Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento degli Studi Linguistici e Letterali

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in

Lingue Moderne per la Comunicazione e la Cooperazione

Internazionale

Classe LM-38

Tesi di Laurea

The Multi-ethnic Post Office "Padova 7"

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INTRODUCTION

One often hears the word "multiculturalism", and even though this term is used in the singular form, which might, misleadingly, lead us to think of it as representing a well-defined conceptual category, it is instead not so. In fact, today's multicultural societies have become more and more complex, heterogeneous and fluid, which makes them include more diverse features of our contemporary western world, with minorities such as people with disabilities or members of the LGBTQ+ community, or even whole social segments experiencing unequal treatment, as is often the case with women. Differentiation seems to permeate our contemporary societies in all sectors, perhaps more than ever before, so much so that there is even talk of "superdiverse" societies, and companies are committed to continually finding innovative solutions to meet all types of customers in an inclusive way.

Born out of the company's need to meet its ever-growing international, multicultural clientele, Poste Italiane S.p.A.'s *uffici postali multietnici* (multi-ethnic post offices) project is a case in point. It is not by chance therefore that, as a Paduan resident myself working for Poste Italiane S.p.A. and studying at the Department of Linguistic and Literary Studies of the University of Padua, my thesis builds on the analysis of this case study, focusing on Padua's only multi-ethnic post office "Padova 7" (UP PD 7) located in the district of Arcella. This is Padua's first, and so far only multi-ethnic post office, and unlike more traditional post offices, it is served by three multilingual employees that the company has carefully selected to support its ever-growing international clientele, for the most part coming from Padua's largest foreign communities, i.e. the Romanians, the Moldovans, the Nigerians, the Moroccans, the Albanians, and the Chinese, followed right behind by the Bengalese and the Philippines.

The overall objective of this study is to investigate the main characteristics of Poste Italiane S.p.A. 's multilingual employees to find if they are simply expert speakers of the languages of the customers they aim to support or if they possess the same skills, sensitivity and awareness as those a trained intercultural mediator displays in his/her delicate tasks. As I will show, these skills are in fact crucial for the success of the

communicative process, especially in negotiations, where the role of an intercultural mediator is nowadays essential, especially in those situations where people coming from even far away countries, cultures and all walks of life meet to reach an agreement on the most diverse subjects or to settle a dispute.

This research builds on the qualitative analysis of data extracted from semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and Poste Italiane S.p.A.'s internal communication. My investigation was carried out within the premises of UP PD 7, and its reference sample is represented by its three multilingual employees and postmaster. The three multilingual employees are all of foreign origin, and display a very good command of the Italian language, whereas the postmaster is a native speaker of Italian. All questions were asked in Italian, and their aim was to analyse the way the post office was managed to cope with the growing need for multilingual and multicultural support.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the concept of multiculturalism and explains how the perception of cultural differences has changed over time. It also includes an analysis of the most common integration models adopted by governments worldwide in their attempt to manage migration flows, as well as an analysis of some of the main social issues that are linked to multiculturalism, such as language, identity, and the coexistence of different religions. The second chapter provides a brief historical overview of multilingualism in an attempt to provide a definition of this phenomenon. After that, an analysis of the main characteristics of multilingual cities is offered, dwelling on the main factors that influence urban centres, and with special focus on the demography of Padua and the Arcella district. The third chapter illustrates the elements that come into play in the course of the communicative process, as well as the role played in it by an intercultural mediator. It also offers a glimpse of the competences and skills that make a good intercultural mediator and a brief outline of this professional figure from its birth to the present day, paving the way to the concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence. The fourth and last chapter is dedicated to the case study of UP PD 7. After providing a short historical overview of Poste Italiane S.p.A.'s main developments and breakthroughs, the focus shifts to the company's multi-ethnic post offices project by illustrating its location, staff, and multilingual employees,

accompanied by an analysis of the outcomes of the semi-structured interviews that I have conducted and of the employees' suggestions for improvement.

