age, level of students, and so on. In this regard, it is essential to define the criteria of evaluation that I will use to determine the suitability of games for the language classroom. Eligible

activities will be categorized as follows:

- Games aimed at practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary
- As identified in the first chapter, speaking is one of the most difficult language abilities to develop due to its complex nature, especially when it comes to foreign languages. Improvisation is one of the techniques in speaking that has a significant influence on improving students' speaking ability (Hadeli & Eviani 2017). As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the development of speaking confidence is one of the main improvisation benefits. Barbee (2014) asserts that improv activities can create the affective conditions essential to promoting spoken interaction according to the principles of the communicative approach to language teaching. Thanks to improvisation activities students can engage in the target language producing more spontaneous communication. The discourses of speech might range from simple list-making to sentence-length dialogue contributions, to paragraph-length descriptions and explanations. Ryan-Scheutz and Colangelo (2004) note that drama techniques are beneficial because they provide learners with opportunities to speak in less controlled and more creative ways. Within a classroom setting, they bring learners closer to what real-life use of the target language might entail. It is through the dramatic worlds of situations and role-plays, therefore, that learners truly begin to explore the socio-pragmatic uses of verbal as well as nonverbal language. As I mostly adhere to a communicative approach in my classroom, the primary goal of improv games must be fluency development. Compared to traditional approaches, improv games provide students with a notably greater amount of speaking practice, even in cases where they make mistakes in grammar and pronunciation. Correc-

tions, as noted by Will (2022) will be made a subject of discussion only after finishing the improvisation.

- Games that facilitate lowering of the affective filter

As was seen in the first chapter, the affective filter is one of the key variables of language learning that is intertwined with others and strongly influences them. Language anxiety can strongly inhibit the learning process (Piazzoli 2011). However, in the previous chapter, it was found that improvisation reduces anxiety. Drama activities, including improvisation games, as mentioned above, can help to lower the affective filter and allow learners to interact confidently with language and each other. Drama allows learners to hide temporarily behind the mask of the fictional situation and prepares language students for the spontaneity of real-life conversation. Putting on this figurative mask offers advantages by engendering a sense of safety that allows learners to shed anxiety (see Arts 2020; Atas 2015; Sağlamel & Kayaoğlu), and gain confidence to express themselves more freely. Accordingly, games involving fitting on another character's mask will fall into this category.

- Games that help to advance Self-Intelligence

To broaden the definition of intelligence, Gardner (1983) developed the Multiple Intelligence theory which states that a person has different types of intelligence. I have chosen self-intelligence as one of the criteria for the game grouping because it incorporates many essential skills such as confidence and self-acceptance, abilities to focus and concentrate, to adapt to ever-changing circumstances, to be courageous and vulnerable, awareness of own emotions, choices, thoughts, and capabilities, sense of fun (Johnstone 2020). As was seen in the previous chapter, all these skills are considered to be benefits of improvisation. Therefore, I will keep them all under the umbrella term “Games that help to advance Self-Intelligence”. Emotional learning is another significant factor that Will (2022) highlights as being addressed and improved by improv games, particularly when it takes the shape of the student performing their unique story. An emotional immersion in the story is made possible for the learner by the use of transverbal language, which includes gestures, voice, body language, body reactions, movement within the space, facial expressions, and body rhythm. As a result, in addition to studying the language cognitively, the student will study it affectively – with joy, humor, and pleasure.

- Games Developing Creative Intelligence

Improvisation develops students' creativity, mental flexibility, and thinking skills in numerous ways, such as the development of imagination and ability to generate new ideas, spontaneity, ability to present without a preconceived idea, ability to take risks, and overcome the fear of failure and being judged, ability to be open to other ideas, support them and build on them. These skills are as ad -

vantageous inside the language classroom, as outside of it as seen by the researchers whose ideas were discussed in the previous chapter. Hence, all games with emphasis on these benefits will fall under the umbrella term Games Developing Creative Intelligence. Moreover, according to Criess (in Flanagan 2015), creativity is one of the main principles of improv.

- Games Enhancing Collaboration Skills

As was found in the first chapter, collaboration is one of the most important aspects of language learning and teaching. The subsequent chapters have shown that the drama activities in general and improvisation, in particular, are collaborative processes. Benjamin and Kline (2019) assert that improv is not about a person but a team. Matthias (2007) adds to this idea by emphasizing the notion of improv not being an exercise for individual players but rather the connection between several players and the players and their environment that leads to the development of an improvised scene, an interaction that results from engaging in the same issue in a focused manner and which leads to communication in the broadest sense. Since many improvisational games involve the entire class, including the teacher, improvisation games necessitate a kind of collaboration that can positively influence group dynamics. This is because creative collaboration creates collective excitement (see Even 2011; Gallagher 2007; Russo Rastelli 2006). As a result, improv significantly improves the collaborative learning environment for both teachers and students. Therefore, this section will feature games that will have establishing and developing collaborative skills as the primary focus.

### 4.3 Eligible games

This section of the research showcases evaluated games, each with its structured profile. In the initial part, the games are described as they appear in the show, and in the subsequent part, I provide insights into how these games can be effectively adapted for the language classroom. Given that all these activities are predominantly oral, the primary focus here is on the development of speaking skills, emphasizing spontaneous speech. Additionally, these activities offer valuable opportunities for enhancing listening skills. While it is worth noting that some of these activities can potentially be modified for writing exercises (as explored by De Michele in 2015), such adaptations are outside the scope of this research.

#### 4.3.1 Games aimed at practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary

The first game in this category is called *Scenes from a Hat*. The host takes cards out of the hat with pre-prepared comically awkward short situations for the participants to make jokes about. For ex-

ample, in the ninth episode of the first season, these situations included: the strangest deed five minutes before the New Year; the oddest behavior by a criminal while committing a crime; things you should not do when you are driving; the worst toast at a wedding; the world's worst cab driver. Making up a quick succession of puns for each situation is the main goal of this game on the show. However, humor seems to be considered optional in the context of language classrooms. Consequently, the adapted version of this activity for language learners is designed to help students practice vocabulary within realistic scenarios, as “drama-work is not just playing; it is preparing for life” (Göksel 2019:43). A notable advantage of this game can be the active use of the target vocabulary (illnesses, colors, clothes, making an order, food and so on). In this game a teacher proposes to students different situations, which should be chosen based on students' level and purposes. For beginners, situations could revolve around everyday scenarios like a visit to the post office, a trip to the bank, or dining in a restaurant. Furthermore, some special situations can be suggested for courses teaching language for specific purposes and to migrants. This is one of the few games that can be played individually. Each student in turn has to say a phrase appropriate to the situation. For example, “I would like to order a coffee and a croissant” for a situation in a café for elementary school students. In the next chapter, this game will be presented within the first case study. By contextualizing language through real-world scenarios, this game empowers students to gain confidence in handling practical challenges in their lives. It can be effectively integrated into lessons as a brief five-minute activity to reinforce recently studied topics.

The next game is called *Change!* In the show, actors are given some situations, and during their improvisation, the host sometimes says *Change!*, and an actor has to change the last line or action until his answer satisfies the presenter. The goal of this game in the show is to make actors generate funny lines as quickly as possible. The teacher guides the students' dialogue in foreign language classes by indicating when a final word or phrase needs to be changed by saying “Change!” until it receives their approval. Asking each other to make changes is an additional option available to students. When this game is adapted for the language classroom, its focus shifts towards vocabulary expansion. I had some concerns about the increase in the affective filter as its review in the first chapter made me realize the importance of the affective domain for language learners. However, my apprehensions were not justified, as my students responded positively to the activity. Nonetheless, this activity seems to be more appropriate for confident language users as proved by my classmates. Last November my group tried it out with our classmates at the advanced level in the framework of the course in Performative Learning and Communication and the result was impressive. The adapt-

ability of this game to enhance vocabulary is particularly beneficial for students preparing for international language exams. These exams often include dialogue tasks in the speaking component, making this activity a valuable tool for exam preparation. The activity aligns with the concept of TBLT, which emphasizes practical language use in authentic contexts to enhance learning (Willis & Willis 2007). This game also was discovered in the book by Goodman (2008) under the title *Say it Again*.

The next activity *Strange Restaurant* differs from the previous ones in its structure and objectives. In this game, a guest star assumes the role of a visitor to three fictitious restaurants. With the assistance of clues provided by the actors, the guests must guess the names of these restaurants. The actors take on various roles, including staff members and other visitors. For instance, in the ninth episode of the sixth season, the names were: Field of Wonders, Adventures of a Deputy, and Cultural Centre. The game *Director* is similar to this one but the restaurant setting is changed to the movie set. In this scenario, the guest assumes the role of the director, and the actors on the show perform as everyone else involved in the production, such as producers, directors, light technicians, makeup artists, and others. The guest's task is to deduce the collective creative project they are working on, encompassing three titles for an imaginary movie, cartoon, and television show. In the language classroom, one student acts as the guesser and other students help them guess by taking on the roles of various restaurant or cinema employees. The guessing task is prepared by the teacher in accordance with the theme and objectives of the lesson. These games serve as effective tools for students to explain various collocations using synonyms or descriptive language. The adaptability of the game allows for tailoring the complexity of the names to the students' language proficiency levels. For beginners, more concrete names can be employed, while more abstract names can challenge advanced learners. The games also promote creative thinking and collaboration among students, as they must work together to generate imaginative and descriptive clues.

In the game *Late Arrival*, Shastun acts as a strict boss, Matveenکو is an employee who comes first and tells nonsense about the reason for the late arrival of his colleagues Popov and Pozov who arrive late and do not know what explanation their colleague provided. They should guess where they woke up, who they met, and what they did. All points are quite weird and not interconnected which makes them difficult to guess. Matveenکو is standing behind the back of the boss and he should explain everything without using words. Besides, when the boss turns around abruptly and sees him in a strange pose, the actor should fit in seamlessly. As seen in the show, these scenarios

can be delightfully bizarre, with elements like waking up on Santa Claus's reindeer runway, encountering Home Alone robbers, and donning festive attire together (as featured in the thirty-second episode of the fourth season). This game presents an intriguing opportunity for classroom adaptation. While it could serve as an engaging warm-up activity, its effectiveness could be further enhanced by tailoring the scenarios to align with specific lesson objectives, ensuring clarity and logical cohesion between the elements. By creating conditions that interconnect and incorporate target vocabulary, the game not only becomes a fun language exercise but also a valuable learning tool that motivates students to apply their verbal and nonverbal communication skills. The latter, as was seen in the first chapter, is one of the key variables of language learning. All roles are played by students and the task is given by a teacher. Students who will take on Matveenko's role will be encouraged to concentrate on their bodies and use their facial expressions and gestures as a means of communication. This game proves Surkamp's (2014) notion about nonverbal communication helping learners both to understand the foreign language and to express themselves in it. The ability to interpret nonverbal cues or transfer some of the communicative intentions to the gesture modality might to some extent compensate for a lack of vocabulary or speech production. Lastly, learners may find it simpler to retain new vocabulary or grammatical structures in a foreign language classroom when verbal and nonverbal communication are combined. According to neurological studies (Knabe 2007), when language is associated with non-verbal cues, students retain vocabulary and language patterns for extended periods.

The *Job Interview* game in the show appears to be relatively weaker and less humorous compared to other games. In this game, one actor, along with a guest, approaches another actor to secure a job for the guest. While its comedic value may be limited, this format aligns well with the communicative approach to language teaching, offering a valuable opportunity for language practice and skill development. I have successfully integrated this activity into my Italian language lessons with my A2-level students. In the classroom, this activity is organized in the form of dialogues in which one student becomes an employer and another student comes to apply for a job. It has proven to be a useful and practical tool for language learners. The ability to navigate job interviews is a crucial skill for individuals across the board. However, for specific groups of students, such as migrants, this skill takes on even greater significance. Apart from its language advantages, the *Job Interview* exercise develops vital life skills, boosting self-esteem and improving employability. It provides students with practical skills and improves language ability in the context of teaching foreign languages. The larger educational benefits of theatrical improvisation in language classrooms are highlighted by this dual-purpose approach to the game.

In the game *Talk Show*, all four actors engage in an interactive talk-show discussion on a given topic. Typically, one actor assumes the role of the host, guiding the improvisation flow. The remaining three actors portray different experts: one offers good advice, another provides bad advice, and the third pretends not to know the topic. Additional participants, such as viewers and other talk-show guests, may also be included in the improvisation, sharing their opinions, whether in the studio or over the phone. This game is particularly suitable for students at higher language proficiency levels, as it encourages them to express their opinions on a variety of topics without prior preparation. Its benefits extend beyond the classroom, promoting language use in real-life contexts. Notably, this game bears a resemblance to Heathcote's "Mantle of the Expert" technique (Heathcote 1995). In this technique, students adopt the roles of experts in specific fields during improvisational scenes, offering them the opportunity to gain profound insights into different aspects of life and fostering empathy. This technique, incorporated in the show game, encourages students to engage with authentic, real-world issues, making their learning experiences more meaningful and transformative.

In the game *Distant Relative*, each family member presents a specific complaint about another family member, and the guesser's task (guest star in the show and student in a classroom) is to identify these complaints. For instance, in the thirty-fifth episode of the fourth season, the father expresses his displeasure with his son's belief in fortune-telling, the son dislikes the grandmother's desire for a pharaoh-style burial, the grandmother objects to her daughter's pretense of being a pet, and the wife expresses her frustration with her husband's affairs with characters from the fairy forest. While the complaint aspect of this game may not be necessary for language classrooms, it can be omitted as well as the guessing component. An alternative approach could involve selecting specific family roles and improvising within those roles. For instance, in a case study I conducted in May 2022, my students and I assumed the roles of members of an Italian family engaged in a discussion about their nephew and grandson's career choices. Due to the small number of participants, I assumed a role and participated with the students, assuming the role of nephew and grandson. This experience will be described and analyzed in more detail in the first case study of the next chapter.

This game can be used with cultural value, emphasized in the first chapter, as it will be easier for students to understand and discuss the concept of 'family' in the target culture if they mirror feelings about family relationships or issues through improvisation, as noted by Ronke (2005) and as Tselikas (1999) has demonstrated students can more easily absorb and understand the socio-cultural



context of the target language if learning is not only cognitive but also involves the body, the voice, and the entire sensorimotor system. The adaptation of this game might propose to learners a more immersive and culturally resonant experience, fostering a richer understanding of the nuances of the target culture and its associated values.

#### 4.3.1.1 Asking questions

Question-answer patterns are a key component of the communicative approach to language teaching, which teachers use to get students to respond and engage in meaningful dialogue. This method improves speaking and listening abilities simultaneously, strengthening vocabulary and grammatical application and understanding (Richards & Rogers 1999). The ability to construct grammatically correct questions holds significant value for a diverse range of students, including tourists, migrants, and various other groups. This skill forms the basis for effective communication and is vital for engaging in everyday interactions, whether it be for seeking directions as a tourist or navigating social and professional situations as a migrant. Linking the improvisational activities from the show and the teaching strategies they employ, it is clear that these activities provide a creative and captivating way to become proficient in the craft of question formulation. Students are introduced to real-life situations where questions are essential to communication by actively engaging in these activities.

In the framework of the game called *Interview*, one of the performers—typically represented by Shastun—becomes a guest star. This main character comes into the spotlight and faces questions from other actors who take on the roles of reporters or journalists, representing different fictional made-up magazines, newspapers, or television channels. Similar to the drama strategy called “hot seating”, Shastun's role as the guest star is to answer many questions from the inquiring group in a way that is similar to how an actual guest could respond to them. A guest controls the actor's answers using buttons with characteristic sounds. If the guest does not like the actor's answer, he changes it until the guest is satisfied with his answer. This makes the Interview a fascinating chance for students to dig into the minds of different personalities and consider how they may respond to being under intense public scrutiny. It gives students a great platform to practice improvisation and character representation, in addition to improving their capacity to formulate questions and define responses. These chances for experiential learning are consistent with theories of language acquisition that emphasize the value of communicative skill development and active participation in language-related tasks. Furthermore, because it invites students to assume various roles and approach questions from a variety of angles, this game can be an engaging tool for fostering empathy and an awareness of multiple perspectives.

The next game *The Right Question* ingeniously parodies the formula of a typical TV quiz show. The computer (guest star) gives answers in special fields as asked by Pozov's character, the presenter. The remaining contestants, who all adopt fictitious personalities created by the host and guest star, have to come up with the smartest and funniest questions to the provided replies. The player whose question garners the most laughter and amusement earns the privilege of selecting a new topic for the next round of play. This exercise proves to be an invaluable instrument for improving students' capacity to formulate insightful and captivating questions on a variety of topics in the classroom. Due to its flexibility, it can be used by students at all skill levels. Specifically, *The Right Question* is a fun and useful training exercise for assessments of language where students must ask questions based on predetermined keywords as in a final state exam in foreign languages in the Russian educational state exams system. Notably, the game provides young learners at the primary school level with an appealing platform to practice question construction, making it well-suited for engaging young learners as was proved in my teaching practice. My elementary students and I suggested responses to each other and we had to come up with a question to which that word could be an answer. For example, for the word "cat" a question could be: "What is your favorite animal?"

In the game *Question to Question*, two actors improvise a sketch on a predetermined topic, addressing each other exclusively with questions. If an actor accidentally gives a non-questionable line, he is replaced by one of his colleagues who is not playing at the moment, at the host's command. This game helps students to focus only on different types of questions and master them for more advanced students. Goodman (2008) refers to this game as *The Question* and considers it to be an exception to the rule for improvisers not to ask questions, as discussed in the previous chapter. However, the fixed and rigid structure of questions in the English language makes it challenging for non-native speakers to speak using only questions. Other languages for instance, Russian and Italian seem more suitable for this game.

