



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI  
DI PADOVA

**Università degli Studi di Padova**

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in  
Lingue Moderne per la Comunicazione e la Cooperazione Internazionale  
Classe LM-38

Tesi di Laurea

*Listen and Learn: an experiment on the  
effectiveness of songs in English L2  
Pronunciation*

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Anno Accademico 2015 / 2016

## **Abstract**

This work is a thesis that aims at verifying the possible effectiveness of using English songs as a means to improve the pronunciation of English as a second language studied by Italian speakers.

The first part is a theoretical presentation. After a general introduction in the first chapter where the most widespread language teaching theories are considered, there is a presentation of a series of applications of songs in language teaching contexts, not always focused on improving the pronunciation of a second language. Finally, some examples of the use of music in areas different from language teaching are presented, hinting to the beneficial effects of music itself.

The second part is the presentation of the experiment. First of all it explores the theoretical implications which determined the choices made to define the structure of the experiment. This is followed by the presentation of the experiment in all its parts and, in the final chapter, the results obtained from the examination of the pre and post experiment audio recordings. The work ends with the conclusions where some considerations are made in the light of the results.

To enter the audio recordings converted into QR codes, an application for the QR codes scanning is required. The application is available and freely downloadable on any device with a built-in camera.



## **Acknowledgements**

I want to thank first of all Professor Maria Grazia Busà, supervisor of this thesis and controller of the recordings used for the experiment. I have to thank her not only for the valuable advices and directions that she gave me as an expert in Phonetics but even for the courage to believe in my ideas. If she saw in me enthusiasm for the work done, this is also due to the support I received from her. Using the words of D’Cruz (2001), cited in Chapter 4, “don’t give your students fish, but teach them how to fish”; in her own way she has taught me how to be a good *fisher* and for this I will be always grateful.

I thank my parents and my brother, who have always encouraged me in these long years of studying and welcomed me back home with open arms in a difficult moment of my life.

Last but not least, I thank my friends who always believe in me and the students who volunteered for this experiment without the stimulus of any compensation. I thank in particular (in alphabetical order) Dr. Matteo Carraro, Dr. Nicola Dal Pozzolo, Dr. Marco Sottoriva for the precious contribution to this project. A special thank goes to Dr. Filippo Gennaro who helped me with technical issues and never left me alone.

There are times when you realize how small you are in the world, and there are others when you realize how great the world can be with you. In those times you can just smile, close your eyes and say ... thanks.



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## Introduction

During these long years of university studies, interrupted by work demands, I was not a good sample of student. I could not consistently attend language classes and other disciplines in general, and I often had to face the exams relying only on my own strength and ability to find helpful supports to my preparation. One thing, however, impressed me during these years of study, and it is the constant presence of music, not as a job nor as the main occupation, but as the soundtrack of every moment of my life. I remember how many times the music helped me to face the saddest moments or stimulated me and stimulates me still when, for example, I work out. It was amazing to recognize how my performance of racing could improve in terms of few seconds simply by listening to the triggering rhythm of *Back in Black* by AC / DC, or as a simple melody like *Elements* by Lindsey Stirling could inspire me serenity and let me pull the plug from the problems and the world. But not only. I realized that from this background music I could get a lot more. I've started to notice how often some songs "stuck-in-my-head", to use the expression of Murphey (1990), and that the same thing happens to many other people who, like me, love music.

From here comes the idea of this thesis. A thesis that wants to be not only a point of arrival, as the happy ending of a long adventure, but rather a starting point; a work that, with its small contribution, wants to pave the way to those who, like me, strongly believe in the effectiveness of non-conventional methods for teaching.

In this "Introduction", I propose a presentation of the chapters that make up this work. The work is divided into two basic parts. The first three chapters, as already mentioned in the Abstract, are a general theoretical approach to the central theme. For those not interested in the general introduction, I suggest to go directly to the second part that begins with Chapter 4 where the experiment is presented and followed by the results and conclusions.

**Chapter 1** traces the milestones of language teaching theories more widely known (paragraph 1.1). Language teaching is a discipline that provides methods for the acquisition of a second language. Each method has a theoretical basis to refer to, but it is often linked more to tradition than to a reasoned choice of the teacher. From a historical point of view, the study of a second language was introduced in the curriculum at the beginning of the century. The first methods used were the grammar-translating method, primarily based on the use of manuals of

grammar, and the reading method, an alternative to the previous one which focused mainly on the ability to read.

In the mid-50s mechanistic-structuralist methods began to offer an alternative to the grammar-translating method, with the so called “pattern drills” (repetitive and pounding exercises that aim at training students in a second language). Teaching was considered a simple and repetitive practice, a kind of *mental habit* to be taught to students according to the scheme stimulus-response-reinforcement: stimulation with an input of a second language, student’s response to the stimulus, correction and reinforcement of the student’s response to the stimulus. Learning a second language was seen as a behaviour to be acquired and the teaching was focused primarily on the acquisition of grammatical concepts. It lacked, however, the component of creativity and especially the second language in a communicative context.

But with the 60’s in the United States, the nativist theories of Chomsky began to spread, in particular the idea of the LAD (Language Acquisition Device) and the humanistic-affective approaches. The student was no longer seen as a box to be filled with theoretical knowledge but as a person who must know how to interact with other people, to cooperate, to have fun and also to be responsible for his/her own learning, with the prospect of realizing a personal growth. So considering these perspectives, the structuralist exercises would be a helpful way to activate the LAD. From the nativist theories of Chomsky the idea of the “comprehensible input” of Krashen arose in the 70’s. The comprehensible input would represent, in fact, a way to acquire a second language: a type of information already known and therefore understood by the student that has to be accompanied by a slightly newer one. But the other important observation of Krashen was the need to lower the affective filters that hinder learning. Performance anxiety is in fact an obstacle for learning. These humanistic-affective approaches are considered fundamental for language teaching, although residues of the old grammar-translating methods are still found in schools.

The problem of the choice of the teaching method is also analyzed from a neurological point of view (paragraph 1.2). We know that the right and left hemisphere of our brain are areas delegated to different functions. The right side is the part where there is the emotional component, which processes information in an intuitive way, while the left side is predisposed to the systematic analysis, deductive and logical reasoning. Along with this bimodality there is also a sort of directionality or an order in the process of acquisition that seems to start from the right

hemisphere and then to move to the left one. Traditional methods, however, very often do not observe this order, and usually approach the second language from a grammar reflection at first. So the use of technology as a tool to activate both hemispheres is one of the ideas to face this problem; Mezzadri is a supporter of these ideas and proposes the use of multimediality as a solution for a comprehensive approach to the study of a second language, given the ability to engage actively and simultaneously the left and right hemispheres.

Despite the very different approach of the mechanistic methods to language teaching, it is clear that even in the humanistic-affective methods one of the goals is to store knowledge and new information. Related to this, is the idea of lowering the affective filter of Krashen. Memory is much more affected by the emotional impact that the new information brings with it, rather than by the lack of attention of students as it is often believed (paragraph 1.3). It is therefore essential to lower the anxiety of the scholastic environment and try to motivate students with something challenging that can capture their attention and their interest.

Considering specifically the learning of a foreign language, it is essential to know where to focus the attention, to know what language skills have to be developed (paragraph 1.4) and above all the prerequisites to be followed between the different language skills (paragraph 1.5). It is a fact that orality has a priority over writing skills, since writing is born from orality. The result is an emphasis on pronunciation of a second language but, despite its importance for the success of the communicative act, it remains a skill often ignored. Still nowadays, in fact, the focus remains on the study of grammar, particularly in Italy, while in other countries such as Denmark, to name the country with the highest level of performance in English as L2, the approach to the teaching of English is completely different.

Finally, some problems are considered that might be related to the difficulty of improving the pronunciation of a L2. The first problem might be related to the lack of practice, or the fossilization of the speaker in the structure and the sounds of his /her first language. The lack of training in listening and producing L2 sounds makes it difficult to pronounce the same (paragraph 1.6). The other problem might be related to social identity. An attitude of cultural closure against what is foreign, in fact, makes it difficult to study a language other than the mother tongue, since language is an identifying character of a people. So before any type of exercise and training it is essential to know how to open our minds to what is different from us, without prejudices and barriers dictated by xenophobia.

**Chapter 2** examines some examples of use of songs as a tool for second language (L2) acquisition, not necessarily restricted to the improvement of the L2 pronunciation. Examples range from English to Italian, French, Spanish, Korean and Japanese as second languages to be acquired.

The chapter is divided into sections, just as the number of examples examined. In particular, the first five paragraphs deal with the use of songs for the teaching of English as L2. The first two paragraphs are essentially examples of learning English in primary schools, while the third is an example led by Tim Murphey, author of the work that inspired the present study. The last two paragraphs of this section (2.4 and 2.5) are examples of English L2 learning through songs in classes of native Chinese students, who generally find more difficulties in learning English, considering that the Chinese linguistic system is very different from the European one.

In paragraphs 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8 there are some examples of teaching Italian as L2 with songs elaborated by Rita Pasqui, Marco Mezzadri and Lidia Costamagna, while from paragraph 2.9 to 2.13 are presented the exercises proposed by Judith W. Failoni, James W. Brown, Jayne H. Abrate, Vicki L. Hamblin and Mary Techmeier for learning French L2 through songs. Finally, examples of using songs for didactic means are given for Spanish as L2 (paragraph 2.14), Korean (paragraph 2.15) and Japanese (paragraph 2.16).

From paragraph 2.17 to paragraph 2.19 are cited some examples of strategies for learning a L2 in general, proposed by Gianfranco Porcelli, Roberto Dolci and Paolo Balboni to name just some of the resonant names reported in this study.

Finally, the concluding paragraphs of this chapter are some examples of how the songs were and are used for learning L2 within the extra-curricular context; in particular some of the resources available from the Network are mentioned (paragraph 2.20), considering some blogs and applications available online, from the Big Screen (paragraph 2.21) with the example of a film based on a true story, and finally from the Radio (paragraph 2.22).

In **Chapter 3** some considerations are drawn on the use of music in extra-linguistic areas and not closely related to the teaching of a foreign language. This not only underlines the too often overlooked role of music in our society, but deals with some subjects still poorly known or treated and that, in my opinion, can exploit the extraordinary potential of music.

The first section of this chapter is an anthropological hint that considers singing as a means of communication developed before speech, and that is considered a universal and

distinctive human trait. Universal but even particular: like a language, music characterizes the identity of peoples; unlike a language, music can *reach the soul* and does not need any translation.

Given this innate nature of singing, some experiments on children are examined, aimed at testing whether singing actually precedes speech. In this regard the experiments considered examine the chanted language of children, also called “motherese” (paragraph 3.2). It is scientifically proven that children begin to perceive sounds even while they are in the womb. Like music, motherese seems to be a universal language that applies to all children of the world and that is gradually lost over time to leave place to a “more adult” and reasoned language. A heritage of motherese seems to be found in the pleasure of listening to music, although the differences in terms of music tastes still represent a difficult theme to be interpreted which requires a lot of research.

From a purely chemical point of view, music has been proven to be able to lower the levels of cortisol, also called the hormone of stress, promoting a sense of well-being in the listener. The sense of welfare that a background music produces can be so high that, as Nicolas Guéguen (2006) observes, it can convince us to buy an expensive bottle of Château Lafite once we have entered in a wine shop with the intention of buying a cheap bottle of Punico from Inzolia (paragraph 3.3). But this is not all. Sometimes, music can turn into an obsession, a melody that does not want to get out of our heads, as recalled by Murphey (1990), something that remains even when we do not like it (paragraph 3.4).

So what is music for? Bencivelli (2007) asks in her book that she herself described as “courageous”. The answer remains a mystery, but it is certainly possible to talk about the functions that music can have in a community. We do not know why the music has this “effect” on us, especially on our minds and on our emotions, but we know that it makes us feel good and sometimes we hardly can stay without it.

And referring to the benefits of music, there are ways to *exploit* this potential. Music can indeed become a tool for learning, not only a second language but even any other subject, as suggested by Professor Roberta Ferencich who uses the suggestopedic method in her work (Section 3.6). But music can also become a tool for therapeutic purposes, since it does not only contribute to the overall well-being but it can help healing (paragraph 3.7).

The last paragraph of this chapter is a reference to the experiments that have been done with music as a tool to: improve certain language dysfunctions (3.8.1), improve auditory perception for the use of the stethoscope in nursing courses (3.8.2), improve visuospatial abilities (3.8.3), store medical technical terms (3.8.4) and develop linguistic and motor skills of children in nursery schools, with the German example of the Musikkindergarten.

From **Chapter 4** begins the second part of this thesis. Specifically, the theoretical implications that underlie the choices made for the structure of the experiment are reported. That is, what led me to think and process the experiment as here presented?

Paragraph 4.1 recalls the necessity to lower the affective filter, proposed by Krashen. Songs and music in general, as introduced in the previous chapter, seem to be a good way to relax and lower the affective filters. Moreover, the idea of proposing a task that involves students in self-healing serves not only to fuel the autonomy of the student but also to lower the affective filters. The student, in fact, does not feel under pressure and therefore the context where he/she works is more relaxing. But this is not all. The cloze exercise here proposed for the experiment, besides being a type of exercise that allows to peacefully face testing as it is to be made individually, it represents a challenging exercise because it allows students to brave their abilities.

In section 4.2 the importance of students' autonomy is reiterated as an important goal to reach. The student is not left alone, but rather driven. Learning is a process and it should be built gradually with the support of technicians, with the common perspective of preparing adults able to independently manage their own knowledge and skills. The teacher's attitude is therefore fundamental within the training because students must be the protagonists of their intellectual growth path, and be provided with the necessary tools.

Another fundamental principle that underlies a L2 acquisition is motivation (4.3). Motivation can be stimulated in different ways, sparking curiosity, for example adopting a creative approach to the matter. The use of multimediality (4.4), as anticipated by Mezzadri in Chapter 1, is seen as a way to stimulate the curiosity of the student and at the same time is also seen as a solution to the widespread problem of the overcrowded classes, where often the students-teacher ratio is very high. Moreover, not only does the use of technology and of the resources available from the Network stimulate the autonomy of the learner, who very often is an

expert in the use of IT tools, but it allows students to get in touch with a constant linguistic input, which goes far beyond the language lessons attended in class.

At this point, given the vastness of the inputs from the Network, of which reliability is not always demonstrated, it becomes essential to make clear what the aims of the teaching are as well as the tools to be used. The choice of the lyrics was done in accordance with the precise purposes of teaching, as seen in some examples mentioned in Chapter 2 where songs were used for language teaching. For example, the musical accompaniment, the lyrics (which must be simple and repetitive), the kind of English accent that is used in the songs, the origin of the singers or musical groups, the level of knowledge of the foreign language skills of the students were all taken into account. The clarity of the objectives is therefore important to prevent the student's loss in the maze of the Net.

Videos or films in original language could also be a good tool to train the auditory perception of the foreign language (section 4.6). However, it is good to remember that the images may distract the students and the general understanding might be linked more to the vision of the images than to the actual perception of the dialogue and the distinctive sounds of a foreign language.

The *passive* listening to songs in a foreign language, however, does not lead to results. There must be a work underneath it all that activates the minds. An example of this is still the cloze exercise (section 4.7) since, in addition to the aforementioned characteristics of individual exercise, it is a sort of exercise that stimulates memory because it puts students in the position to *actively* retrieve information.

It is also important to know what can stimulate the students' interest. Rock songs, in this case, are the right choice, done to meet the interest of young students, who, according to statistical data, seem to spend a lot of their free time listening to music. For the young, music is in fact a kind of language, a way to identify themselves as part of a group and a place where to share emotions, ideas, experiences.

Finally, it is worth remembering that although the music has a strong "emotional impact" on the listener, which allows it to be easily remembered, as recalled by Snyder (2000), it is equally important to remember the prominence of repetition. In this regard, some studies about the practices of repetition linked to learning are reported. Data confirm that the constant repetition at regular intervals favors the storage of information in the long run.



**Chapter 5** is the presentation of the experiment. The idea is to use English songs as a way to improve English L2 pronunciation. The idea is that training the auditory perception of English sounds as well as the practice of the same is a more valid method than the study of theoretical notions of phonetics and phonology. There is no intention here to discredit the value of these two extremely important disciplines, but there is the will to give a different “order” in the approach to the matter. Following the theory of directionality, in fact, the intention is to focus the attention primarily towards a “practical” approach to pronunciation that only secondly can turn into a theoretical reflection.

According to the theoretical considerations analyzed in the previous chapter, both groups will be asked to work on an individual task. The focus will be placed on a defined and limited number of words/sounds; the improvement of the pronunciation of the selected words will be analyzed after three weeks of practice. The Experimental Group, after completing a cloze exercise based on the texts of the five English songs chosen, will have to listen to the same and sing them on alternate days; on the other side the Control Group will have to focus attention on the same words/sounds used for the Experimental Group but through the aid of a phonetic table.

The fundamental premise is that the test has to be done individually to lower the level of performance anxiety but also to avoid embarrassment among students, especially for the Experimental Group who are asked to sing. Furthermore, the chosen students are people who are assumed to be motivated and interested in learning English as a second language. On the one hand, because of the choice of a language faculty where the first foreign language chosen is precisely English, and on the other hand by the desire to improve communication in English in the workplace. To this end, giving clear indications the intention is to exploit the resources available on YouTube, a channel for video and audio sharing that is well-known among students. The object is to provide tools to students in order to work independently, according to precise coordinates.

In **Chapter 6** the QR codes of the audio recordings of each participant are available. Comparing the pre and post audio recordings, it was noticed that some students of Languages of the Control Group slightly improved the fluency in their reading while no improvement was noticed for the students of Engineering of this group. On the other side, the students of Languages of the Experimental Group did not show a noticeable improvement of the pronunciation of the selected words, while the students of Engineering of this group improved

the pronunciation of some of the selected words. What is more interesting is that the students of Languages of this last group have improved the aspiration of the voiceless stops and the same result was achieved by one student of Languages of the Control Group.

In addition, the comments of the students are reported according to the answers given to the questionnaire. First, a general enthusiasm was clear from the beginning among the students of the Experimental Group, in spite of the fact that the task assigned required much more time than the task assigned to the Control Group. Both groups, in fact, were required to do regular work on the task and the regular repetition of certain passages. However, on the one hand, for the Control Group the task was *less active*, while, on the other hand, for the Experimental Group the task required a more active engagement, not only for executing the cloze exercise on the text of the songs but also for singing them. Thus, despite their required *active participation*, the Experimental Group was the group that showed more curiosity and availability in accepting the task proposed. Four out of five students of the Experimental Group immediately showed great appreciation for the songs chosen; a student also expressed the intention of learning to play the same songs with the guitar.

From the answers to the post-experiment questionnaire given to the students it seems clear that the phonetic table was considered a useful tool but a boring one and sometimes difficult. On the other side, the use of songs as a didactic tool generated enthusiasm and curiosity. The students of the Experimental Group expressed their interest for this method. They suggested to lengthen the time of the task and to add more songs. Furthermore, they expressed their preference to do this task autonomously, avoiding the noise and the confusion of a classroom.

Finally, in the “**Conclusions**” I reiterate the idea that this experiment was designed almost like a “drill pattern” but in the substance as an exercise that, despite the constant repetition required, could engage students emotionally. The results demonstrate that songs can be a useful tool for students who have a medium-low level of English L2 and are not used to perceiving English sounds. Students with a medium-advanced level of English L2 improved the fluency of their reading in general and the aspiration of the voiceless stops.

I further emphasize that in this experiment I have suggested a method for improving English L2 pronunciation, with the aim of improving the communication act. However, it is clear that to achieve effectiveness in communication it is crucial to manage all communication skills,

so the *mere* improvement of the pronunciation cannot guarantee the success of the communication act. The proposal is therefore to include the proposed exercises in a larger path of learning that can exploit pronunciation training within, for example, conversations of simulated contexts of real situations. The hope is to promote research that deepens the study of non-traditional applications in language teaching, considering the immense potential that today technology can offer and the benefits in terms of quantity and quality of the results that can be achieved.

## **Chapter 1 A general overview**

The first chapter is an introduction to the theories most known in language teaching. The aim is to introduce the theme of the thesis and make the reader familiarize with some terms and concepts, useful for a better understanding of the following chapters.

### **1.1 An overview of language teaching theories**

Language teaching is a discipline that provides methods to facilitate the learning of a foreign language or a second language (hereafter L2) to develop a communicative competence in L2. As Piva (2000) emphasizes, each method must be regarded as an application of a teaching theory, so behind every method there is first of all a theoretical approach. It is clear that the choice of the method is above all an empirical issue before being a theoretical one, but the choice of which method to follow is often related more to the teaching tradition than to a reasoned choice. Analysing the historical background, foreign languages become part of the school curriculum in the early twentieth century and are taught through the grammar-translating method, a sort of regulatory method that substantially corresponds to the use of handbooks but is not based on explicitly theoretical assumptions. The Reading Method of the 20's is an alternative version of the previous method and is based mainly on the ability to read carefully crafted text. In the second half of the 50's, there is a strong growth in experimental-phonetic studies due to the needs of communication between different countries. Orality has priority over writing, so learning by immersion in L2 is considered the best method, also called direct method, while grammar is taught by imitation and induction.

Between the 40's and 50's in America and ten years later in France and Italy, mechanistic-structuralist methods occupy the field of foreign language teaching. In this period "structural exercises" or pattern drills flourish and are proposed as an alternative to the grammar-translating method and the direct method based on "common sense" (Balboni, 1998). The behaviouristic structuralism of Bloomfield (which aligned itself to the behaviourist psychology that developed in the US in the 20's and which showed how the environment can condition behaviour), the neo-behaviouristic psychology of Skinner, and the theories of Fries and Lado represent the first theoretical approaches and touchstone that dominate the scene in the field of language learning (Balboni, 1998). Teaching is seen as a practice of simple but repetitive and pounding activities aimed at creating mental habits or *automatismi psichici* 'psychical

automatism' as Balboni (1998) calls them. The acquisition of the structures would be achieved through the memorization of the same and the execution of several repetitive exercises according to a stimulus-response-reinforcement/control scheme, where a stimulus generates a student's response which is followed by the control and/or correction of the same by the teacher. However, this model gives much more weight to grammar than to the communication context itself. Referring always to the theoretical model of the American structuralism the audio-oral mechanistic method can be mentioned, as a reaction to the Reading Method, which focuses on practical and functional goals from where the idea of the language laboratory is born in the early 70's. The interaction with the environment becomes important but the language is still seen as a behaviour to be acquired, idea supported also by the CAH (Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis) that aims at teaching the structures of L2 that are different from the L1's ones. In the same area the global-structured audiovisual method can be found, used to teach French as a L2, that has many similarities with the audio-oral method but in this case the communicative context is created by audiovisual tools. The use of mechanical exercises prescribed by the structuralist and behaviourist view, as Mezzadri (2001) points out, lacks creativity. In addition, students are seen as individuals to be lead while the teacher is at the center of the teaching process.

In the late 60's it is clear that the contrastive analysis between L1 and L2 is no longer enough and the trend of mistakes-analysis begins to catch on. The nativist-mentalist theories of Chomsky start to emerge and attack the thesis of Skinner, supporting the creative nature of learning and the concept of "Interlingua" as learner's attempt to produce a target language. In the sixties, while in Italy the grammar-translating method is still being refuted in favour of the structuralism, in the US humanistic-affective approaches develop, as opposed to functional-communicative ones including a wide range of methods. Below are described the most important ones outlined by Dolci and Porcelli (1999).

Table 1

1961-1976	<i>Community Counselling</i>	Curran
1965-1977	<i>Total Physical Response</i>	Asher
1972-1976	<i>The Silent Way</i>	Gattegno
1972-1979	<i>Suggestopedia</i>	Lozanov
1976-1985	<i>Strategic Interaction</i>	Di Pietro

1977-1982	<i>Natural Approach</i>	Terrell (and Krashen, added by Mezzadri)
1983-1994	<i>Linguistic Psychodramaturgy</i>	Dufeu

These methods, according to Dolci and Porcelli (1999), have in common the centrality of the human being as opposed to a “pedagogical season soaked with mechanism and determinism on the one hand and nativism and cognitivism on the other hand [my translation]”.<sup>1</sup> In all of these methods there are some recurring components such as the encouragement to cooperate, the aesthetic enjoyment, the sense of responsibility and the need for self-realization. Furthermore, all these methods affect much on the medium/long term memory, conceive the student as the protagonist and not as a spectator of the learning process and give importance to the emotional sphere, essential to dispel anxiety. However, both the affective-humanistic approach and the functional-communicative one aim at communicative competence.

After the period of the behavioural approach, in the 70’s the communicative methods catch on emphasizing the importance of the socio-cultural besides the grammatical and lexical aspects of the L2. But, even though oral communication skills have been recognized as extremely important and the communicative competence required has become more and more complex, pronunciation is still not given an adequate space, as Costamagna (2000) notes. It is right to recognize that the communicative approach has retained some principles of the structuralist approach, such as the centrality of orality and the use of technology but the student is no longer regarded as a container to be filled with stimulus-response-reinforcement exercises. As Mezzadri (2001) recalls, the goal is participation and communication and not mere correction, while the teacher has to assume the role of facilitator of the communicative process. Piva (2000) mentions the studies of Selinker and Corder about linguistic mistakes because they recognize a systematic nature of the same and the resulting problem of the “fossilization” of the L1.<sup>2</sup> In the 70’s the rigid dichotomy between L1 and L2 was overcome in part because of the influence of the Chomskian nativism, basis of all the current innatist/cognitivist positions that recognize an innate capacity in processing linguistic data (Busà, 1995). Chomsky’s nativist

<sup>1</sup> For an extensive discussion of the presented methods Dolci and Porcelli refer to Stevick E.W. (1990). The first date indicated in Table 1 refers to the year when the theory was presented while the second date refers to the year when the same approach has been developed as a method.

<sup>2</sup> See paragraph 1.6 for further information about *fossilizzazione*.

hypothesis supports the existence of an innate system that allows the acquisition of a language and that goes beyond the external stimuli (a fundamental contribution, this, to overcome the pure structuralism of the environmentalist hypotheses of the neo-behaviourism). The innate process called LAD (Language Acquisition Device) would be proper to the *homo loquens* as defined by Balboni (1998), and structural exercises would be helpful to activate the LAD. It is important to learn to decode the LAD, learn how to “properly perceive” the L2 (Balboni, 1998) and only after this step the establishment of structures in L2 and the production of sentences in L2 can take place. The UG theory (Universal Grammar) of Chomsky, as it is called by Chini (2000), supports the existence of some innate universal principles in the acquisition of languages, principles that would guide the LAD to set the parameters on the basis of the UG according to the environmental inputs of the L2. Beside the so called individual hypothesis of Chomsky, Balboni (1998), citing Bruner (1983), refers to the inter-individual hypotheses which suppose also the need of a LASS (Language Acquisition Support System) or the need for confirmation of the steps of the LAD. This group includes all the functional-pragmatic assumptions that allowed the overcoming of the structuralist approach; the hypotheses of Krashen are part of this group as well.

Among the methods mentioned in Table 1, from the second half of the 70’s to nowadays the most significant theoretic contribution is that given by Krashen and his model of the Monitor, a translation of the Natural Approach as indicated by Chini (2000), which goes back to the psychological studies of the Gestalt in the 30’s. Krashen makes an important distinction, universally accepted, between acquisition and learning of a L2, where the first is a subconscious and unconscious process while the second indicates the development of a linguistic competence through an explicit studying of grammar rules. As Dolci and Porcelli (1999) underline, learning cannot guarantee a lasting acquisition and in particular learning explicit rules has a limited role in speaking. In fact, when we have to make a conversation we rely on acquired experience that is internalized rather than on a list of grammatical rules, useful in case of writing. It suffices to think about the speed of a conversation in a L2; fluency is something we approach through a process of internalization of the structures of a L2 and not through the use of rules simply learned and memorized. The central hypothesis of Krashen, the Input Hypothesis, explains how language acquisition works through the input *i*. According to the rule, to achieve the *i + 1* is necessary to first understand the message *i* of the input. So it is possible to learn a L2 only by

partially understanding a message that is embodied in the target language, through a comprehensible input and the addition of a little more complex one. Unlike the traditional theory, the exercise would take place before fixing grammar rules. The idea of a comprehensible input, according to Mezzadri (2001), is a current concept if linked to the nowadays-use of technology and it is a task of the teacher to make this input understandable. In addition to the comprehensible input, the other important factor to be considered is the affective filter that sits between input and acquisition and that involves both a low level of anxiety and a high level of integrative motivation.<sup>3</sup> Finally, another point on which Krashen focuses his attention is the idea that the SLA (Second Language Acquisition) is an individual process, so that for many scholars this method seems difficult to apply if we decide to use it in a classroom.

In conclusion, the communicative approach is the method that has been most adopted during the last quarter of the twentieth century, although in Italy the use of the grammar-translating method is still in use. Humanistic-affective approaches make an important contribution in focusing on the student as a person, especially with regard to the motivational aspects and the emotional component.

## **1.2 Neurolinguistic issues**

As seen in the previous paragraph, the study of grammar rules does not automatically lead to a comprehensive knowledge of L2. This assertion is not only reflected in a turnaround in terms of theoretical approaches and methods in language teaching but has also a scientific basis. The studies of Danesi between 1988 and 1998 lead to the development and confirmation of the theories of bimodality and directionality that support not only the idea of an order in the process of acquisition which would tend to favor inductive strategies, but also the idea of the existence of specific tasks for the left and the right hemisphere of our brain. In Tables 2 here below, proposed by Dolci and Porcelli (1999) and Mezzadri (2001, 2003) with my translation, there are the operations that distinguish the left and right hemisphere:

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<sup>3</sup> Stevick (1976) makes a distinction between “integrative motivation” which is the interest that prompts someone to identify him/herself with the native speakers of a target language and “instrumental motivation” that is related with some interests or reasons linked to work, business and everything that goes beyond the personal interest.