The multi-ethnic post office project is an ambitious one that tries to keep up with Italy's socio-economic developments, and it has unquestionably revealed Poste Italiane S.p.A.'s commitment and success in addressing the "cultural diversity" that characterizes our societies, by making it possible for their foreign clientele to access their products and services with the aid of carefully selected skilled employees who can speak the languages of the country's largest communities. The recent COVID-19 pandemic is a case in point where Poste Italiane S.p.A. has shown that it was able to meet the arising needs, including those of international customers. Specifically, Poste Italiane S.p.A. adopted procedures and worked to guarantee service continuity while safeguarding the health of its employees and customers alike. It provided personal protective equipment, distributed anti-Covid tests and adopted flexible working hours for most of their workforce. It also supported the immunisation campaign, allowing citizens to book their vaccinations and also showed its commitment by transporting vaccines, ensuring the necessary conditions for serum preservation.

Similarly, multiculturalism is a challenge and an opportunity at the same time. Managing multicultural contexts can in fact present its own unique set of barriers. Language skills, cultural understanding and a highly diplomatic approach seem to be the right set of tools everyone should equip themselves with in our ever-changing societies, where foreign communities and the rising need for inclusion represent both a challenge and a true wealth.

1   MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES

In this chapter, I will explore the concept of multiculturalism along with other related phenomena. I will first try to provide a definition of multiculturalism in an attempt to grasp the changes which have occurred through time in our societies as regards the perception of cultural differences and the concept of difference. What is more, I will illustrate the most common integration models adopted by governments worldwide in their attempt to manage migration flows, and specifically those related to: assimilation, pluralism, and institutionalization of precarious migratory status. I will subsequently analyse some of the main social issues that are linked to multiculturalism, such as language, education, and the coexistence of different religions, as well as the degree of freedom underlying multiculturalism.

1.1   DEFINITION OF MULTICULTURALISM

Before analysing the term multiculturalism, I would like to focus briefly on the concept of culture, which is at the core of multiculturalism. Defining the term culture is not easy, as the attempts made by many academics show. Amongst these, two American anthropologists, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, dedicated themselves to the study of the concept of culture by reviewing and commenting on the many definitions of the term culture from different perspectives: historical, regulatory, psychological, anthropological and sociological. In 1952, in "Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definition", Kroeber and Kluckhohn came up with a list of 164 definitions of the term "culture", and illustrated the developments of the concept of culture highlighting all similarities and differences they found across all definitions, with the aim of providing a scientific description of an extremely complex item (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952, pp. 41–78; Spencer, 2012, p. 1).

Today, as Santipolo (2002) suggests, it is possible to outline two main, and quite opposite, interpretations of the term culture: the first one, the most conventional of the two, is referred to as "cultura animi", and regards the ensemble of the highest ranked products (be they artistic or literary etc.) reserved for the elite of any given society; the second interpretation regards the concept of culture in its anthropological meaning, carrying

values and principles at the basis of social organization and behaviour shaping a given community and representing the way its members react to the most basic needs of nature (feeding, sheltering, preserving their species, etc.). The latter is apparently the most modern and scientific of the two, and this is supported by the most modern social sciences that put the communities rather than the individual at the centre (Santipolo, 2002, p. 188). In this paper, I will therefore refer to the second of the two interpretations hinted at above and therefore to the concept of culture from an anthropological perspective. Edward Burnett Tylor (1871) was a British anthropologist of the Victorian era, who along with Lewis Henry Morgan is considered to be a founding father of modern anthropology. Tylor was the first to provide a definition of the term "culture" from an anthropological perspective (Enciclopedia Treccani, 2022), which outlined as follows:

> Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor, 1871, p. 1).