#### 4.3.1.2 Retelling texts

According to Fonio and Genicot (2011), improvisational techniques can be a useful tool for immersing students in literary texts and allowing them to explore the thoughts and feelings of the characters. By incorporating a variety of dramatic techniques, this interactive approach gives students an effective way to give coursebook texts life, making learning an exciting and dynamic experience. Students are encouraged to express themselves in the target language when allowed to actively participate in dramatizing the text. This motivates them to take ownership of the narrative by incorpo-

rating ideas and contributions from their peers. Furthermore, retelling is an essential teaching strategy for developing critical comprehension abilities. These abilities include understanding the text's structural components, drawing conclusions, interpreting important information, and summarizing the core idea (Kelley 2021). Making use of improvisational strategies, as in the games *True Lies* and *Minus One* offers a way to practice telling stories in both imaginary and real-world settings. In *True Lies*, participants are required to spontaneously enact scenarios based on the guest star's stories they share about certain events in their lives, such as participating in a competition show (episode 198) or pursuing a certain career path (episode 223). If the guest thinks the portrayal is accurate, they give a signal of approval with a green button, while a red button indicates that changes are needed. This framework is easily adaptable to activities in the classroom where students are asked to dramatize a story of classmates or text that the teacher has read and then retell it. Teachers can give instant feedback or indicate when further detail, precision, or a wider vocabulary is required to improve the retelling performance by substituting the buttons with claps (two for approval and one for disapproval). Additionally, the game *Minus One* offers a unique practice opportunity. In this scenario, all four participants initially perform, but after each round, the guest star eliminates one actor, and a different one takes over the role. The same can be managed in classroom with teacher taking the task of a guest. Even though the game provides a thorough vocabulary memory exercise, it can be very challenging, especially for the last student who has to represent every character. It is therefore advised to utilize this game infrequently. Insights about the target culture can be effectively communicated and text comprehension improved through the use of dramatic expressiveness (Ronke, 2005). Students are better prepared to interact with the cultural nuances present in the text when this strategy is incorporated into their language learning, which promotes a deeper comprehension of both the subject matter and the cultural context in which it is set. As a result, students' interaction with literature enhances their language learning experience and broadens their understanding of culture.

#### 4.3.1.3 Interactive games

I grouped the games *Options*, *Genres*, *Circumstances*, and *Choice* under the umbrella term interactive because they all include choices to some degree that influence and alter the story. In the game called *Options*, two actors play a miniature on a predetermined topic, and the host stops the miniature at a certain point and asks a guest star to introduce the topic or genre in which the actors should continue the miniature. For example, in the sixteenth episode of the third season, Shastoon and Popov show the miniature in which the bride came to get a wedding dress, and it is not yet ready. During the scene, the host prompts the guest star to suggest elements like a movie, emotion, profes-

sion, cartoon, or musical genre, along with specifying the number of words actors should use in a sentence. These dynamic options profoundly influence the improvisational flow.

Similarly, the game *Genres* features three actors performing a predetermined scene. The presenter halts the scenario at a specific moment and invites the guest star to specify a genre in which the actors should reenact the scene. These games are adaptable for learners of varying proficiency levels. For example, for beginners, scenarios might involve different genres related to sports, music, movies, or fundamental conversational topics. As students progress, scenarios can become more complex, introducing them to nuanced vocabulary and sentence structures. The *Circumstances* game introduces specific conditions. Two actors initiate the scene in predetermined roles, with additional actors joining later. After the scene concludes, the guest star modifies the circumstances. For instance, as seen in an episode from the eighth season, a guest assigned specific letters to actors to start their sentences. In the subsequent reenactment, all the actors pretended to have various illnesses. In a language classroom setting, these conditions can be customized further. The setting might transition from a bank to a restaurant, roles could shift from customer to vendor, and formality levels could be altered, as seen in your Italian language classroom where students practice imperative forms with both *Tu* and *Lei*.

In the engaging game *Choice*, two actors step into a predetermined situation and begin improvising. Periodically, the host intervenes by halting the scene and presenting the guest star with two distinct options for the potential progression of the storyline. The guest star then makes choices, and the actors continue the improvisation, incorporating these choices into the narrative. The game can provide learners with choices on both linguistic (using specific words or phrases in the target language) and cultural (choices related to cultural behaviors, traditions, or customs). All these games establish an immersive and stimulating environment that fosters language competency. The dynamic quality of these situations encourages students to use their language abilities while adjusting to constantly shifting environments, which is an essential component of language learning. These games' versatility guarantees their usefulness at different skill levels and promotes a deeper comprehension of linguistic intricacies and usage.

#### 4.3.2 Activities that facilitate lowering of the affective filter

The following group of activities confirms Capra's (2015) notion about the language classroom as a place where students risk losing face. He claims that it is possible to save face by wearing a mask. Wearing a mask (i.e. assuming different pretended identities) and playing roles have been claimed to lower the affective filter (Krashen 1982), remove any stress from the learning environment, to

overcome the emotional barriers that limit students' ability to learn which was discussed in detail in theory in the first chapter and will now be examined in practice through games. In all of these games, Popov was the lead. In *Party*, Popov becomes the host of a social gathering, yet he remains unaware of the identities of his incoming guests. His anticipation of the unknown aligns with the metaphorical mask-wearing suggested by Capra (2015). In *News*, Popov transforms into the lead news anchor, supported by Shastun as a co-host, Pozov as the sports anchor, and Matveenکو as the weather forecaster. Each of these roles carries unique constraints and challenges, disrupting their conventional identities and encouraging a deeper connection with the characters they portray. In *Blind Date*, Popov assumes the part of a lady going on a blind date with three possible boyfriends. An emotional similarity to the inherent uncertainty of language classrooms may be seen in the situation's unpredictability, which is further enhanced by Popov's lack of knowledge about the performers' roles. Adapting these games to an online or traditional classroom setting is feasible, as the element of surprise and role assignments can be creatively implemented.

In the show, Popov listens to a piece of loud music in headphones while the host with a guest star assigns roles. In an online classroom, it can be done by putting students in a waiting room in Zoom. In the actual classroom, I showed my classmates cards with written names. In the first and third games, actors are assigned certain roles, for example, in the 102nd episode, party guests are a man who's had his entire lexicon stolen from him, Pinocchio from the redwood tree, and a Cactus who stood beside a computer for a very long time. In the *News*, Shastun acts as Popov's co-host, Pozov is the sports anchor, and Matveenکو is the forecaster, all have some constraints to their usual role. As, for instance, in the forty-second episode co-host has just lost his haster, the sports anchor thinks that his wife had an affair with all his colleagues and the forecaster tries to come out. The core objective in these games is for the lead actor, and by extension, the lead student, to correctly identify all the roles, thereby showcasing their ability to effectively communicate with the guests. For the remaining participants, the focus lies in delving deep into the characters they inhabit, fully immersing themselves in the imaginative and fantastical inner experiences of these roles. By embracing this unique blend of identity exploration and language learning, these activities contribute to a classroom atmosphere where students can take on different personas, lowering their affective filters and enriching their language acquisition journey.

In the *Bar Attendant* game, a guest of the show takes on the role of a bar attendant, a pivotal character whose establishment serves as the backdrop for an engaging social encounter. The primary objective in this game is for the guest star to identify the women who have left their male companions. All the actors come to the bar as visitors and tell about these women. For example, in the seventh

episode of the sixth season, the women were a special forces commander, an honored role-playing artist, and a soloist in Russian folk punk rock. However, this framework can be adjusted to accommodate the diverse dynamics of relationships, both in the classroom and in the wider context of society. The structure of the game allows for a rich exploration of a wide range of relationships, beyond just romantic ones. Students can delve into various forms of connections, such as friendships, familial ties, professional collaborations, or even unexpected encounters. The game's adaptability ensures that it can be employed to illustrate and discuss the complexities of these connections engagingly and interactively.

The games *Detective* and *Psychic* allow students to try on different personalities as well. In the first game the guest star, playing the role of the detective, has to guess what crime occurred, who committed it, and where, with the help of clues from the actors playing the role of the detective's assistant. For example, in the war between rich and poor, a Hogwarts school nurse has spread a virus of failure (fifth season, episode 29). In the second game, the guest star acts as a psychic who should guess who they were in a past life, where they were, and what they did. For example, Godfather missed the decisive goal at the village bachelor party (first season, eighth episode). The games are not only fun and engaging but also serve as effective tools for students to practice deduction, reasoning, and language proficiency. By taking on the roles of investigators and characters from past lives, students can enhance their critical thinking skills, language usage, and their ability to empathize with a diverse range of personalities and situations.

#### 4.3.3 Games that Help to Advance Self-Intelligence

In previous sections, I have explored the language learning advantages of the *Change!*, *Choice*, and *Circumstances* games. These activities are not only beneficial for language acquisition but also serve as exercises in quick thinking and adaptability, preparing students for the ever-changing linguistic landscape they may encounter beyond the classroom. As Fleming (2006) aptly illustrates, language registers in real-life situations can significantly impact interpersonal interactions. For instance, using an inappropriate register in a shopkeeper-client interaction may lead to misunderstandings or conflicts. In the classroom setting, these games allow for immediate analysis, reflection, and the potential to enact alternative outcomes.

With each actor participating in this improvised practice, the *Behind the Back* game cultivates flexibility and reactivity in constantly shifting circumstances. Each character is portrayed by two actors/students, with the actors/students behind their backs unaware of the ongoing scene. When the host/

teacher calls their surname, the actors switch positions, and they must seamlessly integrate themselves into the unfolding narrative. This engaging exercise fosters mutual understanding among students while also improving rapid thinking and adaptability. Students gain the ability to collaborate in erratic environments by completing this challenging task, which is a crucial ability in the larger context of language use and social relationships.

In the *Prompter* game, two actors engage in a miniature scenario, with a twist – at various points during the improvisation, one of them snaps their fingers. This signals the guest star to suggest a word or phrase that the actors must incorporate into their dialogue. The role of the guest star, responsible for prompts, can be transferred to students. These prompts, whether helpful or challenging, require students in the miniature to maintain coherent dialogues on topics provided by the teacher. While students must adjust to outside influences while maintaining the consistency of their narrative, this type of gaming not only fosters spontaneity and rapid thinking but also strengthens communication coherence. It also promotes the growth of critical language abilities like grammar, vocabulary use, and conversational flow. Recently, I encountered this game while participating in the workshop of the American improv school Radical Agreement but with the name *Columns*.

The game *Inner Voice* resembles a drama strategy known as “thought-tracking.” In this improvisation, the guest star initiates the scene by setting the theme with a phrase, which serves as the starting point for the actors. As the improvisation unfolds, a pivotal moment arises when one of the actors takes a step forward and at this moment the inner voice of the guest star makes its entrance, influencing the trajectory of the improvisation. Thought-tracking, a well-known drama strategy, is often used to explore the inner thoughts and emotions of characters in a theatrical performance or process drama (Baldwin 2019). Teachers can emphasize how improvisational games support language development and have common ground with established drama strategies by drawing comparisons between Inner Voice and thought-tracking strategy. Using language and dramatic arts together can be a very effective way to help language learners become more creative and proficient communicators.

#### 4.3.4 Activities Developing Creative Intelligence

In general, as was observed in the previous chapter, improvisation helps people to awaken or improve their creativity. The game *Options* challenges students’ creativity when they need to change the flow of the story according to alternatives proposed by their fellow students. The activity *Gen-*

res might develop students' creativity and let them have fun. As they must swiftly adjust their miniatures to match assigned genres, this activity fosters creativity through genre-specific improvisation. These spontaneous adaptations can result in entertaining and imaginative twists to the narrative.

In the game called *Investigator*, the actors in the show are given the task of acting out a scene simulating an investigation. Shastun usually had the role of investigator and was the only one who did not have speech impediments. Matveenکو acted as the accused, Pozov as a victim, and Popov as a witness. The police context can be changed to something neutral as a university. Actors could start sentences only by starting the letter that the guest star gave them. I think this game can be used as an Icebreaker or warm-up. Although focusing on starting sentences with specific letters may not directly aid language learning, it stimulates cognitive processes, making it a valuable exercise for brain stimulation. The next two games are suitable for this aim too. In the first game called *Neighbors*, all actors participate in a scenario involving noisy neighbors. One actor opens the door, and the guest star assigns two letters, e.g., PF. The actor must quickly state a reason for the noise using words starting with these letters, such as “petting ferrets”. The other actors must respond promptly, demonstrating inventiveness and immediate thinking. This game cultivates inventiveness and rapid cognitive action. The second game is called *Alphabetically*. Two actors are required to lead a dialogue on a topic given by the presenter, but one of the participants may only say the words to a letter given by him. If a participant makes a mistake, he is replaced by the other actor. The same can be done in the classroom as the exercise encourages creative thinking while maintaining a logical and humorous conversation flow. Games such as *Strange Restaurant* and *Director* require not only vocabulary proficiency and the ability to explain concepts but also creativity in terms of explaining concepts to classmates remaining in a restaurant or cinematic setting. Mental flexibility can be also mastered with the already discussed game *Change*.

#### 4.3.4.1 Rap Activities

Rap exercises fit with the concept of a comprehensive language education that includes artistic expression, cultural awareness, and language proficiency (see Emdin 2020, Gajandren 2021). These games combine language learning with creative expression, making them an interesting and innovative method of teaching foreign languages and not only facilitate language acquisition but also promote creativity and cultural awareness among students. In the *It is a Rap* game, actors, and by extension, students, are divided into teams. Each character is portrayed by two actors, collaborating to perform a miniature on a given topic. What sets this game apart is the transformation that occurs



when the host decides to introduce a rap element into the improvisation. This shift challenges participants to continue the narrative in a rapping format. If an actor stumbles or falters, their colleague takes over.

In the *Rap Quiz* game, Shastun takes on the role of the quiz host, while other participants assume various characters. They respond to the host's questions in their respective character's persona, all in the form of rap. This activity not only reinforces linguistic skills but also infuses elements of musical artistry into language practice. Rap activities provide a dynamic platform for improving language skills. They encourage learners to experiment with vocabulary, pronunciation, and rhythm, which are crucial elements in language acquisition as was noted in the first chapter. Rap allows learners to craft verses that reflect their thoughts and ideas while adhering to language rules. However, only proficient students will be more confident in experimenting with such activities.

#### 4.3.4.2 Sound Activities

By immersing students in auditory experiences and testing their linguistic ingenuity, sound-based games like *Voiceover* and *Sound Quiz* offer a distinctive and captivating method of language learning. In the *Voiceover* game, actors engage in improvisation on a theme assigned by the host. This game is unique in that all sounds and noises are voiced by guest stars, even as the actors perform the scenes. For example, in the sixth episode of the sixth season, Shastun and Matveenko act in the roles of a couple. They are assisted by a married couple of guest stars. The situation was the following – a young couple, visiting their friends and seeing their renovation, decided to make their renovation even better. The guests voice the sounds of tearing down wallpaper, drilling, opening, and closing windows and doors. This dynamic makes the improvisation more complex and forces the students to use language to express feelings and actions.

In the *Sound Quiz* game, Shastun takes on the role of the quiz host, with the guest star assigning sound-like surnames to actors. The guest star produces various sounds, and actors must craft humorous responses based on the potential sources of these sounds. It is important to note that in language classrooms embarrassment may arise in these activities, however, this aligns with sociocultural learning theories, which posit that language development often involves a degree of social risk-taking and adaptation to unfamiliar contexts. Overall, these sound-based language activities serve as immersive language learning experiences that harness the power of auditory perception, linguistic creativity, and contextual interpretation. Moreover, lower-level learners' chances of negative emo-

tions can be reduced with sound-based exercises. Students might feel less shy about joining in since the emphasis is on basic language and gestures.

#### 4.3.5 Games that Enhance Collaboration Competence

As was discovered in the first chapter, collaboration is one of the most crucial elements of teaching and learning a language. The following chapters have demonstrated how collaborative processes underlie both improvisation and theater activities in general. The following classroom activities, adapted from improvisational games, are specifically designed to enhance collaborative skills among language learners. Students participate in an interactive journey that resembles the actors' spontaneous process in the *Stuntmen* game. This exercise is intended to foster cooperation, trust, and teamwork in the classroom. Together, the students create a story, but they assign demanding or active parts to their classmates, claiming, "Let stuntmen do it for us." This game can be conducted if a classroom size allows it. Students warm up physically and are urged to observe one another's comments and behaviors throughout this activity. Students also work together in the *Understudy* game. In miniatures, where one actor speaks for another, it promotes active participation. Aligning the performance's verbal and nonverbal components is the ultimate objective. Participants' trust is increased as well as communication skills are improved by this practice. The game mentioned above *Late Arrival* is also a perfect choice for promoting teamwork and fostering cooperation and communication in the classroom.

In *Senseless*, actors simulate working in a restaurant with unique impairments – a mute waiter, a deaf chef, and blindfolded cooks. The guest star chooses a strange dish from the menu, for example, sponge-washed radish in yogurt-mustard dressing mixed in a pot by tossing (episode 202). The waiter's task is to explain the order to the chef only using gestures. The chef's task is to understand order and control its right preparation by blinded cooks he could not hear. This activity is great for strengthening collaboration skills and teamwork as well as practicing nonverbal communication. However, bringing ingredients and utensils to the classroom might be challenging and messy. I propose changing the restaurant setting to something more general and cooking to another collaborative action that can be done without props or with things presented in the classroom. *Alphabetically* and *Neighbours* were previously discussed as games that promote creative intelligence. Besides, they both cultivate an environment where students actively engage with language, collaborate, and value each other's contributions to the learning process.