Table 2

ASPECTS OF THE LEFT SIDE	ASPECTS OF THE RIGHT SIDE
Language	Understanding of metaphorical language
Verbal memory	Visual perception
Denotative meaning	Visual memory
Intellectual activities	Intuitive activities
Convergent thinking	Divergent thinking
Abstraction	Concentration
Analysis	Synthesis

VERBAL FEATURES OF THE LEFT SIDE	VERBAL FEATURES OF THE RIGHT SIDE
Phonology, morphology, syntax	Prosodic structures
Formal relations between the parts of a sentence	Expressive aim of a sentence (statement, command etc.)
Literal meaning	Metaphorical meaning
Stylistic variations	Verbal sense

PREDISPOSITION TO THE LEFT EMISPHERE	PREDISPOSITION TO THE RIGHT EMISPHERE
Inclination for verbal communication	Inclination for body communication/gestures
Rich and varied lexical repertoire	Poor lexical repertoire
Recognition of phonetic discriminations	Difficult recognition of verbal sounds
Limited control over prosodic elements	High control over prosodic elements
Hard recognition of the details in the incomplete figures	Easy recognition of the details in the incomplete figures
Great ability to decipher verbal input	Great ability to decipher visual input
Easy memorization of abstract grammar rules	Easy memorization of concepts
Preference for logical tasks	Preference for intuitive tasks

The right-side modality, as Mezzadri (2003) emphasizes, dominates the early stages of the acquisition and for this reason the presentation of new material through the explanation of

grammar rules would not work but would be essential in the later stages as a form of grammar reflection. Linguistic abilities reside in the left hemisphere but it is also essential to use the right hemisphere in the process of acquisition of a L2 during the first phase, known as *global sequence*.<sup>4</sup> If we consider the Italian school-system for example, teaching is generally strongly rooted to the left hemisphere and wrongly ignores the right side. Mezzadri (2001) observes how many difficulties may encounter a student inclined to the right hemisphere in a system that does not consider bimodality and directionality, strongly oriented towards the left hemisphere. Indeed, we know that all information passes first through the senses, and here Mezzadri makes an important reference to the NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) of O'Connor and Seymour

[...] The visual, the auditory and kinesthetic are the main representation systems used in Western cultures. The sense of taste (T) and smell (S) are not as important and are often included in the kinesthetic. [...] We always use all these three primary systems although we are not aware of each one in the same way and tend to favor one rather than the others.<sup>5</sup>

Mezzadri emphasizes that each person has his/her own system that outweighs the other but multimediality is a way to take advantage of all three systems because it can stimulate multiple sensory areas, unlike the teaching based on traditional instruments. Moreover, according to Dolci and Porcelli (1999), multimediality can involve both hemispheres because it activates cognitive processes of bimodal nature. This guarantees a *global* communicative situation and demonstrates once again that if we assume that the mind is modular and each module has a specific task, it will be essential to use differentiated language-teaching techniques. Therefore

Multimediality, considered as an integration of different language-systems that enable both visual and auditory perception, ensures the conditions for the best learning. [...] From a neurolinguistic point of view, multimedia operates at a high degree of bimodality. (Dolci and Porcelli, 1999: 51)

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to the study of Gestalt, mentioned above, who considers human perception and learning processes as scanned by the sequence globality-analysis-reflection-synthesis. To have a comprehensive perception of the communicative event, after the global perception, we have to move towards a global reception driven by the teacher who is the primer of the LASS suggested by Bruner, an integration of the LAD introduced by Chomsky. These stages are then followed by a reflection on the language, particularly when models involve adult learners and a controlling phase.

<sup>5</sup> O'Connor, J. and Seymour, J. (1990: 27) cited by Mezzadri (2001), my translation.

And Dolci and Porcelli proceed citing Begley (1994: 47)

Men remember the 10% of what they see, the 20% of what they hear, the 50% of what they see and hear (multimediality) and the 80% of what they hear, see and do (interactivity).

Hence it follows that a hypermedial system, which includes multimediality and interactivity, creates the best conditions for learning a L2. It is clear then that technologies represent simply a tool that must serve the student's interest that remains at the center of the learning system becoming the protagonist of his/her own learning. As Dolci and Porcelli remember, referring to Danesi (1991), it is possible to conclude that the principles of bimodality and directionality lead to important considerations with regard to the method of language teaching. We have to consider not only the directionality of the acquisition process, that is, an inductive process which moves away from the grammar-deductive methods and shifts the systematic analysis (typical of the left hemisphere) to a later stage in the process of language acquisition. We must also consider the emotional component associated with the right hemisphere, and this assumes the use of familiar material, that is stimulating and especially that does not create discomfort.

### **1.3 Memory and motivation**

“[...] what is important and emotionally charged tends to be more rapidly embedded than material which is emotionally neutral or unimportant” (Stevick, 1976). These are the words that Stevick uses to emphasize the importance of quality and the emotional impact of the material being taught. He does not consider the act of remembering as a mere “playing back a tape”. Remembering generates itself a new image with some elements taken from the original “tape”. The image of this new generated “tape” depends on individual criteria so it depends on what hits us and what is salient for us. Many teachers think that the failure of fixing sets of words and rules of a L2 is linked primarily to the lack of attention of the students themselves. But Bruner (1967) and Rapaport (1971), cited by Stevick (1976), assert that there is a strong relationship between emotions and memory. The more general theory of memory, in fact, is based on “emotional organization” of memories. Stevick rejects the rigid mental-cognitive models and, taking up the theories of Krashen, considers the study of language as a total human experience that considers not only the bimodality of the mind but also the emotions that involve the individual. One of the criticisms of pattern drills in fact, as Balboni (1998) notes, is the lack of “emotion” because these

exercises are perceived by the students as demotivating, stereotyped, monotonous and lacking creativity. Learning, Balboni (1998) proceeds, first of all requires motivation and, Mezzadri (2003) recalls, motivation is essential for a correct learning. Sauvignon (1991) comes to define the concept of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) as a communicative curriculum that not only focuses on the motivations of the students but involves the use of selected materials or “tailor-made” to promote the internalization of inductive patterns, focusing attention mainly on listening to the L2 and thus encouraging the use of technology.

Another aspect that is useful to facilitate the acquisition and the information storage is definitely the reduction of any anxiety-inducing feature inherent in school institutions and the need for a relaxed atmosphere, conditions that all the most recent humanistic-affective methods aim at.<sup>6</sup> Songs can be a “mnemonic device” (Abrate, 1983) while “music is highly memorable” because of the “relaxed receptivity [...] its rhythms correspond with basic body rhythms [...] its messages touch deep-seated emotional or aesthetic chords, or its repetitive patterning reinforces learning without loss of motivation” (Murphey, 1992). In the third chapter the role of music as a tool to create a relaxed atmosphere will be discussed.

#### **1.4 Language skills**

An overview on the theoretical approaches, basis of the language teaching methods, has been drawn so far, considering the implications and motivations that distinguish a method over another. But what do we have to teach of a L2? Four “primary” skills (Balboni, 1998) are traditionally recognized, that is, listening, speaking, reading and writing. On the axis of a hypothetical diagram there is the oral-written line while on the other the receptive-productive one. The receptive skills, namely listening and reading, are considered together as parts of a single process of understanding (though not yet precisely defined within the psycholinguistics) that is the result of the integration of three factors:

- communicative competence
- knowledge of the word around
- cognitive processes (causal relationships, inclusion, exclusion, selection etc.)

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<sup>6</sup> See Table 1

From the interaction of these three factors results the so-called Expectancy Grammar or “the ability to predict what can be said in a given context and in a given context” (Balboni, 1998, my translation). Understanding is not seen as a linear process but a comprehensive one, a further confirmation of what the neurolinguistic research has shown about the interaction between left and right hemisphere in relation to language. Therefore the best techniques to activate the Expectancy Grammar are essentially cloze exercises and coupling/interlocking ones. The first consists in the elimination of a word every seven, equivalent to the 15% of what is generally lost during communication. In the light of the theories of Krashen, this exercise is well tolerated by students not only because of its nature of personal challenge and individual activity but also because of the absence of a direct confrontation between student and teacher. It considers the text as a whole, activates language proficiency at most and requires little writing so it is a quick exercise. In addition, the affective filter is lowered because it lacks the charge of stress typical of other techniques such as questions and allows at the same time an activation of understanding better than grids (which work only on a basic understanding) or multiple choices (which incur in a high probability of casual correct answers). Lastly, it appears an exercise that is easy to prepare for teachers so it does not require too much time. Instead, the second exercise mentioned requires students to restore an order within a disordered sequence but the weak point lies in the fact that a wrong interlocking causes a chain of mistakes that reflects a consequently wrong image of the student’s understanding.

In addition to what needs to be taught of a L2, we need to bear in mind the importance of each language skill in order to understand a L2. This determines a hierarchy in the process; in particular a priority is recognized of the receptive skills over the productive ones<sup>7</sup> and a priority of the ability of oral reception over the writing skill. It is useful to underline that the priority of orality is given by the fact that writing comes from the spoken language and consequently also their teaching needs to be presented in the same order. The ability to communicate in a L2, then, is a skill that first requires a comprehensive understanding of the social situation - the so called “period of silence” (Mezzadri, 2003) necessary for the collection of information - and only then proceeds with the talking and producing in L2.

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<sup>7</sup> Balboni (1998) in this regard speaks of “delayed oral practice”, the approach to a L2 that starts from the listening ability.

## 1.5 Pronunciation

As said previously, in a communicative context it is essential to know how to get the message before knowing how to produce a response to the same. To understand the context of communication, being able to *perceive* the message is crucial. Therefore it is essential to train our ability to *receive* – auditory perception in particular - a message in L2. The consequence of an erroneous reception of the message is a wrong response to the production of the same and therefore the failure of the communication. It may seem almost a trivial statement but to learn to *perceive* requires training in *perceiving* and unfortunately in school listening activities are still few or are not given a fair attention. Therefore speaking ability in L2 cannot reach a high level and threatens to undermine the act of communication, even by students with a university-level language education. It is recent the mistake that the current Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi made while signing the guest book at the White House. Here below an image published by the blogger @nonleggerlo and La Stampa on its website

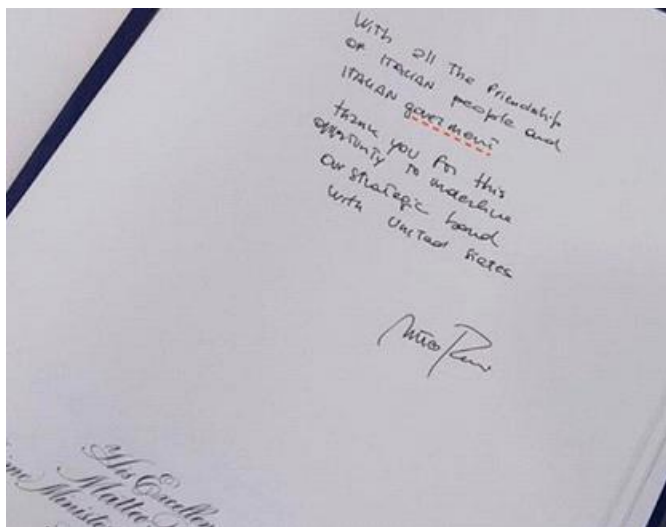


Figure 1

Experts have highlighted the missing “n” in the word “government” and the definite articles that the President failed. But the most interesting fact, as Corbolante (2015) highlights in an article published in her blog, is the reaction of the linguists, that is a symptom of how in Italy there is still much more focus on spelling and grammar, rather than on other aspects that may affect the act of communication, such as the mispronunciation of a L2. Favasuli (2015), in her article,

demonstrates through some statistical tables of the EF (Education First)<sup>8</sup> that the English language spoken by Italians is among the worst spoken in Europe. In particular she compares Italy with Denmark, the country that holds the record of the best performance in English as L2 while Italy is at the twenty-second place in a ranking of twenty-four countries. If we move then to see the situation in the world that considers sixty-three countries, Denmark once again ranks first with an EF EPI score of 69.30 which indicates a high level of proficiency of English as L2 (the highest of the five levels used for the EF's evaluation and equivalent to the level B2 of the CEFR Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), while Italy is in the twenty-seventh place with a score of 52.80 EF EPI corresponding to an average level of proficiency in L2 (equivalent to the third place in the rating scale of EF and the level B1 of the CEFR).

It is natural, therefore, to make a comparison between the two countries that, despite the same number of school-hours dedicated to the study of English as a L2, show such different results. The first difference, Favasuli (2015) observes, is that in Italy we focus mainly on grammar rules and writing whereas in Denmark the focus shifts to listening and speaking skills since primary schools. But the article of Favasuli also shows a strong difference in the cultural attitude that the two countries show towards all what is foreign. Italy, as well as France and Spain, reveals a historical narrow mindedness towards diversity. Translated into numbers, this means that the 93% of Danes prefers to watch movies in their original language with subtitles while the 41% of Italians refuses to see movies in their original language. It is no chance that the best voice actors in the world are Italian and that, unlike many other countries, in Italy the culture of watching movies in their original language does not exist. The 41% of Danes uses English language every day while only the 9% of Italians does the same. It is clear that movies, says Corbolante (2015), cannot help to improve pronunciation and especially speaking ability but they can be useful for improving and training listening perception which is the basis of the communicative act and precedes the speaking itself. In addition, the 58% of Danes consults websites in English compared with the 26% of English sites consulted by Italians; the 84% of Danes use English during their holiday while only the 47% of Italians adopts the same attitude.

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<sup>8</sup> Reckoning the knowledge of English as a basic skill in a globalized economy, the EF Learning Labs considers the EPI, English Proficiency Index for companies, a tool to measure the level of English proficiency in 32 different countries and 22 business sectors, companies with an annual turnover between 1 million and over \$100 billion. This kind of statistics aims to establish reference standards for English language performance in the workplace in order to assess the competitiveness of communication and determine the reasons why some countries and some sectors perform better than others. The economic competitiveness is also an indication of the welfare of a country.

So the everyday-life of the Northern countries seems to be steeped in English and this motivates children to study and learn the English language. English study therefore is not limited to the few hours of English as L2 studied in class but is literally *live* every day in the context of real life. It is true that the English of Italians, detected in the workplace, is improved if compared with the EF EPI index in 2013 when it scored 50.97 points, as states Federica Tilgher, EF Responsible for Italy, in the article of De Gregorio (2014). These data consider the age-group under 35 and show that some positive changes in the language teaching are catching on but improvements are still slow and the competition on the field becomes increasingly high every year. Would it be a coincidence that in Italy, Spain and France there is a situation of recession and economic stagnation? There is no intention to open an economic-political debate here of course, but if we focus on language teaching in the Italian classroom we will recognize that the time devoted to conversation in L2 is still too little and this can compromise the students' future social and professional relationships. As Busà (1993:3, my translation) recalls, in fact, in a view of an European and international perspective,

if English is to serve for working [...] it is important that your message can be understood by all and immediately. It has been shown that an unclear pronunciation requires too high a level of attention from the listener and can affect the successful outcome of the act of communication

Being aware of the importance of oral skills in conversation and of the necessity of enhancing the speaking ability through teaching, the focus of this study is on what precedes the act of speaking and helps to achieve speaking ability: the listening skill.

### **1.6 A matter of practice and perception**

Busà (1995) raises a fundamental question about the study of a L2: are there differences in the way of acquiring the various elements of a foreign language? It seems that for an adult it is easier to acquire the morphosyntactic and lexical system of a L2 rather than the phonological and phonetic system. Costamagna (2000) goes on saying that learning pronunciation is much more natural for children than adults who, though supported by a motivational boost, struggle to obtain the same results in this field. But the difference in the degree of acquisition of an L2 between an adult and a child are not going to be considered here, an issue that would require an extensive discussion by itself; it suffices to remember that there are theories for which there is a “critical”



period or a borderline-age for learning a L2 and after this period the acquisition of a L2 would result more difficult (not surprisingly Danes train children from an early age to the conversation in English L2). Researchers do not know yet the exact reasons of the phenomenon of *fossilization* that is represented by the phonetic-phonological difficulties in pronouncing a second language especially for adults. The phenomenon is defined “J.Conrad” in linguistics because “while writing in a very good English, he always maintained characteristics of his foreign accent in speaking [my translation]” (Costamagna, 2000).

But it is good to underline here how adults generally tend to replace those phonetic/phonological categories of a L2 that they do not find in their L1 with “the best they can find in their first language [my translation]” (Busà, 1995). It has been proved that often the contact with a foreign language causes syntactic, lexical, phonological and phonetic interference. And it is especially in the phonological features that it is possible to feel more the influence of the L1, where the phenomenon of negative transfer can take place. For this it is necessary to consider the native language and the target one so as to avoid interlingual mistakes, although sometimes the transfer can be positive if L1 and L2 are similar. Transfer, reminds Chini (2000), represents a “strategy for acquiring” a L2 but also a “strategy for communicating” in L2 or a way to manage communication in L2 with the available means. This is why beginners generally phonate using intermediate phones between the L1 and the L2 or use those phonetic categories of the L1 until they learn the correct phones of the L2. This happens because the learner uses the articulatory model and the phonetic system of the L1 to produce all sounds of the L2 (J.E. Flege, 1987 in Busà, 1995). There is in fact a process and an order in the acquisition of the phonetic-phonological system and this normally starts with the natural interference of the L1 in the acquisition of the L2. At the beginning, the interference of the L1 prevails on the development of new structures; the structures of L2 are then acquired by the time when the interference with the L1 decreases. In this regard it is interesting to mention Major (1987), in Busà (1995), who precisely refers to a sequence in the acquisition of the phones according to innate principles, valid for any language whether L1 or L2. So in the acquisition of English as L2, both adults and children would tend to “devocalize, delete or add a schwa to the plosives in final position” and continues with other examples as

the acquisition of plosives before fricatives and of fricatives before affricates; among the rounded vowels, the back vowels appear before the front ones and among the front vowels the not rounded vowels appear before the corresponding rounded ones; initial and median sounding plosives before the finals; the late acquisition of the distinction between /s/ and /ʃ/ etc. (Busà, 1995: 29, my translation)

Phonetic/phonological aspects are often neglected and to confirm this point Costamagna (2000) points out that pronunciation is considered “a refined level of the learning process [my translation]” and in fact the most overlooked aspect (what sounds bizarre considering the priority of orality in a language). Many teachers often do not introduce pronunciation in their curriculum because they do not believe to be adequately prepared, although to get good results, explains Costamagna, few notions of phonetics and phonology are enough. Acquiring a correct pronunciation from the very beginning, in fact, is crucial especially to avoid future mistakes that would be hard to redress over time. Here below are listed the skills required for pronunciation and necessary for every language skill, identified by Costamagna (my translation):

Oral comprehension:

- perception of sounds
- segmentation of speech
- perception and understanding of prosodic elements

Oral production:

- correct articulation of sounds
- correct use of prosodic elements according to the kind of message and the communicative situation

Reading:

- correct articulation of sounds
- semantic-prosodic interpretation of the text
- knowledge of the correspondences between written and pronounced words/sounds

Writing:

- knowledge of the relationship between pronunciation and spelling
- knowledge of punctuation

As we can see, the right perception and the correct articulation of the sounds of the L2 are the basis for communication. The theoretical knowledge of phonetics and phonology, in fact, is not enough to achieve a correct pronunciation. In this regard, Balboni (1998) offers a simple but efficient example emphasizing how language proficiency, linguistic meta-competence and meta-linguistic competence are three distinct capabilities. For cycling, he asserts, it is fundamental to know how to maintain the balance but is not essential to know the physical mechanisms at the base of maintaining the balance. Similarly, knowledge of phonetic and phonological rules must therefore be reinforced by knowledge of kinesthetic or articulatory movements required for the correct production of sounds and, as Costamagna (2000) remembers, by the development of auditory perception. Often the target language uses sounds that do not exist in the L1 or that are pronounced in a different way and considering that “what you don’t hear, you can’t say”, if the English sound is not well received (because the main problem is reception) learners convert it into the closest sound they know (Dalton, 1997).

At this point, it seems clear that to learn English as L2 a full immersion in the language is the best solution to acquire the correct pronunciation, perhaps taking advantage of a period spent abroad. But the “mere” immersion in the language, as Mezzadri (2003) warns, is not enough to get a good pronunciation in L2, especially if we have to correct pronunciation mistakes since, before any correction, we need to be aware of the mistakes. There are “people who despite living for twenty, thirty years in a country failed to reach the accent of the target language [my translation]” (Costamagna, 2000). The only exposure to the L2 does not determine the spontaneous acquisition of a L2 and does not represent the formula for achieving the pronunciation of a native. The mother-tongue language teacher is surely a very useful ally to train auditory perception to the L2 and allows students to compare their pronunciation with the correct one, but we must remember that natives possess this ability at an unconscious level so they are not always able to lead students. It is useful, therefore, to focus attention on those elements that differentiate the L1 from the L2, so as to avoid future necessary corrections and the triggering of wrong mechanisms of self-correction using the L1. Without carrying out in details a comparative analysis of the phonetic characteristics and differences between Italian and English,<sup>9</sup> here below is proposed a scheme suggested by Maturi (2010) that displays the most common

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<sup>9</sup> For further information about Phonetics and Phonology in English and in Italian see the works of P. Maturi (2010); L.Bafile and M.Nespor (2008); and the works of M.G. Busà (1993, 1995) all indicated in References.

pronunciation mistakes that Italians make while speaking in English as L2. The first column represents the correct phonetic transcription of the English corresponding words of the third column, while the second column shows the corresponding phonetic transcription of the same words generally pronounced by Italian-speakers:

Table 3

/mæn/	/mɛn/	man
/lʌv/	/lav/	love
/ʃɪp/ and /ʃi:p/	/ʃip/	ship and sheep
/ə'baʊt/	/e'baʊt/	about
/bəʊt/	/bot/	boat
/k'ʌntri/	/'kauntri/	country
/sɪŋ/	/sing/	sing
/'hɒliwʊd/	/'ɔllivud/	Hollywood
/kɑ:ʔ/	/kəʔ/	car
/hi:/	/i/	he
/ðɪs/ and /θri:/	/dɪs/ and /tri/	this and three
/kɪl/	/kil/	kill
/k'æn/	/kæɛn/	can

It is useful to remember that Italian uses seven vowels, represented here with a triangle, proposed by Busà (1993), indicating the positions taken by the tongue during the production of the same

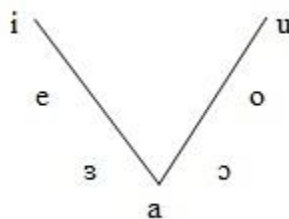


Figure 2

English uses fourteen vowels, arranged on a trapezoidal shape that suggests the different movements of the tongue compared with the Italian ones (Busà, 1993). Unlike Italian, English

does not use only intermediate vowels but even back, front and central vowels. English as Italian use diphthongs but in English the focus needs to be placed on the second vowel of the diphthong that must be pronounced in a less “strong” way than the correspondent in Italian. In addition, the unstressed vowels in English tend to centralize almost disappearing,<sup>10</sup> while in Italian there are constant-sounding vowels, whether stressed or not. Finally, in English the quality of vowel sounds depends on the position of the accent of the word and/or of the sentence.

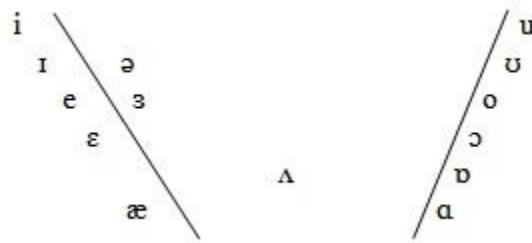


Figure 3<sup>11</sup>

There are differences even among consonants; here below the reference is to the most important ones proposed by Busà (1993):

- /p, t, k/ are unvoiced occlusive pronounced as aspirate in English but not in Italian, at the beginning or at the end of a syllable
- /t, d/ are dentals in Italian and alveolar in English
- /w/ in Italian rarely appears at the beginning of a syllable before /i, e, a/ or consonants like /r/ in English.
- /r/ in English is not a vibrant like it is in Italian and is pronounced like a /w/.
- /ʒ, ɹ, ɫ, h, ð, θ/ are sounds that do not exist in standard Italian.

As Busà (1995) sharpens in the “Introduction” to her experiment,<sup>12</sup> among the factors that cause the Italian accent in English there are differences in articulation and perception, both at a segmental and suprasegmental level.

<sup>10</sup> Here a reference to “schwa”, the reduced central vowel in English.

<sup>11</sup> “ə” is a variant for vowels in unstressed position. Note from Busà (1993).

<sup>12</sup> In her research Busà (1995) analyses, through spectrographic devices, the elements that determine the so called “Italian accent” in the English spoken by native Italians, referring in particular to the English vowels.

## 1.7 A matter of social identity

De Gregorio (2014) in her article makes an interesting observation after having observed the EF data above reported and related to the survey of the year 2014, “women speak English better than men, both in the international sphere and in almost all countries analysed individually [my translation]”. This suggests that the issue of learning a L2 is linked not only to a factor of age and “training” but is also something related to personality. There is no intention here to use the statement of De Gregorio to open a debate on genders, since there is not at disposal scientific data that confirm that the inclination for languages is a distinctive female feature rather than male. Undoubtedly a greater sensitivity is a sign of greater attention to the reality of the world around so it seems conceivable to say that a person with a high sensitivity (which does not necessarily mean being female) is more inclined to notice even minimal differences that there can be between different languages for example.

To confirm this, the experiment of Guiora (1972) called “lowering of inhibitions”, cited in Stevick (1976), assumes that “the more sensitive a person is to the feelings and behaviour of others, the more likely he is to perceive and recognize the subtleties of a second language and incorporate them into his own speaking”. But the more surprising result of this experiment is that in one of his studies a certain amount of alcohol seemed to significantly improve the pronunciation of a foreign language.<sup>13</sup> There is the presupposition that this was an amount of alcohol that lowered inhibitions and developed a tolerance for anxiety over self-image and over noises made by other people. So it seems that the pronunciation is also linked to inhibitions, or that set of moral laws derived from the culture of belonging. This paves the way for an important consideration on the issue of social identity and the need to be part of a social group. In Stevick (1976), Maslow (1970) draws up a scale of needs of a person starting from the physiological necessities to the needs that affect security such as stability and protection. There are then other higher needs that a human being manifests such as the need to find a place in a group and an identity within the group: the need to belong to something or belongingness. Going up to the top of the scale we find the need for esteem and recognition within the group, the “self-actualization”, as Maslow calls it, and the satisfaction with the life led.

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<sup>13</sup> Piva (2000) also underlines how a relaxed atmosphere can enhance the spontaneity when speaking a foreign language.

Failure to meet the needs of physical survival results in death or in bodily damage [...]. Failure to deal successfully with needs for identity and self-esteem results in emotional problems, the side effects of which may be both physical and intellectual. (Stevick, 1976: 50)

Security, identification and self-esteem in order of importance are detected as the three fundamental needs that a student has to find throughout his/her language-learning pathway. It is natural that growing older a person feels part of a group or some groups where he/she feels bound to and where he/she maintains his/her image. An example of this is mentioned in Stevick (1976) by Rivers (1968) who notices that English gentlemen of his time adopted an effeminate way of speaking when they had to speak French, as if speaking French implied a change in cultural attitudes. It seems that the integration with a different culture is a way to risk the “dis-integration” from the in-group. In fact, it is quite normal to feel the need of integration with the culture of the target language. So this reveals that there is a relation between pronunciation and personality, and the “empathy with other people” contributes to pronunciation accuracy (Stevick, 1976).

However, we have to be able to temporarily “suspend” our identity maintaining separateness. Hill (1971, in Stevick, 1976) underlines that phonation in some cultures is a mark of ethnic, regional or sexual identity. An adult who decides to learn a L2 would never completely get rid of his/her foreign accent because he/she has already built his/her identity within a group, and he/she would find even more difficult to empathize with a foreign culture if he/she comes from a xenophobic culture. The more or less conscious narrow-mindedness toward a foreign language and culture makes the learner feel less predisposed to *imitate* the pronunciation of a L2. The idea of “empathizing” with the target language and culture is very important and Stevick himself makes an example from his own experience. He explains that with his studies he reaches an almost native pronunciation but he recognizes that speaking with a foreign accent is a sort of aggressive behaviour towards the mother tongue and it is clear that if a person feels this aggression towards his/her own language he/she would obviously feel less inclined to imitate a foreign accent.

Therefore, pronunciation is also linked to the need for identity, for identification with a group and the need to interact with people, all connected to the idea of integrative motivation (explained in footnote 3 of this Chapter). To this point, some data relieved by ISTAT (1999) and cited by Greco and Ponziano (2007) are very interesting

First of all is worth noting the powerful role that music has among young people in forming individual and collective cultural identities; so listening to music is motivated not only by the intrinsic message of the musical language but also by other forces connected with the processes of socialization and identity formation. [my translation]

In the experience of every day, for example, everyone at least once happens to speak or to hear a person using his/her dialect with some people and not with others, just because he/she feels part of two different groups. So we need to consider this aspect in language teaching because “the subtlest details of pronunciation [...] run deeper into the center of the student’s personality than any other aspect of language” (Stevick, 1976). As Aristotle wrote in the IV century B.C. in his *Politics*, man is a social animal that tends to congregate with others and form a society. Whether this behaviour is the result of an innate need, what Darwin called “sympathy”, or a means to meet other needs such as hunting for survival, as Freud says, socialization is certainly a hallmark of the human being and language is the most powerful means to allow this socialization and therefore communication between individuals (Miliani, 2014).

Human language is the result of an anatomical and cultural evolution began with the *homo habilis* one million years ago in the regions of the Great Lakes in Africa, when the braincase started to expand, the size of the brain increased from 600 to 800 cc and developed the area of language. However the larynx, where the vocal cords are that produce sounds as the air flows, was too high and therefore initially it developed only guttural sounds (Miliani, 2014). With the *homo erectus* the brain increased in volume and the larynx lowered so the sounds changed and became modular. This depended also on climate changes that brought man to a better breathing, the lengthening of the neck and the gradual descent of the larynx. Finally, with the *homo sapiens* we reached the actual use of speech. The sounds were then modulated by the nose, tongue, teeth and lips but the thing that distinguishes man from other mammals is the position of the larynx that so sagging (perhaps because of the upright position) allows voice modulation (Miliani, 2014). Along with the sounds man developed a series of complex structures that give meaning to the sounds emitted. To communicate, in fact, man not only has to capture sensory information (auditive and visual) but has to interpret and process them and finally coordinate the various physical movements to produce meaningful sounds or to write. In



particular, as a result of some research on aphasia in the second half of the nineteenth century, two important areas of the brain were identified as appointed to linguistic expression.

The ability to produce the signals of the message is called Broca's area and is located in the verbal-motory zone, while the ability to understand the meanings of a message is called Wernicke's area and is located in the auditory-verbal zone (Bencivelli, 2007). They are connected to each other and both involved in language functions. In Broca's area lies the memory of the sequences of the movements necessary for the articulation of the words, while the Wernicke's area is the center for understanding the words heard, where the association between sounds and concepts takes place. Recent studies also support that, in addition to anatomical variations described above, it would be due to a gene, called FOXP2, that the mouth and the larynx of human beings can move in such a way as to generate speech acts, a statement that brings back to the ideas of Chomsky who believes that the ability to learn a language is innate.