According to Sciolla (2012), this definition, taken from Primitive Culture, highlights culture as a nucleus consisting of three main components: what individuals think, that is to say their theoretical sets of rules and beliefs (i.e. religion, morality and justice); what individuals do, namely their traditions and habits acquired within a given community of people, including everyday actions that are based on said traditions and habits (i.e. preparing food, dressing, using means of transport, maintaining couple relationships). Last, the third main component concerns the materials individuals produce, artefacts and human labour produce, which include religious artefacts, objects of daily use such as bows and arrows, clothing and ornaments (Sciolla, 2012, p. 17).

What is more, as Fabietti (2020) explains, this definition clearly shows that culture is everywhere and that there is not a single people without culture: all peoples have their own. What is more, it emphasizes its scope as a complex ensemble of features that can be found in any community. In fact, all peoples have their own economy, morality, justice system, and technology. Ultimately, it stresses how culture is not blood-borne, but can only be "acquired by man as a member of society", more precisely the specific society

each person lives in, and since societies are many and manifold, so are cultures. As a consequence of that, human beings are "cultural individuals" (Fabietti, 2020, p. 25).

Another definition of "culture" is provided by American sociologist Richard A. Peterson (1979), focusing on the four sorts of elements it is composed of: norms, values, beliefs, and expressive symbols (Peterson, 1979, pp. 137–138). Bettinelli (2019) describes these four concepts in greater detail. Values are the ideals human beings aspire and look to when making judgements. Value does not identify with the object of interest, but rather with the assessment criterion based on which a given course of action or way of thinking is approved of or not. Peace, honesty, honour, and dignity are all examples of these values (Oreg & Katz-Gerro, 2006, p. 466; Swidler, 1986, p. 274). Norms are instead more specific and imperative than values. They often take the form of duty or imposition, and their efficacy usually relies on sanctions. Values are acquired and internalized early in the course of life, whereas norms are learned throughout the entire life cycle (Ferrari, 1996). Beliefs are assumptions made by groups and individuals which are based on facts or leaps of faith, and help define the reality around us (i.e. nature, humanity and society), whereas norms define what needs to be done. Often, beliefs are needed in order to justify values and norms (Bulle, 2015, Chapter 5). Last, symbols or signs are signifiers of unspoken meanings, and are used to connect a physical object to an abstract idea. Symbols are intersubjective, meaning they are shared among people in a social group, and at the same time shape the implicit dimension of culture, thus representing a knowledge individuals can express even though often without being able to disentangle the reasoning behind it. The cross is an example of a symbol, pertaining to the Christian religion, that not everyone can argue for when asked to explain the criterion on which such an association relies upon (Bettinelli, 2019, Chapter 1; Sciolla, 2012, pp. 54–63).

Swindler (1986) also emphasises the extremely complex character of culture by describing it as " such symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and ritual of daily life", and at the same time describes it as a repository of resources, or even better as a *tool kit* individuals use in a flexible way to develop different strategies for action to achieve different objectives (Swidler, 1986, p. 273). Therefore, as

Sciolla (2012) sums up, culture represents the whole social and physical environment human beings create. This means culture does not only include mental representations, behavioural patterns, artefacts, and routine rules, but also institutions (i.e. family, kinship, political organization, economic system), thus extending the meaning of the concept of culture and making it overlap with that of society (Sciolla, 2012, p. 20).

With regard to the concept of culture and society, American sociologist Talcott Parsons, the creator of the theoretical perspective of structural functionalism, dwelled upon the need to keep culture and society separate at analytical level. In fact, Parsons (1951) believed that even though these two terms are related, they should not be confused or overlapped. He does in fact make a distinction between anthropology and sociology, in that sociology deals with the social system, whereas anthropology deals with the cultural system. This distinction relied upon the fact that anthropologists devoted themselves to the study of primitive societies, whereas sociologists devoted themselves to the study of modern societies (Parsons, 1951, pp. 125–126, 372), even if, as Sciolla (2012) explains, from the late 1960s, this distinction evolved and disappeared due to the evolution of their respective objects, that is culture and society. As processes such as those of modernization, industrialization and globalization kept expanding, those primitive societies described by late 19th century anthropologists as static societies, closed back onto themselves and culturally homogeneous, disappeared.