#### 4.4 Beyond Language: Improvisation Games for Literature, Culture, and History Lessons

Language, literature, and culture often accompany foreign language learning, and Schewe (2013) argues that drama-based foreign language instruction can be applied to all three. Language, literature, and culture are all interconnected and show many overlapping characteristics that are most effective when taught together in the classroom (Surkamp 2014). Preparing language learners to understand the culture and engage with others goes beyond teaching stable, homogeneous skills. It involves preparing them to deploy heterogeneous linguistic and cultural repertoires to navigate contested spaces (Rymes 2014). Successful language learners are those who learn culture and language together. Teaching language and teaching culture cannot be effectively separated (Ho 2009; Valdes 1986). Acquiring cultural competence is as crucial as linguistic and strategic skills for effective communication in the target language. While this dissertation primarily focuses on the framework of language teaching, it is essential to emphasize that improvisation activities from the show can be adapted for literature and history lessons as well and might serve to deepen the cultural aspect of language learning. These games could be used in the CLIL approach to language teaching. However, it is important to note that these activities are more suited for revision rather than for studying new content.

Games such as *Party*, *News*, *Blind Date*, *Bar Attendant*, *Detective*, and *Psychic* help students lower affective filters by stepping into different characters' shoes and understanding them better. In language classrooms, students can embody important modern and historical figures from the target culture to delve deeper into cultural learning. For example, in an English classroom, I proposed to my classmates the roles of Michael Jackson, Meghan Markle, Mickey Mouse, Charles Dickens, and Ed Sheeran. In an Italian classroom, my students explored characters like Dante Alighieri, Christopher Columbus, Leonardo Da Vinci, Adriano Celentano, Galileo Galilei, and Pinocchio. Students are also encouraged to propose other characters. For literature and history classes, characters from literature, or historical figures can be introduced allowing students to comprehend and reflect upon literature and historical events from diverse perspectives, for instance, after studying several novels in a literature class, students can embody characters from the novels. As Bourke (1993) notes, students get inside the culture and experience it from within, even if only in a microcosm, living in a world that was otherwise foreign to them.

It is possible to modify games like *First Date*, *True Lies*, and *Minus One*, which were first designed for retelling practice in language classrooms, for use in literature lessons and history lessons to retell historical events. *True Lies* can be used for any kind of tale, whereas *First Date* is appropriate

for love stories as in the show in this game the actors play out the story of dating and relationship development narrated by a celebrity couple and they as well as in *True Lies* adjust the truthfulness of the story with the buttons. *Late Arrival* is a versatile game that can help students revise material for history lessons and recall pieces of literature previously studied. Additionally, *Talk Show* and *Interview* can be played by transforming into literary characters or historical figures and spontaneously discussing issues related to books or historical events. This approach encourages students to explore different perspectives and immerse themselves in the world of literature and history.

#### 4.5 Non-eligible activities

Eight games were determined to be ineligible after my thorough assessment. Several of the criteria that were established at the beginning of the assessment process were not met by these ineligible activities. It emerges apparent from analyzing these ineligible activities how crucial it is to follow certain rules and specifications when choosing improvisation games for educational settings. Examining these ineligible activities is essential to figuring out what specifically made them inappropriate for language learning and cultural inquiry.

##### 4.5.1 Extreme improvisation

In the game *Shokers*, two actors are tasked with performing within a specific plot set up for the improvisation. However, there is an extreme twist to this game – the host and a star guest possess stun guns, and they and the audience are aware of a particular impediment that the actors themselves cannot see. In earlier seasons of the show, this impediment was a specific letter, and if an actor happened to utter a word containing this forbidden letter, they received an electric shock. The actors' challenge is to identify the prohibited letter while seamlessly continuing with their improvisation. As the show progressed, the list of impediments grew to include other actions, such as actors receiving shocks for making eye contact, standing or sitting, or even handling objects. It was disclosed in a documentary episode of the show that the cast and crew of the show made this game, which had no analogs. The game falls into the category of extreme improvisation, where certain elements of the game can be harmful or distressing to the participants. It is important to highlight that this type of extreme improvisation, or any activity that may potentially harm students, is strictly prohibited in an educational setting. It is possible, though, to take parts of these improvised scenarios and turn them into interesting and secure language-learning scenarios.

Another game, *Mousetraps*, similarly falls under the classification of extreme improvisation and is also unsuitable for classroom use. This game involves scattering one hundred mousetraps across the

floor, and blindfolded actors are required to improvise situations while walking barefoot amidst the traps. These extreme improvisational activities carry inherent physical risks and potential harm to participants and should be avoided in educational settings. The safety and well-being of students must always be a top priority when selecting improvisation games for classroom use.

#### 4.5.2. Equipment-exclusive Games

While entertaining, a few of the show's activities provide difficulties when incorporated into a language classroom. These difficulties could be imposed by the requirement for specialized tools, complexity, or low educational value. The show's activity *Revolving Room* is a mix of extreme improvisation and special equipment needed for it. The cube-shaped room rotates slowly in a clockwise direction. The guest can control the miniature's fate by pressing the buttons. If they press the green button, the room begins to rotate; if they press the red button, the room stops. At the same time, the actors in a floating position must continue the sketch. The use of special machinery and the risk of injury render this game dangerous and not suitable for language classroom settings. A camera is positioned overhead as players lie on the ground to enact scenes with varying locations and genres in the *Red Room* game, which also requires specialized equipment. This arrangement does not seem to be suitable for academic use.

*Rehearsal* game involves the use of chroma key technology to superimpose imaginary characters onto the screen for actors to interact with. This activity, while visually captivating, relies on specialized technology, making it impractical for classroom use. In the game *Loud Conversation* an actor, wearing headphones and hearing nothing, is supposed to guess from the other actor's facial expressions and behavior what he is talking about, accurately repeat, and conduct the dialogue. Although this activity encourages lip-reading and articulation I do not find it a particularly useful or engaging tool for language learning. In the game *Call Center* a guest chooses one of the boxes, and each box contains a strange object, the customer (one of the actors) has many complaints about this product, and he calls the Call Center to express all his complaints, and the Call Center employees (other actors) are supposed to guess what kind of object the customer received and what modifications and deviations it has. For example, iron mounted on a skateboard in the hundred and twenty-sixth episode. Props and complex scenarios can complicate classroom integration of the game. However, the basic task of engaging in a customer service role-play, without the need for specific props, could be adapted for language learning. In the game *Phone Talk*, the guest star records a phrase commonly heard in a telephone conversation. The actors then utilize their mobile phones to enact a

phone dialogue, incorporating the guest's recorded phrase. While this activity can be enjoyable, it may not offer substantial educational value for language learners.

#### 4.5.3 Sensitivity-Centered Games

Games such as *Two Worlds* and *Family Counselor* delve into gender stereotypes, mental health and family issues in a lighthearted manner that I consider inappropriate for a foreign language teaching classroom. In *Two Worlds*, the setup involves a guest attempting to discern the problem being discussed as actors portray contrasting perspectives from the worlds of men and women. These portrayals may perpetuate stereotypes related to gender, which can be considered insensitive or offensive in a classroom setting, especially when trying to create an inclusive and respectful environment.

The *Family Counselor* game involves actors enacting scenarios in a marriage counselor's office. The guest star, playing the role of the therapist, must identify the family's issues, including one from each spouse and a mutual concern. The issues are typically presented humorously and exaggeratedly, which might not be suitable for a classroom focused on foreign language teaching. These scenarios often involve eccentric and surreal problems, potentially making fun of mental health and relationship issues.

In my view, the primary objectives of a foreign language classroom should revolve around fostering language proficiency, cultural awareness, and creating a respectful and conducive learning atmosphere. These games do not align with these specific educational goals. Nevertheless, these essential aspects of gender and mental health issues can be effectively addressed within the context of other language games, such as *Talk Show*.

#### 4.6 Final considerations

This chapter has presented my evaluation and classification of a wide range of improv games from the show *Improvisation* (2016-2022) and their subsequent adaptation for language learning contexts. The games featured in this chapter are designed to serve as building blocks for creating a learning culture in language classrooms that is less rigid, less scripted, and less dominated by the teacher (Kurtz 2015).

The majority of the games have been categorized on the basis of the specific skills or groups of skills they target. However, some games offer benefits on multiple levels, and all of them are included in a comprehensive table in Appendix 1. This table also reflects the chapter's exploration of

potential applications for some games beyond the language classroom setting. Some of these games can be adopted in teaching languages for specific purposes, in professional contexts (as discussed by Giebert 2014), and in intercultural contexts, such as working with migrants and refugees. Such contexts provide opportunities for individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds to engage with one another creatively, understand each other's boundaries, appreciate each other's culture, and navigate challenging situations with sensitivity (Will 2022). These games are versatile and suitable for various learner groups, including children, young adults, adults, and seniors, and are adaptable for different proficiency levels, ranging from advanced beginners to intermediate and advanced students. An indication of the CEFR level is provided next to each game in the table (Appendix 1).

In recent years, the use of drama, especially improvisation, in online formats has gained popularity, as observed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (see Eikel-Pohen 2021, Donohoe & Bale 2020, Tsubota et al. 2022). Consequently, most of the presented games can be effectively adapted for online or blended learning formats. However, it is worth noting that games that require physical space, movement, and physical collaboration cannot be easily transferred to the online format. All possible formats for game implementation are listed in the table. The explored games all fall within the category of small-scale forms of drama (Schewe 2013) and are typically conducted within individual class sessions or lessons. These activities can be smoothly integrated into an existing curriculum with minimal preparation, making them accessible for teachers to incorporate regularly. Additionally, as pointed out by De Michele (2019), improv games are relatively short and engage the entire class simultaneously. With this in mind, having compiled a long list of classified adapted games appropriate for different levels, goals, and learning skills, I will test their benefits in practice after conducting case studies, discussing their results in the next chapter.





## Chapter 5

### From Small Screen to Language Classroom: Three Case Studies

The previous chapters of this thesis have explored various aspects of language learning and teaching, with a focus on drama approaches and improvisation techniques. Chapter Four delved into the classification and adaptation of improvisation games from an entertainment show for use in the language classrooms. In an attempt to provide an example, in practice, of how these adaptations may be beneficial for language students, this chapter will provide the reader with the description and analysis of three case studies. To try out my adapted games a series of case studies was conducted in May 2022 and the summer of 2023. It is important to note that all cases were conducted online. The fourth case study was modeled and planned for August 2023, but unfortunately, it was canceled at the last moment due to unforeseen circumstances of some participants. The primary objective of this study was to assess the impact of integrating improvisation games from the show into language classes. This integration aimed to enhance participants' linguistic and extralinguistic skills. The study sought to validate two hypotheses: firstly, that practicing improv would be advantageous for students, and secondly, that these adapted games could be especially effective in promoting language learning for students who are enthusiastic fans of the show.

#### 5.1 Methodology

Integrating drama as a teaching method in language teaching means bringing real-life as well as fantasy situations and characters into the classroom. It requires enthusiasm and a willingness to take risks on the part of the students and the teacher. The participants in the case studies I will discuss in the following section enthusiastically embraced this notion and were willing to take risks in their language-learning journey.

##### 5.1.1 Participants

The case studies involved a total of nine participants, all of whom were female. These participants represented various educational stages, including high school students, university students, and graduate workers. They also came from diverse fields of study and occupation, such as law, management, and IT. The participants' ages ranged from seventeen to thirty-three. As recommended by Fleming (2006), the participants' degree of language fluency was considered before undertaking projects. In my case, the students had a good command of the language, and their degree of fluency in Italian/English was appropriate to carry out the task. The participants of the first case study were A2 Italian learners at the time while the participants of the second and third studies were intermedi-

ate (B1), upper-intermediate (B2) and advanced (C1) English language speakers. The participants of the first case study were my students in the Italian online school who I have known for a long time and the participants of other case studies were young women from the show's fandom I was acquainted with for the first time.

### 5.1.2 Research and Instrumentation

The qualitative method is applied to measure the impact of the event on participants. With this goal, I designed a questionnaire that was sent after the event; valuable feedback enabled me to understand better the benefits and challenges of activities for students and what I should consider to improve the activities and the process. Research tools included video recordings of all case studies, questionnaires after every event, and thorough analysis of responses. Additionally, for the second and third case studies, I prepared and delivered presentations. All questionnaires and slides are presented in the appendices. Reviewing the recorded sessions was instrumental in the analysis and discussion of the case studies, contributing to a deeper understanding of potential enhancements and adjustments.

## 5.2 Case Study 1: Improv games in the Italian classroom

This idea of the first case study came up to me with an assignment for the course Learning English Through Drama. To put my idea into action I planned the agenda of the event and presented it to the headmaster of the online school Amedici Italiano where I have been working as a teacher of Italian for A1 and A2 levels for more than two years, receiving her permission. Then I announced the event among A2 groups of our school because it was aimed at students of this level. I will use the real names of the participants here and in the following with their expressed written consent.

The event was held on Zoom on the 29th of May, 2022. Two students Sofia (20) and Anna (19), both studying law at the universities of Moscow and Saint Petersburg decided to participate. They were learning Italian because they were planning to go to Italy to study as exchange and master's students respectively. Therefore, they needed to learn how to communicate in everyday life and the educational sphere. They had been studying Italian for ten months at the school. For the first session of improvisation, I decided to choose four activities. The real duration of the event (two hours and five minutes) exceeded the planned (one hour and thirty minutes) as some games motivated conversations about Italian culture.

### 5.2.1 Course of events

Before beginning of the event, I asked students about their experience with

improvisation and drama approaches in general. Being law students, they were faced with a dramatization of trials but planned, not improvised.

The first game was called *Le situazioni*. (*Situations*) and both girls gave this game 3/5 for difficulty and 5/5 for effectiveness. This activity is an adaptation of the show's game *Scenes from a Hat* described in the previous chapter. My activity aimed to teach students to adapt their vocabulary to situations close to real life. Besides, I added some situations to develop creative intelligence. Some special situations could be added in the field of law if the level of participants were higher. I did not prepare any icebreakers as we had known each other for a long time and got on well. For us, the first game functioned like a warm-up. Warm-up is the first phase of a four-phase formula for generalist teachers who are new to working with drama, proposed by Neelands and Goode (2015).

Warm-up builds trust, team spirit, and cooperation within the group, as drama work can only take place once everybody feels safe in the space and understands the rules of activities. Although in her feedback Sofia marked this game as the least favorite, she pointed out that it suited best for warming up. We moved from general situations to more specific ones:

1. *Dal dottore* (at the doctor)
2. *Al bar* (at the bar)
3. *Al ristorante* (in an Italian restaurant)
4. *Alla stazione dei treni* (at the train station)
5. *Al appuntamento con italiano* (on a date with an Italian)
6. *All'opera* (at an Italian opera)
7. *All' Università* (at university)
8. *Quando Italia ha vinto Europei* (when Italy won the European championship 2020)
9. *Quando alla radio parte la tua canzone italiana preferita* (when suddenly on the radio you hear your favorite Italian music)
10. *Sei Il gatto Italiano* (you are an Italian cat)

Each of us came up with an utterance for every situation. Then my students suggested situations, and we improvised them.

11. When you see Russians in Italy (Sofia)
12. When you arrived in Italy for the first time (Anna).

A clear advantage of this game was the active use of the target vocabulary (illnesses, colors, clothes, making an order, food, etc.) Moreover, as we delved into new expressions and engaged in conversations about Italian culture, we applied Schewe's (2013) notion that drama-based teaching

extends beyond language skill development to encompass explorations of both literature and culture. This holistic approach allowed us to enhance our understanding of Italian culture while refining our language skills. Additionally, this game set up a good mood for the whole session; as we laughed, smiled, and joked I believe it was important for lowering the affective filter of the participants.

The initial embarrassment and difficulty in adapting vocabulary to a situation spontaneously were challenging. Anna said that little came to mind. Later, we did a similar exercise during the lesson on Italian, and I noticed that it is difficult for students to adapt their vocabulary to everyday life situations quickly. This observation makes practicing this activity even more important. Sofia proposed implementing this game into lessons after studying the target vocabulary, which, as stated in the previous chapter, is a benefit of short improv games.

The second game we played, is called *Al appuntamento al buio (On the blind date)*.

In her feedback, Anna pointed out that she liked this activity the most and said that she had fun. She evaluated the difficulty of the game at 1/5 and effectiveness at 5/5, while Sofia gave 4/5 and 3/5 respectively. In this game, one student decides to participate in a blind date to choose a possible partner and other students act out the roles of these possible partners by behaving in ways that make them guessable. On a language level, this game aims at practicing asking questions and conducting a dialogue. On a cultural level, students became acquainted with important figures of Italian culture. To help my students I presented them with a possible list of characters: Chiara Ferragni, Fedez, Damiano David, Dante Alighieri, Giordano Bruno, Christopher Columbus, Leonardo Da Vinci, Adriano Celentano, Galileo Galilei, Pinocchio. Additionally, students are encouraged to suggest alternative characters for the game. In the initial round, Anna took on the role of a young woman on a blind date, while Sofia and I transformed ourselves into the iconic figures of Da Vinci and Alighieri, respectively. Sofia's commitment to her character was remarkable, as she even went so far as to put on a scarf in the style typically associated with artists. Anna asked us a series of questions and we responded in turn in Italian. Her questions were the following: "Are you tall?" "What is your job?" When Sofia responded "I am an artist", Anna guessed Da Vinci immediately. Then she asked Dante about his values and priorities in life; my answer contained an allusion to Beatrice and the Divine Comedy, and it helped Anna to guess correctly. She decided to go on a date with Dante.