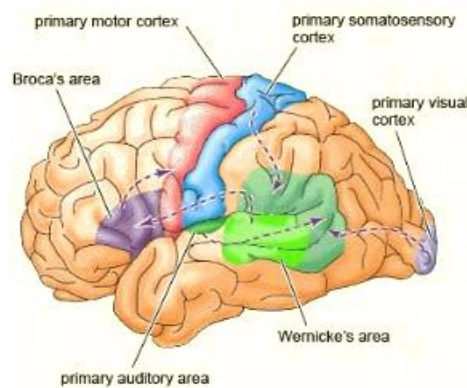


Figure 4 The Broca's and Wernicke's areas. Source: Italiano (n.d.)

But beyond any reasonable scientific explanation that demonstrates how language is a complex set of sounds and rules that allow communication, it is clear that communication itself is born into a communicative context. The need to communicate is therefore the reason why individuals developed a system that allowed them to stay in touch. Language is among the features that distinguish one person from another and identifies an ethnic group. The very idea of a nation-state is realized through the sharing of a common language. Every time a language disappears a community disappears and this indicates that language, whether written or oral, is a sign of identity of an ethnic group, of its presence in the world, its history and its culture. If we consider Italy at the time of its unification in the second half of the nineteenth century, the national language was used by the 2.5% of the population, reports Scalea (2012), who symbolically

quotes the words of d'Azeglio "We made Italy, now we must make Italians [my translation]". It is likely that the lateness in formation of a national language in Italy is one of the reasons why national unity is not particularly strong in Italy and it might be also the source of many manifestations of xenophobia in our country. Even Serraggiotto (2011) in his article speaks of *legame indissolubile* 'unbreakable bound' between language and culture. Examples that show how language is related to the environment where it grows can be found in the many different words used in English to indicate the rain, or the snow in Eskimo or the various commercial terms in Arabic. And citing Schuman, Serraggiotto states that the smaller the distance (that is the difference) between two cultures the easier is to learn the second language. Therefore, to own a language means also to know the context where it is used and it is unavoidable to "fall" into the culture of the people, their language and their life. This is what Serraggiotto (2011) calls an attempt of "acculturation",<sup>14</sup> a process that occurs gradually without abandoning our identity. And it is clear that acculturation depends not only on the degree of diversity between the cultures of the L1 and the L2 but also on the personality of the individual, his/her personal history and experience, his/her role in society. A magic formula universally applicable to trigger the mechanism of acculturation does not exist, but certainly to understand the "other" a degree of openness is essential and enables us to learn to see the world as the "others". The "positive recognition of each other's diversity" (Scalea, 2012, my translation) does not imply the effacement of our cultural identity but the acceptance of diversity without xenophobic and fundamentalist approaches. Not only because diversity is not a threat but because it can be a source of cultural enrichment. So the effects that Guiora noticed alcohol can achieve in his experiment, mentioned above, can also be reached by social means because, "your inability to produce the foreign sounds is not physiological, but psychological. Get yourself into the proper frame of mind by pretending that you are making a hilariously funny imitation of the foreign speakers" is Moulton's suggestion (1966, in Stevick 1976).

Songs and music can represent a language, a way to communicate and to create identity, not only among young people and not only between people of the same ethnicity. Every music genre creates a set of codes that allow communication among people gathered for age, culture, ethnicity, but also music taste, sensibility, personal interests and so on. And in this regard songs

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<sup>14</sup> Defined by Serraggiotto (2011, my translation) as "the process by which a person takes possession of a culture (and a language) which is different from the maternal"

can be a powerful tool to link different cultures, just because in songs elements can be found that link people and go beyond language. Music needs no translation and can serve as the glue that allows an exchange of emotions and feelings common to every human being and expressed in the lyrics.<sup>15</sup> It is definitely a way to create a “direct contact” (Serraggiotto, 2011) between the real world and the educational system, especially among students who are the first to show the need to feel accepted and part of a group, particularly in the adolescence and post-adolescent period of their life (Fuduli, 2013a).

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<sup>15</sup> To this point it is interesting Overly's considerations (2012) on music as a potential means to empathize; she states “The idea of music as a shared experience is central to the SAME (shared affective motion experience) model of emotional responses to music, which proposes that auditory musical signals are heard not simply as abstract patterns of sound, but rather as a series of intentional, expressive motor acts, recruiting similar neural networks in both agent and listener. According to this model, the synchronization of such networks between actor and perceiver [...] can create a sense of empathy and social bonding [...]. Research into multi-brain rather than single brain conceptions of human cognition has suggested that actors and perceivers show similar neural activations during language tasks, and that closer coupling of such activations correlates with increased communication. It has also been shown [...] that group musical activity [...] can lead to increased cooperative behaviour.”

## Chapter 2 Some pedagogical applications of songs in Language teaching

Several are the experiments made with music with the aim of practising with the four abilities of a second language (hereafter L2). One of the first attempts to use music as a glottodidactic means is described in the article of Leith (1979, March) who underlines that “the pedagogic potential of music in foreign language instruction [in the eighties] has only begun to be realized”.

To define the four communication skills Balboni (1998) uses the expression *modello delle quattro abilità* ‘four-abilities model’. They are seen from the perspective of oral abilities, listening and speaking, and written abilities, reading and writing; they are then further re-assembled as receptive abilities, listening and reading, and productive abilities, speaking and writing. However, it is clear that the primary abilities integrate one another. To be able to speak in a foreign language implies being able to listen and so to perceive, detect, sense the L2 before reproducing some propositions in the same foreign language. For this reason, the main focus of this work will be on the receptive abilities, particularly on listening comprehension. Here is a review of a number of approaches to teaching a second language with songs. Examples refer to teaching English as a foreign language, but there are even examples of the use of songs in teaching Italian, French, Spanish, Korean and Japanese as a L2.

### 2.1 Teaching English L2, the “VAK” method

After having specified in the foreword that the use of her manual *It's up to you. Narrazioni, giochi e canzoni per imparare l'inglese divertendosi* does not represent a substitute for but an integration of the school curriculum in teaching English as L2, Brugnone and Fonti (2009) explain the CLIL method that represents the basis of their work.<sup>1</sup> The manual can be a useful tool for the teachers of primary classes and of the first-year classes of secondary classes. The CLIL method contemplates linguistic-learning methods such as VAK (Visual-Auditory-Kinaesthetic, that means representing reality through the five senses), TPR (Total Physical Response, or linking words to physical movements or action), role-playing (simulating an event), cooperative learning and brainstorming (lead group- discussion).

Below are reported two exercises among the many proposed by Brugnone and Fonti that exploit songs potentiality using the VAK method. The first one is labelled “Sing the song” and consists of:

- listening to the song
- repetition of every short verse of the lyrics (when it is too long the repetition has to start

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<sup>1</sup> CLIL stands for ‘Content and Language Integrated Learning’ and is first proposed by David Marsh and Anne Maljers in 1994. For further information see Ball, Phil (n.d.).

from the end up to the beginning of the verse)

- division into groups and alternate repetition of the song by singing
- rhythmic accompanying

The second one is called “Say the chant” and consists of:

- listening to the song
- repetition of the song and completion of a fill-in-the-blank exercise of the lyrics
- singing the song in choir

Also Fuduli Sorrentino (2013), Professor of Italian language at the South Middle School, ECSD at Newburgh, NY, usually adds songs to the curriculum and combines them with the didactic units she is going to introduce. She plays the music-videos during her classes so that students enjoy not only songs but music-videos as well. Anyhow, she carefully advises that this is an additional practice and does not have to substitute “regular” classes.

## **2.2 Teaching English L2 at the elementary school**

Sandra L.Parker (1969), who worked at the Mae Walters Elementary School in Florida, argued that music, “the universal language” as she called it, is the best technique to get students’ attention. During her classes she often proposed question-and-answer melodies that simulate conversations. Many teachers fear to use this technique because they feel they “sing like a frog” but Parker suggests that recorded tapes can be used instead. “Children have a natural musical taste and [...] play is the only activity that they take seriously” (Cakir, 1999) so students’ enthusiasm is guaranteed.

## **2.3 Teaching English L2, Tim Murphey**

In his work *Music and Song*, Murphey (1992) tries to collect data for his research on the glottodidactic functions of songs in language classes, so it can be considered as a tool for tapping into music. Besides the song’s background that can be a valuable starting point for a conversation group, Murphey lists several exercises that can be made with the aid of songs. Here are the most interesting ones: practising selective listening-comprehension; reading songs, articles, books for linguistic purposes; composing songs, articles about songs, letters to singers, questionnaires; translating songs; writing dialogues using the words of a song; doing role-plays; dictating a song; using a song for gap-fill, cloze<sup>2</sup> or for correction; practising pronunciation, intonation, and stress by choral or individual repetition; teaching vocabulary and culture having fun.

Murphey develops his glottodidactic method presenting different activity types, designed

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<sup>2</sup> For further information about the concepts of *expectancy grammar* and *cloze* as one of the techniques used to reinforce the process of L2 comprehension see the previous chapter.

also to encourage work in pair and small groups. His main idea is to keep the student at the centre of the activity, so to use songs effectively means to use the students' choice of music and songs as much as possible. Quoting Stevick (1971), Murphey (1992) explains that "our musical interests are usually emotionally loaded. In other words, what we are doing is digging in, not inputting: we ask students to use their feelings, experiences, and thoughts, stimulated by the music, as the primary materials for our teaching."

*Music and Song* is composed of six different units and each one suggests activities to do in class in relation to the aim of the lesson. The most interesting ones are the first, fourth and sixth chapters and some of the activities proposed are:

- In chapter one, "Weekly song rota" is an exercise where students have to choose a song they like and bring in class a copy of the lyrics providing also some short comments about the singer/group or the songs. The teacher then will look at the chosen lyrics and will prepare them for the following weeks blacking out selected words for dictating songs or asking students to listen first and then write down as many words as they can perceive.
- In chapter four, the teacher has to choose a song and to find a recording of it. He/she will then type it out leaving out some words or phrases (focusing on a particular word-class for example). In class, students will first read the text for an overall comprehension and then, by playing the recording, will be asked to fill in the missing words. The sections of the tape that are not clear enough can be played again. A glossary of the missing words might be useful for lower-level classes. In this case, the teacher can leave the same number of dashes as there are letters in the missing words and/or put in the first letter and number in brackets to let the students understand how many words are missing. With intermediate classes, the rhyming words can be left out at the end of each line. Another task suggested in this chapter is to cross out any words that students do not hear. Lander (1988) quoted by Murphey (1990, 1992), for example, suggests typing out words with rhyming mistakes to check if the students can recognize them. Students can also be asked to listen for certain phrases, words or constructions and count the number of times they occur, to help students focus on certain sounds and make practice in picking the words out of a stream of speech. In addition, Ryding (1985) in Murphey (1992) asks students to number the items in the order that they hear them. The teacher can even re-type the song with the sentences in a different order and ask students to put the words into the correct order after having played the recording stopping after every second line or so. Finally students will listen to the whole song. To practice pronunciation and intonation, Murphey (1992) proposes "Singing", an exercise where students are encouraged to sing looking at the song sheets and listening to the

recording of the song. On the other side, in order to practice listening-comprehension and dictation, after having listened to the song, students can be asked to transcribe as much of it as possible. After a second listening, the teacher reads and corrects students' transcriptions and lets them bring home both the working copy and the original and correct version of the lyrics so as to leave them the possibility to assess their task.

- In chapter six, "Repetition songs" is an exercise proposed to reinforce pronunciation through songs. The aim here is teaching the song and the ways to do it are many. Most teachers like to sing the song bit by bit while students repeat and finally sing it wholly again. Repeating songs is fun and helpful for students because they get hold of some words and new words of the L2. However, the words of the songs they listen to are not automatically transferred into use. For this reason, with the aid of some exercises the teacher has to activate what has only been grasped in one way. Furthermore, Murphey (1992) recommends teachers not to do all the work of gathering song texts, "My belief is that they should share this responsibility with the students, and let them choose videos and songs [...] This will give them more active control over and responsibility for their own learning"

In his analysis *Song and Music in Language Learning* (Murphey 1990), starting point of the present research, Murphey supports the idea that pop song discourse is simple and might be more accessible for learners. He presents a list of songs and their transcriptions ready to be used as didactic tools and he then tries to measure the maximum complexity of pop songs in each section, with two different methods. Word count one (WC1), a full listing of the words from the songs, selected by frequency and range; word count two (WC2) that measures the speaking rate by words or syllables. He proposes a linguistically quantitative look at some features: word number, frequency, range, and rate; a reading ease scale based upon sentence length and a syllable count; a human interest scale; a content analysis. Murphey (1990) believes that the average rate of delivery in pop songs is about half that of normal speech and this can be appreciated because of the unattended acquisition of certain language features that might take place simply through exposure. The sentences found in lyrics are short and there is a great deal of personal references with no precise referents. All ingredients that make songs catching and pleasant to listen. Among the examples of investment in listening-comprehension, Murphey (1990) mentions Carrara (1975) who includes four hours a week of song listening with work sheets in her intensive five-week "Audio-Immersion Course" for intermediate-level high school students.

#### **2.4 Web-based music to learn English L2 for Taiwanese learners**

"Does listening repetition, song likeability, and/or song understandability influence learning environment perceptions, learning perceptions, and/or learning outcomes in Taiwanese EFL learners

engaged in web-based music study?” this is the question from which Beasley and Chuang (2008) started their study. It involved 196 Taiwanese students that were asked to complete an on-line survey. Students were given then three weeks to listen to the four songs as much as they wanted to and to complete the related activities. After this training, the students “were asked to take the post-treatment vocabulary level and lifestyle literacy tests [cultural literacy] and complete the final survey”.

No connection were revealed between listening repetition and achievement of new terms as expected, and the reason might be the short period of time available, as declared by Milton (2002), cited in Beasley and Chuang, who suggests an eight-week period as the ideal to achieve some good results. While Lems (2001), cited in this study,

[i]n terms of language development, for example, asserts that, through music, EFL students can learn the natural stretching and contracting of the normal stream of English speech (e.g., *gotta* vs. *got to*, *I've* vs. *I have*, and so on), which can assist them in developing more natural English conversation skills

In short, the results of this study suggested a “chain of associations between song understandability, song likeability, enjoyment of the learning environment, motivation for learning, and achievement”. This “in turn significantly and positively influences learning perceptions” so EFL educators need to carefully select songs that students can understand.

### **2.5 Music for Chinese ESL Learners <sup>3</sup>**

Chinese learners represent the world’s largest number of ESL (English Second Language) students and Brand and Xiangming (2009), according to their review, present the first experiment made on the effectiveness of music among Chinese ESL students. There are still few empirical studies that assess music’s actual effectiveness on language learning and most of them are made with young students. One of these is the experiment of Ayotte (2004), cited in Brand and Xiangming (2009), who proposed with an experiment the learning of French L2. Two groups were made, one based on the use of songs, the other based on the same material with no music. The results showed that students who listened to songs had better scores on the immediate post-tests with more grammatical accuracy but did not achieve statistically significant results on vocabulary acquisition. The learning through music, however, appeared to be more motivating and “engaged them deeper in the learning of vocabulary” (Ayotte, 2004). The researcher finally points out that despite the slightly meaningful results, other experiments are still required in relation to songs and language acquisition.

Brand and Xiangming (2009) experiment enrolled university graduate students with an average age

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<sup>3</sup> For a reference of how difficult learning English can be for Chinese people see the interesting novel written by Xialou Guo (2008), *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers*.



of 23, from a University in Shenzhen, People's Republic of China, where usually students have no possibility to develop English speaking and listening abilities. The experiment was limited to nine hours of treatment and students were divided into three groups all with the same English language content: the music instructional group, the half-music instructional group and the no-music instructional group. The music and half-music instructional groups had to listen to some American and British pop-rock songs for developing listening, reading comprehension, pronunciation, speaking practice and grammar. The all-music group achieved the highest post-test scores immediately following the treatment, with positive attitude toward their L2 learning, more confidence and a significant improvement in the ability of English usage. It is interesting to note that the no-music instructional group achieved better results than the half-music instructional group. Therefore, music is most effective when it is used intensively, otherwise it might result distracting.

## 2.6 Teaching Italian L2, the “karaoke” method

In the article of Pasqui (2004) there are interesting suggestions on how songs can be used to teach Italian as a L2. After having chosen the song, Pasqui draws up the following steps:

- find out the original lyrics
- *didattizzare i testi*, that means to digitize the texts of the song in order to prepare related exercises
- use the “karaoke”<sup>4</sup> method:
  1. lexical-brainstorming
  2. first listening, without lyrics, and few easy questions
  3. second listening and work on lyrics with cloze exercises to activate the expectancy grammar
  4. comparison between the lyrics filled out by the students and the teacher's one
  5. third listening using a video-projector and rereading of the lyrics
  6. group-discussion on the lyrics with historical and cultural references, considerations of the themes
  7. fourth listening and oral reproduction by singing the song in class with the aid of the video-projector

In the same article there are also other demonstrations of the use of songs as glottodidactic means. Grassi and Tartaglione,<sup>5</sup> who manage the website [www.scudit.net](http://www.scudit.net) of the School of Italian in Rome, are an example. Here a series of music-videos and their related lyrics are available and accompanied

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<sup>4</sup> This is how Prof. Rita Pasqui, Lettore at the University of Pennsylvania and Cultural Officer at the Consulate General of Italy in Philadelphia, defines her method in her article (2004).

<sup>5</sup> Giulia Grassi is Head of the department of Arts and Archeology at the Scudit (School of Italian in Rome), while Roberto Tartaglione is founder and director of the Scudit since 1996.

by exercises concerning comprehension; the multiple choice test is the most frequent. Another example is the website of the University of Toronto, managed by Gargano,<sup>6</sup> where songs are available for listening and cloze exercises are ready to be completed, with or without a list of the words among which students have to choose to fill in the blanks of the lyrics. The same kind of exercise is proposed even by Daniela Forapani (Professor at the University of Parma specialized in language skills teaching) who adds not only true-false tests but also exercises that require students to remove the words that are not pronounced.

## 2.7 Teaching Italian L2, Marco Mezzadri

In his work *Internet nella didattica dell'italiano: la frontiera presente*, Mezzadri (2001) offers a short list of websites where Italian songs are available for all foreigners who intend to study Italian language and culture but do not give any suggestions about how to take advantage of this list.

However, in his other work *I ferri del mestiere* (2003), Mezzadri proposes some receptive activities [my translation]:

- Cloze: students have to fill in the spaces left empty inside the text, where a 15% of the words are left out.
- Completion: based on the context of the listening, students are asked to write or choose the missing words. The text's transcription can be provided and students have to complete the text based on the songs heard.
- Songs: a tool appreciated by students and teachers. This is one of the activities related to cloze exercises, completion and dictation. Lyrics are provided without some lexical items and students are asked to complete the text while listening to the song.

Among the techniques used to facilitate vocabulary memorization, Mezzadri presents association through the rhythm, a technique used for teaching children and based on the similarities between words, rhythm and music. In the chapter "La fonologia in classe", Mezzadri suggests the observation of the phoneme /r/, taken as example, through the inclusion of the same in a rhyme/song. The rhyme proposed for the case above mentioned is "Trentatré trentine entrarono a Trento, tutte e trentatré trotterellando" and is pronounced at different rate by the teacher. A moment of choral and/or individual repetition is then performed, without caring about understanding the meaning of every word. A phonological and not only phonetic interpretation allows teachers to work on communication aspects of a L2. Among the activities suggested are:

- Choral repetition, individual, chain
- Recording and playback

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<sup>6</sup> Nicla A. Gargano has worked to prepare even some of the exercises available from the website [venus.unive.it](http://venus.unive.it) of the Cà Foscari University (website directed by Paolo E. Balboni).

- Listening and repetition of parts of songs
- Rote learning of songs, rhymes and tongue twisters
- Imitation of recorded texts
- Identification of isolated sounds in single words or written phrases
- Phonetic transcription with symbols or “normal” words or phrases heard or read
- Completion of the listening texts transcribed incompletely

## 2.8 Teaching Italian L2, Lidia Costamagna

In the chapter “Fonetica e musica” from *Insegnare e imparare la fonetica*, part of the series *Italiano lingua straniera*, Costamagna (2000) explains how the song offers a number of advantages in terms of phonetics starting with the lower learning levels. Song develops the auditory perception because “[to] understand a sung text is more difficult than one spoken” [my translation].<sup>7</sup> Singing is a good exercise of imitation that facilitates the articulation of certain sounds and phonic sequences because the pronunciation is led and facilitated by the musical rhythm. Memorizing songs helps to fix certain sounds and thanks to music some difficulties are outweighed. The proposed “Task 14 - Listening to 32” is an exercise from the textbook mentioned above that invites students to imitate the lyrics of a song after having listened to it.

## 2.9 Teaching French L2, Judith W. Failoni

To check listening comprehension, Failoni (1993) notes how Leith (1979) in his French language lessons provides his students with the lyrics of a song. Students “can mark the frequency of words upon hearing the song, cross out the letters not pronounced, find homonyms, fill in the missing words in sentences from the song, and order a list of words as they appear in the song. These activities will make students *visually conscious* and alert them to phonetic peculiarities [emphasis mine]”. Besides listening comprehension, activities that enhance pronunciation and help students to remember the correct one include the repetition of songs’ lines with rhythm and correct sounds. First of all, to be visually conscious of the more difficult phonetic characteristics, students need to handle with a text that is phonetically marked in a simple way by the teacher, for example a text where silent letters are crossed out. In his texts concerning French songs, Leith (1979:540) places

a dot under the mute *e* when it is sounded and a slash through it when it is dropped [, while] those instances where a possible liaison is not made are so indicated with a ( ʁ ). The irregular pronunciation of final consonants is set off with penciled quotation marks [...][and,] as for the contractions of certain words, [Leith] not only mark[s], them but give[s] their pronunciation above the line in the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet. [He] tr[ies] to put a tilde over

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<sup>7</sup> Costamagna, L. (2000:121).

every *r* that is heavily rolled.

Memorizing these phonetically marked texts, students might have less difficulty with *e*'s, liaisons, contractions and so on. The lyrics will first be read as a prose and read again for a second time as it is sung. The gap between the two different ways of reading will trigger the learning. However, printed texts are not always reliable so it is necessary to check their validity. After that, a good suggestion to refer to the different verses of the lyrics is to number each line and provide some information about the text, such as the name of the artist or group of artists, the title of the song and the year of publication.

In his advanced conversation class, Leith (1979: 542) uses songs in addition to the main text. He declares that

I usually have the student listen to the song, first without the text and then with it. [...] After the song has been played several times, I call attention to the pronunciation. I call on students to read certain lines and stanzas as they are pronounced in the spoken language; and, for contrast I read them back as they are articulated in the song. After that, I devote whatever time is necessary to vocabulary items and grammatical difficulties.

He then proposes fill-in-the-blank exercises for the song after having allowed to listen to the recording four or five times. The students of advanced language courses are required to end the task with a discussion of the song and an exchange of opinions, after the song has been introduced (this is the main goal of conversation classes). In this way students not only speak French but also associate the learning of the language with fun and “If the students like a song, they usually memorize it, whether asked to do or not” (Leith, 1979). Sometimes Leith lets the students bring home the lyrics of the song/s to study before dealing with them in class. After the problems relating to vocabulary and syntax have been analysed and the discussion begins, Leith throws out questions about the rhyme schemes, the number of syllables per line, the meaning of the poem, the differences perceived between the original text and the version that is sung and finally even questions of biographical, historical, or sociological nature.

For what concerns with the reading comprehension, Rivers (1988), quoted in Failoni (1993:99), suggests the following activities:

underlining certain vocabulary, answering questions about the song text in a true-false or multiple-choice format, translating the lyrics, arranging spelling games based on the lyrics, and locating certain grammar points such as negative phrases, adjectives, or direct object. Vocabulary development [...] may include identifying cognates, distinguishing slang from informal language, matching words of songs with synonymous or antonyms, finding gender of new vocabulary by clues in the song, and circling categories of words, like food or colors. [...] Along with reading, writing activities can incorporate music. Students can practice spelling by filling in the missing words from a printed song text [...] personalizing the song by changing names and places, or substituting words in the lines [and] may progress from

writing summaries or expressing opinions of the song to writing their own song texts.

### **2.10 Teaching French L2, James W. Brown**

In his article Brown (1975) offers some theoretical considerations made after a course on French *chansonniers* that he held the year before. He proposes a pedagogical approach more suitable to advanced language classes. According to Brown (1975), teachers “should make the students aware of [...] French structure, syntax and phonology”. However, Brown concentrates on discovering the poetic message underneath the song’s text and adopts a semiotic approach to the lyrics’ elements which are considered as signs that incorporate many codes. This is how he thinks to proceed:

- a preliminary listening to the song-poem. Students are then asked to express their feelings about the text.
- a process of decoding as the second step. This stage considers the semantic field so the teacher will concentrate on the new vocabulary providing students with information and exercises. Students are then given a copy of the lyrics and the song is presented a second time. They are asked again to express their feelings after having learned the new words of the song.
- a phonological analysis represents the third step. The song is replayed and is followed by a further recording of the same that observes the laws of ordinary discourse. This will show the phonological differences between the ordinary and poetic discourse. For a better understanding, the given lyrics need to be marked with sound features.
- a structural-grammatical analysis of the song is performed.
- an integrative phase is the last step. Students know all the codes after having broken down the lyrics into all its parts.

Once again a printed text of the song is considered needful. As Brown (1975) states, “the printed words generate new meanings because of the students’ incapacity to decode the sounds of the foreign language, hence they do not immediately associate meaning in a poetic context with the sounds but with visual or ideational constructs”

### **2.11 Teaching French L2, Jayne H. Abrate**

Jayne Abrate, language educator and expert in using music in the classroom, is used to create units with specific songs in order to reinforce particularly vocabulary and composition skills. She proves some examples of this technique using French popular songs, but she herself claims (1983) that the same “techniques are applicable to any language”. After having chosen a recording on the basis of the students’ language level, the soundtrack and the speed of the song, the teacher has to accurately

prepare the text of the song.<sup>8</sup> Students are boosted to play with the new and known vocabulary they encounter throughout the lyrics. Abrate in her article (1983) refers to Elliott (1977), for example, who proposes several games which concentrate on rhymes and folk songs in order to teach pronunciation, grammar and culture through popular songs: counting the homonyms that are present in the text, filling-in-the-blank dictations or filling in the blank the correct form of a verb tense, matching new vocabulary to synonyms, antonyms, or short definitions in the target language, matching the new words with their definitions are only few examples.

Abrate (1983) cites also Melpignano (1980) who “recommends the teaching of listening-comprehension through the transcription of lyrics”, but she insists on highlighting the cultural contribution that a song might provide because a

song with a storyline or one that deals with a specific philosophical question functions well in conversation or composition classes. [...] Students may narrate, write, or act out the story, inventing dialogue or more detailed narrative. [...] Songs with a social message [...] can be discussed or composition topics assigned, [while] comparative analyses arising from song study furnish another alternative to textual study. [...] Comparison of translations provides one possible introduction to stylistic analysis and the difficulties of translation. (Abrate, 1983: 10-11)

Songs are here considered not only as a means to develop language skills, but also as a literary genre with its stylistic and poetic features and for this reason it can be useful to explain versification, rhythm and meter as well.

## **2.12 Teaching French L2, Vicki L. Hamblin**

Hamblin (1987) represents another example of integration of French songs in the classroom. The importance of an accurate preparation of lyrics has been mentioned several times in this work and, as Leith (1979) suggests, is fundamental. Although some lyrics are available in print, they should be compared to the recording version before they are presented to the class so sometimes the best solution is the transcription of the lyrics (note that the advices given in this article date back to the last eighties, when on-line resources were fewer). Since in France poetry and music have a long tradition, Hamblin creates a chronology of songs that could embody cultural, historical and linguistic references in order to exemplify the popular music genre. Looking at the grid<sup>9</sup> of popular songs in France arranged in order of occurrence, Hamblin includes some of the personalities who represent each respective era. She catalogues all entries and times in sequence for being readily available to provide the historical period of each song, title of the songs and the name of the artist or music-group. Besides the use of these materials for starting discussion concerning the social,

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<sup>8</sup> See above Leith's suggestions, quoted by Failoni, about how to prepare a text with phonetic markings.

<sup>9</sup> See Hamblin, Vicki L. (1987:481).

literary, and political events connected with the songs, Hamblin (1987) suggests “any combination of skill exercises (listening-comprehension, fill-in-the-blank, speech patterns or vocabulary)”. Finally, Hamblin (1987) considers popular music both as a distinct genre and as a tool for language teaching, so “by developing it for more extended use in the classroom educators affirms its integral part in one’s culture.”

### **2.13 Teaching French L2, Mary Techmeier**

Mary Techmeier (1969), Professor of Modern Foreign French Language at the St. Norbert College in the late fifties, explains in her article how usually students are not able to communicate in French as L2 and she points the attention at the problem of pronunciation which is never properly achieved. To this point, she brings the example of her stay at the Laval University in Quebec where she realized that American students were not always understood by the professors of the university whose native language was French. So she decided to take some singing-songs lessons two to three hours every day. After six weeks the American students could notice an improvement in their pronunciation of French L2.

### **2.14 Teaching Spanish L2**

Music and songs can be used in different ways in the foreign language classes because of their power to address multiple intelligences and diverse learner needs (Mora, 2000; Failoni, 1993 and Abrate, 1992 cited in Barnhardt, 2007) and their effectiveness as mnemonic tools.

The study proposed by Barnhardt involved six elementary schools in Carolina. Sixteen Spanish teachers were interviewed in order to understand “the role of music in the K-12 Spanish language program to promote language development” and the strategies adopted consequently. Most of them confirmed the use of music in class especially as

a memory aide, a strategy for promoting students’ interest in Spanish through their enjoyment of music, a bridge between language and culture, and an instructional tool for teaching particular language concepts. [...] music is being used at all levels to support all aspects of Spanish language instruction, including speaking, listening, reading, writing, and cultural knowledge development.

Many respondents finally stated that music can really represent a way to satisfy different learners’ needs.

### **2.15 Teaching Korean L2**

Currie (2003) in her article investigates the possible applications of the Multiple Intelligence Theory (MI) proposed by H.Gardner in his work *Frames of Mind* (1983). Gardner sustains the

existence of “seven human intelligences” that are: linguistic, mathematical-logical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal.<sup>10</sup> Everyone uses them but with different strength and has different ways of invoking and combining them together. In terms of didactics, this means that teachers have to be aware that a class is full of students who differ from each other because everyone has his/her own “profile of intelligences” (Gardner).

Acknowledging these assumptions, Currie submitted a group of academic Brazilian students enrolled in a Reading class in English to a questionnaire that aimed at understanding an initial intelligence profile of each student and the group tendencies. She discovered that

The two intelligences which seem to be most highly developed by the class as a whole are Linguistic Intelligence and Musical Intelligence [...]. This result might be considered surprising since the students are studying language, not music. But if we analyse both disciplines we discover that they have a lot in common. The study of language does involve the study of rhythm, stress, accent and melody, which are also fundamental concepts in the study of music. So perhaps language teachers should be more aware of the importance of music and the study of music as it relates to the acquisition of language.