Modern societies too, thanks to the spread of mass media and new communication technologies as well as to the importance assumed by knowledge, information and immigration, have transformed to take on a character based on differentiation across all areas and fields, including culture (Santoro, 2000, pp. 185–186; Sciolla, 2012, p. 52). As a matter of fact, modern societies are not completely homogeneous. As Sciolla (2012) states, as regards ethnicity, language and religion, societies are made up of very heterogeneous groups and populations. Differences linked to social classes, generations, minorities, religions, groups or political movements add up to that. All of these divisions bring different values and social norms, and to describe this new dimension where "cultural pluralism" plays an essential role, the expression "multicultural society" is used (Sciolla, 2012, p. 93).

If we look up the term multiculturalism in some of the most well-known English and Italian online dictionaries and encyclopaedias, we run into these three definitions:

> The belief that different cultures within a society should all be given importance.
>
> (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2021)
>
> As a descriptive term, multiculturalism refers to the coexistence of people with many cultural identities in a common state, society, or community.
>
> (Oxford Reference, 2021)
>
> Orientamento politico e sociologico volto a promuovere il riconoscimento e il rispetto dell'identità linguistica, religiosa e culturale delle diverse componenti etniche presenti nelle complesse società odierne.[1]
>
> (Treccani, 2021)

Even if each differs from the other, especially those retrieved from the two English-language sources when compared to the one taken from the Italian encyclopaedia quoted above, all three definitions of "multiculturalism" converge on the coexistence of people with different cultural backgrounds (in terms of memories, options, references, values, preferences, projects, expectations, experiences, practices, and attitudes) in a common society or community. What is more, as Kastoryano (2018) points out, besides representing the coexistence of many cultures within a given community, multiculturalism aims at ensuring values like freedom, equality, fraternity, and unity between the various ethnic groups of said community. Multiculturalism considers migrants as fellow citizens sharing the same community made of different identities needing to be equally respected as they cultivate and fulfil their traditions and cultural habits (Galeotti, 2010, p. 442; Kastoryano, 2018, p. 3).

However, it is curious how a term in its singular form, thus conveying the idea of something homogeneous, does in fact relate to something so varied, a social reality made up of different cultures, rules, values, beliefs and expressive symbols. Shaping up and defining a whole ensemble of "smooth" factors that change based on their diachronic,

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[1] *Trans.* "Sociological and political orientation aimed at promoting the recognition and respect of linguistic, religious and cultural identity of the diverse ethnic mixture of today's complex societies"

diatopic, diastratic and diaphasic dimension is not easy (Allievi, 2010, p. 89; Sciolla, 2012, pp. 93–95). In this regard, Sarmento (2014) suggests using the term interculturalism instead of multiculturalism, as he believes the term multiculturalism represents a dead-end, a delimited system where people from different cultures coexist, thus denying those, often accidental and mutual, multidirectional movements that encourage communication and facilitate dialogue, exchange and mutual understanding between people having different backgrounds, thus veering away from mere tolerance. (Sarmento, 2014, p. 606). Taylor (2012) too questions the difference between the two terms, and dwells upon their semantic distinction: "if multiculturalism in the generic sense includes policies which aim both at recognition of difference and integration, one might argue that the prefix 'multi' gives greater weight to the first goal – acknowledging diversity – while 'inter' invokes more the facet of integration" (Taylor, 2012, p. 416).

In addition, besides the concept of multiculturalism, from the 21st century onwards, the term *super-diversity* started spreading. Vertovec (2019) analyses the various facets and uses of this new term, highlighting its connotation with the differentiation and variance of cultural differences in contemporary societies. Societies are defined as *superdiverse* in that the current international migrations are fluid and complex, and subjects developed interactions resulting in the creation of more and diverse micro-categories of subjects differing not only culturally, but also with respect to their socio-economic positions, experiences, skills, and education, rather than in easily recognizable homogeneous communities (Vertovec, 2019, pp. 130–133).