Sofia showed enthusiasm as she eagerly proposed an additional round of the game, displaying a strong sense of determination and motivation, which aligns with the idea of creating a positive and engaging language learning environment (Dörnyei 2001). During this round, Anna chose to embody Celentano, while I took on the role of Christopher Columbus. Sofia skillfully posed questions like, “Why did you come here?” and “What are your plans for this summer?” Her inquiries delved deeper into our characters' identities and occupations, a practice that encourages critical thinking and active engagement with the target language (Kusumaningrum et al. 2020). After her thoughtful questions, Sofia successfully guessed Anna's character. When it was my turn, Sofia inquired about my occupation and the historical era I belonged to. However, she encountered some difficulty in guessing that I was portraying Columbus. To aid her in making the connection, I provided hints from the perspective of my character, fostering collaborative problem-solving within the game, which aligns with social constructivist learning theories (Vygotsky 1978).

The third activity *Cambia! (Change!)* was inspired by the game of the show with the same name. Sofia marked this activity 5/5 for difficulty and 5/5 for effectiveness, while Anna's points are 4 and 5 respectively. I had concerns about the game as I was afraid of creating a negatively stressful situation. I explained to the students that the activity aims to help them generate more vocabulary. The situations were the following: Go to a shopping mall to buy a gift. Get advice from the saleswoman; You are at Fashion Week in Milan. One of you is a picky model. Another is a stylist. The purpose of the stylist is to convince the model to choose the dress and get on the podium. The students improvised these two dialogues, and I said “cambia” when I wanted them to name another color, profession, dish, item of clothes, and so on. I took the first situation from the international exam and created the second myself. In my opinion, the character of a picky model already implies changes and additional change requests can make the game unnecessarily difficult and stressful for students. I think it might be better to use this situation in an improvisation session without asking to change something. I asked participants how they would change this activity to minimize possible discomfort. Anna said: “I do not think that there may be discomfort here, but the participants of the game themselves can ask to change the phrase instead of a teacher”.

Sofia stated that the game is effective as it is and does not have to be altered: “There should be uncomfortable situations”, - she added, and in her feedback marked this game as her favorite “because of its atypical nature”.

For the final activity of the session, I decided to propose a role-play improvisation on the Italian family inspired by the game Distant Relative of the show. Role-playing is most similar to improvisation in that participants enact spontaneous, unscripted roles, but for longer periods, as noted by Bowman (2015). Anna marked this activity 3 for difficulty and 5 for effectiveness, while Sofia put 4 for both criteria. First, I asked the students to name family members in Italian to practice target vocabulary. Subsequently, I presented three possible situations related to family dynamics: a family dinner, a child (son or daughter) deciding what to do after school or university, and the family choosing a vacation destination. Both students opted for the second situation, which involved the younger generation seeking advice from older family members. Roles were assigned, with Anna portraying the aunt, Sofia taking on the role of the grandmother, and myself as the young man – the grandson and nephew. The scenario encouraged interactive conversations, and the discussion was notably vibrant. This activity highlighted the potential benefits of involving more participants to offer a broader perspective on the dynamics of the Italian family. Despite the engaging nature of the game, there were challenges encountered, mainly related to Sofia's connectivity issues. Her sporadic audio disruptions made it difficult for her to actively participate and engage in the conversation. Sofia's feedback on the session indicated that she found it highly interesting and enjoyable; however, by the fourth activity, she began to feel a bit fatigued. She mentioned that extended participation in a somewhat stressful environment became challenging. This valuable feedback emphasized the importance of considering the duration and intensity of activities when planning future sessions. These challenges and benefits, along with my role as a facilitator, will be further discussed and summarised in the subsequent sections after examining all the case studies.

### 5.3 Case Study 2: When Fandom Meets English

The study was carried out on 25th June 2023. Three participants aged eighteen to twenty-five from Russia, Latvia, and Germany took part in it. They all were of different occupations (Daria is a software developer, Nina is an English teacher, and Polina is a high school student) and had never met each other before the event, united by being the part of fandom of the show. The event was held on Zoom and lasted almost two hours as planned. To find participants I announced it in a famous fan telegram group. Many people responded but fewer came. For the session, I chose four games focusing on different skills: practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary, developing creative intelligence, and lowering the affective filter. After the event, in the questionnaire, I asked the participants if all these objectives had been reached, in their opinion. All of them answered positively.

### 5.3.1 The course of the events

We started with an introductory exercise that was geared towards getting to know each other (ice-breakers) and creating a group spirit. Everybody were to introduce themselves, using adjectives, and to report their likes and dislikes. There was only one condition – all the words could start with the first letter of the name of the participants. I started first and then we did it one by one. It might not be the best activity as it raises some difficulties. Nonetheless, I actively assisted in generating descriptive words for participants who encountered difficulties, and this process also led to the introduction of new vocabulary. This introductory ice-breaker served its intended purpose of helping participants become more comfortable with one another and allowed them to share personal information in a fun and creative way, even if it presented some initial difficulties (Hadfield & Dörnyei, 2013).

Right from the start, the activities fostered a warm and friendly atmosphere. Following the warm-up exercise, I presented the participants with four pictures (as seen in Appendix 3), each serving as a clue for the name of a game derived from the show. The participants' objective was to guess the names of these games, which they accomplished with some guidance from me. After outlining the goals of the event, I encouraged the participants not to be afraid of making mistakes, stressing that this aligns with one of the fundamental principles of improvisation, as explained in the third chapter. In line with Barker (2016), improvisers view mistakes as valuable gifts and consider them both inevitable and essential aspects of being human. It is important to note that when discussing mistakes in the context of improvisation, I am not referring to language errors, but rather to a general fear of making the wrong moves or saying the wrong things while improvising in any language. I further emphasized to the participants that in improv activities, fluency takes precedence over accuracy, a principle they seemed to grasp well, as demonstrated in Daria's feedback: "Improvisational games are generally a great way to learn how to use language with the right to make mistakes, but all participants need to understand the principles of improvisation".

In the new version of the show *Improvisers* (2023-present), without the host, actors say to the guest star at the beginning of the program that the show will be the way the guest wants and shapes it. I adopted a similar approach before commencing my case studies, emphasizing the importance of participants' input and influence on the activities. Also in the new show, a guest starts every activity with some gesture and phrase, determined in the beginning. Nina proposed "Go Up to the Stars" and the relevant movement which was a great fit for it. Additionally, the participants requested that I conduct the session exclusively in English, including the explanation of the rules and instructions,

aligning with their goal of practicing and improving their English language skills. This choice is consistent with the immersive language learning approach, where learners are exposed to and encouraged to use the target language as much as possible to enhance their proficiency (Swain 2005). By incorporating elements from the show's format, such as granting participants a sense of control and autonomy, as well as emphasizing an English-only environment, I aimed to create a dynamic and engaging atmosphere that would enhance the participants' language learning experience (Donato, 2000).

The first game was called *Strange Restaurant* in the show, I called it *Not a Strange Restaurant* as the words for guessing are particular and random in the show, and for the event I used vocabulary for the B1 level. The average point from participants for complexity was 2,3 and for effectiveness 4,3. I took the words (only nouns) from different areas and to help the guesser, I gave the field of the word. We played this game two times. The first time Daria was a guesser, a guest of restaurants, and Nina and Polina were responsible for restaurants “adolescent” (field: person and stages of life) and “assignment” (field: education) respectively. I put Daria in a waiting, room while giving words to the others, doing this every time with the students in the guessing role. I will not include all the remarks made by the participants but rather focus on the most significant and relevant ones for discussing the outcomes of the event. In explaining “the adolescent” in the restaurant theme Nina said, “Your menu looks like a passport, you can have it now and it is so cool”. In Russia, people receive a national passport at fourteen and it is considered to be a sign of maturity and coolness. Daria never used this word and she did not understand it but she said that she would use it afterward. Polina adeptly articulated a vivid description of her restaurant, showcasing a commendable level of proficiency in conveying details and creating a compelling narrative: “You should use either black or blue ink or a computer, it is up to your preference while compiling the menu. Also, there is a possibility to fail, so be precise while ordering. Respect the deadline. Don’t copy your friend’s order”.

Daria had difficulties with guessing the exact word but my hint “Look at a sign and there is your cocktail with mint” helped her to guess the word. Then Polina was eager to try her hand at guessing. Nina has chosen the word “exhibition” (field: art) and Daria has chosen “volcano” (field: nature). The astute and insightful hints provided by the students significantly facilitated Polina's swift and accurate identification of the scenario, showcasing the effectiveness of collaborative efforts in the context of the activity. In her questionnaire, Polina said: “It was relatively easy for my level, however, I believe, it was quite effective since the speech was spontaneous, and the participants were trying to be creative which positively influenced learning/using the language”.



Daria pointed out that adapting utterances to the restaurant's theme can be challenging. The theme of the restaurant can be changed to other spaces for language for specific purposes, for example, a hospital for medical students or a court for law.

The second game was called *Options*. The average score of the game totaled 4,3 for complexity and 3, 6 for effectiveness. According to Lubis (1988), when working with improvisations, the teacher should have a large supply of hypothetical situations that are simply stated and challenging to the students' creativity. Therefore, I proposed three situations: two friends are planning a trip; you would like to start a dance course in a foreign country; you are new to some university abroad. Speak with a secretary to find out all the necessary information. Nina and Polina chose the second situation. Daria gave them options when I stopped the girls and asked her to do so. Daria pointed out that this game is very difficult but very effective. Difficult because the options are highly restrictive and require improvisational skills, but, as for me, strong restrictions allow you to focus more on the ability to use the language fluently.

The dialogue was well constructed; it was very lively and believable. I asked Daria to assign to my students different emotions (happiness to Nina and offensiveness to Polina), a movie genre (comedy), a music genre (rock), several words in a sentence (three and six), a letter to start words with (M and S). Such elements challenge learners to respond to a variety of situations through their speech, their emotions, and their body. The transformation of the participants into the roles of rock stars was an intriguing observation. Polina's query about the use of swear words during the game led to an interesting exploration of creative expression, adding an element of authenticity to their rock star personas. While the restriction on the number of words might have seemed challenging, it was surprising to witness the participants' exceptional performance in conveying the essence of their assigned roles. However, Polina made a crucial observation regarding the linguistic nature of the game. It was designed in Russian, a language with synthetic and analytical elements, while English is primarily analytical. For instance, in the context of the game, participants needed to convey specific concepts within the constraints of limited words. In Russian, a more flexible language structure allows for a concise expression of complex ideas, leveraging synthetic elements. However, English, being more analytical, may pose challenges in capturing the same breadth of meaning within a restricted word count. This linguistic distinction emphasizes the importance of adapting activities to the specific linguistic features of the target language, ensuring that the intended learning objectives are effectively met. In future adaptations, considerations for these linguistic differences will be paramount, especially when tailoring activities for English language learners.

Nina expressed her preference for other games, considering *Options* more challenging in terms of displaying options like music and film genres. This feedback suggests the need to explore alternative options that are more adaptable for participants who are newer to improvisation. Daria shared a similar sentiment, labeling the game as her least favorite. She pointed out that this game requires a higher level of improvisational skills alongside language proficiency. Her hesitance to assume the role of an interlocutor during the game was acknowledged, and there was no insistence on her participation. Daria also mentioned that, while she enjoyed the game, it might be better positioned as the final activity in a session to provide participants with more time to engage with it. The game's cognitive demands seemed to create a certain level of apprehension for her. Daria's comment highlights the potential cognitive intensity of the game, suggesting that participants may benefit from gradual exposure to such challenges throughout an event. It made me realize I should rethink the order of the games.

The third game was *Detective*. It received 2, 6 for complexity, and 5 for effectiveness. A student in the role of a detective was to guess the place of a crime, who committed it and what have they done. A unique aspect of this game was that these components were intentionally disconnected from each other, adding an extra layer of complexity to the task. Daria found this game relatively easy, remarking that it lacked restrictive elements. However, her comment underscores an interesting aspect of language learning: this game can be highly effective when familiar vocabulary is intertwined with new lexis. By incorporating both known and novel language elements, this activity can serve as a valuable tool for language acquisition. Nina was a detective in the first round and she should guessed that “an annoying shoe seller, on a farm lost her money gambling”. We (when needed) were giving her hints as assistants of the detective. For example, “Boss, we found the evidence – boots and sneakers” made Nina understand that it may concern a shoe shop. The phrase “Boss, I want to write a book, I think it would be a bestseller” made her understand the profession of the accused. This game teaches learners to be engaged in the process and listen attentively. which confirms the importance of the same principle of improvisation discussed in Chapter Three, also realized through practice by Daria: “I also noted that in improvisation it is necessary to listen much more attentively to the interlocutors, so it should help to develop concentration when listening to foreign speech and not to let everything pass by your ears”.

Nina had a problem with the word “gambling” which was not part of her active vocabulary, the challenge I will discuss in one of the subsequent sections.

Then we played the second round with Polina guessing. She had to guess that “a goldfish in an amusement park graduated without honors”. The examples might be not the best but in the learning process with a constant class, it seems beneficial to mix lexis from different topics after studying them. Therefore, this game can be used for recap and revision. Daria noted: “I liked how you mixed more complex vocabulary with simpler vocabulary in *The Detective*. That is, in one sentence, simple words, and one complex word and it helps to remember the word in context”.

While reviewing the recorded session, I noticed that the students tended to employ more explanatory language rather than adhering to the criminal theme. This deviation from the expected context was perfectly acceptable since it was their first experience and it takes much practice to allow themselves to be creative.

The last game *News* received 2,6 for complexity and 4,3 for effectiveness. The score for the complexity shows a high level of participants’ mastery because this game requires skills of multitasking mixing language mastering with an acting challenge. Especially hard is the role of the lead news anchor who needed to lead the news, mediate the co-hosts, and listen to them attentively trying to guess their professions in the first round and roles/lifestyles in the second one. In the first round Daria was a host who presented food news. She needed to guess that Nina, the sports news anchor, was a psychologist, her co-host, responsible for show business Polina was a hairdresser, and I, the forecast anchor, was a musician. Both Nina and Daria marked this activity as the favorite while Polina thought the opposite. The professional level of the girls’ participation, involvement, and devotion to this game was admirable, confirming Barbosa and Davel's (2022) notion about improv games revealing a potential that not every student knew they had. Daria expressed that she had no difficulties at all with the game, only great fun. However, she acknowledges that it can be difficult for those who have no experience playing this game. According to her, the efficiency is a bit lower than in other games because it is difficult to combine new vocabulary with the theme of the game. Polina said that the game itself was quite fun, but as for her, it was difficult both to speak spontaneously and to make some jokes or use some idioms, to make it funny. However, she enjoyed trying it and also observing other girls doing it pretty great.

In the second round, Nina was a leading host who presented the news about animals, Daria was a sports anchor – a millionaire, and Polina again was responsible for showbusiness, she was in the role of vampire. I was a forecast anchor again and I was a hippie. I purposely gave the lead anchors

simple and general topics because they had to switch between colleagues and guess at the same time. In the show all four actors play this game, that is why I joined too.

#### 5.4. Case Study 3: Turning Setbacks into Insights

After a very successful second case study I had a very high bar and expectations for the next event, but to my dismay, it was not as successful. However, my mistakes and the negative aspects of this event represent the ground to grow into valuable insights for improvement. The event was held on the 24th of July, 2023. Four participants aged seventeen to thirty-three from Russia and Belarus took part in it (Nastya and Marina are university students, Ann is a high school student, and Sveta works). The event was held on Zoom and lasted an hour and twenty minutes, a little bit less than was planned due to the reason I will explain later. For the session, I chose another four games from my ultimate classification focusing on different skills: practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary, developing creative- and self – intelligences, and lowering the affective filter. After the event, in the questionnaire, I asked the participants if all these objectives had been reached, in their opinion. All of them answered positively. However, one of the participants said that for her as a traumatized person, there was no benefit in terms of creativity and could not be as long as games cause her pain. She hopes that in the future she will be able to overcome it. Her answer raises the problem of working and managing improvisation sessions with people who suffer from mental disorders. According to Crossan (1998), improvisation's spontaneous and dependent nature poses psychological risks. Although there are studies dedicated to drama approach and improv in overcoming anxiety (see Lincoln 2006; Paveau 2012; Rudowicz 2003; Spolin 1999), for me, it was a challenge because I do not possess a special education in this field. Nevertheless, it seems to be a groundwork for further research.

##### 5.4.1 The course of the event

We started with the same introductory exercise I used for my previous case study. The challenge was the mood of Svetlana who stated that she was sad and stupid. I was trying to support her and convince her otherwise, putting her in a positive mindset. After the warm-up, I showed them four pictures (Appendix 4), each one was a hint of the name of the game from the show. The students' goal was to guess which they accomplished with some prompting from me. We started each improvisation with the word "Magic" and a gesture from the meme with Sponge Bob. The first game was called Not an Investigator devised from the Investigator game of the show. I decided to soften the police context of this game. In the show, all four actors participate in the game. Therefore, the number of participants was perfect. We changed the police office to a dormitory office. We had a dorm

supervisor (Ann), a victim (Marina), a witness (Nastya), and a suspect (Svetlana). The game received 3,5 for complexity and 3,7 for effectiveness.

The impediment was to use the majority of words with assigned letters, but other words were not prohibited. Ann's role was also to manage an investigation, and she was brilliant in it. However, I realize that I made a series of mistakes with this game. Firstly, I should not have proposed it as the first one. Secondly, it was a mistake to assign the role of a suspect to a very anxious person. Finally, I needed to finish it because it became chaotic and I should develop it better.

The second game was the *Bar attendant*. It received 3 for complexity and 3,5 for effectiveness. Marina encouraged Ann to be the guesser, complimenting the skills she admired after the first game. Other girls and I went to Anna's bar to talk to her about some famous people from American or British culture (Johnny Depp, Michael Jackson, Elton John, George Washington) as they were some people we know and have some sort of relationship with. However, some girls' performances seemed more like summaries of autobiographies than an unleashing of creative energy. I asked the girls to tap into their creativity, and Nastya heard me. Her character was George Washington and she presented him as her ex-husband: "I want to forget him but I see him everywhere. I go to the shop to buy something, I open my wallet and I see him, my stupid ex-husband's face on a dollar bill. He was American and when I came here, I saw him everywhere. There is even a state named after him".