So the MI theory suggests different ways of learning and different ways of teaching as much, and teachers need to be sure to provide “enough variety in the activities” (Bas, 2008).

This was even the purpose of the workshop proposed by Sung (2004) to some Korean language instructors at the Stanford University in California. After a questionnaire to identify the participants’ and their students’ intelligence profiles and the best related activities, most suitable in particular for foreign language teaching, different workshops were presented. The third one called “Teaching Korean as a Foreign Language with Music and Songs” is the most interesting and consistent with the present study. “[M]usic and songs barely have been used in the Teaching Korean as a Foreign Language (TKFL) in classrooms” claims Sung. But he testifies

I have composed many songs for the TKFL classes including the Korean alphabet song, greeting song, and number song. I have used them for a variety of Korean language classes, including Korean weekend school classes, college-level foreign language classes, and working adult classes in the U.S. [...] The purposes of this workshop are to show the significance of using music and songs and to demonstrate how to use music and songs for teaching Korean as a foreign language. [...] At the Conference Audiences, the audiences will be given several songs composed by myself, and they will have a chance to sing the songs to experience the effectiveness of using music and songs for teaching Korean.

However, the close relationship between language and music (Jolly, 1975) is not something new.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> In 1997, during an interview with Checkley, Gardner added an eighth intelligence that he called “naturalistic intelligence” (Bas, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> To this point Overy (2012) states that many are the researches that “provide strong evidence in support of the embodied nature of music cognition and, indeed, embodied cognition in general. Evidently, musical behaviour is deeply rooted in motor behaviour, from vibrating vocal chords and clapping hands to expert fine motor control of



Songs represent the “the middle ground between the disciplines of linguistics and musicology” because both possess the communicative features of a language and the amusement of music so theoretically these similarities are enough to prompt the use of songs in language teaching.

[W]e might consider songs as representing “distortions” of the normal speech patterns of a language [...] songs and normal speech are on the same continuum of vocally-produced human sounds. Both have rhythmic and melodic content, and represents forms of communication in a linguistic sense. [...] Songs not only represent material for study, but represent a “method” of language study within themselves. (Jolly, 1975)

Fiset (2013) in her blog-article points out how it is easier to “*sing* a foreign language” than “*speak* it” and the reason is that the rhythm of music itself helps articulate the words and develop pronunciation.

## **2.16 Teaching Japanese L2**

During the three-year course of Japanese conversation for beginners and intermediate learners at the University of Hawaii, Professor Jolly has integrated songs to the ordinary lessons. He has adopted songs in consisting of 15-20 students per section, carefully considering the students’ ability in managing terms and grammar in Japanese (1975). Jolly selected the songs for his lessons considering the themes of the lesson and their relation to Japanese culture. But besides bracing grammatical structures, vocabulary, idiomatic expressions and cultural aspects of the Japanese language, according to Jolly (1975) songs can be useful for pronunciation. The main difference between the English and the Japanese language, he explains, is between the phonological elements, the element of accent in particular. English is stress-timed while Japanese is mora-timed with short syllables composed of a vowel or a consonant-vowel cluster, so it results easier to adapt Japanese lyrics to Western music because the language structure is flexible.

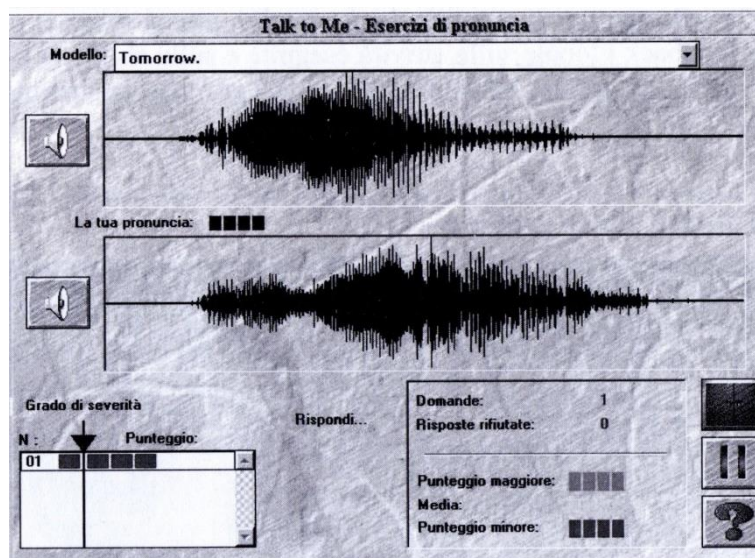
At the end of each course, a rating of the songs was asked to students on a scale of 1 to 5 considering the level of usefulness of the songs, and usually evaluation never dropped below 3; when songs were used as additional tool during two successive semesters, evaluation was always higher than 3. This demonstrates that songs not only can be a good means to use for educational purposes but can even contribute to create a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere.

## **2.17 L2 acquisition, Gianfranco Porcelli and Roberto Dolci**

Porcelli and Dolci, in their work *Multimedialità e insegnamenti linguistici* (1999), give important suggestions and guidelines to all language teachers on how to use modern technologies for

glottodidactic purposes.<sup>12</sup> For oral comprehension, for example, they present an exercise proposed in a software for learning English language (VoiceBook, 1996) where students can choose the song they prefer among the several authentic texts available with different degrees of difficulty. Users can listen to the song many times or easily jump from one side to the other of the text and while singing they can even record their voice in order to compare their pronunciation with the original one. It is clear that in this way users can get a prompt feedback of their performance, their mistakes and using the software mentioned above, with the aid of some highly specialized competences, they can even control the sound-wave graphic of their voice. They then have to transcribe the text of the song and even after this exercise they get a feedback of the work done, in this way working both on oral comprehension and writing production.

There are also didactic programs created specifically for voice recognition and correction of the pronunciation mistakes. A screenshot of one of these programs (Talk to Me, 1997) is here available from Porcelli and Dolci's work.<sup>13</sup>



The exercise consists in pronouncing some words and their pronunciations, graphically represented, will then be compared with the correct pronunciation of the same words, graphically represented as well. Students, in this way, not only can train their pronouncing ability but can be *visually conscious*<sup>14</sup> of their mistakes examining the comparison of the graphics. Even this program enables students to practice combined abilities (listening and writing) as it proposes even dictation exercises with an instant feedback of the task.

<sup>12</sup> Gianfranco Porcelli is former professor at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, while Roberto Dolci is professor of Educational Linguistics and Applied Linguistics at the University for foreigners in Perugia.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Fig. 4.23, Porcelli G., and Dolci R. (1999:81)

<sup>14</sup> See above the same expression used by Leith.

## 2.18 L2 acquisition, Paolo E. Balboni

Balboni (1998), in his work *Tecniche didattiche per l'educazione linguistica*, indicates the cloze exercise as one of the techniques that are useful to recall the content of the source text and that for this reason represents a challenge to memory (for the purpose of recovery, that implies activities of deep understanding).<sup>15</sup> After the first listening of the original text, students have to fill in the text with the words that have been omitted, one every seven. A copy of the original text is given before the listening and the execution time indicated. Balboni (1998) believes that this activity is justified in terms of motivation as it allows everyone to evaluate his/her own work privately. In addition to the units of foreign language starting with an oral text, the phase of pure listening introduces the work on other language skills through (for the purpose of enhancement, so techniques that increase fixation):

- Listening-repetition
- Listening-silent reading and listening-reading-repeat aloud (graphemic images are combined with sound images without necessarily going through an analytical spelling).

Within the language teaching techniques presented, Balboni inserts the "Songs". He specifies that this is not a technique but a genre and under this heading he includes the techniques that allow to use the song as a tool for learning the L2. Many are the activities to be performed during and after listening: categorical grouping, reordering of the words, combining or substituting of the linguistic elements of the text, filling in the blanks, identifying mistakes and singing along with the source (kept at low volume). Balboni is warning here about the kind of *ascolto interferito* 'interfered listening' (1998) of the songs since there is a backing track that accompanies the text and this can imply phonological changes that the artist might have considered as necessary to adapt his/her voice to the music. But the most interesting point is that Balboni then underlines the fact that the student is forced to follow the pace of the source and as a consequence he/she is forced to speak rapidly, something that he/she would not dare to do otherwise. In addition to this important contribution that songs can give to prompt oral abilities, Balboni underlines how they can represent a starting point for the study of literary aspects but can help even the fixation of certain expressions and structures that are repeated.

## 2.19 Music Mania for L2 acquisition

"Music Mania", this is the name of one of the six activities that P.D. Ambard (2004), professor at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado, proposed to generate enthusiasm in learning a L2. As he suggests, this is an activity that can be easily adapted to different settings, levels and ages. It

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<sup>15</sup> Paolo E. Balboni is Director of ITALS at the University Ca' Foscari in Venice, President of the CLA (Centro Linguistico di Ateneo) and Director of the Language Education Centre both of the same university.

requires 10-15 minutes and it starts with a song carefully selected according to the level of the students and played twice. A copy of the lyrics is given after the second listening and a third one is played again while students follow the text of the song they have at hand. In younger classes students are encouraged to sing and finally they are asked to point out the words that they do not know while advanced classes may be asked to do some exercises on grammar.

## **2.20 From the Net**

Many useful tools are available from the Net such as websites and blogs managed by professors, teachers, students but even people merely enthusiast for learning foreign languages, who sometimes turn into makeshift polymaths and clumsily might give wrong advices. However, as Osman (1965) cited by Murphey (1990) underlines, it is clear that teachers are required to make careful choices of the materials they intend to use in class so anything that comes from a non-authoritative or simply unchecked source has to be taken with a pinch of salt.

MOSAlingua is a website that proposes innovative learning methods and fosters users to listen to their favourite songs while reading the lyrics and picking up the unknown words before a second listening of the song. Here below there is a review of some applications that MOSAlingua's developers have done, regarded as good hints for learning English with songs:

- LYRICSTraining proposes cloze exercises. Once chosen the music-video, users have to find out the missing words of the text of the song they are listening to. Three levels of difficulty are available and if spaces are left empty the music stops.
- LyricsGaps offers the possibility to fill in the blanks of the lyrics, choosing the missing words from a drop-down menu. The music-video does not stop and users have a link to Google's dictionary to check the meaning of the words they do not know.
- Lyrics.com proposes the music-video and the text of the song at the same time. This is less interactive than the previous ones.
- MyLingo is another application that offers music-video with subtitles.
- Tubeoke is very similar to Lyrics.com. Users can sing the song while listening and looking at the music-video.
- KaraokeParty is a website where users can sing along with recorded music while the lyrics are displayed on the screen. Here users can also record their voice and play it back in order to correct pronunciation mistakes.

The website [languagesbysongs.eu](http://languagesbysongs.eu), a result of the integration of three projects Europei Grundtvig Learning Partnership and coordinated by FENICE (Federazione Nazionale Insegnanti *Centro di Iniziativa per l'Europa*), aims at teaching a L2 using music-videos, karaoke and songs. In this

website users can find the texts of the music-videos, the links to the music-videos from YouTube, the historical background of the songs and some grammar exercises related to the text of the songs. COCOOA.com is a blog that proposes a method to study grammar and learn new words with the aid of songs. First the user has to find a music-group he/she likes and preferably songs that are understandable and/or performed by a single person. Then he/she has to proceed searching for the lyrics in the original language and checking their translations. After that, he/she will have to:

- listen to the song and think what it reminds of, match the song to some personal experience or feelings
  - read the translation, listen to the song and try to follow the lyrics looking at the translation
  - listen to the song and read the original lyrics
  - read the lyrics aloud, always checking if pronunciation is close to the original and correct it easily by listening to the song bit by bit
  - try to read the lyrics fluently, with the same speed and rhythm that the artist uses to sing it.
- In the end, users should be able to sing along with the singer, most probably having learned the lyrics by heart.

## **2.21 From the Big Screen, Juan Carrión**

*Vivir es fácil con los ojos cerrados* (2013) is a film directed by David Trueba that tells the true story of a professor, Juan Carrión Gañán, who in the sixties used the songs of the Beatles to teach English. Having learned that John Lennon, after the world tour of the Beatles in 1965, was in Almería while Richard Lester was shooting *How I Won The War*, the professor decided to leave and head for the south of Spain to meet “the smart one” of the Beatles. In the film, the professor meets a 16 year-old boy and a 21-runaway girl with whom he strikes up a strong friendship.

Even in the true story, the goal of Carrión, professor at the University of Cartagena, was determined to ask Lennon to correct the Beatles’ lyrics transcribed in his notebook for teaching English in class. Carrion was one of the first professors in Spain to teach English through the listening and reading of the songs, particularly those of the Beatles that so captivated the students but were so difficult to transcribe from the radio at that time.<sup>16</sup> In his eighties, Carrión, during an interview realized by Aunión (2006), remembers how the singer was flattered by the idea that kids could learn his language through his lyrics and he decided to correct them for the professor. It seems that from this meeting the Beatles, as other bands after them, began to provide the lyrics of their

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<sup>16</sup> N.F. Orlova (2003), Professor of English as L2 at the UJEP University in Ústí nad Labem in Czech Republic, in her ten-year experience in teaching English as L2 with songs she asserts to have used always songs that she first knew and loved and she believes that the “Beatles” generally appeal even to the tastes of young students of latest generations, as well as Professor S.K. Ahola (2005), Professor at the Kansai Gaidai University in Japan, proposes the band from Liverpool for his writing activity with songs.

songs in the back of the LP.

### **2.22 From the Radio, *Rock in Translation***

*Rock in Translation* is a program of the radio station Virgin Radio, hosted by Giulia Salvi who writes in the dedicated web-page “Music is not merely notes, it is even and above all words” [my translation]. Every day she gives in brief some background information of the rock-song she proposes and she then reads the translation of the lyrics. Even if this is a kind of exercise that mainly focuses on vocabulary acquisition, for the rock-music lovers it surely represents the perfect exercise to learn new English terms as well as to know the most important bands that made history.



## Chapter 3 Music

Murphey is one of the most passionate researchers to believe in the usefulness of non-traditional methods in developing linguistic abilities. Starting from the interesting title of Murphey's work *Music & Song* (1992), where music is not merely incorporated into the term "song" but is considered as a separate entity, in the present chapter I want to make some considerations, from my point of view, over the potential power of music on other fields of knowledge not always closely related to L2 teaching. It is interesting to note that music is present in our lives since birth, almost like something innate. As we grow up, we feel that music surrounds us in everyday life: sometimes it looks like a sweet melody that can almost persuade (Effect Château Lafite) at other times it looks like something on the brain that we cannot get rid of (Song-stuck-in-my-head). And still we wonder what music is useful for. And although this question has yet to find a definite answer, what is definite is that music makes us feel good. To this point, I felt it was right to mention two unfairly-snobbed disciplines that exploit the "effects" of music: Suggestopedia, where music leads learning (in every field), and Music-therapy, where music promotes healing. I conclude summoning some interesting experiments where music has been used to achieve results different from learning a second language.

### 3.1 Music and the human being

Bencivelli (2007), in the introduction to her work *Perché ci piace la musica*, tells the story of the German archeologist Nicholas Conard that in December 2004, during some excavations in Sweden, announces the discovery of a strange 18cm long tool in ivory. The instrument seemed a flute and is dated back to the Paleolithic period, a time when there were already the first *homo sapiens* and the last Neanderthals.

Musical vocalization seems to have accompanied *homo sapiens* since their appearance on earth (Murphey, 1990). It is supposed that at the beginning human being produced a great variety of vocalizations with sing-song intonational features and in a later stage he/she learnt finer distinctions that require the training of articulators and the ability to perceive these distinctions. Many are the anthropologies, like Livingstone and Jespersen, who believe that the human being possessed song before language. Livingstone (1973), for example, states, " Since singing is a simpler system than speech [...] I suggest that he (man) could sing long before he could talk and that singing was in fact a prerequisite to speech and hence language". Furthermore, Livingstone,



citing Haldane (1955), asserts that the development of language and of symbolization comes from the practice of naming persons and objects that is the reason why human being developed vocalization. On the other side according to Darwin, cited in Bencivelli (2007), the sung-sounds production, that would precede the use of language, would be developed as a form of sexual hollo.

Blacking (1981), cited in Murphey (1990), goes further because he does not only consider the universality of music but he believes it to be a specific human trait as it is specific of the human being the expression of emotions like ecstasy, agony and motherese. To this same regard Livingston (1973) observes

Although it is often stated that man is the only primate that can talk, it is rarely noted that he is also the only one that can sing. Since singing is a simpler system than speech, with only pitch as a distinguishing feature, I suggest that he could sing long before he could talk and that singing was in fact a prerequisite to speech and hence language.

Greco and Ponziano (2007), in fact, explain how throughout history music has experienced multiple forms and meanings but has represented a universal culturally-significant means. So music is both based on fundamental and universal elements (rhythm, harmony, melody) but at the same time it is even the peculiar cultural expression of every people. In fact there is no society in the world without music as there is no community without communication. It is like a *fatto sociale totale* ‘total social fact’ (my translation) and can help us to understand life as a system of social relations. However, it is right to say that at the beginning, the sound production was closely linked to problems of survival: creating sounds was useful to communicate any kind of information. Only later, the sounds’ creation was used also to improve life’s quality, but this is another story and is discussed later in this chapter.

### **3.2 Motherese**

As human being goes from singing to speaking in the course of the evolutionary process, like mentioned in the previous paragraph, the same seems to occur in children: songs appear to precede and aid the development of language in young children (Murphey, 1990). In all human cultures music has always existed so the suspect is that a part of this is written in our genes. Hence it follows that the ideal object for this kind of research are infants.

To prove that music is in the inherent rhythmic nature of life itself, Jolly (1975) and Murphey(1990) cite an important experiment conducted in Boston by two medical doctors William S. Condon and Louis W.Sander (1974). The experiment indicated that babies respond to and are influenced by the rhythmic patterns of the language spoken to them. Jolly reports

Through a frame-by-frame study of sound films taken of infants (some only 12 hours old) while they were being spoken to by an adult, the doctors were able to establish that the babies' movements became synchronized with the rhythm of the speech patterns used by the adult speaker. This response by the listener to the speaker's speech pattern has been termed "interactional synchrony."

Infants moved precisely in response to the organized speech of their culture and this demonstrates the innate responsiveness to rhythm. A reflection on language teaching methods is the natural consequence after considering the great influence that rhythm has on language acquisition. However, to this regard, many studies in the relationship between language and the rhythmic and tonal elements of music have been and are being conducted in many countries besides the United States (Jolly, 1975).<sup>1</sup>

Lecannuet at al. (1987), cited in Murphey, goes even further arguing that the fetus between the 35<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> weeks is already capable of responding. Bencivelli (2007) explains that at the twentieth week the ear is ripe and a little later the fetus begins to hear noises. Inside the womb the fetus perceives reassuring noise such as the mother's heartbeat, which is also his first auditory stimulus. He can even perceive external noise if sufficiently high. Intonation, in fact, is considered as a primordial tool for the recognition of the mother's voice by the newborn; Murphey (1990) says

The brain is extremely complex and begins ordering its universe even before birth. We might say there is already music in the womb [...]: the bass rhythm of the heartbeat, the melodies of circulatory, respiratory and digestive systems, as well as the mother's own voice and external sounds that come to the fetus all stimulate the growing brain which is already quite mature (physically) in rapport to the rest of the body at the time of birth.

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<sup>1</sup> Here Jolly (1975) refers to the work of Nicolas Ruwet (1996) *Les Methodes d'analyse en musicologie, Liber Amicorum Andre Souris*, and to the work of Sadanori Bekku (1973) *Yonbyōshi Bunka-ron, Gengo Seikatsu*, 265, 31-39.

Doctor Sandra Trehun, psychologist at the University in Toronto and cited several times in Bencivelli (2007), for decades subjected infants to several musical stimuli to discover the reactions that music causes. Her aim was

to shed light on musical biases or dispositions that are rooted in nature rather than nurture. [...] Their discrimination of pitch and timing differences and their perception of equivalence classes are similar, in many respects, to those of listeners who have had many years of exposure to music. Whether these perceptual skills are unique to human listeners is not known. What is unique is the intense human interest in music, which is evident from the early days of life.

Research aims at proving that the musical perception of children is similar to that of adults, and this would demonstrate that music perceptions is a product of nature rather than of culture, or in other words that the man's attitude towards music is physiological (Bencivelli, 2007). Dr. Trehun in this field has found very clear and minimally invasive systems that allowed her to interpret the children's reaction. Specifically, she sought to understand if children can detect disorders of tone and rhythm, and to discover what is lost or kept from birth to adulthood. Below are reported the conclusions that Dr. Trehun, in Bencivelli (2007), has achieved so far. She confirms that children:

- prefer mother's chant to her speech (the motherese is in fact a halfway between these two)
- remember music for long time
- recognize consonant and dissonant sounds and prefer the first ones like adults; they even recognize the same melodies played with different tone and/or speed
- are more efficient than adults in some specific activities; they recognize when a note clashes in every music genre but this ability is lost over time as a consequence of the fossilization in the belonging society

Therefore, although the environment we live in determines our music taste, music understanding is something innate. Trehun's theories are confirmed even by the studies of the musicologist Heinrich Schenker, mentioned in Bencivelli. Schenker analyzed the structures of the musical compositions of several different cultures and recognized the same basic rules, as Chomsky would do later with regard to language. This is a further proof in favor of the universality of music that has to be considered as a natural fact and not a cultural one.

In particular, the motherese, that sort of pitched and slowly chanted language that people use with children, is a constant in all cultures as well as in all cultures exist lullabies that contain many repetitions (Bencivelli, 2007). Laurel Trainor, in Bencivelli, suggested that children find motherese so interesting for its beep tones that, like songs, convey the “emotional message”. So motherese straightly communicates an emotional message while words can do only indirectly and, for children, in a still incomprehensible way. Parents adopt the song-like motherese responses to up to a year old children’s vocalization and adjust their speech to the prelinguistic utterances of their children to facilitate communication. Long (1983), cited by Murphey, suggests that people use the same adaptations with foreigners. It is not unusual to see a native speaker that acquires some features of non-native speech in order to communicate with a foreigner and then unconsciously leads the non-native toward the native code.

Anthropologically speaking, researchers assert that there is a sort of directionality from right to left, the same presented in the paragraph 1.2, even in the development of the hemispheric specialization. As introduced in the first chapter, language is located in the left hemisphere of the brain while musical processing in the right. The more language develops, the more the left hemisphere specializes. According to Murphey (1990:104) this imply that the right hemisphere

performs preliminary analyses upon non-symbolic auditory signals first before possibly, as in the case of language, learning to pass them on to the LH [Left Hemisphere] for more direct assignment of abstract meaning. If this proves correct, teachers have to ask themselves whether or not presenting language musically first might make it not only more memorable, since it coincides with the processing modes of the RH [Right Hemisphere], but also eventually more malleable for LH take-over for direct abstract processing. It seems this is what happens naturally.

Infant must still go through this same gradual process of confirming and developing cerebral dominance through interaction with the environment and this gradual development seems to be reflected even in the different types of speech children receive at different stages from caretakers (Murphey, 1990). So during the first years of school teachers and caretakers of the very young use music and kinesthetic learning methods that soon disappear as children grow older and adjust to more abstract learning methods. Even if “modern society discriminates against the right brain hemisphere” (Abraham, 1983 in Murphey, 1990), it seems to play an important role in the preliminary organization of language in the brain with the aid of musical sounds.

All this considered, teenagers' attraction to pop songs would correspond to the age when children begin less receiving affective motherese responses and teachers start approaching the adult way of speaking. Murphey calls songs "adolescent motherese" because he believes they replace that affective and musical language that is lost with time and that we feel we need to replace somehow.<sup>2</sup> So even if children grow adults and enter society where they "are required" to hide these needs publicly, on the other side they will express the same needs privately, as Murphey suggest, in love relationships for example. However, the idea here is that we never get over the need for affective musical speech.

From a physiological point of view, the effects of music and motherese have been measured even on mood (Bencivelli, 2007). In particular, scientists measured the levels of cortisol of infants. This is even called the hormone of stress because it is produced by the adrenal gland when there is an alarm. It has been proved that the maternal singing greatly decreases the levels of cortisol while motherese equally reduces stress but for less time. Furthermore, Trehub adds, as motherese establishes a bond between mother and son, music conveys emotions and fosters ties between adults. In pure scientific words, socialization is considered a human need because favoring ties can ensure the survival, not only because this would favor mutual help within a group but also because it would increase the probability of reproducing. However, it is fair to say that it is difficult to talk about "emotions" from a scientific point of view and which feelings music conveys (Snyder, 2000). In this field problems are several. Blood and Zatorre (2001) of the Montreal Neurological Institute, cited in Bencivelli (2007) enumerate some:

- emotions have always been linked to some instinct of survival. Music "has no biological value directly understandable" so it is difficult to establish which is the reason why it arouses so many emotions
- personal music taste can change over time, so every evaluation would be not objective enough
- the technical difficulty of assessing emotions in a science lab

The hypothesis that music is used to create social bonds for survival is certainly valid, but it is still not clear why man, and not other species, like music so much not only at a collective level but even at the individual level, and why it influences our mood so much. Blood and Zatorre,

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<sup>2</sup> To this point Glausiusz (2001) is skeptic and he challengingly wonders why some teenagers love heavy metal. Deeper researches in this field are supposed to be done.

cited above, have shown that listening to “good” music excites the same neural circuits involved in motivation and reward mechanisms, the same mechanism activated during nutrition and reproduction. However, not all the pleasure that comes from music has to be shut down to these primitive instincts. Some researchers believe that people like music because they like listening to music and it creates enjoyment, as a sort of “masturbation”, states provocatively Bencivelli (2007) commenting on the words of the psychologist Steven Pinker, but studies have yet to be done about that.

### **3.3 The Effect Château Lafite**

Nicolas Guéguen, French Professor of Social and Cognitive Psychology at the University of Southern Brittany, describes in his article (2006) an interesting experiment conducted in 1993 by two psychologists: Charles Areni of the James Cook University in Australia and David Kim of the Texas Tech University. The intent was to demonstrate the effect of music on the human mind. The two researchers wanted to test the effect of a classical music, Mozart to be precise, in a wine shop. The results were surprising because it revealed an increase in customer spending by 250%. But the number of customers had not increased, they had just bought the most expensive bottles. So it seemed that music had acted as a method of thin and occult persuasion. A stimulus that at the beginning we do not pay attention to predisposes the brain to be more selective toward that kind of stimulus in the next few seconds. Brain processes faster semantic ties related to the initial stimulus so the following actions will be closely related to this stimulus. Guéguen proposes another example of this phenomenon suggesting to write the word “job” on the screen of a computer. If the next request would be to press a button on the keyboard, the reaction would be faster if the word that appears on the screen is “computer” compared with a word like “flower” that has no direct semantic link with the initial word “job”. The same applies to the music of Mozart that triggered buyers with the idea of “sophistication” and led them to purchase a fine wine.

Another interesting phenomenon, according to Guéguen, is the music tempo an element analyzed and experienced by the psychologist and professor of marketing at the University of Kentucky Ronald Milliam. Milliman noted that instrumental music widespread at the time of 70 crotchet beats causes a moderate level of physiological arousal, slow heart rate, little adrenaline

and excitement. All positive feelings that lead customers to a restaurant, feel relaxed and calm, stay longer and have more sweets and drinks.

### **3.4 The “Song-stuck-in-my-head”**

I report here some important concepts cited in Murphey (1990) who lists them in order to give an explanation to what he calls the “song-stuck-in-my-head” phenomenon. This is the name he chose to describe the “echoing of a song in one’s mind, and at times its surprising externalization, long after it has ceased to physically be available”.

The first concept Murphey refers to is the “Din” or the “involuntary rehearsal of language” named in this way for the first time by Barber (1980). Krashen (1983) went further and related this “din” to the Chomskian idea of LAD which is “set off by interactions involving comprehensible input after only a few hours”. However, it has been proven that the “din” is experienced more by beginners than by advanced learners.

The second important concept is Piaget’s association of the child’s babbling in the crib as an “egocentric language” (1923) opposed to the social language. According to this theory, the child’s “egocentric language” would be characterized by echoic repetitions, monologues and collective monologues (when children seem to communicate with each other). However, it would gradually disappear by age six or seven. This is supposed to be a manifestation of the external Din and of the LAD both working for language acquisition.

The third concept is the “inner speech” of Vygotsky (1934/1962) who believes that the “egocentric language” does not disappear but turns into a sort of inner speech or, as some other researchers think, into complex forms of art. Vygotsky thinks that the egocentric speech gradually differentiates itself from other social speech and from this differentiation inner speech develops. Inner speech is silent and is characterized by the use of predicative syntax and decreasing vocalization so less words are needed and pronounced because it deals “with semantics, not phonetics”. Even in lyrics, Murphey observes, we notice an absence of nominalization; a strong predication and what a person understands from a pop song comes from a framework of sense, not from the reconstruction of the specific meanings. Pop songs seem to be closer to the semiotics of music than to those of language in their incapacity to name. As motherese works upon semantics that has priority over syntax, so do pop songs that give importance to sense over syntax; Murphey (1990:111) states

That words and melodies continue to echo in our minds, apparently much more with songs than other forms of language, may be evidence of PS's [pop songs] similarity to inner speech. That our brains may be bio-genetically preordained to play with, or treat, information in this form first for language acquisition may account for the fact that we echo songs and melodies that we dislike.

The fourth concept is what Murphey calls "walkman". He links the invention of an internal invisible device to the development of inner speech from egocentric language. However, Murphey warns that private listening of pop songs is not inner speech even if it reflects some of its discourse properties.

The final concept is the subvocal rehearsal experimented by Lyczak (1979). In Murphey (1990:114) he concludes that

rehearsal is a primary mechanism for getting information into long term and making it available for later recall. Recognition is much less dependent on the rehearsal process. The effects of rehearsal, therefore, are much more likely to be exhibited on a recall task, such as language production, than on a recognition task such as translation...Subvocal rehearsal, therefore,...may be a more potent factor in second language learning than language teachers had heretofore imagined.

Furthermore Kadota (1987), supporting the idea that listening training has to precede every other skills, believes that subvocalization during reading may reinforce unnatural rhythms and pronunciation if it is not preceded by enough listening and lead to a foreign accent. In order to acquire a foreign language auditory contact is first required, as well as the silence that is the time to absorb the melody of language without interference.