Nonetheless, despite the plurality of meanings and the various debates over the term "multiculturalism" and its related concepts, depending on who makes use of it and on its context, today it mainly refers to the, usually welcomed, coexistence of different cultural habits, preferences and values of ethnic groups sharing the same social area (Colombo, 2018, p. 22). All definitions relate to peoples, but vary based on factors such as: the historical age and society they live in, as well as the communities where they are brought up and those they come into contact with. What is more, all these features could even intertwine: suffice to think of all the infinite variables that are the product of the factors hinted at above.

1.2   THE HISTORY OF MULTICULTURALISM AND THE CONCEPT OF DIFFERENCE

The first mention of the word multiculturalism is quite recent. It does in fact date back to the 20th century, and is mainly found in both the United States of America and Europe. As with most neologisms, the word "multiculturalism" was born out of the need to understand and depict a new social reality. As a matter of fact, at the beginning of the 20th century, the cities of the United States of America, Canada and Australia were affected by flows of immigration of people from Italy, Ireland, Poland, Germany, Great Britain and China, all driven by economic development and abundance of natural resources. These peoples found themselves in the condition of sharing the same living space, for most cases big cities that have rapidly and chaotically grown, all of whom had very little knowledge of the English language, if any, and at the same time showed strong ties to their multifaceted and varied cultural heritage (Colombo, 2018, pp. 21–22; Viola & Verheul, 2020, p. 925). At that time, the western multicultural society, especially in North-American cities, was in fact mostly made up of ghettos of people from the same nation or community, thus making multiculturalism anything but an integrated society despite its variety of cultures and identities, so much so that the issue of immigration became one with that of race: "the issue of who gets defined as a legitimate part of the nation – who is *us* rather than *them* – shifted uneasily along lines of racial and nationality classification" (Nissen & Grenier, 2001, p. 569).

These social divisions are well represented in the press: suffice to think that each of these communities had one or more periodicals in their language. In 1923, in the USA, 67 weekly magazines, 18 monthly magazines and 19 daily magazines were published in Polish, and about 264 newspapers in Italian were published as well (Colombo, 2018, p. 23; Deschamps, 2011, p. 81; Viola & Verheul, 2020, p. 925). In the same years, 270 publications in 23 languages appeared in New York, and in Chicago 19 daily magazines were translated into 7 languages (Burgess et al., 1967, pp. 26–27). In the 1960s, European countries such as Germany, France and Great Britain witnessed important flows of immigration providing manpower for growing industries. In both cases, the phenomenon of immigration led to new socio-political experiments aimed at managing this new reality,

which is different from the one known so far as "normal and right". These new migration flows brought out the need for each country to redefine their boundaries and social rules, as well as their ideals and the way their societies were organized, and at the same time to re-elaborate new languages and new perspectives with a view to making sense out of the coexistence of differences (Colombo, 2018, pp. 23, 63).

As Bauman (1991) states, modern society is in the constant pursuit of an orderly world, free from chaos: "Indeed: order and chaos, full stop. […] The other of order or not another order: chaos is its only alternative" (Bauman, 1991, p. 7). As Colombo states (2018), in the mid-20th century, differences were not perceived as enriching. On the contrary, they were perceived as something veering away from what was considered to be the "standard", and as such seen as a defect. Immigrants were perceived as a threat, and what differed contrasted with the ideals of equality that domineeringly shaped up and pushed citizens to look forward to, so as to flatten any specificity and difference (Colombo, 2018, p. 23). In the mid-20th century, the American expression of "melting pot" started spreading to mean a single overarching culture stemming from the assimilation of norms, values, languages and traditions of different cultures. The concept of "melting pot" mainly spread in the USA, which in the second half of the 20th century were even defined as "God's own melting pot", after the title of a successful theatre *pièce*, The Melting Pot, by Israel Zangwill (Melotti, 2004, p. 90). This expression was frequently used in newspapers as well: in 1962, a Chicago newspaper commented on the choice of Miss Hawaii to represent the USA for the Miss Universe competition defining said Miss as a "typical child" of "a true American-style *melting pot*" (Gleason, 1964, p. 20). At the core of this concept is the idea that all differences, be they ancient and original, would melt in everyday's modern life melting pot to give birth to a new and better mankind. However, as Colombo (2018) states, this ideological representation was not prone to including non-European immigrants (such as the Chinese, the Japanese and the Indians), thus failing to encompass all Europeans but the white Europeans.