Ann pointed out that she did not know the fact about Washington being on a dollar bill which underlines the value of the game in a cultural context. The girls wanted to play the second round of the game. However, nobody expressed the willingness to be a guesser, except Ann. Throughout the event, she showed determination to try on different roles. Thus, due to her encouragement, Nastya became a guesser of the round. Girls have chosen Sherlock Holmes, Frodo Baggins, and James Potter. Their descriptions were detailed, however, too scholarly. As for me, the goal of a creativity boost was not accomplished and they forgot about the bar theme. I suppose that multitasking can be too challenging. Spolin (1999) marked that ingenuity and inventiveness appear to meet any crises the game presents, for it is understood during playing that a player is free to reach the game's objective in any style he chooses. As long as they abide by the rules of the game, they may swing, stand on their heads, or even fly through the air. Any unusual or extraordinary way of playing is celebrated and applauded by fellow players.

The third game was called *The Prompter*. The game received 3, 5 for complexity and 4 for effectiveness. We had two couples – Marina and Ann and Nastya and Sveta. Throughout the dialogues, participants were to actively seek prompts and cues from their assigned partners to complete sentences and subsequently navigate the conversation, either utilizing these prompts as support or facing them as challenges to spur engaging discussions. I gave them three situations to choose from: two friends are planning a trip and have some disagreements; you are new to some university abroad and you need to speak with a secretary to find out all the necessary information; you want to change your room in a hotel. Ann and Marina chose the hotel setting. This round showed an ambiguity in the role of the prompter because Nastya used to help Marina and on the contrary, Svetlana hindered Ann. The second couple chose a trip theme which they dealt with very well. However, they went far off-topic and moved on to something more imaginative, suggesting that by the end of the event, they could still strike the imagination and go beyond it. Overall, the event lasted less than planned because the girls refused to try the last game which should have been a rap quiz. I admit that it can be difficult to rap even in a first language. Although it was not as difficult as it seemed, I managed to do it. It made me realize that you should not measure students' abilities by yourself. Also, Ann proposed giving a list of words that rhyme to help participants which seems like a good idea I have not foreseen. Having reviewed all the case studies, we can move on to my role as a teacher, and the merits and challenges of all the activities.

### 5.5 Behind the Scenes: The Teacher's Role in Improv Case Studies

From chapters one to three, I examined the role of the teacher in different methods of language learning, drama in general, and improvisation in particular, to understand how I should behave during my case studies. Having few participants I decided to be a teacher in the role. According to Baldwin (2012), a teacher-in-role (TiR) tends to be one of the most powerful, interactive, and engaging drama strategies and the most potent concerning learning. From personal experience, I was convinced that this strategy enables the teacher to be alongside the students as a fellow participant interactive model, and mediator of the shared imagined drama experience. Ramadhaniarti (2016) states that after choosing the game, the teacher should explain its rules to the learners in a direct and non-complicated way. Hodgson and Richards (1974) note that teachers should be trying to do is to enable the group members to become absorbed in the activity they are pursuing instead of being concerned with themselves undertaking the activity. Hodgson and Richards (1974) also note that the challenge to the teacher is to activate each student in the group while respecting each one's immediate capacity for participation. I tried to do all of these things and be more of a facilitator, and mediator, who monitors the process lets students communicate on their own without intervening, and as-

sists them only if they do not know how to proceed. However, I was afraid to steal the spotlight from students as sometimes I could find a reflection of my behavior in O'Neill's (1989) notion about the overtly dramatic teacher dominating as a performer in the classroom and intimidating the participants. Yet, the feedback did not prove me right. All participants said that my participation was helpful. From Anna's point of view, the active participation of the teacher cannot have a negative impact, on the contrary, it shows indifference and equal involvement. Sofia added: "...On the contrary, you picked up on time when we were reaching a dead end".

#### 5.6 From Theory to Application: Understanding the Advantages of Case Studies

The numerous advantages of drama and improvisation in language teaching have been discovered and documented in the tables in Chapters Two and Three. This section will look at the benefits that have been observed in practice. All girls found their improvisation sessions beneficial, except Svetlana's case which was already mentioned above, and they would like to participate in the event again or even practice permanently. Anna said: "It was cool training for the brain in a non-native language to simulate different situations and improvise".

My experience as an Italian and English instructor has shown that students are in a much better position to use the language effectively after only a few dramatic exercises. The speech of participants became more fluent and more lively, and their intonation was more varied. The case studies confirmed that the improvisation involved of drama gives students opportunities to develop their communicative skills in authentic and dynamic situations. By using drama in the foreign language classroom, I used English and Italian with my students in intriguing and useful ways. Drama has the potential to make the learning experience fun for the students and even memorable because it is interactive and visual and it was proved by participants. The process of improvising brought to play, humor, inside jokes, positive energy, smiles, and laughter to learning.

Sofia expressed: "It was not only the practice of speaking skills but also practice in unusual and interesting situations. It was not boring – for sure!"

Additionally, as Ronke (2005) points out, the primary psychological advantages of dramatic exercises or performances in the study of foreign languages include a sense of accomplishment, increased self-worth, a reduction in speech inhibitions, empathy for others, a strong intrinsic drive to learn the language, enjoyment of the process, and a significant amount of social learning. Drama-oriented classes tend to foster these crucial interpersonal aspects of language acquisition far more than traditional ones, largely because the exercises are drawn from theater arts demands and help to

create a relaxed, enjoyable environment. Drama's joyous tone lowers the affective filter and increases social communication motivation. All these were implemented in practice to some extent. The improvisational exercises and games we tried out tended to close the gap typically existing between “thought and expression” (Stern 1981: 24). As stated by Shimizu (1993) the learner's acquisition of oral fluency in any language must build precisely on the creative process of improvising. Therefore, games offered students the opportunity to practice the acquired language without a script so that they could develop more spontaneous speaking skills, greater fluency, more confidence, and better function in the foreign culture. One of the main characteristics of spontaneous speech, according to Christie (2016), is collaborative language production.

One of the key variables, which is also one of the main benefits of improvisation – collaboration was seen and developed during the case study process. Participants supported and encouraged each other. The students’ feedback made me realize that the main objectives of the event had been achieved: “As I am kind of a shy person, the event helped me to get rid of my shell and start engaging with new people faster thanks to the common activities. Practicing language in some creative ways increases my motivation to study it. Improvisation in particular improves spontaneity a lot, which helps in real-life conversations” (Nastya).

Nina admitted that she boosted her skills of fast thinking, creativity, and detailed listening. Polina found very exciting the parts of the games where it was possible to use the “creative” part of the language and it was also valuable for her to communicate with other people.

### 5.7. The Unpredictable Classroom: Managing Challenges in Improv Case Studies

Although the case studies were beneficial for both the participants and my research, not everything proceeded smoothly and this is important to note when speaking about the challenges I faced. The first challenge was the different levels of language proficiency of participants in the first case study. It is necessary to admit that Sofia and Anna both followed A2 courses, but their levels were different at the time as Sofia did not attend weekly online lessons, and Anna, on the contrary, devoted a great deal of time to studying Italian on her own. Therefore, Anna was more fluent whereas Sofia needed time to come up with the right words which slowed down the process. I tried to help her by paraphrasing. In the next case studies, there was no such problem, as there were prerequisites for the minimum language level, and the participants' level was even higher, they were practically on an equal level. Ann, a participant in the last case study, confirmed my thought about the games being more efficient for intermediate and advanced learners: “Games are effective but only when the



students have a level high enough for such a session. It may be the next step in building fluency but earlier it will be complicated to catch up on what's going on. Grammatical constructions are needed to properly build a story, words, and topics. Therefore, appropriate levels are very important”.

Another challenge encountered was the insufficient active vocabulary. Both students in the first case study admitted to having a lack of active vocabulary as they used to think everything out in advance. That is why it is even more important to practice spontaneous speech which is the basis of didactics in the school I work at. The challenge of other case studies, especially observed in the second one, was the use of passive vocabulary for words to guess. I think this is inevitable when doing events with people who you do not teach regularly. My mistake was starting with difficult words which was not helpful for the motivation and affective filter of Daria who was first in the role of guesser. Hopefully, she was able to let the situation go and enjoy the games, realizing she was not alone in the situation. She said that at first, she was very frustrated when she could not guess the words in the game *Restaurant* but then she tried to relax and enjoyed herself. In terms of the study itself, Daria proposes to start with simple vocabulary in progression so that the participants have time to loosen up and stop worrying. This is a very valuable feedback that I will follow up on. Moreover, it resonates with Ronke's (2005) notion that the affective filter tends to be especially high at the beginning of the class due to the novelty of the language and the situational context. To express themselves, practice their language skills, and experience the fictional 'reality' of the cultural situation the learners should be able to let go of their inhibitions and fears and feel safe. All participants succeeded in this to some degree. The most difficult was Svetlana, who suffers from mental disorders that affected her participation, I tried my best to help her, but unfortunately, my expertise was not enough. However, in her feedback, she noted that my participation helped, particularly when I praised the participants for even the smallest things. Besides, in the third case study, there was some doubt about whether their cues and utterances were too plain and unintelligent, I perspired to explain that there is nothing unintelligent in improv, but they did not seem convinced. My ideas found reflection in Smith (1984) who stated that learners should be open to different ideas and to having their mistakes corrected. In a theater/drama rehearsal as well as in a foreign language class, students should be willing to “take chances, be wrong, look silly, then try again” (Smith 1984: 6).

Another of my concerns was the fear of spreading stereotypes about cultures of countries of the target language in the classroom. Kramsch (2012) confirmed the validity of my concerns by pointing out that language teachers may be afraid of falling into the stereotypes promoted by the textbook

and the marketing industry and prefer to remain on the safe ground of grammar and vocabulary. Anna reassured me that in her opinion, we were not spreading stereotypes in any way, rather we were laughing at moments typical of Italians, and there is a lot of truth in many stereotypes.

Martinez-Lage (1997) mentions that multimedia presentations allow a greater and more effective learning process among learners. Hence, my presentations for case studies with fandom were theater and show-themed (Appendix 4). However, in her feedback, Svetlana noted that she was a little distracted by too colorful presentation, and she could not understand where to look and what was written. This made me realize that I had not taken into account one of the most important dimensions of language learning discussed in chapter one – different learning styles - and took it for granted that the presentation would be liked and effective for everyone. The last problem is inevitable while working online which is a problem with connection. I would prefer to conduct live sessions of the events. Some participants admitted that it would be better offline too.

#### 5.8 The three case studies: final observations

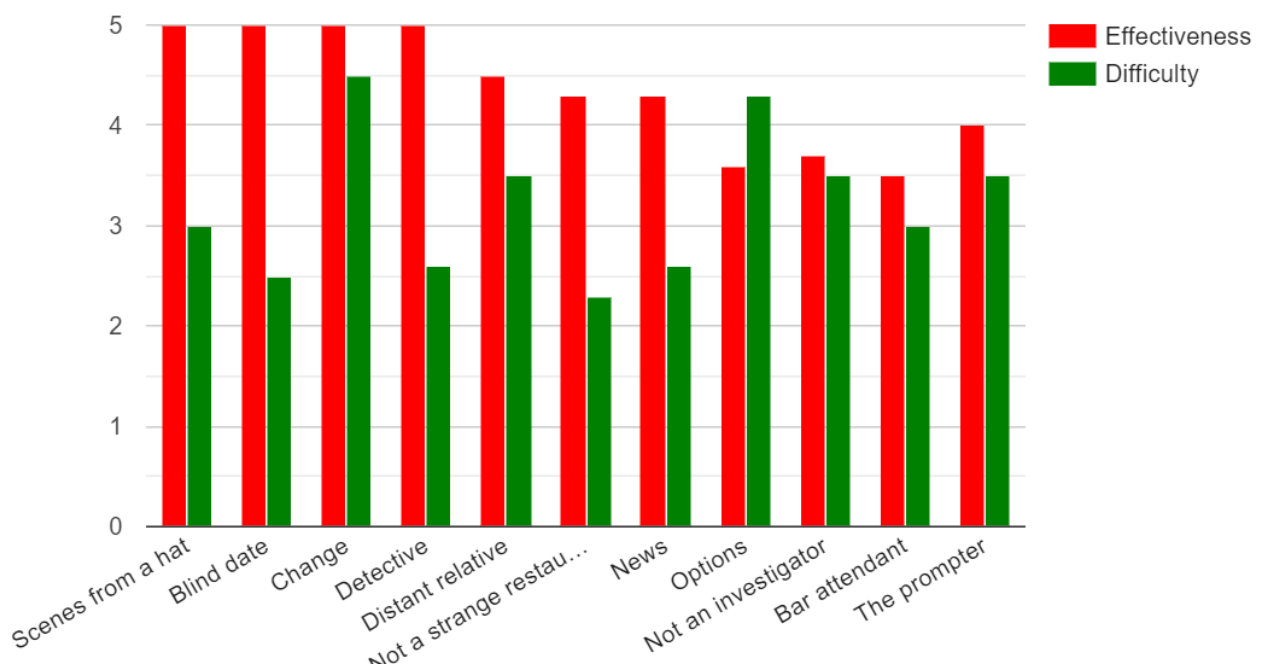
Learning foreign languages is a complex matter, which implies the active use of language in many situations, most often which students will not be able to predict. Therefore, the ability to speak in different situations develops through improvisation activities. The magical part of a drama lesson is the change it brings into everyday academic life. Case studies were undertaken to adapt and implement games from the show *Improvisation* for use in Italian and English language classrooms. I express gratitude to all participants for their participation and valuable feedback. The conducted events showed the importance and advantages of these activities for students. Although some challenges should be taken into consideration and overcome, improv games contributed to letting both, the teacher and students, discover an innovative form of learning in a new learning and teaching setting. Taking into account the participants' answers included in the questionnaire, it can be assumed that they consider drama as a valuable method of learning, which contributes greatly to language lessons as well as increases learners' motivation, and makes classes more unpredictable.

From my point of view, it is important not only to conduct separate improvisation sessions but to integrate them into regular lessons as well. For example, some activities can be given from five to fifteen minutes at the end of the lesson with the requirements to use specific vocabulary or grammatical constructions. I have experienced in practice that improvisational games from the show are equally effective for both fandom people and those who have never watched it. I believe that these games can be used to attract people, especially teenagers in schools, to learn languages, as the show

is loved by millions of people and can be used not only as a means of entertainment but also for learning. As confirmed by one of the participants, it is a great way to improve one's knowledge, speaking, and listening skills while also meeting interesting people.

In the table of all activities (Appendix 1), I indicated approximate CEFR levels required for activities. Conducted case studies and participants' feedback allowed me to go deeper and assess eleven games we tried out from the point of view of effectiveness (Figure 2) and difficulty (Figure 2). The second case study gave me a feeling of the power of improvisational games in bringing people together. We were strangers before the experience, but in the end, there was a great atmosphere of love, respect, and mutual admiration that motivated not only the participants to learn languages but also me to continue to pursue this field of study.

Figure 2. Participants' evaluation of effectiveness and difficulty of the games



## Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to adapt improv television games for language classrooms based on key variables of language learning and teaching, drama approaches, play, and improv theories. After analyzing the collected data and discussing the results obtained after conducting three case studies, it is crucial to refer back to the research questions formulated at the beginning of the present work and draw conclusions. The limitations of the study will be identified as well, and valuable input for further research will be provided. Exploring the constructs of play, drama, and improv in foreign language learning and their multifaceted nature was at the centre of this dissertation. However, many other related aspects were addressed to paint a vivid and complete picture of the mechanisms underpinning learning. In particular, the present case studies were carried out in English and Italian language contexts to investigate the adaptability of the games in practice as well as their benefits and my role in their implementation in foreign language classrooms.

The first research question, “Is it possible to transfer improvisation activities from the comedy show to the language classroom? If yes, how could it be done?”, attempted to understand how to transfer the improv games from the show to the language classroom. What emerges from the data collected is a rather positive vision. As a matter of fact, the majority of the more than four dozen games can be used in the language classroom as shown in the course of the fourth chapter. However, it is important to take into consideration the individual characteristics of our students, such as age, proficiency level, purpose of language learning, and the skills we aim to develop. This recognition is encapsulated in a comprehensive table provided in Appendix 1, offering a nuanced guide for instructors in tailoring improv activities to suit the unique attributes and needs of their students.

Yet, as posed by the second research question “What are the possible limits and impediments of adapting games from the show?”, it becomes clear that some games can not be effectively transformed into a language classroom activity. In the fourth chapter, I identified several groups of issues that tend to prohibit adaptation. Foremost among them is the category of “extreme improvisation games,” where elements of the game may carry the risk of harm or distress to participants. Emphasizing the paramount

importance of prioritizing student safety and well-being, it is crucial to note that extreme improvisation, or any activity with potential harm, is strictly prohibited in an educational context. However, elements from these extreme scenarios can be extracted and repurposed to create engaging and secure language-learning activities. Another category comprises “equipment-exclusive games,” which, despite their entertainment value, may present difficulties in integration into a language classroom due to requirements for specialized tools, complexity, or limited educational value. Additionally, there is a group of “sensitivity-centered games” that might not align with the primary goals of a foreign language classroom, such as fostering language proficiency, cultural awareness, and maintaining a respectful learning environment. Nevertheless, the crucial themes related to gender and mental health issues can be effectively addressed through alternative language games, exemplified by the *Talk Show* game.