### **3.5 What is music for?**

Music is "innate", music can persuade and cannot get out of our minds. But Bencivelli (2007) still asks, what is music for? "Music is not useful" is the answer of Greco and Ponziano (2007) who then add, citing Merriam (1983), "but has some functions" and these functions can be identified only considering a specific environment. Music has some universal functions and here is the list the authors propose:

- expression of emotions
- aesthetic enjoyment



- entertainment
- communication
- symbolic representation
- physical answer (as a stimulus to come incite, encourage, calm etc.)
- conformation ( it reflects *the ethos* of people, for example in religious songs)<sup>3</sup>
- cultural expression of people
- social integration

So human being has always tried to give a sense to music. Continuing the historical path, after the invention of musical notation between the eighth and ninth centuries, the first symbols used in religious manuscripts of the Middle Ages and the invention of the tetragrammaton thanks to Guido d'Arezzo in 1000 A.D., things began to change in the nineteenth century (Bencivelli, 2007). With the romantic thought, in fact, people began to appreciate music for its ability to communicate without words and because among all arts it is the one that, Bencivelli says quoting Leopardi, “acts more directly on the soul”. The advantage of music as other forms of art, add Greco and Ponziano (2007), lies in the fact that it conveys an instant message without translation. The first who realized this was the Soviet producer Sergej Eizenstein who linked the sounds with the images and so were born the soundtracks as a support for images for films (Bencivelli, 2007). Music in the world of cinema is a very important emotional lever. It suffices to think about the many films that became famous just for their soundtracks to which we associate a certain image and film genre, as well as a particular actor or place. If we watch films without their soundtrack, in fact, the emotional impact would definitely be different and it would be much more difficult for the viewer to know what to expect without the use of a music background. It is good not to forget that the opera was born with the intention to transmit emotions. The image recalled by Bencivelli from the namesake story *Der Rattenfänger von Hameln* by the Grimms, is emblematic. After having rescued from mice a small town in Lower Saxony using the melody of his flute, the Pied Piper of Hamelin enchants the children of the same town and kidnaps them all for not having received any remuneration for the work done.

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<sup>3</sup> I have entered here under the same heading one more feature that Greco and Ponziano define as “support function of the social institutions and religious rituals”.

So finally, “Why do we like music?” Not much has yet been figured out about the biology of music. Bencivelli says that beyond its real function, “useless” like all other arts, music is something that makes us feel good and that, “more than sex, should be compared to pornography”; we do not know exactly why it exists but we know well how to enjoy it.

### **3.6 Suggestopaedia, music that teaches**

According to Murphey’s definition (1990), Suggestopaedia is a teaching methodology, developed by the psychiatrist and psychotherapist Georgi Lozanov with his wife and colleague Gateva Hikova in Bulgaria that aims at producing hypermnesia. Piva (2000) enumerates Suggestopaedia among the recent holistic methods that, together with the Silent Way, fosters the unconscious cognitive mechanisms of the learning process.

From a scientific point of view, through this method, the two hemispheres right (intuitive) and left (logical analytical) communicate more easily. Under stress there is usually a significant rush of hormones that mobilize the fat reserves and elevate blood pressure, causing a blockage in the transmission of information between individual neurons and synapses that decreases the ability of learning. In particular, “the method works on the association between hearing the music and the flow of speech in L2 (the music is baroque and its rhythm would increase  $\alpha$  waves, drop the blood pressure and decrease the heart rate)” (Piva, 2000, my translation). Periods of silence and listening are alternated with music and speech. The first part of the lesson, explains Piva (2000), consists of a silent reading of the translation of the words of the teacher; then the teacher repeats the text and students listen. Finally, the student must repeat a silent reading of the text in the evening before bedtime and in the morning before getting out of bed.

The purpose of this method is to use music to relax students’ defences, create the most favorable environmental conditions around the learners and to open up their minds to the language. Murphey (1990) suggests activities with either instrumental music or songs with lyrics, using music as a background just to relax and/or stimulate keeping the volume low. He even gives examples of other researchers who work in this field, such as Anton Prochazka, Marianne Vaney, Heather Murray and Anne-Christine Doebelin.

From the interview realized by Nunzia Latini (2013) to the Professor Roberta Ferencich, top trainer in Italy for the suggestopaedic method, it seems clear that Suggestopaedia is a method

still unknown in Italy. Ferencich uses the suggestopaedic method in her lessons of German L2 and Italian L2 in particular and she explains that there are few basic ideas at the base: if students like the subject, they learn it better and faster as well as if the teacher is good, students learn more effectively. Classes alternate between activities and relaxation, have a multi-sensory basis and are presented in a creative way; the teacher tries to lower the barriers, organizes fun activities to intrigue and uses music to facilitate the long-term storage. The teacher has to ascertain that the environment is peaceful and encourage the creation of a sense of belonging in the group of study. Professor Ferencich remembers, in her teaching experience, to have administered a test of German L2 to the first year students of an Italian Language High School who attended her lessons for a year. The test results were better than the entrance test of the last year students of the same school. This method is used especially for the learning of second languages, but the same can be applied to any other type of discipline, Ferencich advises. The material is stored up to 60% faster than traditional methods, students have a positive attitude towards the subject and finally acquire more confidence in the exposure of the material.

### **3.7 Music-therapy, music that heals**

Music seems to be very convincing, as it has been explained so far, but its positive effects can have effects on our health and not merely on our mood. Murphey (1990) gives some examples of the “manipulative” power of music used as a means to fight pain: at the dentist in order to relax patients and at the London Maternal Hospital as “a tranquilizer for women having Caesarians”, while in the field of sports it helps the mind coordinate the body.

Professor Fuduli (2013b) points out that not only loving music inspires us, motivates us in our work and helps develop cognitive skills. Researchers confirm the therapeutic power of music for some disorders and diseases, and expectant mothers are often advised to listen to music. At this point, a little nod to that discipline defined as “Music-therapy” seems fair. The use of music for therapeutic purposes appears to have ancient origins that departs from Greek mythology with the rites of American Indians, the Chinese culture, Tibetan, Jewish and Christian. Beyond the religious function and then the symbolic significance that some music can have in a community, as explained in the previous section, there is evidence showing its beneficial effects for the human body (Danon, 2009). One of the first texts in this field dates back to 1748 and is the *Traité des effects de la musique sur le corps humain* ‘Treaty on the

effects of music on the human body' written by Roger Louis, who compared the body to a set of musical instruments. The work did not have immediate responses but then made France the homeland of Music-therapy. Another big boost came after the War of Vietnam from the United States where music was used in hospitals during periods of hospitalization. In the seventies finally the first national associations of music therapy was born and the matter spread to the rest of the world. In the mid-70s took place the first workshops on Music-therapy in Italy in addition to the establishment of the first forms of association.

Bonanomi and Borghesi (n.d.), psychologist and director of Artiterapia the first and Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Perugia the second, explain what Music-therapy consists in. Therapy starts from healthy parts and residual powers; this is an imperative for rehabilitation interventions in general. The work of the whole group usually takes its cue from the minimum benefit expressed. This means that operators have to start with a first simple task in order to allow them to observe patients; difficulties that emerge at this point will be the indications for the choice of the musical elements to act on.

The most frequently used techniques in Music-therapy are strategies that range from rehabilitation exercises to vocal and instrumental practice, music-theater dramatizations, works of analysis and composition of songs; what assembles these different activities to a single area of focus is the general philosophy that inspires them. They all trust in a prepared and structured practice that do not only seek the recovery of understimulated skills, but also the transfer of the structure inherent in such sound events to the functions of the individual, encouraging a harmonic reassembling (Bonanomi and Borghesi). To this often correspond strains to expression, especially with regard to motor functions, neuropsychological and social. The use of increasing complex musical structures goes hand in hand with an increasing involvement in quantity and complexity of the neurological, motor and cognitive structures. Exercises are usually proposed with a first verbal and graphic presentation and then with an exemplification of the operators. From individual experimentation patients are lead to achieve a collegial execution. Much of the rehabilitation work is inspired by the practice singing and songs are usually selected from the repertoire of popular music. Music-therapy works on songs, but even on breath, tone, intensity and intelligibility of voice; it identifies the individual parameters and contextualizes the song, leading patients to a performance as empathetic as possible.

### **3.8 Others Did It**

#### **3.8.1 Music for linguistic impairments**

Chobert J. and her colleagues conducted an interesting experiment in 8- to 10-year-old children for twelve months submitting them to an active musical or painting training. “Musical training has been shown to positively influence linguistic abilities”(Chobert, 2012) in fact results demonstrate not only that neuroplasticity (the brain’s capability of changes during the life-time of every human being) is present in the child brain but that the active musical training leads children to improve duration perception in speech and phonological representations. In particular, verbal ability enhanced in 90% of the children after only 20 days, results that were not achieved after visual arts training. “Both musical aptitudes [...] and musical training [...] can enhance the preattentive duration and phonological processing of speech sounds”, states Chobert but she rejects the idea of a genetic predisposition for music and paves the way to important considerations on the possibility of music-based training programs as new remedying strategies for children with language-based learning impairments. So Chobert (2012) states

if acoustic and phonological processes are strongly linked, musical training, by improving the discrimination of the acoustic features of speech sounds, may increase the abilities of children with developmental dyslexia and of children with cochlear implants to build better phonological representations. [...] Moreover, by helping children with dyslexia to develop more robust phonological representations, musical training may also enhances [*sic*] reading ability

There are still not clear explanations for the positive influence of musical training in extending the processing of speech sounds, even if some observations have been made on the correspondence between music and speech of the processing of acoustic features. However, Chobert admits that to achieve these effects at least 6 months of musical training are required. Children who took part in the experiment were trained for only 45 minutes once a week during the second school year and twice a week during the first school year, but she believes that shorter and more intensive musical training may achieve the same results.

#### **3.8.2 Music in nursing educational pathways**

In the field of nursing educational pathways educators are trying to develop the best-practice teaching-learning strategies to help students achieve clinical competence in APRN (advanced

practice registered nurse) roles. The project explained by Duffy and Honan (2012) used art works in a museum and visual training as “a means to develop observational and diagnostic reasoning skills”. Students who participated in this experiment showed significant improvements of their observation skills when they were asked to observe photographs of patients. But since auscultative abilities are challenging for the students of this area, as suggested by many scholars, current educational methods are not always successful and this is the reason why non-traditional methods are being developing in order to enhance visual and auditory skills. The study showed that adding auditory skills training by the use of music may also “increase students’ ability to hear and interpret heart, lung, and bowel sounds”. The music auditory training (MAT) proposed to nursing students in an accelerated master’s entry program was developed during the first semester in a two-hour MAT session and small curricular actions showed to have an impact on acoustic ability. Other results were the doubled ability to label normal and abnormal heart sounds and the interpretation of normal and abnormal lung sound which improved by 50 percent. All abilities were used then for the clinical identification of auscultative sounds.

### **3.8.3 Music for visuospatial abilities**

According to Horng-Yih and Sot-Fu, musical training can develop a range of non-musical cognitive functions including visuospatial abilities. The experiment that they presented aimed at studying the ERP (event-related potential) features achieved after a musical training, whether positive or negative and to analyse the musician/non-musician differences in visual modality, since some brain imaging studies have found a similarity between the effects of a visual and a sound presentation.

Many studies have already showed the different responses of the auditory cortex to sound between musicians and non-musicians, as well as the effects of musical training on sound representations in the auditory cortex. Furthermore, it has been proved that music-reading experts prove a higher activity for musical notation as a consequence of the distributed multimodal network of areas (during visual judgments with musical notation). In particular, citing the studies of Halpern and Zatorre (1999), they claim that “when musicians had to imagine the continuation of a tune cued by its first few notes, the right auditory association cortex was active” while “when musicians had to imagine the sound of a single note presented visually, the left auditory association areas were active” (Schürmann, Rajj, Fujiki and Hari, 2002).

The interesting results of this study proved that the visual presentation of musical notation produces the same effects of the sound presentation and that there were strong interactions between visual ( by visual musical notation) and auditory musical codes in musicians.<sup>4</sup> However, musicians proved to require fewer resources in executing visuospatial attention than non-musicians, due to musicians' automatized note-naming skill and their experience.

### **3.8.4 Music as a mnemonic tool in medicine**

Studies in the field of music and education link songs to a variety of human traits: memory (see Snyder (2000) *Music and Memory*), language acquisition (see Murphey (1992) *Music and Song*), emotion, intelligence, identity. Cirigliano (2013) states that music has been used as a tool in humanistic subjects, social science, mathematics, history, English as L2 but in his article he analyses the use of music in medicine.<sup>5</sup> Medical students have always created mnemonics to remember the great amount of terms that is required to know for any career in healthcare. Among the diverse techniques used to fix vocabulary, music and songs seem to represent a powerful learning tool, even if little has been written in this regard. Fortunately some creative students have started to use this technique and disclose their medical music mnemonics online using consumer software, networking sites and accessible online venues available from the twenty-first century on. The most interesting thing, underlines Cirigliano (2013), is that instructors have begun to adopt this method in health science classes, so this will surely help to promote this method. Musical mnemonics can, in this way, represent not only a useful study aid for students, but even useful material for courses.

### **3.8.5 Education through music: the model of the *Musikkindergarten* in Berlin**

In her article Uibel (2012) focuses on a project born in Berlin from the ideas of Daniel Barenboim, a famous pianist and conductor, who believes that music in schools has to be the central education medium and not an occasional add-on. In 2005, Barenboim built a small *kindergarten*, a 'day nursery', with twenty-one children and three educators with the idea of

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<sup>4</sup> Stevick (1976) underlines that by means of electrical discharges "the neurons which bring auditory, visual and other sensory inputs to the brain communicate with one another".

<sup>5</sup> Dalen (2013) commenting on Watling's article (2013), where a comparison between music and medicine learning is discussed, asserts "I regret this focus on the differences, because I think that in good medical training and goes music training there are many more similarities than differences."

educating “through music” in order to achieve a comprehensive education. He believes that, with the right guidance

singing and learning to listen can assist in developing speech abilities, [...] foster the development of motor activity; experiences with acoustic and sound phenomena build bridges to natural sciences; singing and playing are able to combine counting, recognition of structures, and social competences. Music as a medium opens up doors to all educational areas and helps children find their way into the complexity of the world. (Uibel, 2012)

At present the kindergarten comprises 60 children and a part from the high satisfaction of parents and children, scientists revealed that, comparing these children with age-matched children from different day nurseries, the first showed higher results in terms of social competency and communication skills. Uibel concludes “very positive effects were also found in children with attention deficit disorder (ADHD) and children with other impairments in social interaction abilities.”





## Chapter 4 Preparing for the experiment

As introduced in the first chapter, “pronunciation is the Cinderella of language teaching” (Dalton, 1997) and it is a fact that many language-learners are aware of having gaps about their pronunciation. An important target of language teaching is working on the orality “primary essence of the language itself” (Dolci and Porcelli, 1999) and with the tools available from the Internet, students can access infinite information. In this way it is possible to retrieve those “living contexts” (Dolci and Porcelli, 1999) where L2 becomes an instrument of communication and life, such as music, while making a leap toward the “naturalness” that transforms the study of a new language from foreign to the second language of acquisition (Krashen, 1987). It is clear that “the best technologies for the development of the ability of oral interaction are those based on audio recording” (Balboni, 1998, my translation) and, as Mezzadri (2003) remembers, new technologies modernize language teaching creating a work environment in the tradition of the communicative approach of the humanistic-affective theories. The training of auditory perception and oral imitation also helps in reading and spelling but “the theoretical notions concerning the phonetics and phonology that teachers possess are not to be transmitted to students whose ultimate goal is just to reach a correct pronunciation” (Costamagna, 2000, my translation) so teachers have to seep their knowledge through an “adequate practice”. Auditory training has to be well planned in order to enhance the skills of perception and recognition of prosodic and individual sounds.

With this experiment, I want to prove that not only is it important to train students to perceive sounds in a L2 but that this training can be done in a funny and stimulating way. In the eighties Leith maintained that “There is probably not a better nor quicker way to teach phonetics than with songs”. Using songs students “may be intrigued by the mixture of languages” of the lyrics (Failoni, 1993) that music offers, such as musical style, cultural topics and social themes. But too often, as Mezzadri notes (2001), teachers adjust to the school program while the need is to create individual educational paths starting from the students’ needs. To this point Engh (2013) states

If connections between music and language are as strong as the literature reviewed above suggests, why is there such disparity between theoretical support and practical application in the classroom? Why, outside of a few young learner texts, has there been such a gap in teacher pedagogical resource books supporting the use of music in language learning since the early 1990s? Why are the needs of adult and teen learners not reflected in the current

web or print pedagogical resources? Of the many useful music books aimed at English language teachers of adult and teen students published in the 1990s, only Murphey's (1992) is still available. Therefore, the suggestion from many respondents to publish new materials may be valid.

Using the words of Balboni (1998, my translation), "*first you have to possess the rules and then, eventually, you have to know them*: they are two clearly different language-teaching targets". And yet D'Cruz (2001), "don't give your students fish, but teach them how to fish" because "it is in being able to do things that you acquire and consolidate knowledge" (GISCEL, 2007, my translation). Here below I give an explanation of the three main assumptions and the theoretical considerations made in order to realize the experiment as it is, presented in the next chapter.

#### **4.1 No-stress conditions for learning**

Very often teaching preserves an intellectual approach focusing on what is taught "from the neck up", avoiding every feeling and stimulant emotion (Dolci and Porcelli, 1999). The problem of lowering the affective filter had already been identified by Krashen who stressed the importance of lowering the psychological barriers, fears, dislikes and tireless mnemonic exercises that have little effect. A child who seems not-suited to languages is not always linked to the "phonic plasticity" of his/her brain but also to the kind of stimuli he/she receives (Costamagna, 2000). The use of songs as a tool for language teaching is a way of contributing to the "elimination of boredom while maintaining the positive rewards of the drill approach" (Jolly, 1975) and at the same time "music motivates learning and contributes to a relaxed, informal atmosphere" (Leith, 1979).

However, lowering affective filters is fundamental as it is fundamental considering the mistakes in a constructive manner, proposing the correction technique in a positive and natural way. Self-correcting, as Mezzadri (2003) observes, not only fits the perspective of an approach that aims at students' autonomy but helps them to face mistakes without anxiety. So

[the] teacher and the learner can work towards autonomy by creating a friendly atmosphere characterized by low threat, unconditional positive regard, honest and open feedback, respect for the ideas and opinions of others, approval of self-improvement as a goal, collaboration rather than competition. (Candy, 1991 in Thanasoulas, 2000)

Backus (1957), in Stevick (1976), argues that reducing barriers is more important than introducing new items. The anxiety and the level of self-esteem also greatly affect performance. Anxiety is not only a factor of character but it is also tied to a state caused by a situation, such as the correction in class, that is often a source of stress. To get to this important point Dolci and Porcelli (1999) use the word “to surrender” in a footnote of their cited work. The word, coined by H.Palmer and M.Rinvoluceri, is interesting and meaningful because it underlines how learners have to let themselves be invaded by the language-stimuli, in a natural way, without resistance and without anxiety.

Furthermore, even the use of cloze exercises (as proposed in the experiment) is a way to give students a task to do individually and that, for this reason, does not create stress, but constitutes even a challenge for them. In this way, learners feel relaxed and stimulated at the same time, not-subjected to the anxiety of an assessment or to the prejudice and/or preferences of some teachers.

#### **4.2 The need for autonomy**

Autonomy is one of the aims of the humanistic-affective approaches because it puts the student at the center of the learning process while the teacher provides strategies for learning and gives input, confirmation or denial without necessarily being “hierarchically superior” (Balboni, 1998). In the last few decades some gradual shifts have taken place, with less emphasis on teachers and greater stress on learners’ learning (Lessard-Clouston, 1997). The LLS (language learning strategies) are important because they are tools for active, self-oriented involvement that are essential for developing communicative competence. Also, autonomy is considered as a goal to achieve like all other language skills, with the difference that autonomy has also the higher goal of moulding independent individuals within a society (Mezzadri, 2001).

It is clear that “the learning of a language in isolation from any sort of supportive environment is unnatural” (Small, 1999). Stimulating the student’s ability of autonomy should not be interpreted as a buck-passing of the teacher’s work at the expense of the students. Instead, learner’s autonomy implies a perennial dynamic process and not a static product, amenable to educational interventions which help learners to take greater control over their own learning. As a constructive process, learning is a self-activated maker of meaning so any individual learner will differ in his/her learning habits, interests, needs and motivation, developing various degrees

of independence (Thanasoulas, 2000). Teachers, in turn, must be familiar with multimedia tools, carefully considering the provided means and checking the results.

The student's autonomy is important also to give him/her the opportunity to successfully continue his/her path of learning beyond the school program, the tests and the exams (Dolci and Porcelli, 1999). But it would not be correct to speak of a student-centered system, because the teacher has a great responsibility in the learning path of the students. Both parties, teacher and student, have an active role in the learning process but, according to the human-affective theories, the relationship is no longer seen as hierarchical, instead it is seen as a collaboration for the same purpose. In the same text *Dieci Tesi* some of the main points are the reference to sociality and corporeality of the linguistic experience, the centrality of the subject of education and the need of students' involvement, motivating and making them the protagonist of the process (GISCEL, 2007). Being the protagonist, the student will surely get a higher satisfaction and flexibility, due to their surfing the Internet, which can facilitate the understanding.

The self-assessment, known as the capability to observe the cognitive processes or the art to reflect on our own thinking, is also considered a way to strengthen memory in the psychology of learning. This is demonstrated by Sadler and Good (2006) in an experiment that verified the behaviour of the students in cases of self-correction, and testified that "those students who corrected their own tests improved dramatically". So this is an "additional opportunity for students to deepen their understanding about a topic [...] and can have benefits that go beyond *learning* specific subject-matters" because "students become more aware of their own strengths, progress, and gaps" (Sandler and Good). "Autonomous learning is by no means teachless learning" nor an "unbridled learning". The teacher must become a counselor, a facilitator and a manager of learning resources (Thanasoulas, 2000). Learners have to follow certain paths to achieve autonomy and the teacher must show the way.

### **4.3 Motivation**

Effectiveness and autonomy in learning are to be considered as related to each other but the starting point is motivation. Curiosity about a foreign culture can be triggered, as an interest or a communication need, a pleasure in overcoming a challenge, for example, or in discovering new things (Balboni, 1998). However, in teaching a L2 it is good to remember that "language is a system for the expression of meanings. The primary function is communication. So we must use

it to learn the language in communication-based activities which are able to stimulate and motivate students through meaningful tasks” (Mezzadri, 2001, my translation). The inductive approach keeps up students’ motivation because of the constant intellectual curiosity and challenging expectations regarding the contents on which they focus their attention (Mezzadri, 2003). With the words of Phil Ball (n.d.) the teacher has to “install a hunger to learn in the student” even if the main problem for many teachers is precisely sustaining a “genuine interest” in studying English as L2 and to use it once the examinations are over (D’Cruz, 2001).

D’Cruz gives an example of an enrichment program (a three-day workshop) in Pahang, Malaysia, that showed positive results. The program was rich with language inputs where the learning situation had a low affective filter, continuous exposure to the L2, a supportive environment and language had to be used as a “natural means of communication”. Students’ motivation was increased by the creative way of teaching language and it helped maintaining the interest over time. So how is it possible to encourage a genuine interest for a life-long learning? Motivation is no single entity but a multi-factorial one, as it has been already showed.<sup>1</sup> Many are the factors that impact motivation; Shearin and Oxford (1994), cited in D’Cruz (2001), identify six: attitudes, beliefs about self, goals, involvement, environmental support, personal attributes. Therefore activities should be process-based and not product-based. So exercises must be carried out in-class and outside-class and must be communicative, pleasant, enthusiastic, group-based, meaningful, challenging. It is no coincidence that among the various activities proposed during the three-day workshop in Pahang there was the song cloze.

If we then assume that students have already an underlying interest for the L2, we even know for sure that they would like to put immediately into practice what they have acquired and they would continue their studying if they have the motivation and the right tools to do so (Mezzadri, 2003).

#### **4.4 The use of multimediality**

Self-education and technology are terms that go hand in hand when talking about self-access learning. The “problem is not technological but methodological” so a carefully coordinated plan is required, Dolci and Porcelli warn (1999). With multimedia technology the spoken and the written can be both represented, even if it is not correct to place too much confidence in

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<sup>1</sup> See Footnote 3 in Chapter 1.

multimedia technologies. It is not a chance that many computer scientists and linguists work closely together to harness the power of the media for didactic aims, to support and enhance self-education in particular. If we consider the traditional model of teaching in the Italian universities the professor-students ratio is too high, often of 1: 100. While lessons are held in Italian and the L1's inputs are received every day as well as in life outside the school environment, in the teaching of foreign languages the only input of the L2 is the voice of a teacher who often is not even mother-tongue (Balboni, 1998). "In this scenario, technologies can play an important role in promoting language learning" (Dolci and Porcelli, 1999, my translation) even from the point of view of the organization of teaching.

Furthermore, considering young students Leith (1979) underlines that

the techniques that I shall discuss should prove of equal value to high school teachers and university instructors. On the high school level, advanced students might appreciate popular music even more than would university undergraduates

At a level of advanced study, in fact, but especially in the multimedia-era students can easily retrieve audio files and resources of language inputs through the Internet. Digital tools can be an important ally for both the teacher and the student (Dolci and Porcelli, 1999).<sup>2</sup> However, the use of technologies, Dolci and Porcelli warn, might cause anxiety because of the competence required to use them. A sort of "computer literacy" is required, Mezzadri (2001) notes, but there are tools that students already know how to use, sometimes even better than teachers. So why not take advantage of this knowledge that often results from a self-taught learning? This is a point that should make us reflect, because no class teaches how to use YouTube but almost every teenager perfectly knows what it is and how to use it. It is clear that teachers, beyond the need to teach how to use computer tools, must be present to avoid that students lose sight of the path, especially considering the magnitude of the Internet. The teacher remains a compass and a reference point for the students while multimedia must fit a framework without replacing it (Dolci and Porcelli, 1999).

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<sup>2</sup> For further information about the use of Internet see chapter 5 in Dolci and Porcelli (1999), *Multimedialità ed insegnamenti linguistici*.

#### **4.5 Clarity in teaching choices**

Since the teacher has to act as a guide in the learning of the L2, it is essential to consider the choice of the materials. As said above, students would be able to easily recover every sort of material from the Net, but it is essential to choose things carefully keeping in mind the “clear understanding of the goals for language learning” (D’Cruz 2001). For this reason, teachers can surely take advantage of the technological competencies of the students but at the same time have to give clear instructions. Considering some of the uses of songs for language teaching presented in Chapter 2, Failoni (1993) for example offers “clear recordings with minimal accompaniment to allow the voice and text to be clearly understood, and a tempo appropriate for the listener”. Leith (1979) in his article proposes to prepare texts with phonetic markings indicating pronunciation, in particular when the text has to be used for the study of pronunciation. But the choice of the songs should be made considering also how much music itself “hinders the hearing of the words of the lyrics” (Costamagna, 2000, my translation), especially if we consider exercises for pronunciation. Abrate (1983) underlines the importance of a careful and accurate preparation of the text and proposes three criteria to be considered in choosing a recording: the student’s ability, considering the level and the goals to achieve, the musical accompaniment (in fully orchestrated arrangements, lyrics are not so clear), the speed of the song. Hamblin (1987) gives the example of the song of Édith Piaf “Non, je ne regrette rien” for French as L2, a choice made because it is “simple, repetitive lyrics”. Great attention is needed when choosing songs for teaching because some songs might get away from the phonological patterns or contain wrong expressions. The success of a teaching aid is very much dependent upon the teacher using it (Jolly, 1975).

#### **4.6 Video: a double-edged weapon**

Many are the young students who “profess a desire to learn a language outside a classroom setting” (Small, 1999). Using films in the original language is definitely a way to get closer to the L2 but their use is definitely not recommended in the classroom. As Murphey (1992) recalls, using films in class could not only disturb the neighbouring classes but could be even difficult for students that have to watch the film with the entire script at hand. The exercise would become too long and difficult and it would not be plausible to watch the same one several times. Furthermore, it would require the teacher a huge workload for the preparation. Moreover,



students themselves might be distracted from the scenes and the cinematographic effects in general rather than focusing on the language itself. Canning-Wilson (2000), after an experiment conducted on the effectiveness of the use of videos in teaching a L2, claims that

there is scant, if any, empirical evidence to indicate that videos shown in their entirety improve listening comprehension scores of non-native speakers of English. For as much as the visual may aid in understanding the scenari [...] it may detract from the individual messages produced by the speakers.

Surely using videos is an appreciated practice because students like learning with videos, but student comprehension may be due to the visual clues instead of the auditory components because video offers supporting features to the context. There are few pieces of research in this area, but a study of Balatova (1994), cited in Canning-Wilson, observes how videos enhance comprehension in general and not necessarily the understanding of a text. Among the advantages that videos provide Canning-Wilson lists the body rhythm, the speech rhythm, the speed of speech and the possibility to clarify the meaning of the text. But videos are ineffective when the visual is too small, when stereotypes are used, when the visual is a poor reproduction, when the picture is too far from the audio, when there are meaningless subtitles, when videos offer too much information or when they are poorly scaled. Furthermore, in order to maximize the advantages of using videos they should be shown in segments and not as a whole.

In an experiment conducted on some Asian students, Wolf (2006) observed the effectiveness of the videos in developing writing fluency of English as L2 since the English lessons given were focused mostly on grammar and vocabulary and provided little help in expressing and writing. Even if the activity looks appealing and engaging, Wolf himself concludes that a “significant amount of careful preparation” is required, such as selecting scenes, preparing a viewing guide to follow the entire plot and unfortunately teachers often “need to limit length to fit available class time”.

#### **4.7 The effectiveness of cloze exercises**

A key point is to help learners develop the use of the expectancy grammar<sup>3</sup> through task-based reception techniques that lead students in considering what has to be understood. In his textbook, Murphey (1992) observes that the most common technique for the use of songs in classes as a

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<sup>3</sup> For further information about the “expectancy grammar” see paragraph 1.4

listening comprehension and vocabulary exercise is represented by a cloze exercise, where a certain number of words are left out. The cloze exercises are considered effective exercises to strengthen memory by stimulating the regular extraction of information.<sup>4</sup> As Pashler (2007) emphasizes, tests in general require students to actively recall specific information. The act of recalling information from memory helps to cement them to memory reducing the risk of forgetting what has been acquired. “Active retrieval of information at all phases of the learning process to exploit the ability of retrieval directly [...] facilitate[s] long-lasting memory traces” is one of the statement of Pashler’s *Practice Guide*.

#### **4.8 Studying the students: the rock music genre**

The crucial point here is to know something about students, their interest, motivations, learning styles, their world. The study of the teaching context is the first step to focus on specific LLS (Lessard-Clouston, 1997). We know that

Students enjoy hearing popular songs (that have achieved public acceptance) in the target language [...] [but] the pop music field is constantly changing and it can be difficult to keep up with the latest hits and styles, and certainly it is impossible to guess what kind of music will appeal to which student and class. In addition, popular songs may present problems for the teacher because of the uncontrolled vocabulary. (Failoni, 1993:100-101)

So a careful scanning of the songs is needed even if it is almost impossible to say with certainty what selection will be successful with a given group. As Leith (1979) suggests when we talk about music, there is frequently no rational explanation for taste and he “might hazard, though, as a general rule, a successful song [...] is one that is musically lyrical and sociological in nature”. Everybody has his/her own favorite music genre and songs so we can make our choice considering what is available to us in our environment.