The "melting pot" concept worked as a basis for the implementation of new political programs aimed at dealing with integration and assimilation issues. This is how new integration and assimilation policies were born that were based on the western model,

which was already considered to be the most advanced and rational, and therefore the best. All the various models are dealt with in the following sections. However, the ideal of the assimilation of differences and their merging into a new mankind united in the sharing of ideals of progress and rationality crashed with some events and social behaviours of that time. The ideal of the melting pot that drove attitudes and policies with regard to immigrants was not equally applied when it came to African Americans, for instance (Colombo, 2018, pp. 23–25). In fact, the 1960s were also the years of the racial discrimination against both the African Americans of the United States and the colonists in Europe, as well as of the beginning of the decolonization processes, of the feminist claims, and of the youth protests against the war in Vietnam, which was deemed senseless and unjust (Sabbatucci & Vidotto, 2004, pp. 470, 521–522, 533). In this scenario, as Colombo (2018) states, civil rights movements highlighted how equality, which the West chose as its own founding and legitimating ideal, is just a front which, if ever achieved, would only apply to the white man. Inconsistencies between the ideal of equality set forth by the Western social model and the reality that was instead made up of discrimination against black people and women in particular, were on the one hand at the basis of all protests and civil rights movements of the 1960s, reasonably oriented towards a better social inclusion and the full recognition of men and women (Colombo, 2018, p. 25).

1.2.1   DIFFERENCE AS A VALUE

In the 1960s, more radical movements for the recognition of differences and peculiarities started to develop. Amongst these radical movements, there were: black movements claiming both the dignity and value of their culture as opposed to the white culture, and their need to be recognised as different; youth movements opposing a model "approved" by the majority of people and deemed "normal" as opposed to their need to claim their difference; women's movements distancing themselves from that principle of equality that placed men and masculinity as a universal benchmark for comparison (Colombo, 2018, pp. 28–29). According to Baird (2021), these movements attacked the ideal of equality and the concept of assimilation since they were perceived as an imposition, namely an abuse at the hands of a social minority claiming to be superior. It is no surprise the reference model was always that of the white people of the West. One of the most extreme movements strongly claiming differences was the "*Black is beautiful*"

movement, which advocated and emphasized the features of black culture whilst refusing to assimilate to white culture as they did not wish to be considered either as inferior or as equal to a model that was so far from theirs (Alexandra & Emily, 2019; Baird, 2021, pp. 557–558).

In the second half of the 20th century, the consumer market further boosted the recognition of differences claimed by these new movements arguing for the recognition of differences and peculiarities. In fact, while the beginning of the 20th century was characterized by the standardized mass production intended for the average consumer, as technology evolved, the Ford model was instead gradually replaced by a model based on the valorisation of the customers' diversities and uniqueness (Soskice, 1999, pp. 115–118): as Jean Baudrillard observes, the customer was no longer required to adapt to the product; on the contrary, the market was required to customize products based on the needs of consumers. To cut a long story short, not only was diversity emphasized, but it was sought after, as it made one stand out from the crowd (Baudrillard, 2016, pp. 105–107).