The third research question, “To what extent can the improv games relate to core language learning variables and drama approaches?” aimed to determine the degree of alignment and integration between the adapted improv games from the television show *Improvisation* and essential language learning components and drama-based instructional methodologies. The inquiry into affective space, authenticity, autonomy, collaboration, culture, motivation, non-verbal communication and oral skills, learning styles, and strategies within the context of drama-informed language education reveals profound connections. In the realm of authenticity, the dramatization inherent in improv games offers real communication scenarios, allowing learners to engage with language authentically and in context. Autonomy is echoed in the participatory nature of drama, empowering learners to take charge of their language development. The affective filter and affective space, crucial concepts in language acquisition, find expression in the emotionally rich environment cultivated by theatre activities. Drama serves as a catalyst, lowering the affective filter, fostering risk-taking, and cultivating positive language experiences. Dramatic activities naturally stimulate curiosity, investigation, and a desire to interact, which is a key component of learning and a major source of motivation.

Dramatic activities highlight the importance of learning styles and strategies in meeting the unique requirements of learners. These modes can be visual, aural, kinaesthetic, or any combination of these. The integration of non-verbal communication and oral skills harmoniously aligns with the expressive nature of drama, presenting a holistic approach to language acquisition. Collaboration, a prized skill in language education, is foundational to drama, where participants collabora-

tively craft narratives, solve problems, and express ideas. Through collaborative improvisation, learners not only enhance their language competence but also cultivate interpersonal and intercultural communication skills. Also, improvisational games have much in common with play and games in general, with different dramatic approaches, especially process drama, role-playing games, and storytelling. Furthermore, I noticed techniques from the drama in education in games from the show such as hot seating (Interview), the mantle of the expert (Heathcote 1995, seen in *Talk Show*), thought-tracking strategy (*Inner voice*), and others. The nuanced analysis of these intersections in the study resonates with the works of scholars such as Piazzoli (2011), Nicholson (2002), Spolin (1999), Krashen (2009), Long (2015), Kramsh (1993), Surkamp (2014), Oxford (1990), Ronke (2005), Belliveau (2008) and many others, grounding the exploration in both theoretical frameworks and practical implications for language education.

The exploration of the question “How could students benefit from these activities?” aimed to uncover the advantages of incorporating improvisational games into language learning. Chapters 2 and 3, particularly Tables 1 and 2, provided comprehensive insights into the benefits of drama and improvisation in the language classroom. The ensuing case studies, detailed and analyzed in Chapter Five, further affirmed the positive impact of improvisational sessions on participants. The case studies underscored that the improvisational dimension of drama offers students valuable opportunities to enhance their communicative skills within authentic and dynamic contexts. Participants exhibited increased fluency, livelier speech, and more varied intonation. The improvisational process injected playfulness, humor, inside jokes, positive energy, and moments of laughter into the learning environment. This resonates with the idea that drama-oriented classes excel in fostering crucial interpersonal aspects of language acquisition compared to traditional methods, creating a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere (Ronke, 2005). A pivotal variable and a prominent benefit of improvisation emerged in the case studies – collaboration. Participants actively supported and encouraged each other, demonstrating how improvisational activities not only contribute to linguistic development but also cultivate important interpersonal skills among learners. The case studies, thus, served as a practical testament to the multifaceted advantages that improvisational games bring to language learning environments.

The subsequent question, “Are the games equally beneficial to students within and outside the show’s fandom?” naturally arises from the exploration of the benefits. The case studies, involving participants both from and outside the show’s fandom, affirmatively address this question. The findings suggest that these games hold educational value for a diverse range of students, regardless of

their familiarity with the show. The inclusivity of benefits underscores the potential of these games to engage a broad audience, particularly appealing to teenagers in school settings. Leveraging the popularity of the show, which is loved by millions, these games can serve as a dual-purpose tool—entertaining while facilitating language learning. This dual functionality positions the show’s improvisational games as a resource not only for entertainment but also as a means to attract and engage learners in language education.

The next is “What is the role of the teacher in conducting improvisation activities?” seems to be one of crucial importance and led me to a continual search for an answer. In Chapter One I looked at the teacher’s role in different approaches to FLT. Each language instructor may choose from a variety of methods according to the goals, levels, needs, and learning styles of their students. I relied mostly on ideas of the communicative approach, bolstered by elements of the oral approach, the task-based language learning method, and Content and Language Integrated Learning which see the teacher mostly as facilitator. The second chapter took a look at the teacher’s role in play and drama approaches. Bessadet (2022) claims that teachers should act as facilitators and supervisors;. Rivers (1972) emphasizes that effective FL teachers should embody a dynamic presence in the classroom, even though professional acting expertise is not required. This viewpoint resonates with my approach, as I recognize the teacher’s role as a facilitator of engagement and interaction. Another possible role of the teacher is of “formmeister”. Schewe and Woodhouse (2018), based on Bauhaus’s ideas, stated that the basic concept of a Formmeister (Form Master) might have potential within the drama approach to foreign language teaching. This implies that the language teacher should aim to become as proficient as possible in the many “art forms” through which the aesthetic experience is achieved. Following this notion, I pursued improvisation not only in theory in the context of research but also in practice online and offline which helped me become a better formmeister for my case study participants and students. In chapter three, I explored the role of the teacher in improvisation. Sawyer (2011) contends that effective creative instruction involves finding a balance between structure and improvisation which resembles my vision. As noted in earlier chapters, a teacher should not act as an authority figure. In Spolin’s method, the teacher is referred to as a “side coach” whose role is to sustain the stage reality for the student actor. In Spolin’s view, students should feel completely free to play without the embarrassment of being judged by the instructor. I endorse this line of behavior because it helps students lower their affective filter. Finally, based on a theoretical foundation through case studies I practically explored my role, which was that of facilitator, and

mediator, who monitored the process letting students communicate on their own without intervening, and assisting them only if they did not know how to proceed. For some activities, I also had to become a teacher-in-role. According to Baldwin (2012), a teacher-in-role (TiR) tends to be one of the most powerful, interactive, and engaging drama strategies and the most potent concerning learning. From personal experience, I was convinced that this strategy enables the teacher to be alongside the students as a fellow participant interactive model, and mediator of the shared imagined drama experience.

The research question “How do improvisation activities prepare learners for language use outside the classroom?” delved into the practical implications of incorporating improvisation activities into language education. These skills are transferable to various real-life scenarios where language use is essential, such as social interactions, professional settings, or travel experiences as was confirmed by enacted situations during case studies. Additionally, improv activities often involve cultural references, diverse scenarios, and varied language registers, providing learners with exposure to the richness and complexity of language as it is used in different contexts. This exposure helps learners navigate the nuances of language and cultural communication outside the controlled environment of the classroom. Furthermore, the collaborative and cooperative nature of improv fosters teamwork, active listening, and empathy—attributes that are valuable in interpersonal communication beyond the classroom. During case studies, learners not only enhanced their language skills but also developed the interpersonal skills needed for successful communication in diverse social and cultural settings. The practical benefits extend beyond the academic context, empowering learners with the linguistic and socio-cultural competencies required for effective communication in real-world situations.

All in all, the analysis of the results clearly shows that all objectives were met and all research questions were answered positively and satisfactorily. Improvisational games from the television show can be transferred to the classroom to foster the learning of language, culture, literature, and history, improve collaborative skills, develop creativity and self-intelligence, reduce the affective filter, and be beneficial for students with different backgrounds, aims and levels of proficiency outside and inside fandom. Even though the current study does not provide a complete and detailed overview of all games in practice and real classroom settings, it has hopefully shed some light on the implementation of different improv show games in online language classrooms. The main implication of the dissertation is a classification of adapted activities that can be



used in practice by language practitioners.

After supplying a tentative answer to the research questions at the basis of this work and drawing some implications from the findings, the main limitations of this study also need to be addressed. First of all, since the case studies were conducted in a sample of female native speakers of Russian in the contexts of Italian and English language learning, it seems reasonable to consider the generalizability of the present findings to other potential group members. Since this was a small-scale study, the sample selected cannot exemplify the entire population at large. Furthermore, the results obtained from this sample of students may not be readily generalized to all individuals of the same age range or with a similar background in foreign languages. Future investigations are necessary to validate the kinds of conclusions that can be drawn from this study. Indeed, the solutions described throughout the various chapters could provide a good starting point for discussion and further research in the field of drama and improvisation in FLT. Looking forward, it would seem that more case studies in a variety of settings and with students from diverse backgrounds are required to better understand the features and benefits of all presented improv games not only online with all female participants and in two languages but also offline with participants of different genders and in a large number of languages.

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#### Material of analysis

Episodes of the show *Improvisation* (2016-2022)

[https://filmix.ac/series/tok\\_show/140021-1-improvizaciya-2022.html](https://filmix.ac/series/tok_show/140021-1-improvizaciya-2022.html)

Appendices

Appendix 1  
The table of eligible games

Title	Level	Skills and benefits	Classroom type
Scenes from a hat	From A1  Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary	Online/in presence/blended language classroom
Change!	From A2 but more effective with advanced learners  Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary  Advancing Self-Intelligence  Developing Creative Intelligence	Online/in presence language classroom
Stuntmen	From A1	Enhancing collaboration skills	In presence language classroom
Blind date/News/Party	From A2+  Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Facilitating lowering of the affective filter	Online/in presence language classroom +literature/culture
Interview	From A2  Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Practicing asking questions	Online/in presence/blended language classroom +literature/culture
First date/True lies	From A2+  Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Retelling texts	In presence language classroom + literature/culture
Options/Genres/Circumstances/The choice	From A1+ but will be more effective with students of intermediate level  Can be adapted for special	Practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary  Advancing Self-Intelligence	Online/in presence language classroom

	purposes/professional contexts	Developing Creative Intelligence	
Detective/Psychic	From A2+  Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Facilitating lowering of the affective filter	Online/in presence language classroom +literature/culture
Strange Restaurant/ Director	From B1  Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary  Developing Creative Intelligence	Online/in presence language classroom
Understudy	From A2	Enhancing collaboration skills	In presence language classroom
Voiceover	From A1+	Developing Creative Intelligence	In presence language classroom
It's a Rap	From B1+	Developing Creative Intelligence	Online/in presence language classroom
Late arrival	From A2  Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary  Enhancing collaboration skills	In presence language classroom + literature/culture
Senseless	From B1	Enhancing collaboration skills	In presence language classroom
Investigator	From B1	Developing Creative Intelligence	Online/in presence language classroom
Rap quiz	From B1+	Developing Creative Intelligence	Online/in presence

		gence	language class-room
Sound quiz	From A2	Developing Creative Intelligence	Online/in presence language class-room
Inner voice	From A2	Advancing Self-Intelligence	In presence
Minus one	From B1 Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Retelling texts	In presence language class-room + literature/culture
Job interview	From A2 Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary	Online/in presence/blended language class-room
Talk show	From A2+ Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary	Online/in presence/blended language class-room + literature/culture
The right question	From A1 Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Practicing asking questions	Online/in presence/blended
Bar attendant	From B1 Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Facilitate lowering of the affective filter	Online/in presence/blended language class-room + literature/culture
Neighbors	From A2+	Developing Creative Intelligence Enhancing collaboration skills	In presence language class-room
Distant relative	From A2+	Practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary	Online/in presence language class-room
Behind the back	From B1	Advancing Self-Intelligence	In presence

	Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts		language classroom
Question to question	From B2	Practicing asking questions	In presence/online language classroom
Call center	From B1 Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary	Online/in presence/blended language classroom
The prompter	From A2+ Can be adapted for special purposes/professional contexts	Advancing Self-Intelligence	Online/in presence/blended language classroom
Alphabetically	From B1	Developing Creative Intelligence Enhancing collaboration skills	Online/in presence language classroom

## Appendix 2

### Questionnaires for participants of the case studies

#### Case study 1

- 1) How do you assess the benefits of this event for yourself?
- 2) Have you experienced discomfort or anxiety?
- 3) Did you encounter any difficulties? If so, which ones?
- 4) How would you suggest changing the “Cambia!” game to minimize possible discomfort?
- 5) Which game did you like the most? Why?
- 6) Which game did you like the least? Why?
- 7) What were your expectations from the event? And were they justified?
- 8) What would you improve in such an event?
- 9) Do you consider important to use theatricalization, in particular improvisation, in foreign language lessons? Why yes or no?
- 10) Would you come to a similar event again?
- 11) Your general impressions of the event
- 12) Was it hard to use the Italian language in games?
- 13) Did my active participation in the games hinder or help?
- 14) Rate each game from 0 to 5 according to the criteria of complexity and effectiveness (for learning Italian)  
0 – very easy 5 – very difficult  
0 – generally ineffective 5 – very effective
- 1) Situations 2) Blind date 3) Change 4) Distant relative
- 15) Did some games or the behavior of the teacher or participants contribute to the spread of stereotypes about Italians? Does it have a negative or positive effect?

#### Case study 2

- 1) Your name, age, city, occupation
- 2) Why have you decided to participate? What were your expectations and were they satisfied?
- 3) How do you assess the benefits of this event for yourself?
- 4) Games aimed at practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary, developing Creative Intelligence and lowering an affective filter. Do you agree or disagree with it and why?
- 5) Have you experienced discomfort or anxiety?
- 6) Did you encounter any difficulties? If so, which ones?
- 7) Which game did you like the most? Why?
- 8) Which game did you like the least? Why?
- 9) What would you improve in such an event?
- 10) Do you consider important to use theatricalization, in particular improvisation, in foreign language lessons? Why yes or no?
- 11) Your general impressions of the event.
- 12) Was it hard to use the English language in games?
- 13) Did my active participation in the games hinder or help?
- 14) Were the instructions provided for the games clear? And do you think they would be clear to those who didn't watch the show, or is there more to be added for them?

15)Rate each game from 0 to 5 according to the criteria of complexity and effectiveness (for learning English)

(if you want you can comment on advantages and disadvantages of games and the ways of improving them but it is not obligatory)

1. Not an Investigator

2. Bar attendant

3.The prompter

16)In your opinion, could these types of activities help popularize language learning among the fandom? and not in the fandom?

17)Thanks again! If you still want to say something, you can do it here:)

### Case study 3

1)Your name, age, city, occupation

2)Why have you decided to participate? What were your expectations and were they satisfied?

3)How do you assess the benefits of this event for yourself?

4)Games aimed at practicing spontaneous speech, fluency in a language, and target vocabulary, developing Creative Intelligence and lowering an affective filter. Do you agree or disagree with it and why?

5)Have you experienced discomfort or anxiety?

6)Did you encounter any difficulties? If so, which ones?

7) Which game did you like the most? Why?

8)Which game did you like the least? Why?

9) What would you improve in such an event?

10) Do you consider important to use theatricalization, in particular improvisation, in foreign language lessons? Why yes or no?

11) Your general impressions of the event

12) Was it hard to use the English language in games?

13) Did my active participation in the games hinder or help? 14)Were the instructions provided for the games clear? And do you think they would be clear to those who didn't watch the show, or is there more to be added for them?

15) Rate each game from 0 to 5 according to the criteria of complexity and effectiveness (for learning English) (if you want you can comment on advantages and disadvantages of games and the ways of improving them but it is not obligatory)

1. Not an Investigator

2. Bar attendant

3.The prompter

16)In your opinion, could these types of activities help popularize language learning among the fandom? and not in the fandom?

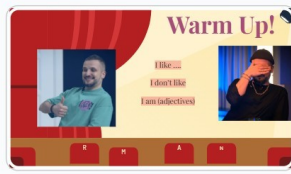
17)Thanks again! If you still want to say something, you can do it here:



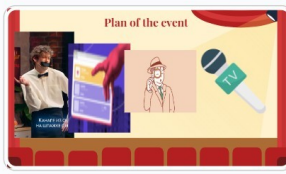
## Appendix 3 Presentations for case studies Two and Three



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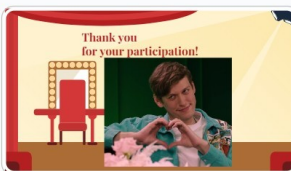
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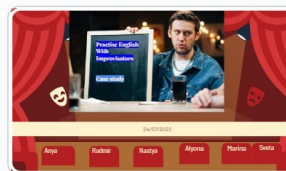
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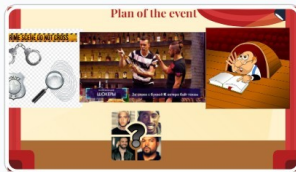
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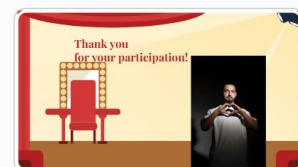
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## Riassunto

La presente tesi di laurea *Unleashing the power of improvisation: adapting a television game show for the foreign language classroom* pone l'obiettivo di adattare i giochi dallo show televisivo per la didattica delle lingue straniere. L'apprendimento e l'insegnamento delle lingue hanno subito una trasformazione significativa, guidata dalla ricerca continua di approcci pedagogici innovativi che possano coinvolgere gli studenti e stimolare la loro competenza nelle lingue straniere. Gli insegnanti moderni hanno una missione che va oltre la semplice trasmissione di competenze linguistiche. Oltre a coltivare le competenze linguistiche, il loro ruolo si estende a coltivare la consapevolezza culturale, a nutrire il pensiero critico e a promuovere la creatività dei propri studenti. L'adozione dell'approccio del dramma, compresa l'arte dell'improvvisazione, svolge un ruolo fondamentale nel raggiungimento di questi obiettivi educativi più ampi. L'incorporazione di elementi drammatici nell'educazione linguistica introduce gli studenti a scenari di vita reale e di fantasia, incoraggiandoli a impegnarsi con la lingua in modi significativi. Come Ausubel (1963) ha dimostrato, l'apprendimento delle lingue diventa più efficace quando è situato in contesti autentici che risuonano con gli studenti. L'approccio teatrale in generale e l'improvvisazione in particolare hanno il potenziale per fornire proprio questo, creando un ponte tra la competenza linguistica e le abilità extralinguistiche.