But while children usually accept any kind of music and song, Murphey (1992) observes, adolescents have their own genre and use music as a vehicle for group identity and self-discovery; they often reject dated music and on the other hand they nostalgically embrace rock and roll or jazz. “Activities in this book can work with just any music and songs” states Murphey (1992) in the introduction of his workbook where he offers a list of songs that he presents as a personal selection. It is fifty songs from the current most popular songs, even if this means the

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<sup>4</sup> See the paragraph 1.4 for further information about the cloze exercise.

“most promoted” ones, Murphey specified. However, his choice pointed at native-British artists and at their carefully controlled song transcriptions. Of course “rock [and pop] music is not recorded for the benefit of phoneticians” (Zwicky, 1976) but songs represent a piece of our identity and our life besides being a useful tool for developing all language skills, listening comprehension in particular, which is involved in nearly every category of use; it is especially an “integral precursor to pronunciation” (Murphey, 1992).

In his teaching experience, Leith (1979) reports to have used from thirty to forty songs in an average semester course and underlines that to choose “good” songs means to choose the most successful ones for conversational ends. So it is important to consider the power of empathizing of a music genre, power that might be used as a means to approach even different cultures. Elliott (1977), for example, points to songs as a way to teach culture and civilization, create debates and lead students to questions and answers, recognizing that in some experiments the songs are “riche en modèles pour une étude phonétique”.<sup>5</sup> Even Delière (1985) considers music as an “ideal marriage of poetry and music” and a possibility to introduce the cultural context of the song (Abrate, 1983).

But focusing more specifically on students’ tastes, Scoppola (2013) draws up a useful list of favorite genres analysing the youth habits. Listening to music turns out to be “one of the favorite tasks among adolescents during their free time [my translation]” and she cites numerous studies in both sociology and music that support this statement. Pop music in the US is listened to and bought by 70% of young people between 12 and 20 years old and she believes that the musical culture of young people is the result of a continuous exposure to listening to the music they find in their environment. Scoppola then refers to an interesting experiment done with 1163 students of the last year of a secondary school in Rome.<sup>6</sup> The more or less proximity to the capital, the affiliation or the social class seem not to affect much the musical tastes. What most influences the choice of songs is the sort of acculturation of the family and the home habits. The chart below shows that 42% of students prefer the pop genre while 23.4% rock music, with a higher preference for rock music among males (data from Miur, 2010 cited in Scoppola, 2012). The other slight difference between males and females, as well as the favorite genre, is the time

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<sup>5</sup> [songs are] rich models for a phonetic study [my translation].

<sup>6</sup> The study (2012) is a Doctoral research in experimental Pedagogy at the faculty of Medicine e Psychology at the University La Sapienza in Rome.

dedicated to music: more than three hours a week for the 52% of females while the same time for the 38% of males.

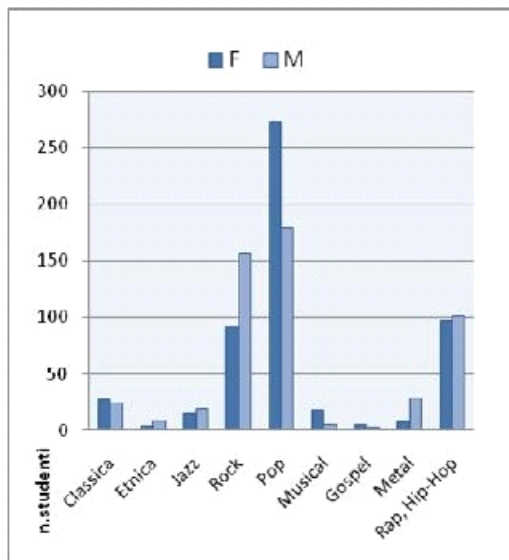


Figure 5 Favourite music genre in relation to gender. Source: Miur (2010) in Scoppola (2012).

The average however is between two and three hours a week, a sign that listening to music turns out to be a kind of pleasant activity in youth’s free time. But Scoppola points out even an important observation: the interest in music falls when it becomes the subject of study, although she refers mainly to classical music that the author reveals it is considered old-fashioned among young people. However, carefulness is required not to deprive students of one of their favorite communicative means. The songs, in fact, represent a “dear” genre for all young people (Balboni, 1998). It is therefore essential to present a program that is not “too-scholastic”, in order to prevent students from perceiving the use of songs as an “identity theft” of the teacher, who takes possession of a students’ genre and language (Balboni, 1998). Students perceive these texts as their *own* way of communicating and this can be exploited as a motivating rather than a testing means.

#### 4.9 Repetition to enhance memorization

Songs generally use a simple and conversational language with a lot of repetitions (Murphey, 1990) so requiring students to sing and repeat the songs might sound like a mechanical and boring exercise. However, Gatti-Taylor (1980), cited in Murphey (1990), confirms that during

her Italian L2 lessons in class she strongly advocates singing with her students even if they were often shy.

Since the students have to “build a proper hearing-image of the words” (Costamagna, my translation), pronunciation needs to be trained and through oral repetition the process of memorization takes place. Music supports motivation while singing is a good exercise for imitation: students memorize the songs and develop auditory perception. It is clear that songs, unlike films or videos, can be replayed many times and can be easily used as an exercise for repetition not only because of their briefness but also because of their pleasantness. Elliott (1977) in her music research states that

*Il est indéniable qu'un poème ou une chanson qu'on aura répété bien des fois et avec plaisir, implantera chez l'étudiant l'habitude d'utiliser automatiquement une structure correcte sans souffrance tout en maîtrisant le sens de ce qu'il dit (p. 400)*

‘A song repeated many times with pleasure puts students in the habit of using the structures correctly while mastering the content at the same time.’

But the practice of repetition is not only a *modus operandi* arisen from our common sense or the practice of common use. Repetition, when imitating other’s speech, is considered a cognitive strategy that is a strategy that operates directly on incoming information (Thanasoulas, 2000) and the SRS (Spaced Repetition System) is considered a method that allows people to remember things using the repetition practice. To recall information and enter it into long-term memory it is necessary to defer revisions over time according to a schedule, as shown by the experiments conducted by Harry P. Bahrick (1993) and P.A.Wozniak (2005).

Bahrick, together with other colleagues from different universities around the world, developed a 9-year investigation (quasi-experiment because there were no standard controls required in laboratory experiments) on the benefits of spaced retrieval practice to long-term maintenance of academic knowledge areas. He investigated the acquisition and retention of foreign terms in relation to the number of relearning sessions and the spacing between the sessions distributed over different intervals. The data showed that when the spacing of training sessions increased with a constant practice, it greatly enhanced and stabilized the long-term retention of the foreign terms acquired. So retention improved with distributed practice, but the effects could not be estimated because the laboratory data were usually based on short periods

and none used retention intervals longer than 31 days. The powerful long-term effects of spaced retrieval practice constitute an important but unexploited result of memory research for didactics. So, optimally-distributed spaced retrievals over time offer the opportunity to access the knowledge acquired at a cost that is lower than the cost of acquisition.

Piotr Wozniak is the inventor of a technique that is embodied in a software program called SuperMemo. Of course this is not an advertising of any product but simply a report of some considerations that Wolf (2008) made in his interesting article. According to Wolf, there is an ideal moment to practice what we have learned and it is precisely when we are about to forget it. This moment, however, differs from person to person. The pattern is well known in the field of cognitive psychology, but it has been difficult to put to practical use. Wozniak elaborated a method that exploits the computer in order to track the personal forgetting curve – when the chance of recalling drops roughly to 90 % – and reminds the user to revise his/her knowledge, in particular with the aid of an algorithm converted into the software SuperMemo.<sup>7</sup> However, Wozniak was not the first in this field; in the late 1880s a German scientist Hermann Ebbinghaus discovered the learning curve and suggested the idea of the correctly-spaced sessions of practice to improve learning. Robert Bjork, chair of the Psychology department at the UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) and quoted by Wolf (2008), points that

most people think about forgetting as decay, that memories are like footprints in the sand that gradually fade away. But that has been disproved by a lot of research. The memory appears to be gone because you can't recall it, but we can prove that it's still there. For instance, you can still recognize a 'forgotten' item in a group. Yes, without continued use, things become inaccessible. But they are not gone.

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<sup>7</sup> Wozniak elaborated a repetition spacing algorithm to compute the intervals between repetitions of items. Inter-repetition intervals are computed using the following formula:

$$I(1)=OF[1,L+1]$$

$$I(n)=I(n-1)*OF[n,AF]$$

where:

- OF - matrix of optimal factors, which is modified in the course of repetitions
- OF[1,L+1] - value of the OF matrix entry taken from the first row and the L+1 column
- OF[n,AF] - value of the OF matrix entry that corresponds with the n-th repetition, and with item difficulty AF
- L - number of times a given item has been forgotten (from “memory Lapses”)
- AF - number that reflects absolute difficulty of a given item (from “Absolute difficulty Factor”)
- I(n) - n-th inter-repetition interval for a given item

For an extended explanation of Wozniak's algorithm visit his website [www.supermemo.com](http://www.supermemo.com)

Bjork, with his colleague Thomas K. Landauer of Bell Labs in the late sixties, published the results of two experiments that involved nearly 700 undergraduate students and confirmed that the best moment to revise something in order to remember it is when we are about to forget it. Therefore, computers were the obvious answer, and the idea was developed by Wozniak. Wozniak, in the mid eighties, resumed these theories when he had to face some problems connected with the acquisition of English L2 that represents the most important challenge for him, not for learning the material but for retaining it. He believes that people who become experts in some particular field are people who made intense practice in that particular field as to keep their memory alive, and it is surely not due to their ability of memorizing the materials of the lessons attended in class.

Small (1999), exposing the guidelines for self-instruction states that “studying one hour every day is more effective than studying every Sunday for seven hour [...]. It is especially important to study every day – or almost every day – even if for only 30 minutes of concentrated study”. When he refers to self-instruction by audio-cassette, Small underlines how repetition is the key of this method for language study while “in a classroom, the speaker cannot be made to repeat sentences countless times”. Repetition allows students to internalize structures and at the same time “grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation are concurrently practiced”. So repeating what is heard, vocalizing the material, sometimes just listening, reading and mimicking are the techniques proposed by Small that best focus on pronunciation, rhythm and intonation of the target language.

Even among the seven recommendations of Pashler’s *Practice Guide* (2007), resulting from the research on learning and memory, we find at the first place the “space learning over time” and at the sixth the need to “allocate study time efficiently”. Pashler notes that

Research has shown that delayed re-exposure to course material often markedly increases the amount of information that students remember [...]. [T]here is a significant amount of research involving memory tasks indicating that the optimal amount of spacing tends to increase as the retention interval (time from the second study to the final test) is lengthened.

for his first collection of songs Murphey (1990) asserts that by devoting just from five to ten minutes a lesson, two or three times a week, students can learn more than twenty songs during

the year. This is because of the so-called “Song-Stuck-in-My-Head”<sup>8</sup> phenomenon and the need for “bridging exercises” to retain the terms acquired while “pauses may aid retention, as they allow echoic memory to process information with more depth and as they allow the words time to echo in one’s mind”.

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<sup>8</sup> Explained in the previous chapter.





## **Chapter 5 Testing the effectiveness of songs on English L2 pronunciation**

### **5.1 The objective of the experiment**

In the light of the findings both in theory and in practice analysed so far, it seems clear that pronunciation is still a neglected aspect in terms of school curriculum. The idea of this experiment starts from the concept, anticipated by Busà (1993, 1995), that the imperfect pronunciation is not a matter of articulatory impediment but of not-trained perceptive ability. I believe that to get used to feel and produce English sounds is the key to achieve a good pronunciation; using the words of Harmer, the most important thing is to train students' ears because when "they can hear correctly they are on the way to being able to speak correctly" (2001). The assumption that has led me to this experiment is to consider the songs as useful means to improve the pronunciation of a L2, a fact that I have noticed even in my personal experience. I believe that by listening and singing songs in their original language is an effective method to give students a good oral-perceptive training that would help them then to improve their pronunciation. Therefore, I have organized an experiment that compares two different groups: a group (Control Group) will use the traditional method, that is, studying phonetic examples, the other group (Experimental Group) will use the method here proposed and will have to listen and sing the songs that contain the same phones on which the first group is asked to focus their attention on. Despite the short time available of three weeks, I believe that the Experimental Group will obtain much better results than the Control Group.

### **5.2 Motivating the structure chosen for the experiment**

After the general theoretic considerations of the previous chapters, the focus is now specifically on the structure of the experiment proposed. Here are nine points as the number of the paragraphs of the Chapter 4 where the theoretical approach to this experiment was analyzed. So each point here described has to be considered as the *naturally-consequent* choice, to my point of view, that led me structure the task of the Experimental Group as presented in the next paragraphs.

1. In order to avoid stressing and embarrassing students who are unwilling to sing in class (Murphey, 1990), I have opted for an individual kind of exercise. Singing and repeating have to be relaxing activities. As a repetitive exercise it may lack creativity but the

purpose is to help students to achieve fluency in speaking and to develop their self-control (Costamagna, 2000). Furthermore, the cloze exercise (proposed in addition to the singing songs) is a task to do individually not only to avoid the “performance anxiety” but to stimulate students to challenge their capabilities.

2. Among the negative elements associated with the use of songs in class, Murphey (1992) remembers, is that there is a high possibility of disturbing the neighbouring classes. It is also possible that some students get too excited or just want to listen and not work or, as mentioned above, do not sing. These are other reasons why I think that the experiment should be carried out individually. However, another reason is that autonomy is a skill that students have to achieve. For individual activities to work it is imperative to supply immediate feedback. This is why I have provided a copy of the original lyrics to the students of the Experimental Group so as to immediately check their performance after the cloze exercise. In this way, there is no direct control from the teacher and the student uses materials for self-assessment though still guided, aided and rated by an expert.

Finally I have considered appropriate to give a questionnaire to the students of both groups because I believe it is important to encourage learner reflection on language-learning and make learners aware of their own strategies (Lessard-Clouston, 1997).<sup>1</sup> I have chosen a semi-constructed interview to extract information about learners’ feelings, problems encountered, techniques resorted and learners’ view. The awareness of the language strategy used is important as much as the awareness of mistakes<sup>2</sup> because “without awareness [learners] will remain trapped in their old patterns of beliefs and behaviours and never be fully autonomous” (Wenden, 1998 quoted in Thanasoulas, 2000).

3. I have chosen some volunteers among a class of university students of the Department of Languages that select English as their L2, so it is assumed that they are motivated and interested in learning English. The other volunteers are former university students with a scientific academic qualification who did not attend specific language courses but had

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<sup>1</sup> In this regard Thanasoulas (2000) makes an important distinction between reports: introspective (that is the verbalization of one’s stream of consciousness) and retrospective (where learners are asked to think back or retrospect on their learning). The retrospective self-reports are semi-constructed interviews unlike structured questionnaires that are true or false questions. The retrospective self-reports are semi-constructed interviews unlike structured questionnaires that are true or false questions.

<sup>2</sup> See paragraph 1.6

few chances to work with foreign partners during their job experiences and are interested in enhancing their skills in English. It is expected that all participants have a positive cultural attitude towards the English culture.

4. In order to exploit and take advantage of the technological competences of the young students, for this experiment I have decided not to use software but YouTube, the web platform of video sharing and the third most visited site in the world after Google and Facebook.<sup>3</sup>
5. As the goals of the experiment need to be clear and choices carefully examined, I have myself chosen the songs to work on. Since this is an experiment aimed at verifying the pronunciation of English L2, the choice of British artists seemed the most reasonable one because it is the English variant most frequently taught in Italian schools. Then, I have considered appropriate to evaluate the performance of the participants with the aid of an expert of phonetics specialized in Italian-English contrastive pronunciation.
6. Songs have been preferred to videos and films that might distract besides requiring a higher amount of time and attention. Even if songs are presented as video-clips from the YouTube's files-store, students have to keep the lyrics at hand, so they cannot be distracted from the scenes of the video-clips.
7. A cloze exercise has been chosen because it allows focusing attention on the key words and strengthens memory (Mezzadri, 2003). I have decided not to provide a list of words to choose to fill in the blanks of the missing words of the cloze exercise since this is not an exercise of vocabulary but of auditory perception.
8. Murphey himself (1990) suggests some of the same artists here chosen for the experiment, such as David Bowie and Freddy Mercury to cite two among the biggest names in rock-music history. I have opted, in fact, for artists ranging in different ages and hence different cultural backgrounds, in order to check if these musical proposals would stimulate the desire for a deeper research and study in the music and/or the historical and cultural context where these songs were born. One of the questions of the post-experiment questionnaire, in fact, intends to verify just this. I have focus the attention more on the rock genre to avoid the possibility that the chosen songs (if pop songs) would

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<sup>3</sup> Source: (2014) The top 500 sites on the web, retrieved from <http://www.alexa.com/topsites>

be already well known and because the rock genre is equally one of the most loved genres by the youth.

9. The experiment, after a first listening to the songs and the completion of a fill-in-the-blank exercise of the lyrics, provides for the repetition of the songs that have to be sung (Costamagna, 2000) with the text of the songs at hand in order to make students “visually conscious” (Leith, 1979). Songs repetition helps training pronunciation and memorizing it.





### 5.3 Materials.

To perform the experiment, I have decided to focus the attention on a few English sounds, highlighted in yellow in Appendix 4.<sup>4</sup> These same words are found in the texts of the five chosen songs, sung by British artists (in Appendix 3). For convenience, below there are the QR codes corresponding to the chosen songs, listed in chronological order.<sup>5</sup>

QR Code	Song	Year
	David Bowie. Rebel, Rebel. <i>Diamond Dogs.</i>	1974

<sup>4</sup> The choice of the sounds to be analyzed is the result of some considerations related to my personal experience as an Italian who studies English L2 and of the indications found in the work of Maturi (2010) mentioned above.

<sup>5</sup> The QR Code (Quick Response Code) is a two-dimensional bar-code or machine-readable optical label associated with an URL (Uniform Resource Locator). The QR bar-code can be read by a scanner through an application, available and freely downloadable on any device with a built-in camera. Since the songs here reported are associated with an URL taken from the YouTube’s file store, I take no responsibility if the links become no-longer available.

	Queen feat David Bowie. Under Pressure. <i>Hot Space.</i>	1981
	Depeche Mode. Personal Jesus. <i>Violator.</i>	1989
	Cold Play. Paradise. <i>Mylo Xyloto.</i>	2011
	Johnny Marr. Easy Money. <i>Playland.</i>	2014

#### 5.4 Participants.

To test the actual effectiveness of the proposed method, six volunteer students have been selected from the Department of Linguistic and Literary Studies. They attend the course of English language held by Professor Maria Grazia Busà during the first semester of the academic

year 2015/2016 at the University of Padua. The other four volunteer are former students of Mechatronic Engineering, graduated at the University of Padua. To protect the students' privacy the names of the participants will not be given; it is six males and four females aged from twenty to thirty who chose English as L2 or want to enhance it. They will be divided into a Control Group (CG) and an Experimental Group (EG), both composed of three students with a linguistic background and two with a scientific degree. All participants will be asked in advance if they are provided with a home Internet connection and if they know the YouTube channel. Audio recordings of the pronunciation of the students before and after the experiment will be reviewed and evaluated by Professor Maria Grazia Busà, expert of phonetics specialized in Italian-English contrastive pronunciation whom I thank for the kind cooperation. In Appendix 6, the graphical representations in QR format of the audio recordings of the students before and after the experiment and the results of the data collected are available.

## **5.5 The steps of the experiment**

### **5.5.1 Before the experiment**

Before making the experiment, an audio recording of the reading of eight sentences will be made to check the level of pronunciation of each participant. These audio recordings will serve as a sample to be compared with the post-experiment audio recordings, which will both then be examined by the native speaker. The sentences chosen for the pronunciation-check (reported in Appendix 1)<sup>6</sup> are decontextualized sentences in order to avoid any connection with the lyrics to be tested.

### **5.5.2 The experiment**

Both groups will be given precise instructions. The participants of the EG first of all will have to individually listen to the five songs chosen and will have to visually follow the text of the songs turned into a cloze exercise (in Appendix 2). They will then have to listen to the songs for a second time and at the same time complete the cloze exercise filling in the missing words. The cloze exercise serves to verify students' perception but also to focus students' attention on the sounds that I have decided to examine. After having completed the exercise, the students can

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<sup>6</sup> The sentences to be read will be given without any yellow-marker's signs. The same are taken from the Internet and the source is indicated in italics on the right inside round brackets.

check their results by comparing the completed text with the original text (in Appendix 3). The next task will be again to individually listen to the songs, which takes 20 minutes overall, on alternate days for three weeks not only keeping at hand the text they worked on but singing the songs that they are listening to.

The CG will have to read, again on alternate days for three weeks, the table given in Appendix 4 and taken from the textbook *L'Inglese per studenti della Facoltà di Economia* of Professor Maria Grazia Busà. I have decided to use this text because it is easy to consult, even though it is a handbook for students of Economics and not of Languages.

### **5.5.3 After the experiment**

I proceed to the audio recording of the reading of the eight sentences (Appendix 3) by each participant. As previously introduced, the post-experiment records will be reviewed by a native-English speaker. The comments on the comparison of the recordings and the impressions of the members of the two groups about the experiment (see Appendix 5 for the questionnaire) will be given in the last chapter of this work, together with the conclusions.





## Chapter 6 Results

In this chapter are reported the comments of Professor Busà who analyzed the audio-tapes of the ten students that kindly took part in this experiment.

The audio-tapes can be found in Appendix 6. In the first column there is the referring number of every student and the group they were part of (CG stands for Control Group and EG stands for Experimental Group). The QR codes of the pre-experiment recordings of each participant are in the second column and those of the post-experiment recordings in the third one. The last column indicates the area of academic studies of each participant and/or any possible experience done abroad.

### 6.1 The controller says...

Below are the main observations made by Professor Busà comparing the pre and post recordings of each student. For convenience, comments are reported within a table. The first five rows are the comments on the performances of the Control Group. The last five rows are the comments on the performances of the Experimental Group.

Student and Group	Main observations	Studies and job experience with English L2
1 CG	<p>“rebel” is pronounced as /'rebel/ in the first recording, while in the second is /'ribel/;</p> <p>“money” is pronounced with /ɔ/ and not with /ʌ/ and with final /ei/ in both recordings;</p> <p>“Jesus” is pronounced as /'dʒizus/ in both recordings;</p> <p>“faith” is pronounced with final /f/ and not /θ/ in both recordings;</p> <p>“divine” is pronounced as /'daivin/ in both recordings;</p> <p>“ourselves” is pronounced without considering the plural in the first recording with /f/ while in the second recording is pronounced with /fs/ and not with /vz/;</p> <p>“chance” is pronounced as /'tʃfens/ and in the second recording as /'ʃfians/;</p> <p>Furthermore, it is worth noticing that in the first recording “faced” is pronounced as “faces” while in the second recording it is pronounced correctly; “clamped” is pronounced /'kleimd/ in the first recording while in the second it is pronounced /'klamp/.</p>	<p>Third year of the academic Course of Foreign Language, Literature and Culture. Some contacts abroad (not with an Anglo-Saxon country).</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>3</b> <b>CG</b></p>	<p>“paradise” is pronounced with the accent on the last syllable, even if it is immediately corrected and the accent is moved to the first syllable. In the second recording the accent is read correctly at once;  “Jesus” is pronounced as /'dʒizus/ in the first recording while in the second it is pronounced /'dʒizas/;  “deliver” is pronounced /de'livəʔ/ in the first recording while in the second it is pronounced without the first /e/;  Furthermore, it is worth noticing that in the first recording of “crisis” the stressed vowel is pronounced /ɪ/ and then corrected with /aɪ/, while in the second recording it is pronounced correctly /aɪ/ at once;  “457” is pronounced as “forty hundred” in the first recording while in the second recording it is pronounced “four hundred”.</p>	<p>Third year of the academic Course of Foreign Language, Literature and Culture.  No experience abroad.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>4</b> <b>CG</b></p>	<p>“money” is pronounced /'manɪ/ in both recordings;  “Jesus” is pronounced /'dʒizus/ in both recordings;  in the first recording “ourselves” is pronounced as singular and with /f/ and then immediately corrected with /fs/. In the second recording it is not pronounced as /vz/ but /fs/.  Furthermore, it is worth noticing that in the first recording “reached” is pronounced /'ri:tʃd/ while in the second recording it is pronounced /'ri:tʃd/;  the stressed vowel of “manner” is pronounced /e/ while in the second recording /a/; then in the first recording numbers are read slowly while in the second recording the reading is faster.</p>	<p>Third year of the academic Course of Foreign Language, Literature and Culture.  No experience abroad.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>9</b> <b>CG</b></p>	<p>No improvement has been noticed between the first and second recording.  In both recordings “money” is pronounced as /'moneɪ/; “rebel” as /re'bel/; “Jesus” as /'dʒezus/; “faith” as /feit/; “divine” as /di'vin/; “ourselves” with final /f/; “chance” as /tʃendʒ/.  However, in the first recording number “457” is pronounced as “thousand” while in the second recording it is first pronounced as “thousand” and then immediately corrected with “hundred”.</p>	<p>Degree in Automation Engineering. No experience abroad.</p>

<p><b>10 CG</b></p>	<p>No improvement has been noticed between the first and second recording.  In both recordings “money” is pronounced as /'manei/; “rebel” as /'ribeɪl/; “Jesus” as /j'ezus/; “divine” as /di'vin/; “ourselves” with final “f”; “chance” as /'ʃɑːns/; “edge” as /eidʒ/.  However, in the first recording the number “457” is pronounced as “455” while in the second recording it is pronounced correctly.</p>	<p>Degree in Automation Engineering.  Occasional contacts abroad for work.</p>
<p><b>2 EG</b></p>	<p>Both recordings are quite similar. Few differences were noticed.  “money” is pronounced stressing the final /eɪ/ in the first recording, while in the second recording it is less strong; “Jesus” is pronounced /'dʒizus/ in both recordings; “faith” is pronounced /feɪf/ in both recordings; in the first recording “ourselves” is pronounced with final /f/ then corrected with /fs/, while in the second recording it is pronounced /vs/; “chance” is pronounced “tʃiːns” in the first recording while in the second is pronounced /'ʃiːns/  Furthermore, in the first recording both “457” and “160” are pronounced as “thousand” while in the second recording it is again pronounced as “thousand” then immediately corrected as “hundred”</p>	<p>Third year of the academic Course of Foreign Language, Literature and Culture.  No experience abroad.</p>
<p><b>5 EG</b></p>	<p>There are no noticeable differences between the first and second recording; in both recordings “money” is pronounced with final /eɪ/, “love” is pronounced with /o/, “edge” as /eidʒ/;  “chance” is pronounced as /tʃeɪndʒ/ in the first recording while in the second is pronounced /tʃiːns/.  However, in the first recording the number “457” is pronounced as “thousand” then immediately corrected, while in the second recording the number is pronounced correctly at once.</p>	<p>Third year of the academic Course of Foreign Language, Literature and Culture.  No experience abroad.</p>

<p><b>6</b> <b>EG</b></p>	<p>Here there is no difference in the pronunciation of the chosen words, but there is a great general improvement of the way of pronouncing the sentences. In the second recording the aspiration of /t/ and /k/ is strongly stressed</p>	<p>Third year of the academic Course of Foreign Language, Literature and Culture. Lived abroad for many years (not in an Anglo-Saxon country)</p>
<p><b>7</b> <b>EG</b></p>	<p>Here there are some improvements in the words chosen. “money” is pronounced as /'moneɪ/ in the first recording while it is pronounced as /'mani/ in the second recording; “rebel” is pronounced as /'rɪbel/ in the first recording, while in the second one it is pronounced /'rebol/; “Jesus” is pronounced /j'ezus/ in the first recording, while in the second is /'dʒɪzəs/; “ourselves” is pronounced with final /f/ in the first recording while in the second with /fs/; “chance” is pronounced as /'ʃɑns/ in both recordings as well as “edge” pronounced as /eidʒ/ However, the pronunciation of numbers is more fluent in the second recording.</p>	<p>Degree in Automation Engineering. No experience abroad.</p>
<p><b>8</b> <b>EG</b></p>	<p>Here there are some improvements in the words chosen. “Faith” is pronounced with final /t/ in the first recording and with the final /f/ in the second one. “Divine” is pronounced as /'dɪvɪn/ in the first recording while in the second one it is pronounced /'dɪvaɪn/. However, “rebel” is pronounced /'riebl/ in the first recording and /'rɪbel/ in the second; “ourselves” is pronounced with final /f/ in both recordings as well as “chance” is pronounced as /'ʃɑns/ What is worth noticing here is an improvement in the aspiration of /t/; “hope” is pronounced with initial /h/ in the second recording while in the first it is not; “faced” and “reached” are pronounced correctly in the second recording.</p>	<p>Degree in Automation Engineering. Six months abroad for work (not in an Anglo-Saxon country)</p>

### **6.1.1 The Control Group**

Student 1 (linguistic background) does not seem to have improved pronunciation by using the phonetic table provided. It seems that some words are even pronounced worse in the second recording (“chance” for example). On the other side, pronunciation of the past simple forms is slightly enhanced. It is possible to consider that during the first recording some students were more concentrated than during the second recording.

Student 3 (linguistic background) has a good pronunciation from the beginning. In the second recording some improvements are noticed. This student has enhanced the pronunciation of a few words such as “paradise”, “Jesus” and slightly enhances “deliver”, but even words not analyzed, such as “crisis”. This student seems more fluent in the reading of the second recording. This may be due to a sort of “familiarization” with some English words. This student seems more confident when reading the sentences in the second recording. Probably having become aware of the phonetics, Student 3 tries to scan words better, stops to be clearer not going straight ahead as in the first recording. Very interesting is the aspiration of the voiceless consonant in “kind”.

Student 4 (linguistic background) has a good pronunciation from the beginning. There are no noticeable differences between the first and second recording. “Ourselves” is pronounced slightly better in the second recording because the plural form is stressed. However, it is worth noticing that the pronunciation of “reached” is enhanced.

Students 8 and 9 (scientific background) both have a low level of English pronunciation and both show no improvements in the second recording; however, both of them show more confidence in pronouncing numbers during the second recording.