La motivazione che mi ha spinto a esplorare questo particolare argomento è profondamente personale. Il mio interesse per l'improvvisazione si è ulteriormente approfondito quando, alla fine del 2021, ho scoperto il programma televisivo russo intitolato *Improvvisazione* (2016 - 2022). Lo studio di discipline come Learning English Through Drama e Performative Learning and Communication ha trasformato il mio entusiasmo in un interesse professionale. La passione per lo spettacolo e l'acquisizione di conoscenze teoriche e competenze pratiche hanno influenzato l'improvvisazione a diventare il campo della mia ricerca e a implementare le attività di improvvisazione nella mia attività di insegnamento. Nel quadro del progetto finale di Learning English Through Drama, ho condotto il mio primo caso di studio, adattando quattro giochi dello show. Questa esperienza mi ha fatto capire che c'è un grande potenziale nell'adattamento di questi giochi, sia per gli studenti che per il lavoro scientifico su vasta scala. Questa tesi, composta da cinque capitoli distinti, rappresenta il mio tentativo di approfondire le dimensioni chiave dell'apprendimento e dell'insegnamento delle lingue, del dramma e del gioco nell'educazione linguistica e dell'improvvisazione, sia come forma d'arte che come strumento educativo. L'obiettivo è anche quello di adattare i giochi di improvvisazione dello show per applicarli alle aule di lingua e di esaminare, attraverso casi di studio, il grado di adattabilità e i benefici di questi giochi e il ruolo dell'insegnante in questo processo.

Nel **primo capitolo** vengono descritte le dimensioni dell'apprendimento e dell'insegnamento delle lingue. alcuni elementi fondamentali hanno un impatto sull'efficacia dell'insegnamento delle lingue. L'apprendimento delle lingue implica un approccio plurimo che va oltre dimensioni per un'espe-

rienza di apprendimento più completa ed efficace. Nel libro *“Lessons from Good Language Learners”* (2008), Griffiths presenta più di venti variabili dell'apprendimento delle lingue, fornite da diversi studiosi. Non era nell'ambito di questa tesi esaminarle tutte. Ho selezionato variabili come lo spazio affettivo, l'autenticità, l'autonomia, la collaborazione, la cultura, la motivazione, motivazione, comunicazione non verbale e abilità orali, stili e strategie di apprendimento che sono rilevanti per l'adattamento e la conduzione delle mie attività di improvvisazione, dato che l'obiettivo del presente studio è quello di modificare i giochi di improvvisazione dell'omonimo programma televisivo per utilizzarli all'interno della classe di lingue straniere. Approfondendo l'integrazione delle tecniche teatrali e di improvvisazione nell'insegnamento delle lingue, questi elementi chiave emergono come essenziali per dare forma al quadro pedagogico. Ad esempio, l'autenticità assume un ruolo dinamico in quanto la drammatizzazione del processo incorpora scenari comunicativi reali, permettendo agli studenti praticare una lingua in modo autentico. L'autonomia consente agli studenti di assumersi la responsabilità del proprio sviluppo linguistico. Il filtro affettivo e lo spazio affettivo, concetti centrali nell'acquisizione della lingua, trovano applicazione nell'ambiente emotivamente intenso che si crea con le attività teatrali. Stabilendo un'atmosfera di sostegno e privo di minacce, il teatro funge da catalizzatore che abbassa il filtro affettivo, incoraggia l'assunzione di rischi e promuove le esperienze linguistiche positive.

La motivazione, un fattore indispensabile per l'apprendimento, è naturalmente rafforzata dalla natura coinvolgente e divertente delle attività teatrali, che favoriscono la curiosità, l'esplorazione e l'apprendimento. Gli stili e le strategie di apprendimento, che sono fattori critici per soddisfare le diverse esigenze degli studenti, sono in primo piano in quanto le attività teatrali consentono una varietà di stili di apprendimento, siano essi visivi, uditivi, cinestesici o di altro tipo. L'integrazione della comunicazione non verbale e delle abilità orali si combina organicamente con la natura espressiva del dramma per offrire un'opportunità di comunicazione e di apprendimento.

La collaborazione, un'abilità molto apprezzata nell'educazione linguistica, è un aspetto fondamentale della drammatizzazione in cui i partecipanti lavorano insieme per creare narrazioni, risolvere problemi ed esprimere idee. Attraverso improvvisazione, gli studenti non solo migliorano la loro competenza linguistica, ma sviluppano anche capacità di comunicazione interpersonale e interculturale.

Anche in questo capitolo ho esaminato il ruolo dell'insegnante in relazione ai diversi approcci all'insegnamento delle lingue straniere. Mi sono riferita principalmente alle idee dell'approccio comunicativo, rafforzato da elementi dell'approccio orale, del metodo di apprendimento linguistico basato sui compiti (Task-based learning) e dell'apprendimento integrato di lingua e contenuto (CLIL).

Il **secondo capitolo** si concentra sul gioco e il dramma nell'insegnamento delle lingue. l'integrazione di giochi e del gioco nelle aule di lingua emerge come un potente strumento pedagogico. Nel 1984 Wright, Betteridge e Buckby hanno pubblicato il libro *“Giochi per l'apprendimento delle*

*lingue*”, confermando i benefici dei giochi: “L'apprendimento delle lingue è un lavoro duro... Lo sforzo è richiesto in ogni momento e deve essere mantenuto per un lungo periodo di tempo. I giochi aiutano e incoraggiano molti apprendenti a mantenere il loro interesse e il loro lavoro” (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby 1984:2). Ersöz (2011) segue Wright, Betteridge e Buckby (1984) nel sottolineare che i giochi possono fornire una pausa necessaria e legittima nel difficile processo di apprendimento delle lingue. Ha affermato che i giochi ben selezionati hanno un valore importante per l'apprendimento perché sono divertenti e stimolanti allo stesso tempo. Inoltre, favoriscono la cooperazione. Langran e Purcell sostengono che i giochi aumentano autonomia degli studenti, consentendo loro di fare di più da soli, cosa che in seguito potrebbe portare a un aumento del loro livello di autostima (Langran & Purcell 1994). Un ulteriore supporto può essere trovato nel lavoro di Zdybijewska (1994), che suggerisce che i giochi sono un modo utile per praticare la lingua perché offrono un modello di ciò che gli studenti useranno in futuro nella vita reale. Nedomová (2007) sottolinea che nella scelta di un gioco, gli insegnanti dovrebbero considerare se l'attività di gioco per gli studenti bambini è solo rendere la lezione più attraente. Huyen e Nga (2003) forniscono alcuni fattori per l'uso efficace dei giochi nelle classi di lingue straniere: il numero di studenti, il livello di competenza e il livello di apprendimento, il contesto culturale, l'argomento di apprendimento e il setting della classe. language games can function as a natural introduction to dramatic activities and as preparation for role-playing, improvisation, and other theatrical activities (Davies 1990). They are intended to create immediate motivation as well as physical and/or mental stimulation that engages or supports students in active learning centered on authentic/active communication in the target language (Stoate 1984, Dougill 1987). L'integrazione del dramma nell'insegnamento delle lingue straniere non è uno strumento recente; le sue radici storiche risalgono al XIX secolo (Schewe 2007). Ma solo di recente il dramma è entrato in classe come strumento di apprendimento, come tecnica anziché come materia, ed è stato riconosciuto per il suo contributo pedagogico all'apprendimento da numerosi studiosi nel campo del teatro e dell'educazione (Heathcote & Bolton 1995; Wagner 1998; Neelands 2000; O'Connor 2010; Nicholson 2011, Anderson 2012), del dramma di processo, del dramma di ruolo e del dramma narrativo (O'Toole 1992; O'Neill 1995; Howell & Heap 2001, 2005; Miller & Saxton 2004; Booth 2005; Fels & Belliveau 2008; Eriksson 2009), così come del dramma e dell'alfabetizzazione (Grady 2000; Baldwin Fleming 2003). Nel corso della storia, l'arte drammatica non solo ha avuto le sue evoluzioni, i suoi stili e i suoi approcci, ma ha anche lavorato in tandem con altre discipline per raggiungere vari obiettivi. Tra gli approcci al dramma nell'apprendimento della lingua ci sono i seguenti: dramma e teatro, processo e prodotto, piccole e grandi forme. Di seguito, ho elaborato una breve revisione dei principali tipi di drammatizzazione. Si tratta di “tableaux vivant”, mimi, giochi di ruolo, drammi di processo, task interattivi come i dialoghi e storie teatralizzate.

L'approccio del teatro di processo mi è sembrato particolarmente importante per la sua natura semi-improvvisativa, in quanto il dramma è costantemente improvvisato, creando il contesto di apprendi-

mento sul posto in classe, con gli studenti tutti coinvolti come partecipanti alla creazione del dramma e come personaggi all'interno di esso che si svolge nel corso del tempo, raramente completo e mai completamente preordinato. Secondo Caplan (2011) e Neelands e Goode (2000), il dramma di processo utilizza alcune convenzioni essenziali, tra cui l'insegnante in ruolo, il fermo immagine, il hot seating, il soundscape, il mantello dell'esperto e l'improvvisazione. Sulla base di numerosi studi condotti in tutto il mondo, l'utilizzo del dramma nelle classi di lingua straniera ha mostrato solo risultati positivi. Bolton (1984) e Heathcote (1984) sono stati i primi accademici a riconoscere l'importanza della presenza del teatro nelle classi di prima lingua e a incoraggiare gli insegnanti a inserirlo nelle loro lezioni. In risposta al loro incoraggiamento, gli insegnanti di seconda lingua e di lingua straniera hanno iniziato a ideare nuovi approcci per integrare questo potenziale strumento nelle lezioni di lingua straniera perché, secondo loro, il dramma è in grado di influenzare efficacemente le quattro abilità di base: leggere, parlare, scrivere e ascoltare (Dodson 2000; Dunder 2013; Aldavero 2008). Numerosi studi, tra cui i lavori di Maley e Duff (2001), Brumfit (1991) e Philips (2003), hanno sostenuto i vantaggi dell'integrazione del dramma nell'apprendimento delle lingue straniere. Zyoud (2010) afferma che il dramma trascende lo sviluppo cognitivo, favorendo anche la crescita emotiva e personale in un modo che i metodi convenzionali non possono raggiungere. In aggiunta, Maley (2005) enumera molteplici benefici del dramma, tra cui la sua naturale integrazione delle abilità linguistiche e la sua combinazione coerente di comunicazione verbale e non verbale. Afferma inoltre che, contestualizzando completamente il linguaggio, il dramma dà vita alle interazioni di apprendimento attraverso un'intensa attenzione al significato e promuove uno stile di apprendimento aperto ed esplorativo in cui la creatività e l'immaginazione hanno un notevole sviluppo. Sebbene il teatro abbia un immenso potenziale nella didattica FL, ci sono alcuni prerequisiti da affrontare prima della sua integrazione. In primis, l'insegnante deve essere ben preparato per la lezione. È essenziale che definisca in anticipo gli obiettivi della lezione e che scelga il tipo di attività in base alle competenze linguistiche e agli interessi degli studenti.

L'istruttore dovrebbe anche essere attento ai tabù sociali o religiosi che potrebbero influenzare le dinamiche di gruppo, stabilendo così un clima sicuro e rispettoso. Per quanto riguarda il ruolo dell'insegnante nella conduzione di attività teatrali Bessadet (2022) afferma che gli insegnanti dovrebbero agire come facilitatori e supervisori. Per i facilitatori è importante assicurarsi che tutti gli studenti possano parlare liberamente durante le sessioni di facilitazione. Alcuni studenti possono essere più attivi di altri e il loro ruolo è quello di assicurare che tutti abbiano la stessa voce. Rivers (1972) sottolinea che gli insegnanti di lingue straniere dovrebbero avere una presenza dinamica in classe, anche se non è richiesta un'esperienza di recitazione professionale. Questo punto di vista è in sintonia con mio approccio.

Il **terzo capitolo** si tratta di improvvisazione in teatro, educazione e insegnamento delle lingue straniere. In generale, tutti i nomi del teatro contemporaneo utilizzano in qualche misura l'improvvisazione sia nella preparazione degli spettacoli che nella loro realizzazione. Chacra, Artaud,

Meyerhold, Brecht, Stanislavskij e Boal sono alcuni esempi di coloro che hanno fatto del teatro un linguaggio di improvvisazione, uscendo dalla formalità. Un aspetto centrale della ricerca sull'improvvisazione teatrale è la spontaneità (Moreno 1977; Spolin 1970; Johnstone 1979; Boal 2003; Chacra 1983; Meyerhold 1968; Hauser 1972; Berthold 2001; Roubine 2003; Moussinac 1957), che libera gli individui da schemi più meccanici di stimolazione dei sentimenti e di osservazione del mondo (Moreno 1977). Improvvisazione applicata è un termine generico, che si riferisce ad un approccio di tecniche d'improvvisazione teatrale in contesti non artistici come strumento per perseguire obiettivi specifici (Tint & Froerer, 2014) - l'area a cui appartengono le mie attività di improvvisazione.

Dal lavoro di Spolin e Johnstone, l'improvvisazione si è sviluppata fino a diventare una forma d'arte professionale a sé stante. Entrambi gli insegnanti sono stati di sviluppare giochi strutturati come modo per affrontare le questioni che si presentavano durante il processo teatrale formale, anche se Spolin ha fondato la Second City, nota per la sua rinomata sketch comedy, e Johnstone ha creato Theatresports, la forma di improvvisazione comica più popolare a livello globale. McLaughlin (2022) ha dichiarato che c'è una grande risonanza tra Spolin e Johnstone. Ha notato che entrambi erano educatori che lavoravano con i giovani prima che la loro metodologia venisse applicata agli adulti; entrambi consideravano il coinvolgimento con la realtà del momento come la chiave per liberare l'immaginazione creativa; entrambi consideravano i giochi come la chiave per entrare in questo stato di interazione con il mondo e con gli altri; ed entrambi credevano che la disciplina imposta dall'autorità fosse il più grande ostacolo a questa liberazione. Johnstone e Spolin hanno entrambi utilizzato il side-coaching mentre svolgevano i giochi. Spolin ha fornito all'insegnante o al direttore un linguaggio specifico di side-coaching per ogni gioco. Anche Johnstone ha fornito esempi di side-coaching che ha usato in passato per affrontare le difficoltà, ma non l'ha usato con la stessa regolarità o coerenza di Spolin. Passando dalle somiglianze alle differenze, va detto che la metodologia di Spolin (1983), originariamente progettata per incoraggiare l'interazione sociale tra pari, pone una forte enfasi sulla spontaneità e sull'intuizione (McKnight & Scruggs 2008), mentre Johnstone (1999) ha inizialmente sviluppato giochi ed esercizi di improvvisazione che rendevano più facile sviluppare linee di trama per il teatro.

Si potrebbe pensare che, poiché l'improvvisazione è qualcosa che si esegue senza preparazione, non abbia regole o principi, ma non è questo il caso. Questa nozione è sostenuta da Duranti e Black (2011) che affermano che l'improvvisazione spesso non si riferisce a un comportamento casuale. Alcune regole e principi possono variare a seconda della compagnia teatrale e degli insegnanti. Tre regole principali sono state derivate dalla teoria di Spolin da Close et al. (1994). Accettare sempre la realtà ("Sì, e"), prendere una decisione attiva (essere presenti) e sostenere ciò che accade sul palco. Secondo diversi improvvisatori, il principio del "sì, e" è alla base dell'improvvisazione e, in effetti, nei set di regole, questa regola è spesso la prima (vedi Del Close (1994), Goodman (2008), Fey (2011), Perone (in Sawyer 2011), Zakharyin (2022)). I partecipanti sono incoraggiati ad ac-

ettare e ad espandere le idee proposte dagli altri. Del Close (1994) ha notato che le negazioni non sono ammesse nell'improvvisazione e che avere un'etica è una componente necessaria di un membro competente del gruppo. Un insieme di regole relativamente meno universalmente riconosciute, che tende a essere simile tra i diversi praticanti, comprende anche le regole di concentrarsi sul momento presente, l'ascolto attivo, il sostegno al partner di scena ("sii il riflettore del tuo partner" (Zakharyin 2022:48), l'uso del corpo e dei movimenti fisici per esprimere idee ed emozioni, l'evitare i blocchi, il coinvolgimento di tutti i sensi, il giocare con lo status e le dinamiche di potere. Inoltre, Spolin (1999) ha consigliato di evitare di porre di far ricadere la responsabilità sull'altra persona. Invece, i partecipanti dovrebbero offrire dettagli per far progredire l'azione. L'ultima regola, ma non meno importante, riguarda gli errori. L'improvvisazione insegna agli studenti a non aver paura di sbagliare. di commettere errori. Spolin (1999) ritiene che gli errori possano dare origine a momenti inaspettati e innovativi. Fey (2011) aggiunge che gli errori dovrebbero essere visti come opportunità, non come fallimenti.

Prima di procedere ad una riflessione sull'improvvisazione in ambito educativo, è importante notare che non si tratta di un concetto univoco che può riferirsi uno stile di insegnamento in contrapposizione alla pianificazione e a un approccio teatrale. La mia ricerca si occupa in particolare di quest'ultimo. Sempre più istituzioni educative, come notato da Patel (2014), stanno vedendo il valore di programmi o laboratori di improvvisazione che insegnano a insegnanti e studenti come accettare le incognite e a pensare velocemente durante la presentazione di ricerche e conferenze. Una varietà di materie, tra cui storia (Taylor 2008), matematica (Smith 1998), educazione civica (Pellegrino et al. 2010), scienze sociali (Gravey et al. 2017), archeologia (Trimmis & Kalogirou 2018) e medicina (Hooker & Dalton 2019). Dalton (2019), sono state insegnate attraverso il teatro, la musica e l'improvvisazione. Kloetzer et al. (2020) hanno notato che le arti dello spettacolo possono essere applicate all'educazione in diversi come strumento artistico in aggiunta a un curriculum tradizionale o in modo più radicale - le arti performative possono essere il frutto di un'esperienza. I ricercatori hanno riconosciuto il potenziale per l'identificazione di un continuum contenente soluzioni intermedie e questo si adatta perfettamente a quello che mi interessa.