### **6.1.2 The Experimental Group**

Student 2 (linguistic background) has a good pronunciation from the beginning. There are no great differences between the first and second recording. In the second recording it seems that the student stopped less while reading, so the overall reading results more fluent. The idea is that having familiarized with some words, the reading is enhanced in fluency. So, what is interesting is that this fluency is not closely related to the words examined, but it regards the fluency of the reading of the sentences. In particular, this student has improved the pronunciation of “ourselves” in the second recording and has learnt to keep separated the words “people” and

“love” in the third sentence. Furthermore, while in the first recording of the seventh sentence “as” is read “as a”, in the second recording, after having repeated the same mistake, the word is immediately corrected with “as”. However, the pronunciation of some other words is the same in both recordings (“money” for example).

Student 5 (linguistic background) has a good pronunciation from the beginning. The pronunciation of “chance” is slightly improved. However, it seems that a person with a good pronunciation cannot improve it, at least not in such a restricted period of time.

Student 6 (linguistic background) has a very good pronunciation from the beginning. In the second recording there are no strong differences in the pronunciation of the words chosen. What is interesting, however, is the pronunciation of the aspiration of the voiceless consonants /t/ and /k/, much more emphasized in the second recording. This student in particular, seems to have a very musical ear or seems to be used to listening to American music in particular.

Students 7 and 8 (scientific background) both have a mid-low level of English pronunciation. Some improvements were noticed in the pronunciation of some of the chosen words: “money”, “rebel”, “Jesus” and “ourselves” for Student 7; “divine” for Student 8. In particular, Student 8 improved even the pronunciation of “hope”, of the forms of the past simple and the aspiration of the voiceless consonant /t/.

Finally, no one has correctly pronounced the words “pressure” as /'preʃə/, “deliver” as /dɪ'lɪvə/ (expect Student 3 who in the second recording did not pronounce the first /e/ of “deliver”) and everyone had some difficulties to pronounce numbers, while in the second recording they acquire more confidence.

All this observed, it seems that songs can be a valid tool to improve English pronunciation of those students with a low-middle level of English L2. These students, in fact, are less-trained in perceiving English sounds while students with a higher level of English L2 are more used to perceive the same. For this reason, students with a higher level of English L2 might need more time to refine a pronunciation that is already good, or more and different songs. Further and deeper considerations are treated in the final chapter.

## 6.2 The students say...

After the experiment, the students were told what the experiment was about and they were asked to answer some questions (see Appendix 5). The students' feedbacks on the idea of the experiment, their feelings and the problems faced are here reported. To be easily readable, questions precede the answers of the students. The answers are then divided into two columns as were the two groups of the experiment: in the first column there are the answers of the Control Group, in the second one the answers of the Experimental Group.

1. How was the experiment? What kind of feelings did you experience? Describe your sensations and the problems you faced.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exiting, funny, interesting.</li> <li>• Slightly boring but useful. I have paid more attention to some words than I used to before.</li> <li>• The experiment was interesting on the whole. The task assigned to me was boring.</li> <li>• Insecurity and discomfort.</li> <li>• Funny.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interesting. Listening to songs is a pleasant and relaxing task. The level of difficulty of the test was restrained.</li> <li>• Funny. I had the possibility to sing and have fun. Sometimes little boring because I had to listen to the same songs.</li> <li>• Very interesting and funny. I love singing.</li> <li>• Funny.</li> <li>• Relaxing because I had to listen to some good music.</li> </ul>
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2. Do you think that the task assigned was useful for improving your English L2 pronunciation?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, I think so.</li> <li>• Yes, I think it is useful to improve pronunciation in particular it could be useful to study it from the elementary schools.</li> <li>• Yes, but it was useful only for the pronunciation of the words exemplified.</li> <li>• No, it was not useful.</li> <li>• No, it was not useful.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, absolutely. Especially for recognizing words with the same pronunciation but with different meanings.</li> <li>• Yes, I have noticed that my pronunciation has improved during the experiment.</li> <li>• Yes, very useful. After only the first listening I have noticed that some words were stuck in my head.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, very useful.</li> <li>• Yes, very useful.</li> </ul>
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3. Do you think that this is a task to do at home by your own or do you think it is better if you do in class?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both at home and in class</li> <li>• Both at home and in class. Particularly at home autonomously.</li> <li>• At home autonomously.</li> <li>• At home especially for someone who is not used to speaking English every day.</li> <li>• In class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both at home and in class (with the right acoustic conditions).</li> <li>• Autonomously. However, I think that more attention to the listening skill is required in class.</li> <li>• Autonomously, because in class there might be too much noise.</li> <li>• Autonomously</li> <li>• Autonomously, I already do it by myself.</li> </ul>
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4. Have you learnt some new words? Which ones?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Yes, from the test “parousia, neutering, manner, prickly pear”</li> <li>• Yes, from the test “a fence of prickly pear”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No, I knew them.</li> <li>• Yes: fence, torn, underneath</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Yes: faith</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>
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5. Did you like the songs proposed for the task? Have you found something more about these songs (other songs of the group, the historical background)? (only for EG)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes I liked them and I know the artists.</li> <li>• Yes I liked them. I know the artists and other songs of them. I have tried to translate them.</li> <li>• Yes, I liked them, the ones of the Queen and Cold Play in particular. The others little boring but overall funny.</li> <li>• Yes, I liked them</li> <li>• Yes, I liked them but I did not further</li> </ul>
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	any research.
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6. Were the phonetic transcriptions of the table difficult? (only for CG)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No, it was not difficult because I have studied it</li> <li>• No, I already knew the IPA transcriptions</li> <li>• Sometimes it was difficult. I think that it is generally difficult to understand the real sounds of the words from the phonetic transcriptions only.</li> <li>• Yes, because I do not know it.</li> <li>• Yes, it was difficult.</li> </ul>	
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7. Do you have some comments or suggestions on this experiment?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> <li>• I have no suggestions, instead I am curious to know the results of the test.</li> <li>• No suggestion. I think the experiment is interesting and I am curious to know the results of the test.</li> <li>• I do not think that the IPA Table is the right tool to improve pronunciation in English.</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No, the experiment looks more than positive as it is.</li> <li>• Yes, maybe it could be interesting to work on more songs, but the time was limited.</li> <li>• I think it is a useful method for didactic means. Sometimes there is too much theory to learn and little practice.</li> <li>• No.</li> <li>• Yes, maybe the experiment could be done in a longer period of time.</li> </ul>
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## Conclusion

The experiment here proposed, as has been said many times, is focused on improving the pronunciation of English as a second language. The pronunciation is considered to be a key issue for the success of the act of communication. Someone might argue that the exercise proposed is repetitive and could be likened to those famous “pattern drills” under fire in the introductory chapter. But as already mentioned, the humanistic approach does not deny the usefulness of pattern drills, rather it calls for a different use. Pattern drills can be considered as activators of the LAD proposed by Chomsky in his theories. Therefore, the basic idea is to use a type of exercises that can train perception as a pattern drill can do, but at the same time stimulate and maintain a high level of motivation, as a pattern drill cannot do.

It is also important to reiterate that to achieve a complete mastery of a foreign language the *mere* training of the L2 perception will not be enough. Perception and pronunciation represent a first step, but it is a step that is often missed and that is difficult to recover over time. Considering the experiment specifically, a slight improvement was observed in two Language students of the Control Group (Student 3 in particular), while for one Language student no improvement was noticed. Students of Engineering that used the phonetic table did not show any improvement. These results can be interpreted in the light of the Theory of directionality, cited in paragraph 1.2. Language students, having at least a smattering knowledge of phonetics and a more extensive knowledge of English L2, are more likely to reflect on phonetic theoretical issues. For students of Engineering, who do not have any kind of training in phonetics as well as little knowledge of the language itself, the task was difficult with no positive results. Despite this, there was a greater confidence in reading numbers during the second recording; this was true in general for all students.

On the other side, out of the Experimental Group, the students of Languages did not improve greatly the pronunciation of the words chosen, whereas the students of Engineering improved the pronunciation of some of the words chosen. What is more interesting, however, is the overall improvement in the aspiration of the voiceless stops among the students of this group, including a student of Engineering. The same improvement in the aspiration of the voiceless stops was noticed in one of the student of Languages of the Control Group. Moreover, the Experimental Group improved in the fluency of the reading in general; with this regard it is worth noting that the words chosen were examined within a context, and in isolation. Some

words were not learned but this can be due to the influence of spelling which could affect and slow down the acquisition of the words pronunciation.

Among the objections that may be risen, there is the choice of the words. The words chosen were perhaps too simple or well known (something demonstrated by the fact that only four of the ten students have learned few new words). However, it must be said that knowing the words does not imply knowing how to pronounce them correctly. An example of this is “Jesus”, often pronounced wrong, or “deliver” and “pressure”.

It can also be argued that the students chosen have different levels of English L2, but this was done on purpose. This, in fact, confirms not only the truthfulness of the Theory of directionality, but also the idea of the “Din” proposed by Murphey and previously mentioned in paragraph 3.4. Considering the above-mentioned phenomenon related to the “songs-stuck-in-my-head”, Murphey (1990) recalls that “lower level learners would experience it more than advanced learners”(even though in this experiment the same phenomenon was clearly experienced by a student of Languages with an advanced level of English L2).

It follows that students with a good level of English L2 are more predisposed for a theoretical phonetic reflection, need a longer workout or more songs to improve pronunciation, as proposed by some students themselves. Those who have a low-medium level of English L2 can find this type of exercise very useful.

Furthermore, occasional exposure to contacts with foreign countries does not seem to have affected the level of pronunciation. The only student who has contacts with foreign countries in English, in fact, showed no improvement; a sign that an awareness of the matter is required.

Finally, the students’ observations revealed a general appreciation and curiosity for the experiment conducted. The use of the phonetic table seemed to be considered useful by the students of Languages who have some familiarity with the phonetic pronunciation. For the others, the phonetic alphabet resulted difficult and not particularly useful. However, even for some students of Languages the use of the phonetic table resulted tedious and sometimes difficult.

On the other hand, the students of the Experimental Group considered the task assigned very interesting, funny and relaxing and found no difficulties in carrying out the task. Someone found a few songs a little boring because they did not meet exactly their music taste or because

they had to listen to the same five songs, but overall the exercise was well appreciated. Many students, in fact, expressed an interest in listening to music, singing and a student even in playing an instrument.

Both groups stressed the need to improve pronunciation, through the methods proposed, in class as well at home on their own, with a preference for working autonomously when using songs. Only one expressed a desire to improve pronunciation using the phonetic table in class, probably because of the partial knowledge of the subject.

Among the interesting observations made by the students there are those who expressed the idea that English L2 pronunciation needs to be taught since elementary school. Furthermore, some students of the Experimental Group confirmed that pronunciation was improving during the test or that some words remained “stuck-in-the-head” after only the first listening. The students of the Experimental Group showed even the desire to work on more songs, using the method proposed for a longer period of time and for educational purposes, even if teachers are often reluctant to use music as a teaching tool (Engh, 2013).

Stevick (1976), Gardner (1985) and Failoni (1993), for example, suggested that music is a “powerful motivator” and can “achieve skills in non-musical areas such as foreign languages”. It can even enhance cultural awareness and the practice of communication skills. Leith (1979:544) states that

A song, of course, does not have to serve a single end. One of the many uses [...] is that of teaching a recognition of slang words or expressions [, colloquialisms, vocabulary slangs]. [Some particular sounds that are] difficult to grasp in the abstract [,] when encountered in a song that has rhythm, melody, and rhyme, [are] easily memorized.

Songs can be put in a conversation course, they can be used as a tool to develop conversational skills, discussing poems set to music, genres and historical backgrounds (Brown, 1975; Cullen, 1998; Orlova, 2003). Furthermore, since a colloquial language is often used in songs, they can “prepare students to genuine language” (Schoepp, 2001).

My wish is to foster other experiments on songs as a didactic tool. It would be interesting to verify for example if there is a “critical age” for the capability of improving pronunciation, as hinted in paragraph 1.6. To this end, it would be worthwhile to conduct an experiment with children, as already observed by one of the students of the test. It could be interesting also to testify if songs can develop other language skills, promote the acquisition of new words or

enhance the use of grammar rules in practice. Every comment on the present work is welcomed. My hope is to rise interest in this area while the prospect is to make a step, though little, towards a new way of teaching. Questions are still many, but answers are only waiting to be found.

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<sup>1</sup> I take no responsibility if the links become no-longer available.



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## **Appendices**

## APPENDIX 1

- The heart of the crisis was excess, excess of every kind: **easy money** that compressed the time required to create value [...] *(Source: privata.edmond-...e-rothschild.ch)*
- Agreement was reached concerning **rebel** movements which were using **money** gained from the sale of diamonds to fund illegal [...] *(Source: europarl.europa.eu)*
- Paradise** is the place where **people love** God in a perfect manner, while Hell is the place where man loves only himself. *(Source: medjugorje.org)*
- When faced with the parousia, that is, the latest coming of **Jesus**, Christians must adopt three types of behaviour: absence of fear, hope and **faith in divine** mercy”, explains the Holy Father. *(Source: medjugorje.org)*
- A vote by 457 members, 160 of them voting against, means that we are, in some **sense**, neutering **ourselves** as a legislative body with the power of codecision. *(Source: europarl.europa.eu)*
- But here is a **chance** for it to **deliver** a success story for Europe before the end of this mandate. *(Source: europarl.europa.eu)*
- A **fence** of prickly pear, which contains water, **serves** as protection against fires. *(Source: theplan.it)*
- The workpiece is clamped on its clamping **edge** by applying hydraulic **pressure** to the piston and mechanically unclamped by a spring return. *(Source: hilma.de)*

## APPENDIX 2<sup>1</sup>

### **Bowie, David.**

You've got your mother in a whirl  
She's not sure if you're a boy or a girl

Hey babe, your hair's alright  
Hey babe, let's go out tonight  
You like me, and I like it all  
We like dancing and we look [REDACTED]  
You love bands when they're playing hard  
You want more and you want it fast  
They put you down, they say I'm wrong  
You tacky thing, you put them on

[REDACTED], you've torn your dress  
[REDACTED], your face is a mess  
[REDACTED], how could they know?  
Hot tramp, I love you so!

Don't ya?

You've got your mother in a whirl  
She's not sure if you're a boy or a girl

Hey babe, your hair's alright  
Hey babe, let's stay out tonight  
You like me, and I like it all  
We like dancing and we look [REDACTED]  
You love bands when they're playing hard  
You want more and you want it fast  
They put you down, they say I'm wrong  
You tacky thing, you put them on

[REDACTED], you've torn your dress  
[REDACTED], your face is a mess  
[REDACTED], how could they know?  
Hot tramp, I love you so!

Don't ya?

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<sup>1</sup> Lyrics are taken from [www.lyricsmania.com](http://www.lyricsmania.com)

[redacted], you've torn your dress  
[redacted], your face is a mess  
[redacted], how could they know?  
Hot tramp, I love you so!

You've torn your dress, your face is a mess  
You can't get enough, but enough ain't the test  
You've got your transmission and your live wire  
You got your cue line and a handful of ludes  
You wanna be there when they count up the dudes  
And I love your dress  
You're a juvenile success  
Because your face is a mess  
So how could they know?  
I said, how could they know?

So what you wanna know Calamity's child,  
Where'd you wanna go?  
What can I do for you? Looks like you've been there too  
'Cause you've torn your dress  
And your face is a mess  
Ooo, your face is a mess  
Ooo, ooo, so how could they know?  
Eh, eh, how could they know?

**Queen feat. David Bowie.**

Mm ba ba de  
Um bum ba de  
Um bu bu bum da de  
[redacted] pushing down on me  
Pressing down on you no man ask for  
Under [redacted] that brings a building down  
Splits a family in two  
Puts [redacted] on streets  
Um ba ba be  
Um ba ba be  
De de da  
De de da – that's okay  
It's the terror of knowing  
What this world is about  
Watching some good friends  
Screaming 'Let me out'  
Pray tomorrow gets me higher  
[redacted] on [redacted], [redacted] on streets  
De de de mm hm  
Da da da ba ba

Okay  
Chippin' around kick my brains around the floor  
These are the days it never rains but it pours  
Ee do ba be  
Ee da ba ba ba  
Um bo bo  
Be lap  
[redacted] on streets - ee da de da de  
[redacted] on streets - ee da de da de da de da  
It's the terror of knowing  
What this world is about  
Watching some good friends  
Screaming 'Let me out'  
Pray tomorrow gets me higher higher high  
[redacted] on [redacted], [redacted] on streets  
Turned away from it all like a blind man  
Sat on a [redacted] but it don't work  
Keep coming up with love but it's so slashed and torn  
Whyyyyy why why?  
[redacted] (x 5)  
Insanity laughs under [redacted] we're breaking  
Can't we give ourselves one more [redacted]  
Why can't we give [redacted] that one more [redacted]  
Why can't we give [redacted] give [redacted] give [redacted] give [redacted]  
Give [redacted] give [redacted] give [redacted] give [redacted] give [redacted]  
'Cause [redacted] 's such an old fashioned word  
And [redacted] dares you to care for  
The [redacted] on the [redacted] of the night  
And [redacted] dares you to change our way of  
Caring about [redacted]  
This is our last dance  
This is our last dance  
This is [redacted]  
Under [redacted]  
Under [redacted]  
[redacted]

**Depeche Mode.**

Reach out and touch [redacted]  
Your own Personal [redacted]  
Someone to hear your prayers  
Someone who cares  
Your own Personal [redacted]  
Someone to be your prayers  
Someone who's there

Feeling unknown and you're all alone  
Flesh and bone by the telephone  
Lift up the receiver  
I'll make you a believer

Take second best  
Put me to the test  
Things on your chest  
You need to confess  
I will [redacted]  
You know I'm a forgiver  
Reach out and touch [redacted]  
Reach out and touch [redacted]

Your own Personal [redacted]  
Someone to be your prayers  
Someone who cares  
Your own Personal [redacted]  
Someone to be your prayers  
Someone who's there

Feeling unknown and you're all alone  
Flesh and bone by the telephone  
Lift up the receiver  
I'll make you a believer  
I will [redacted]  
You know I'm a forgiver  
Reach out and touch [redacted]  
Your own Personal [redacted]  
Reach out and touch [redacted]  
Reach out and touch [redacted]  
Reach out and touch [redacted]  
Reach out and touch [redacted]  
Reach out and touch [redacted]

**Cold Play**

Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo.  
Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo.  
When she was just a girl,  
She expected the world,  
But it flew away from her reach,  
So she ran away in her sleep.

Dreamed of [REDACTED],  
[REDACTED],  
Every time she closed her eyes.  
Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo.  
Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo.  
When she was just a girl,  
She expected the world,  
But it flew away from her reach,  
And bullets catch in her teeth.  
Life goes on,  
It gets so heavy,  
The wheel breaks the butterfly.  
Every tear, a waterfall.  
In the night, the stormy night,  
She closed her eyes.  
In the night,  
The stormy night,  
Away she flies.

I dream of [REDACTED],  
[REDACTED],  
Whoa-oh-oh oh-oooh oh-oh-oh.  
She dreamed of [REDACTED],  
[REDACTED],  
Whoa-oh-oh oh-oooh oh-oh-oh.  
La-la  
La-la-la-la-la  
La-la-la-la-la  
La-la-la-la.  
Still lying underneath the stormy skies.  
She said oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh.  
I know the sun's set to rise.

This could be [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Whoa-oh-oh oh-oooh oh-oh-oh.  
This could be [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Whoa-oh-oh oh-oooh oh-oh-oh.



This could be [redacted]  
[redacted]

Whoa-oh-oh oh-oooh oh-oh-oh.

Oh, oh. Oo-oo-oo-oo-oo  
Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo  
Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo  
Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo  
Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo...

**Marr, Johnny**

I used to want it all  
And that's [redacted]  
That's [redacted]  
That's [redacted]  
Watching human fall  
And that's only [redacted]  
That's [redacted]  
That's [redacted]  
That's no way to [redacted]  
No way to [redacted]  
No way to [redacted] nobody  
There's no benefit  
There is no benefit  
No way to benefit somebody  
That's not any [redacted]  
No innocence  
No way no way they sex, no way no  
That's no way to [redacted]  
That ain't no way to [redacted]  
Working for it all  
But it's [redacted]  
It's [redacted]  
It's [redacted]  
Watching human fall  
But it's only [redacted]  
That's [redacted]  
That's [redacted]  
You can walk the street  
And it's [redacted]  
It's [redacted]  
It's [redacted]  
Catch the fantasy  
Cause it's [redacted]

That's [REDACTED]  
That's [REDACTED]  
No checks, no loan, no rent to pay  
It's gone today  
How to accumulate  
There's not any sense  
There's no innocence  
There is [REDACTED] commerce no baby  
It's all an expense  
The way the pans are set  
The way the weather burned nobody  
It's just all expense  
No way the world accepts  
There is no innocence, no baby  
That's no way to hurt  
That ain't no way, no sir  
Catch a fantasy  
Cause it's [REDACTED]  
That's [REDACTED]  
That's [REDACTED]  
Catch her and degree  
And that's [REDACTED]  
That's [REDACTED]  
That's [REDACTED]  
Working for it all  
But it's only [REDACTED]  
That's [REDACTED]  
That's [REDACTED]  
Watching how we fall  
Cause that's [REDACTED]  
That's [REDACTED]  
That's [REDACTED]  
No spend no sum no lays no claims  
And there's no pain to play  
No free fortune so let's just slave  
No rainy day better come this way  
Working for it all  
But it's [REDACTED]  
That's [REDACTED]  
That's [REDACTED]  
Watching human fall  
And that's only [REDACTED]  
That's [REDACTED]  
That's [REDACTED]  
C'mon come buy the tea

And it's [redacted]  
That's [redacted]  
That's [redacted]  
Catch a fantasy  
'Cause it's [redacted]  
That's [redacted]  
That's [redacted]

### APPENDIX 3

#### **Bowie, David. "Rebel, Rebel"**

You've got your mother in a whirl  
She's not sure if you're a boy or a girl

Hey babe, your hair's alright  
Hey babe, let's go out tonight  
You like me, and I like it all  
We like dancing and we look divine  
You love bands when they're playing hard  
You want more and you want it fast  
They put you down, they say I'm wrong  
You tacky thing, you put them on

Rebel Rebel, you've torn your dress  
Rebel Rebel, your face is a mess  
Rebel Rebel, how could they know?  
Hot tramp, I love you so!

Don't ya?

You've got your mother in a whirl  
She's not sure if you're a boy or a girl

Hey babe, your hair's alright  
Hey babe, let's stay out tonight  
You like me, and I like it all  
We like dancing and we look divine  
You love bands when they're playing hard  
You want more and you want it fast  
They put you down, they say I'm wrong  
You tacky thing, you put them on

Rebel Rebel, you've torn your dress  
Rebel Rebel, your face is a mess  
Rebel Rebel, how could they know?  
Hot tramp, I love you so!

Don't ya?

Rebel Rebel, you've torn your dress  
Rebel Rebel, your face is a mess  
Rebel Rebel, how could they know?

Hot tramp, I love you so!

You've torn your dress, your face is a mess  
You can't get enough, but enough ain't the test  
You've got your transmission and your live wire  
You got your cue line and a handful of ludes  
You wanna be there when they count up the dudes  
And I love your dress  
You're a juvenile success  
Because your face is a mess  
So how could they know?  
I said, how could they know?

So what you wanna know Calamity's child,  
Where'd you wanna go?  
What can I do for you? Looks like you've been there too  
'Cause you've torn your dress  
And your face is a mess  
Ooo, your face is a mess  
Ooo, ooo, so how could they know?  
Eh, eh, how could they know?

**Queen feat. David Bowie. "Under Pressure"**

Mm ba ba de  
Um bum ba de  
Um bu bu bum da de  
Pressure pushing down on me  
Pressing down on you no man ask for  
Under pressure that brings a building down  
Splits a family in two  
Puts people on streets  
Um ba ba be  
Um ba ba be  
De de da  
De de da – that's okay  
It's the terror of knowing  
What this world is about  
Watching some good friends  
Screaming 'Let me out'  
Pray tomorrow gets me higher  
Pressure on people, people on streets  
De de de mm hm  
Da da da ba ba  
Okay  
Chippin' around kick my brains around the floor  
These are the days it never rains but it pours

Ee do ba be  
Ee da ba ba ba  
Um bo bo  
Be lap  
People on streets - ee da de da de  
People on streets - ee da de da de da de da  
It's the terror of knowing  
What this world is about  
Watching some good friends  
Screaming 'Let me out'  
Pray tomorrow gets me higher higher high  
Pressure on people, people on streets  
Turned away from it all like a blind man  
Sat on a fence but it don't work  
Keep coming up with love but it's so slashed and torn  
Whyyyyy why why?  
Love (x 5)  
Insanity laughs under pressure we're breaking  
Can't we give ourselves one more chance  
Why can't we give love that one more chance  
Why can't we give love give love give love give love  
Give love give love give love give love give love  
'Cause love's such an old fashioned word  
And love dares you to care for  
The people on the edge of the night  
And love dares you to change our way of  
Caring about ourselves  
This is our last dance  
This is our last dance  
This is ourselves  
Under pressure  
Under pressure  
Pressure

**Depeche Mode. "Personal Jesus"**

Reach out and touch faith  
Your own Personal Jesus  
Someone to hear your prayers  
Someone who cares  
Your own Personal Jesus  
Someone to be your prayers  
Someone who's there

Feeling unknown and you're all alone  
Flesh and bone by the telephone

Lift up the receiver  
I'll make you a believer

Take second best  
Put me to the test  
Things on your chest  
You need to confess  
I will deliver  
You know I'm a forgiver  
Reach out and touch faith  
Reach out and touch faith

Your own Personal Jesus  
Someone to be your prayers  
Someone who cares  
Your own Personal Jesus  
Someone to be your prayers  
Someone who's there

Feeling unknown and you're all alone  
Flesh and bone by the telephone  
Lift up the receiver  
I'll make you a believer  
I will deliver  
You know I'm a forgiver  
Reach out and touch faith  
Your own Personal Jesus  
Reach out and touch faith  
Reach out and touch faith  
Reach out and touch faith  
Reach out and touch faith  
Reach out and touch faith

**Cold Play. "Paradise"**

Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo.  
Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo.  
When she was just a girl,  
She expected the world,  
But it flew away from her reach,  
So she ran away in her sleep.  
Dreamed of para-para-paradise,  
Para-para-paradise,

Para-para-paradise,  
Every time she closed her eyes.  
Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo.  
Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo.  
When she was just a girl,  
She expected the world,  
But it flew away from her reach,  
And bullets catch in her teeth.  
Life goes on,  
It gets so heavy,  
The wheel breaks the butterfly.  
Every tear, a waterfall.  
In the night, the stormy night,  
She closed her eyes.  
In the night,  
The stormy night,  
Away she flies.

I dream of para-para-paradise,  
Para-para-paradise,  
Para-para-paradise,  
Whoa-oh-oh oh-oooh oh-oh-oh.  
She dreamed of para-para-paradise,  
Para-para-paradise,  
Para-para-paradise,  
Whoa-oh-oh oh-oooh oh-oh-oh.  
La-la  
La-la-la-la-la  
La-la-la-la-la  
La-la-la-la.  
Still lying underneath the stormy skies.  
She said oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh.  
I know the sun's set to rise.

This could be para-para-paradise  
Para-para-paradise  
Para-para-paradise  
Whoa-oh-oh oh-oooh oh-oh-oh.

This could be para-para-paradise  
Para-para-paradise  
Para-para-paradise  
Whoa-oh-oh oh-oooh oh-oh-oh.

This could be para-para-paradise  
Para-para-paradise



Para-para-paradise  
Whoa-oh-oh oh-oooh oh-oh-oh.

Oh, oh. Oo-oo-oo-oo-oo  
Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo  
Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo  
Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo  
Oo-oo-oo, oo-oo-oo...

**Marr, Johnny. "Easy Money"**

I used to want it all  
And that's money money  
That's money money  
That's money money  
Watching human fall  
And that's only money  
That's money money  
That's money money  
That's no way to serve  
No way to serve  
No way to serve nobody  
There's no benefit  
There is no benefit  
No way to benefit somebody  
That's not any sense  
No innocence  
No way no way they sex, no way no  
That's no way to serve  
That ain't no way to serve  
Working for it all  
But it's money money  
It's money money  
It's money money  
Watching human fall  
But it's only money  
That's money money  
That's money money  
You can walk the street  
And it's money money  
It's money money  
It's money money  
Catch the fantasy  
Cause it's money money  
That's money money  
That's money money

No checks, no loan, no rent to pay  
It's gone today  
How to accumulate  
There's not any sense  
There's no innocence  
There is money commerce no baby  
It's all an expense  
The way the pans are set  
The way the weather burned nobody  
It's just all expense  
No way the world accepts  
There is no innocence, no baby  
That's no way to hurt  
That ain't no way, no sir  
Catch a fantasy  
Cause it's money money  
That's money money  
That's money money  
Catch her and degree  
And that's money money  
That's money money  
That's money money  
Working for it all  
But it's only money  
That's money money  
That's money money  
Watching how we fall  
Cause that's easy money  
That's easy money  
That's easy money  
No spend no sum no lays no claims  
And there's no pain to play  
No free fortune so let's just slave  
No rainy day better come this way  
Working for it all  
But it's money money  
That's money money  
That's money money  
Watching human fall  
And that's only money  
That's easy money  
That's easy money  
C'mon come buy the tea  
And it's money money  
That's money money

That's money money  
Catch a fantasy  
'Cause it's money money  
That's easy money  
That's easy money

## APPENDIX 4

Simbolo fonetico	Alcune varianti ortografiche	Esempi
/i(:)/	'ea'	easy /'i:zɪ/
	'e'	people /'pi:pl/, Jesus /'dʒi:zəs/
/ɪ/	'e'	money /'mʌni/
	'i'	deliver /dɪ'lɪvəʳ/
/e/	'e' solo in dittonghi(?)	sense /sens/
/æ/	'a'	paradise /'pærədəɪs/
/ʌ/	'o'	love /lʌv/, money /'mʌni/
/ɜ/	'er'	serve /sɜ:v/
/ɑ/	'a'	chance /tʃɑ:ns/
/ʊ/	'ou'	ourselves / ,aʊə'selvz/
/eɪ/	'ai'	faith /feɪθ/
/aɪ/	'i' con 'e' finale	divine /dɪ'vɪn/, paradise /'pærədəɪs/
/aʊ/	'ou'	ourselves / ,aʊə'selvz/
/ə/	'th'	faith /feɪθ/
/s/	'c'	fence /fens/
/ʃ/	'ss' prima di 'u'	pressure /'preʃəʳ/
/tʃ/	'ch'	chance /tʃɑ:ns/
/dʒ/	'j'	Jesus /'dʒi:zəs/, edge /edʒ/
/r/	'r' davanti a vocale	rebel /'rebl/
/l/	'l' sillabica	rebel /'rebl/

## APPENDIX 5<sup>2</sup>

<p><b>Il questionario è <u>anonimo</u>. All’inizio vi vengono richieste alcune informazioni relative al vostro inglese, utili per analizzare i dati del test. Alcune domande del questionario sono rivolte solo ad un gruppo o all’altro, in questo caso verrà segnalato da “solo per EG” per le domande rivolte al gruppo che ha svolto l’esperimento con le canzoni, e “solo per CG” per le domande rivolte solo al gruppo che ha svolto l’esperimento con la tabella fonetica.</b></p> <p><b><u>NON</u> è un test di valutazione e non avete limiti di tempo per dare le risposte, fate con comodo:)..se lo spazio non è sufficiente scrivete dietro al foglio.</b></p>	
Di quale gruppo del test facevi parte?	EG <input type="checkbox"/> CG <input type="checkbox"/>
Che corso universitario hai frequentato/stai frequentando?	
Hai vissuto all’estero e/o hai contatti frequenti con l’estero di natura lavorativa e/o non?	