Sebbene la drammatizzazione, con la sua enfasi sull'interpretazione testuale e sulla performance, sia un metodo utile per l'apprendimento delle lingue straniere (Kao & O'Neill 1998; Maley & Duff 2005; Manuel 2008; Stinson 2008; Winston & Stinson, 2014), secondo Kurtz (2011), non molte ricerche hanno esplorato il potenziale delle attività di improvvisazione nell'apprendimento delle lingue straniere. L'uso dell'improvvisazione nei corsi di arte, di educazione e di lingua straniera ha prodotto solo risultati positivi, secondo varie ricerche condotte in tutto il mondo (cfr. Berk & Trieber 2009; Crossan & Sorrenti 1997; Moshavi 2001; Sawyer 2004; Spolin 1999). Attraverso le attività di improvvisazione gli studenti possono sperimentare l'apprendimento a livello intellettuale,

fisico ed emotivo. L'improvvisazione è stata riconosciuta da tempo come un mezzo utile per spontaneità, l'intuizione, l'ascolto empatico, la comunicazione non verbale, l'ad-libbing, il gioco di ruolo, l'assunzione di rischi, il team building, la creatività e il pensiero critico. Come affermato da Costa et al. (2014), l'improvvisazione è un'esperienza multisensoriale che attiva le aree visive, uditive, motorie e sociali del cervello mentre si guarda, si ascolta e si agisce durante giochi, prove o scene. Non solo gli studenti beneficiano dell'applicazione dell'improvvisazione alle classi di lingua ma anche gli insegnanti. Ronke (2005) ammette che l'uso regolare dell'improvvisazione ci costringe ad ascoltare ciò che i nostri studenti creano al momento, e questa può essere un'esperienza sorprendente. Una breve attività di improvvisazione può fornirci più informazioni sui nostri studenti più di quanto non possa fare un'intera unità di insegnamento svolta in modo tradizionale. Mentre l'improvvisazione è spontanea, l'insegnante dovrebbe fornire una struttura per guidare le attività. Fauzan (2014) sviluppa questa concezione sostenendo che gli insegnanti dovrebbero essere ben preparati, perché la loro preparazione influenzerà l'implementazione delle attività. Sawyer (2011) sostiene che un'istruzione creativa efficace implica la ricerca di un equilibrio tra struttura e improvvisazione, corrispondente alla mia visione.

Il **quarto capitolo** si focalizza in particolare sull'adattamento dei giochi di improvvisazione del programma televisivo alla didattica delle lingue. L'improvvisazione teatrale come forma è stata presente nei media attraverso spettacoli di improvvisazione come *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* versione britannica (1988-1999) e statunitense (1998-2023), *Carey's Improv-A-Ganza* (2011) e *Thank God You're Here* (2006-2009). Tutti gli show presentano divertenti esercizi di improvvisazione e giochi divertenti, spesso con la partecipazione di celebrità. Sebbene il genere dell'improvvisazione sia nato e si sia sviluppato negli Stati Uniti e nel Regno Unito, il mio incontro con questo genere è avvenuto soprattutto grazie allo show russo *Improvvisazione*. Il genere dell'improvvisazione in Russia è giovane (non ha più di quindici anni) ed è diventato rapidamente popolare grazie allo show, attirando sullo schermo un pubblico di milioni di persone e contribuendo allo sviluppo e alla diffusione dell'improvvisazione in Russia e nella CSI. Durante i sei anni di attività dello show, sono stati girati duecentoventisei episodi. Ogni episodio dello show presentava lo stesso cast di quattro attori (Shastun, Popov, Matveenko e Pozov), il conduttore (Volya) e una o più guest star. Il conduttore si è seduto a un tavolo a lato dell'ampia area del palcoscenico, con la o le star ospiti sedute accanto a lui. Gli attori erano seduti in fondo al palco su divani e salivano sul palco solo per le improvvisazioni. Gli interpreti che non erano coinvolti nello spettacolo sono rimasti ai loro posti in fondo al palco. C'era anche un set secondario sul palco, un set appositamente nascosto che appariva a un certo punto. Ogni episodio consisteva in sei o sette giochi di improvvisazione, con la partecipazione di guest star nella maggior parte di essi. Il numero di attori coinvolti nelle improvvisazioni variava da due a quattro. Complessivamente, il patrimonio dello spettacolo comprende circa cinquanta giochi, che vanno dai semplici esercizi di riscaldamento a scene più complesse che richiedono maggiore at-



tenzione e concentrazione. Il mio compito è stato quello di adattare i giochi eleggibili in base al curriculum, agli obiettivi, agli interessi, all'età e al livello degli studenti. Per essere considerata idonea, un'attività non deve provocare alcun danno fisico o mentale agli studenti e non deve richiedere attrezzature complesse che sono disponibili per gli studi televisivi ma non per le aule di lingue. Ho classificato i giochi idonei in base alle abilità che sviluppano: giochi per esercitare l'eloquio spontaneo, la padronanza della lingua e il vocabolario di riferimento (suddivisi anche in giochi che aiutano ad esercitarsi a fare domande, a parafrasare i testi e in giochi interattivi con opzioni); attività che facilitano la diminuzione del filtro affettivo; giochi che aiutano a migliorare l'auto-intelligenza; attività che sviluppano l'intelligenza creativa (suddivise in attività rap e acustiche); giochi che migliorano le competenze di collaborazione. Sebbene questa tesi si concentri principalmente sul quadro dell'insegnamento delle lingue, è essenziale sottolineare che le attività di improvvisazione dello spettacolo possono essere adattate anche alle lezioni di letteratura e di storia e potrebbero servire ad approfondire l'aspetto culturale dell'apprendimento delle lingue. Questi giochi potrebbero essere utilizzati nell'approccio CLIL all'insegnamento delle lingue. Tuttavia, è importante notare che queste attività sono più adatte al ripasso che allo studio di nuovi contenuti.

Otto dei cinquanta giochi inclusi nel programma sono stati giudicati non idonei dopo la mia valutazione approfondita. Molti dei criteri stabiliti all'inizio del processo di valutazione non sono stati soddisfatti da queste attività. Dall'analisi di queste attività non eleggibili emerge chiaramente come sia fondamentale seguire le regole e specifiche quando si scelgono giochi di improvvisazione per i contesti educativi. Nel quarto capitolo ho identificato diversi gruppi di problemi che tendono a impedire l'adattamento. Il primo è quello dei giochi di improvvisazione estremi, in cui alcuni elementi del gioco possono essere dannosi o stressanti per i partecipanti. È importante sottolineare che questo tipo di improvvisazione estrema, o qualsiasi attività che possa potenzialmente danneggiare gli studenti, è severamente vietata in un contesto educativo. È possibile, tuttavia, prendere parti di questi scenari improvvisati e trasformarli in scenari interessanti e sicuri per l'apprendimento delle lingue. Il secondo gruppo si riferisce ai giochi esclusivi per le attrezzature. Pur essendo divertenti, alcune attività dello spettacolo presentano delle difficoltà quando vengono inserite in una classe di lingua. Queste difficoltà potrebbero essere imposte dalla necessità di strumenti specializzati, dalla complessità o dal basso valore educativo. Un altro gruppo si occupa di giochi incentrati sulla sensibilità. A mio avviso, gli obiettivi principali di una classe di lingue straniere dovrebbero essere la promozione della conoscenza della lingua, la consapevolezza culturale e la creazione di un'atmosfera di apprendimento rispettosa e favorevole. I giochi di questo gruppo non sono in linea con questi obiettivi educativi specifici. Tuttavia, questi aspetti essenziali del genere e della salute mentale possono essere affrontati efficacemente nel contesto di altri giochi linguistici, come il Talk Show. In questo capitolo ho presentato la mia valutazione e classificazione di un'ampia gamma di giochi di improvvisazione tratti dallo show *Improvvisazione* (2016-2022) e il loro successivo adattamento per

l'apprendimento delle lingue. I giochi presentati in questo capitolo sono stati progettati per servire come elementi di base per la creazione di una cultura dell'apprendimento nelle aule di lingua che sia meno rigida, meno programmata e meno dominata dall'insegnante (Kurtz 2015).

Cercando di fornire un esempio, nella pratica, di come questi adattamenti possano essere utili agli studenti di lingue, **quinto capitolo** presenta al lettore la descrizione e l'analisi di tre casi di studio. Per testare i miei giochi adattati è stata condotta una serie di casi di studio nel maggio 2022 e nell'estate 2023. È importante notare che tutti i casi sono stati condotti online. Il quarto studio di caso è stato modellato e pianificato per l'agosto 2023, ma purtroppo è stato cancellato all'ultimo momento a causa di circostanze impreviste di alcuni partecipanti.

Gli studi di caso hanno coinvolto un totale di nove partecipanti, tutti di sesso femminile. I partecipanti rappresentavano diversi livelli di istruzione, tra cui studenti delle scuole superiori, universitari e laureati. Inoltre, provenivano da diversi settori di studio e occupazione, come la giurisprudenza, il management e l'informatica. L'età dei partecipanti variava dai diciassette ai trentatré anni. Come suggerito da Fleming (2006), il grado di conoscenza della lingua da parte dei partecipanti è stato preso in considerazione prima di intraprendere i progetti. Nel mio caso, gli studenti avevano una buona padronanza della lingua e il loro grado di fluidità in italiano/inglese era adeguato per svolgere il compito. I partecipanti al primo studio di caso erano all'epoca studenti di italiano di livello A2, mentre i partecipanti al secondo e al terzo studio erano di livello intermedio e avanzato di lingua inglese. I partecipanti del primo caso di studio erano miei studenti della scuola online di italiano che conoscevo da tempo, mentre i partecipanti degli altri casi di studio erano giovani donne del fandom dello show che ho conosciuto per la prima volta.

Il metodo qualitativo è stato applicato per misurare l'impatto dell'evento sui partecipanti. Con questo obiettivo, ho progettato un questionario che è stato inviato dopo l'evento; il prezioso feedback mi ha permesso di capire meglio i benefici e le sfide delle attività per gli studenti e cosa dovrei considerare per migliorare le attività e il processo. Gli strumenti di ricerca comprendevano le registrazioni video di tutti i casi di studio, i questionari dopo ogni evento e l'analisi approfondita delle risposte.

Dal primo al terzo capitolo ho esaminato il ruolo dell'insegnante in diversi metodi di apprendimento delle lingue, nel dramma in generale e nell'improvvisazione in particolare, per capire come dovevo comportarmi durante i miei studi di caso. Avendo pochi partecipanti, ho deciso di essere un insegnante nel ruolo. Secondo Baldwin (2012), l'insegnante in ruolo (TiR) tende a essere una delle strategie recitative più potenti, interattive e coinvolgenti e la più efficace per quanto riguarda l'apprendimento. Per esperienza personale, sono stata convinta che questa strategia consenta all'insegnante di

essere al fianco degli studenti come modello interattivo e mediatore dell'esperienza di teatro immaginario condiviso. Hodgson e Richards (1974) hanno notato che gli insegnanti dovrebbero cercare di consentire ai membri del gruppo di essere assorbiti nell'attività che stanno perseguendo invece di essere interessati a se stessi intraprendendo l'attività. Loro notano anche che la sfida per l'insegnante è quella di attivare ogni studente nel gruppo rispettando la capacità immediata di partecipazione di ciascuno. Ho cercato di fare tutte queste cose ed essere più di un facilitatore, e mediatore, che monitora il processo consente agli studenti di comunicare da soli senza intervenire, e li assiste solo se non sanno come procedere. Tuttavia, avevo paura di rubare la scena agli studenti poiché a volte riuscivo a trovare un riflesso del mio comportamento nella nozione di O'Neill (1989) sull'insegnante apertamente drammatico che dominava come performer in classe e intimidiva i partecipanti. Eppure, tutti i partecipanti hanno detto che la mia partecipazione è stata utile.

Quasi tutte le studentesse hanno trovato le loro sessioni di improvvisazione benefiche e vorrebbero partecipare di nuovo all'evento o addirittura esercitarsi in modo permanente. La mia esperienza come insegnante di italiano e inglese ha dimostrato che gli studenti sono in una posizione molto migliore per usare la lingua in modo efficace dopo solo pochi esercizi drammatici. Il discorso dei partecipanti è diventato più fluente e più vivace e la loro intonazione è stata più varia. Casi di studio hanno confermato che l'aspetto improvvisativo del dramma offre agli studenti l'opportunità di sviluppare le loro capacità comunicative in situazioni autentiche e dinamiche. Utilizzando il dramma in classe di lingua straniera, ho usato l'inglese e l'italiano con i miei studenti in modi intriganti e utili. Il dramma ha il potenziale per rendere l'esperienza di apprendimento divertente per gli studenti e persino memorabile perché è interattivo e visivo ed è stato dimostrato dai partecipanti. Una delle variabili chiave, che è anche uno dei principali vantaggi dell'improvvisazione - collaborazione - è stata vista e sviluppata durante il processo di case study. I partecipanti si sono sostenuti e incoraggiati a vicenda. Il feedback delle studentesse mi ha fatto capire che gli obiettivi principali dell'evento erano stati raggiunti. Sebbene i casi di studio siano stati utili sia per i partecipanti che per la mia ricerca, non tutto è proceduto senza intoppi e questo è importante da notare quando si parla delle sfide che ho affrontato. La prima sfida sono stati i diversi livelli di competenza linguistica dei partecipanti al primo caso di studio. Un'altra sfida incontrata è stata l'insufficiente vocabolario attivo. Entrambe le studentesse nel primo caso di studio hanno ammesso di avere una mancanza di vocabolario attivo. Ecco perché è ancora più importante praticare il discorso spontaneo. La sfida di altri casi di studio, specialmente osservati nel secondo, era l'uso del vocabolario passivo per le parole da indovinare. Penso che questo sia inevitabile quando si fanno eventi con persone a cui non si insegna regolarmente. Inoltre, nel terzo caso di studio, c'era qualche dubbio sul fatto che i loro spunti e le loro espressioni fossero stupidi, ho cercato di spiegare che non c'è nulla di stupido nell'improvvisazione, ma non sembravano convinti. Le mie idee hanno trovato una riflessione in Smith (1984) che ha affermato che gli studenti dovrebbero essere aperti a idee diverse e ad avere i

loro errori corretti. In una prova drammatica così come in una classe di lingua straniera, gli studenti dovrebbero essere disposti a “rischiare, sbagliare, sembrare sciocchi, quindi riprovare” (Smith 1984: 6). Un'altra delle mie preoccupazioni era la paura di diffondere stereotipi sulle culture dei paesi della lingua di destinazione in classe. Kramersch (2012) ha confermato la validità delle mie preoccupazioni sottolineando che gli insegnanti di lingue non native hanno paura di cadere negli stereotipi promossi dal libro di testo e dall'industria del marketing e preferiscono rimanere sul terreno sicuro della grammatica e del vocabolario. L'ultimo problema è inevitabile mentre si lavora online che è un problema con la connessione. Anche se alcune sfide dovrebbero essere prese in considerazione e superate, i giochi di improvvisazione hanno contribuito a far scoprire sia all'insegnante che agli studenti una forma innovativa di apprendimento in un nuovo ambiente di apprendimento e insegnamento.

Tenendo conto delle risposte dei partecipanti incluse nel questionario, si può presumere che considerino il dramma come un metodo prezioso di apprendimento, che contribuisce notevolmente alle lezioni di lingua e aumenta la motivazione degli studenti e rende le lezioni più imprevedibili. Dal mio punto di vista, è importante non solo condurre sessioni di improvvisazione separate ma anche integrarli in lezioni regolari. Ad esempio, alcune attività possono essere dato da cinque a quindici minuti alla fine della lezione con i requisiti per utilizzare vocabolario specifico o costruzioni grammaticali. Ho sperimentato in pratica che i giochi di improvvisazione dello show sono ugualmente efficaci sia per le persone del fandom che per coloro che non lo hanno mai visto. Credo che questi giochi possano essere utilizzati per attirare le persone, specialmente gli adolescenti nelle scuole russe, per imparare le lingue, poiché lo spettacolo è amato da milioni di persone e può essere utilizzato non solo come mezzo di intrattenimento ma anche per l'apprendimento. Come confermato da uno dei partecipanti, è un ottimo modo per migliorare le proprie conoscenze, capacità di parlare e ascoltare e allo stesso tempo incontrare persone interessanti. Il secondo caso di studio mi ha dato la sensazione del potere dei giochi di improvvisazione nel riunire le persone. Eravamo estranei prima dell'esperienza, ma alla fine c'era una grande atmosfera di amore, rispetto e ammirazione reciproca che ha motivato non solo i partecipanti a imparare le lingue, ma anche me a continuare a perseguire questo campo di studio.

Nel complesso, l'analisi dei risultati mostra chiaramente che tutti gli obiettivi sono stati raggiunti e che a tutte le domande di ricerca è stata data una risposta positiva e soddisfacente. I giochi di improvvisazione dello show televisivo possono essere trasferiti in classe per favorire l'apprendimento della lingua, della cultura, della letteratura e della storia, migliorare le capacità collaborative, sviluppare la creatività e l'auto-intelligenza, ridurre il filtro affettivo ed essere utili per gli studenti con diversi background, obiettivi e livelli di competenza al di fuori e all'interno del fandom.