Domanda	Risposta
1. Come hai trovato l’esperimento? Descrivi che sensazioni ti ha dato, comprese le eventuali difficoltà riscontrate (ad esempio noioso, difficile, divertente, stimolante, gratificante, impegnativo, ha provocato insicurezza e/o disagio, confusione ecc.)	
2. Il compito assegnato ti è sembrato utile per migliorare la pronuncia del tuo inglese?	

<sup>2</sup> Questionnaire is submitted in Italian in order to avoid stress and/or discomfort because this is an experiment and not an exam.

<p>3. Lo ritieni un esercizio utile da fare a casa in modo autonomo o preferiresti farlo in classe?</p>	
<p>4. Hai imparato dei vocaboli nuovi? Quali?</p>	
<p>5. Le canzoni erano di tuo gradimento? Se sì, hanno stimolato la tua curiosità di ricerca? (ad esempio hai cercato informazioni o altre canzoni degli stessi artisti, il genere musicale, il periodo storico-culturale, il significato delle parole del testo ecc.) <b>(solo per EG)</b></p>	
<p>6. Hai trovato difficile la trascrizione IPA degli esempi nella tabella? <b>(solo per CG)</b></p>	
<p>7. Hai qualche suggerimento e/o commento relativo all'esperimento a cui sei stato sottoposto?</p>	

Grazie della collaborazione :)



APPENDIX 6

	Pre-experiment recording	Post-experiment recording	Studies and job experience with English L2
1 CG			<p>Third year of the academic Course of Foreign Language, Literature and Culture.</p> <p>Some contacts abroad (not with an Anglo-Saxon country).</p>
2 EG			<p>Third year of the academic Course of Foreign Language, Literature and Culture.</p> <p>No experience abroad.</p>
3 CG			<p>Third year of the academic Course of Foreign Language, Literature and Culture.</p> <p>No experience abroad.</p>

<p>4 CG</p>			<p>Third year of the academic Course of Foreign Language, Literature and Culture. No experience abroad.</p>
<p>5 EG</p>			<p>Third year of the academic Course of Foreign Language, Literature and Culture. No experience abroad.</p>
<p>6 EG</p>			<p>Third year of the academic Course of Foreign Language, Literature and Culture. Lived abroad for many years (not in an Anglo-Saxon country)</p>



<p>7 EG</p>			<p>Degree in Automation engineering. No experience abroad.</p>
<p>8 EG</p>			<p>Degree in Automation engineering. Six months abroad for work (not in an Anglo-Saxon country)</p>
<p>9 CG</p>			<p>Degree in Automation engineering. No experience abroad.</p>

10 CG			Degree in Automation engineering.  Occasional contacts abroad for work.
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## Summary in Italian

Nel corso del mio lungo percorso universitario, interrotto per esigenze lavorative, non sono stata una studentessa modello. Non ho potuto seguire con costanza le lezioni di lingua e di altre discipline in generale, e spesso mi sono trovata ad affrontare gli esami contando solo sulle mie forze e sulla capacità di trovare sostegni utili alla mia preparazione. Una cosa, però, mi è rimasta impressa durante questi anni di studio, ed è la presenza costante della musica, non come lavoro nè come principale occupazione, ma come soundtrack di ogni momento della mia vita. Ricordo come tante volte la musica mi ha aiutato ad affrontare i momenti più tristi o come mi ha stimolato e mi stimola tuttora quando, ad esempio, faccio attività fisica. E' stato incredibile vedere come le mie performance di corsa potevano migliorare di 2/3 minuti ascoltando il ritmo scatenante di *Back in Black* degli AC/DC o come una semplice melodia quale *Elements* di Lindsey Stirling riusciva ad infondermi calma e serenità, farmi staccare la spina dai problemi e dal mondo. Ma non solo. Mi sono accorta che da questo sottofondo musicale si poteva ottenere molto di più. Ho iniziato a notare come spesso alcune canzoni mi restavano in testa, “stuck-in-my-head” per usare l’espressione di Murphey (1990), e che lo stesso non succedeva solo a me ma a tante altre persone che, come me, amano la musica.

Da qui è nata l’idea di questa tesi. Una tesi che voleva essere non solo un punto di arrivo, quale il lieto fine di una lunga avventura, bensì un punto di partenza; un lavoro che, nel suo piccolo, spero possa dare un contributo a chi, come me, crede fortemente nell’efficacia di metodi non-convenzionali nell’ambito dell’insegnamento.

Qui di seguito propongo una presentazione dei capitoli che compongono questo lavoro. Il lavoro è diviso in due parti fondamentali. I primi tre capitoli trattano una parte teorica generale, mentre gli ultimi tre capitoli presentano l’esperimento seguito dai risultati e le conclusioni.

Il **Capitolo 1** ripercorre le tappe fondamentali delle teorie glottodidattiche più conosciute e diffuse (paragrafo 1.1). La glottodidattica è una disciplina che propone dei metodi per l’acquisizione di una lingua seconda. Ogni metodo ha una base teorica a cui fare riferimento che spesso è più legata alla tradizione che ad una scelta ragionata da parte dell’insegnante. Da un punto di vista storico, all’inizio del secolo si inizia ad introdurre nel curriculum lo studio di una seconda lingua. I primi metodi utilizzati sono il metodo grammaticale-traduttivo, basato essenzialmente sull’uso di manuali di grammatica, ed il reading method, alternativa al precedente e che si concentrava principalmente sull’abilità di lettura.

A metà degli anni '50 iniziano a farsi strada i metodi meccanicistico-strutturalisti che propongono, in alternativa al metodo grammaticale-traduttivo, i cosiddetti “pattern drills” ovvero esercizi ripetitivi e martellanti che hanno come obiettivo quello di *abituare* gli studenti ad una lingua seconda. L'insegnamento è considerato una pratica semplice e ripetitiva, una sorta di *mental habit* da insegnare agli studenti secondo lo schema stimolo-risposta-rinforzo: stimolo di una seconda lingua, risposta dello studente allo stimolo, correzione e quindi rinforzo della risposta dello studente allo stimolo. L'apprendimento di una seconda lingua è visto come un comportamento da acquisire e l'insegnamento è focalizzato essenzialmente sull'acquisizione di nozioni di grammatica. Manca, però, la componente di creatività e soprattutto l'utilizzo della lingua a fine comunicativo.

Ma con gli anni '60 negli Stati Uniti, iniziano a diffondersi le teorie nativiste di Chomsky, in particolare l'idea del LAD (Language Acquisition Device) ovvero l'idea dell'esistenza di un dispositivo innato per l'acquisizione linguistica, e gli approcci umanistico-affettivi. Lo studente non è più visto come uno scatolone da riempire con nozioni teoriche ma come un individuo che deve saper interagire con altri individui, cooperare, divertirsi ma anche rendersi responsabile del suo stesso apprendimento, nell'ottica di una realizzazione e maturazione personale. Gli esercizi strutturalisti sarebbero quindi un ausilio per l'attivazione del LAD. Dalle idee nativiste di Chomsky nascono le teorie dell'input comprensibile di Krashen negli anni '70. L'input comprensibile rappresenterebbe, infatti, un modo per acquisire una seconda lingua: ad un tipo di informazione già conosciuta e quindi comprensibile da parte dello studente se ne aggiunge una nuova di livello leggermente superiore. Ma l'altra grande importante osservazione di Krashen è la necessità di abbassare i filtri affettivi che ostacolano l'apprendimento. L'ansia e lo stress “da prestazione” costituiscono infatti un ostacolo per l'apprendimento. Questi approcci umanistico-affettivi sono considerati fondamentali anche se ancora oggi rimangono i residui dei metodi grammatico-traduttivi nelle scuole.

La questione relativa al metodo di insegnamento glottodidattico da utilizzarle, è analizzata anche da un punto di vista neurologico (paragrafo 1.2). Sappiamo infatti che nell'emisfero destro e sinistro del nostro cervello ci sono aree deputate a funzioni diverse. La parte destra è la parte dove risiede la componente emotiva, che elabora le informazioni in modo intuitivo, mentre la parte sinistra è la parte predisposta all'analisi sistematica, alla deduzione ed al ragionamento logico. Assieme a questa bimodalità esisterebbe anche una direzionalità, ovvero

un ordine nel processo di acquisizione che sembra iniziare dall'emisfero destro per poi passare a quello sinistro. Con i metodi tradizionali, però, spesso questa direzionalità non viene osservata e si approccia una seconda lingua partendo solitamente da una riflessione grammaticale. Da qui nascono le proposte di utilizzo delle nuove tecnologie come strumento per attivare entrambi gli emisferi; una tra tante l'idea della multimedialità proposta da Mezzadri quale soluzione per ottenere un approccio globale allo studio di una lingua seconda, data la capacità di coinvolgere attivamente e contemporaneamente l'emisfero destro e sinistro.

Nonostante l'approccio all'insegnamento molto diverso dai metodi meccanicistici, è chiaro che anche nei metodi umanistico-affettivi uno degli obiettivi è quello di memorizzare nozioni ed informazioni nuove. A questo si collega l'idea dell'abbassamento dei filtri affettivi di Krashen. La memoria è fortemente influenzata dall'impatto emotivo che l'informazione nuova porta con sé, più che dalla mancanza di attenzione degli studenti come spesso si crede (paragrafo 1.3). Per questo è fondamentale abbassare l'ansia che può portare con sé l'ambiente scolastico e piuttosto cercare di motivare gli studenti con qualcosa di stimolante, che catturi la loro attenzione ed il loro interesse.

Entrando nello specifico e considerando l'apprendimento di una lingua straniera è fondamentale sapere dove concentrare l'attenzione, sapere quali sono le abilità linguistiche da sviluppare (paragrafo 1.4) e soprattutto la propedeuticità da seguire tra le diverse abilità linguistiche (paragrafo 1.5). È associato che l'oralità ha una priorità sulla forma scritta nell'atto comunicativo, dato che la scrittura nasce proprio dall'oralità. Ne deriva un'attenzione particolare alla pronuncia di una seconda lingua che, nonostante l'importanza fondamentale per il successo dell'atto comunicativo, resta ancora un aspetto spesso poco curato. Ancora oggi, infatti, l'attenzione resta concentrata sullo studio della grammatica, in particolare in Italia, mentre invece in altri Paesi come la Danimarca, per citare il Paese con una performance di L2 elevata, l'approccio all'insegnamento dell'inglese L2 è completamente diverso.

Infine, sono stati considerati alcuni problemi che potrebbero essere collegati alla difficoltà di migliorare la pronuncia di una L2. Il primo problema potrebbe legarsi alla mancanza di pratica, ovvero la fossilizzazione del parlante nella struttura ed i suoni della lingua madre. La mancanza di allenamento all'ascolto e alla produzione di suoni in L2 renderebbe difficoltosa la pronuncia dei suoni in L2 (paragrafo 1.6). L'altro problema potrebbe essere legato ad una questione di identità sociale. Un atteggiamento di chiusura culturale nei confronti di ciò che è

straniero, infatti, renderebbe difficile lo studio di una lingua diversa da quella materna, considerando che la lingua è un carattere identificativo di un popolo. Prima di ogni tipo di esercizio ed allenamento è quindi indispensabile saper aprire la nostra mente verso ciò che è diverso da noi, senza pregiudizi e barriere dettate dalla xenofobia.

Nel **Capitolo 2** vengono esaminati alcuni esempi di utilizzo delle canzoni cantate in una lingua seconda (L2) come strumento per l'apprendimento della stessa, non necessariamente ristretto al miglioramento della sola pronuncia della L2. Si spazia dall'inglese all'italiano, il francese, lo spagnolo, il coreano ed il giapponese.

Il capitolo è suddiviso in paragrafi, tanti quanti solo gli esempi presi in esame. In particolare, nei primi cinque paragrafi si trattano degli esempi d'uso delle canzoni per l'insegnamento dell'inglese come L2. I primi due paragrafi sono essenzialmente esempi di apprendimento dell'inglese nelle scuole primarie, mentre il terzo è l'esempio portato da Tim Murphey, dal quale lavoro ha preso spunto ed ispirazione il presente elaborato. Gli ultimi due paragrafi di questa sezione (2.4 e 2.5) sono sempre esempi di apprendimento dell'inglese L2 attraverso le canzoni in classi di studenti madrelingua cinesi, ovvero studenti che generalmente hanno maggiori difficoltà nell'apprendimento dell'inglese, considerando il sistema linguistico di partenza molto diverso da quello europeo.

Nei paragrafi 2.6, 2.7 e 2.8 si portano gli esempi di Rita Pasqui, Marco Mezzadri e Lidia Costamagna che hanno usato le canzoni per l'apprendimento dell'italiano come L2, mentre dal paragrafo 2.9 al 2.13 si presentano gli esercizi proposti da Judith W. Failoni, James W. Brown, Jayne H. Abrate, Vicki L. Hamblin e Mary Techmeier per l'apprendimento del francese L2 attraverso le canzoni. Si passa, poi, ad un esempio di utilizzo delle canzoni nell'apprendimento dello spagnolo come L2 (paragrafo 2.14), del coreano (paragrafo 2.15) e del giapponese (paragrafo 2.16).

Dal paragrafo 2.17 al paragrafo 2.19 sono citati alcuni esempi di strategie per l'apprendimento di una L2 in generale, proposte da Gianfranco Porcelli, Roberto Dolci e Paolo Balboni per citare solo alcune tra le voci altisonanti riportate in questo lavoro.

Infine, i paragrafi conclusivi di questo Capitolo trattano di alcuni esempi di come le canzoni sono state e vengono usate per l'apprendimento dell'inglese L2 in ambito extra-scolastico, in particolare vengono citate alcune tra le risorse reperibili dalla Rete (paragrafo 2.20), considerando alcuni blogs ed applicazioni disponibili on line, dal grande schermo

(paragrafo 2.21) con l'esempio di un film tratto da una storia vera, ed infine dall'etere (paragrafo 2.22).

Nel **Capitolo 3** sono state trattate alcune considerazioni sull'uso della musica in ambiti extra-linguistici e non strettamente collegati all'insegnamento di una lingua straniera. Questo non solo per sottolineare il ruolo spesso sottovalutato della musica nella nostra società, ma anche per accennare ad alcune discipline ancora poco trattate o conosciute e che, a mio parere, sanno sfruttare la straordinaria potenzialità della musica.

Il primo paragrafo di questo capitolo è un accenno di tipo antropologico al canto quale mezzo comunicativo sviluppatosi nell'uomo prima della parola e considerato un tratto universale e distintivo umano. Universale ma anche particolare perchè caratterizza l'identità di ogni popolo come una lingua, con la differenza che, diversamente da una lingua, la musica per *arrivare all'anima* non ha bisogno di traduzioni.

Data la sua natura innata si prendono in esame alcuni esperimenti condotti sui bambini, volti a testare se effettivamente il canto precede la parola. A questo proposito si considerano quegli esperimenti che hanno esaminato il linguaggio cantilenato dei bambini, chiamato anche "motherese" (paragrafo 3.2). E' stato scientificamente provato, infatti, che il bambino inizia a sentire già da quando si trova nel grembo della madre. Come la musica, il motherese sembra essere un linguaggio universale che vale per tutti i bambini del mondo e che via via si perde con il tempo per lasciare spazio ad un linguaggio "più adulto" e ragionato. Il retaggio di questo cosiddetto motherese sembrerebbe ritrovarsi proprio nel piacere di ascoltare la musica, anche se la differenza in fatto di gusti musicali sembra essere ancora un tema di difficile interpretazione nel quale molta ricerca dev'essere ancora fatta.

Da un punto di vista strettamente chimico, si è visto inoltre che la musica è in grado di abbassare i livelli di cortisolo, chiamato anche ormone dello stress, favorendo una sensazione di benessere in chi la ascolta. E come Nicolas Guéguen (2006) osserva, il benessere che un sottofondo musicale produce può essere tale da convincerci a comprare una bottiglia di preziosissimo Château Lafite una volta entrati in un negozio di vini con l'intenzione di acquistare un modestissimo Punico di Inzolia (paragrafo 3.3). Ma non solo, alcune volte la musica può trasformarsi in una specie di ossessione, una melodia che non vuole proprio togliersi dalla testa, come ricorda Murphey (1990), qualcosa che ci rimane anche quando non ci piace (paragrafo 3.4).



Il senso della musica, allora qual'è? si chiede Bencivelli (2007) nel suo libro da lei stessa definito "coraggioso". La risposta resta ancora un mistero, ma è possibile sicuramente parlare di funzioni che la musica può assumere all'interno di una comunità. Non sappiamo ancora perchè la musica ha questo "effetto" su di noi, sulle nostre menti e soprattutto sulle nostre emozioni, ma sappiamo che ci fa stare bene e a volte difficilmente riusciamo a farne a meno.

E a proposito di effetti benefici legati alla musica, c'è chi ha ben pensato di *sfruttare* queste potenzialità. La musica può infatti diventare uno strumento per l'apprendimento, non solo di una seconda lingua ma di qualsiasi materia in generale, come suggerisce la professoressa Roberta Ferencich che del metodo suggestopedico ne ha fatto un mestiere (paragrafo 3.6). Nell'altro caso la musica può diventare uno strumento a scopo terapeutico, dato che non solo contribuisce al benessere generale ma può aiutare a guarire (paragrafo 3.7).

L'ultimo paragrafo di questo capitolo è un accenno ad alcuni tra gli esperimenti che sono stati fatti con la musica quale strumento per: migliorare alcune disfunzioni linguistiche (3.8.1), migliorare la percezione uditiva per l'uso dello stetoscopio nei corsi infermieristici (3.8.2), migliorare le abilità visuospatiali (3.8.3), memorizzare termini tecnici in ambito medico (3.8.4) e sviluppare le capacità linguistiche e motorie dei bambini negli asili nido, con l'esempio tedesco del Musikkindergarten.

Dal **Capitolo 4** inizia la seconda parte della presente tesi. Nello specifico, vengono analizzate le implicazioni teoriche sottese alle scelte fatte per la struttura dell'esperimento. Ovvero, che cosa mi ha portato a pensare e ad elaborare l'esperimento così come viene presentato?

Nel paragrafo 4.1 si ricorda la necessità di abbassare i filtri affettivi, proposta da Krashen. Le canzoni e la musica in generale, come introdotto nel capitolo precedente, sembrano essere un buon modo per rilassare e abbassare i filtri affettivi. Inoltre, l'idea di proporre un compito che implica l'autocorrezione da parte degli studenti non solo serve per alimentare l'autonomia dello studente ma è anche un ulteriore modo per abbassare i filtri affettivi. Lo studente, infatti, non si sente "sotto esame" e di conseguenza il contesto in cui opera è più rilassante. Ma non solo. L'esercizio cloze, qui proposto per l'esperimento, oltre ad essere un tipo di esercizio che permette di affrontare un testing in modo sereno perchè fatto in modo individuale, è anche un esercizio stimolante perchè permette allo studente di sfidare le proprie capacità.

Nel paragrafo 4.2 si ribadisce l'importanza dell'autonomia dello studente quale importante obiettivo da raggiungere. Lo studente non è lasciato da solo, ma bensì guidato. L'apprendimento è un processo e va costruito gradualmente con il supporto di tecnici del settore nella prospettiva comune di formare delle persone adulte in grado di gestire in modo autonomo le proprie conoscenze e capacità. L'insegnante è quindi di fondamentale importanza all'interno del percorso formativo dello studente perchè deve saper renderlo protagonista del suo percorso di crescita intellettuale, fornendogli gli strumenti del caso.

Altro principio fondamentale alla base dell'acquisizione di una L2 è la motivazione (4.3). La motivazione può essere stimolata in vario modo, innescando la curiosità, ad esempio adottando un approccio creativo alla materia. L'uso della multimedialità (4.4), come già anticipato da Mezzadri nel Capitolo 1 quale sistema di apprendimento "globale" per lo studente, è visto come un modo per stimolare la curiosità dello studente e allo stesso tempo è visto anche come soluzione al diffuso problema del sovraffollamento delle classi, dove spesso il rapporto insegnanti-studenti è molto basso. Inoltre, non solo attraverso l'uso delle tecnologie e della multimedialità della Rete si stimola l'autonomia dello studente, che spesso è già esperto nell'uso degli strumenti informatici, ma si permette allo studente di entrare in contatto con un input linguistico costante, che va ben oltre le lezioni di lingua seguite in classe.

A questo punto, data la vastità degli input provenienti dalla Rete dei quali non sempre l'affidabilità della provenienza può essere dimostrata, diventa fondamentale rendere chiari gli obiettivi dell'insegnamento nonché gli strumenti da usare. Considerando alcuni esempi citati già nel Capitolo 2 dove le canzoni venivano usate a fine glottodidattico, la scelta delle stesse dev'essere fatta secondo i fini precisi dell'insegnamento. Si valuta ad esempio l'accompagnamento musicale, il testo della canzone (che dev'essere semplice e ripetitivo), il tipo di accento inglese che viene usato nelle canzoni e quindi la provenienza dei cantanti o dei gruppi musicali, il livello di conoscenze linguistiche degli studenti ecc. La chiarezza degli obiettivi è quindi importante per evitare che lo studente si perda nei meandri di Internet.

I video o gli film stessi in lingua originale potrebbero diventare un ottimo strumento per allenare la percezione uditiva della lingua straniera (paragrafo 4.6). E' però necessario ricordare che le immagini potrebbero distrarre lo studente e la comprensione potrebbe essere legata proprio alla visione di immagini più che all'effettiva percezione dei dialoghi e dei suoni distintivi della lingua straniera.

Il semplice ascolto *passivo* di canzoni in lingua straniera, comunque, non porta da solo risultati. Deve esserci alla base un lavoro che stimoli la mente in modo *attivo*, perché venga sollecitata a “fare” oltre che a “percepire”. Un esempio di questo è ancora l’esercizio cloze (paragrafo 4.7) in quanto, oltre alla già citata caratteristica di esercizio individuale che come tale non porta con sé la carica di stress “da esame”, è un ottimo esercizio per stimolare la memoria perché mette lo studente nelle condizioni di richiamare *attivamente* le informazioni.

Resta di primaria importanza l’attenzione verso lo studente, e per questo è importante conoscere che cosa può stimolare il suo interesse. Le canzoni di genere rock, in questo caso, sono una scelta mirata, fatta per incontrare l’interesse dei giovani studenti, avvicinarsi ai loro gusti musicali e ad un’attività come l’ascolto della musica che, secondo dati statistici, pare occupare gran parte del loro tempo libero. La musica infatti è una sorta di linguaggio, un modo per identificarsi come parte di un gruppo nel quale si condividono emozioni, idee, esperienze.

Infine, è utile ricordare che nonostante la musica abbia un forte “impatto emotivo” su chi la ascolta, cosa che ne permette la facile memorizzazione come ricorda Snyder (2000), per ricordare è altrettanto importante ripetere. A questo proposito si riportano alcuni studi fatti in merito alle pratiche di ripetizione legate all’apprendimento che confermano come la ripetizione costante ed ad intervalli regolari favorisca la memorizzazione delle informazioni nel lungo periodo.

Nel **Capitolo 5** si passa alla presentazione dell’esperimento vero e proprio. L’idea è quindi di usare le canzoni inglesi come mezzo per migliorare la pronuncia dell’inglese quale seconda lingua, partendo dall’idea che l’allenamento alla percezione e la pratica siano un metodo più valido rispetto allo studio di nozioni teoriche di fonetica e fonologia. Ricordo che non si intende per questo togliere valore a queste due discipline importantissime, bensì si vuole dare un “ordine” diverso di approccio alla materia. Seguendo la teoria della direzionalità, infatti, si intende puntare l’attenzione innanzitutto verso un approccio “pratico” alla pronuncia, che solo in un secondo momento può diventare riflessione teorica e quindi più tecnica sulla materia.

Secondo le indicazioni teoriche generali già analizzate nel capitolo precedente, per entrambi i gruppi verrà proposto un compito individuale. L’attenzione sarà posta su un numero definito e limitato di parole/suoni, delle quali si analizzerà il miglioramento a distanza di tre settimane, seguendo due modalità di approccio differenti. Il Gruppo di Test, dopo aver completato un esercizio cloze basato sul testo di cinque canzoni inglesi scelte, dovrà ascoltare le

stesse e cantarle in modo individuale a giorni alternati; il Gruppo di Controllo dovrà concentrare l'attenzione sulle stesse parole/suoni del gruppo di test ma attraverso l'ausilio di una tabella fonetica.

I presupposti fondamentali dai quali si è deciso di partire sono il fatto che il test dev'essere fatto in modo individuale per abbassare il livello di "ansia da prestazione" ma anche per evitare imbarazzo negli studenti, soprattutto per il gruppo di test al quale viene chiesto di cantare. Gli studenti scelti sono persone che si presuppone essere motivate ed interessate ad imparare l'inglese come seconda lingua, da una parte per la scelta di una facoltà linguistica dove la prima lingua straniera scelta è appunto l'inglese, dall'altra per il desiderio di migliorare la comunicazione in lingua inglese nell'ambito lavorativo. A questo scopo, si intende sfruttare le risorse disponibili su YouTube, canale per la condivisione di video/audio che i ragazzi già conoscono, dando però delle chiare indicazioni su che cosa e come usare tale risorsa. L'obiettivo è quindi di fornire degli strumenti agli studenti perchè possano essere usati in modo autonomo, secondo delle coordinate ben precise.

Nel **Capitolo 6** sono infine disponibili in formato QR le registrazioni audio delle otto frasi decontestualizzate lette prima e dopo l'esperimento da ogni partecipante al test. Da qui i commenti della Professoressa Busà che in generale ha riscontrato che alcuni studenti di Lingue del Gruppo di Controllo hanno migliorato leggermente la scorrevolezza della lettura delle frasi del test, mentre gli studenti di Ingegneria dello stesso gruppo non hanno avuto nessun miglioramento in merito. Dall'altra parte, gli studenti di Lingue del Gruppo di Test non hanno mostrato un notevole miglioramento nella pronuncia delle parole selezionate, mentre gli studenti di ingegneria dello stesso gruppo hanno migliorato la pronuncia di alcune parole selezionate. La cosa interessante da notare è il miglioramento generale dell'aspirazione delle occlusive sorde da parte degli studenti del Gruppo di Test, risultato ottenuto solamente da uno studente del Gruppo di Controllo.

Inoltre, riportiamo i commenti degli studenti che hanno partecipato all'esperimento. Innanzitutto, è stato evidente da subito un entusiasmo generale nella proposta dell'esercizio agli studenti del gruppo di test, nonostante il compito loro assegnato richiedesse più tempo rispetto al compito assegnato al gruppo di controllo. Ad entrambi i gruppi, infatti, è stata richiesta una costanza nell'esecuzione del compito e la regolare ripetizione di alcuni passaggi. Ma da una parte al gruppo di controllo veniva richiesto un impegno *meno attivo*, ovvero uno studio e una

lettura della tabella fonetica, dall'altra parte invece al gruppo di test veniva richiesto un impegno attivo maggiore, non solo per l'esecuzione dell'esercizio cloze sul testo delle canzoni ma anche per il canto delle stesse. Nonostante, quindi, l'impegno maggiore a soprattutto la *partecipazione attiva* richiesta al gruppo di test, quest'ultimo è stato il gruppo che ha mostrato maggiore curiosità e disponibilità nell'accogliere la proposta loro fatta. Quattro su cinque studenti del gruppo di test hanno dimostrato immediatamente grande apprezzamento verso le canzoni che venivano loro sottoposte; uno studente ha anche manifestato l'intenzione di imparare a suonare con la chitarra le stesse canzoni proposte.

Dal questionario post-esperimento fornito agli studenti di entrambi i gruppi e compilato in forma anonima è emerso che l'uso della tabella fonetica è considerata uno strumento utile ma allo stesso tempo noioso e qualche volta difficile da usare. Dall'altra parte, l'uso delle canzoni come strumento didattico ha generato entusiasmo e curiosità negli studenti. Gli studenti del Gruppo di Test hanno espresso interesse per il metodo a cui sono stati sottoposti; tra i loro suggerimenti, infatti, evidenziamo la necessità di estendere questa pratica su un periodo di tempo più lungo e di ampliare la scelta delle canzoni. Hanno infine espresso la loro preferenza per una modalità di lavoro autonomo per questo tipo di esercizio, evitando il rumore e la confusione che potrebbero crearsi in classe.

Infine, nelle “**Conclusioni**” ribadisco l'idea che il presente esperimento è stato pensato nella forma quasi come un “pattern drill”, ma nella sostanza come un esercizio che, nonostante la ripetitività, potesse coinvolgere emotivamente gli studenti. I risultati dimostrano che l'uso delle canzoni può essere un valido strumento per chi ha un livello d'inglese medio-basso e non è allenato alla percezione di suoni in lingua inglese. Non dimentichiamo, comunque, la maggior scorrevolezza nella lettura raggiunta dagli studenti di Lingue del Gruppo di Test e la notevole aspirazione delle occlusive sorde.

Ritengo importante sottolineare ulteriormente che in questo esperimento si è voluto prendere in esame una modalità di esercizio per il miglioramento della pronuncia di una lingua seconda, con il fine di migliorare l'atto comunicativo. E' evidente, però, che perché la comunicazione sia efficace è fondamentale saper comunicare a 360 gradi, per questo il miglioramento della *sola* pronuncia non può garantire il successo della comunicazione. La proposta è quindi di inserire questo tipo di esercizi in un contesto di apprendimento più ampio, all'interno di un percorso che non solo comprenda anche le abilità di scrittura ma che possa

mettere in pratica l'allenamento alla pronuncia, mirando ad esempio ad esercizi di conversazione simulata di contesti e situazioni reali. La speranza è di invitare la ricerca ad approfondire lo studio delle applicazioni non-tradizionali della glottodidattica, considerando le immense potenzialità che le tecnologie oggi possono offrire ed i vantaggi in termini di quantità e qualità dei risultati ottenibili.