In the 1980s, the process of valorisation of diversities was boosted by the increasing pace of globalization, an economic phenomenon of worldwide dimensions, with political, environmental and social implications (De Benedictis & Helg, 2002, pp. 3–4). As a matter of fact, as Anthony Giddens (1990) explains, this term indicates the economic, political and cultural changes that increase social interactions occurring between far off places, transform perceptions and time-space relations, and make social actions far less dependent on the local context. Companies started relocating their production processes beyond national boundaries for the sake of costs, and the growth of multinational companies created more issues rather than solving them describes Giddens, as the gap between economic interests and national interests narrows, thus resulting in a nation-state crisis encompassing citizenship and national belonging, which in turn symbolically represent the principle of equality (Giddens, 1990, pp. 17–21).

In a world characterized by ever closer economies, cultures and societies, by the end of the 20th century, in the view of some scholars, the process of national identification starts

becoming inadequate and outmoded (Sassen, 2003, pp. 5–13; Zanchetta, 2000, pp. 11–14). Such cultural, or rather national, barriers change shape and, as Bauman (2011) affirms, are no longer those of a condition (or solid) but of a process (or liquid):

> But to cut a long story short: the difference between 'cognitive maps' carried in their heads by the older generations of entomologists, and that acquired/ adopted by the youngest reflects the passage from the 'nation-building' stage in the history of modern states to the 'multicultural' phase in their history; more generally, from 'solid' modernity, bent on entrenching and fortifying the principle of territorial, exclusive and indivisible sovereignty, and on surrounding the sovereign territories with impermeable borders, to 'liquid' modernity, with its fuzzy and eminently permeable borderlines, the unstoppable (even if bewailed, resented and resisted) devaluation of spatial distances and the defensive capacity of the territory, and an intense human traffic across all and any frontiers. (Bauman, 2011).

The spread of information on the internet and across mass media allows for the overcoming of time-space barriers, thus making it possible to see the world, share different life styles, customs and ideas. In this regard, Giddens (1990) speaks of "disembedding mechanisms":

> The separation of time and space. This is the condition of time-space distanciation of indefinite scope; it provides means of precise temporal and spatial zoning. The development of disembedding mechanisms. These "lift out" social activity from localised contexts, reorganising social relations across large time-space distances (Giddens, 1990, p. 53).

Sciolla (2012) even speaks of virtual "communities" or "quasi-communities" (from the fans of gaming through to those of show business stars, as well as to the followers of new religious movements), which are born out of a common interest, often across national boundaries (Capstick, 2021, p. 7; Sciolla, 2012, p. 262). Such processes, just as much as the globalization process, are self-contradictory, as Colombo explains: on the one hand, they tend to homologate and standardize, thus favouring the creation of a new global community, and on the other they revive community, ethnic, cultural and religious identities focusing on their members, features and differences, thus creating new contexts

for self-identification based on selected and restricted local membership (Colombo, 2018, p. 34).

The concept of difference has undergone diachronic and diatopic changes, taking on meanings that deeply vary depending on their socioeconomic contexts. For the purposes of this thesis, this topic is closely related to the concept of multiculturalism, in that it encompasses cultural, ethnic and religious differences, and if, as we have already discussed, across time and space the recognition of differences has been perceived differently, then the term "multiculturalism" would necessarily have to modify its meaning favouring some policies over others. Each country would therefore define the strategy to be implemented to manage "multiculturalism" phenomena based on how difference is perceived. The following sections will deal with the main integration policies as they were adopted by one or more countries.

1.3   INTEGRATION MODELS

It is thus clear that both "multiculturalism" and the concept of "difference" are extremely complex subject areas. Even if migration has always occurred, the creation of nation-states made national identities grow stronger. On their territories, or on those that are adjacent, people belonging to diverse cultural groups have settled and keep on generating differences within that nation. Suffice to think of Italy and its broad cultural and linguistic representations: from the north to the south, and from the east to the west, and possibly even across regions. We do however need to wait until the 1960s before we can witness massive migration flows, which always stress the need for integration models aimed at meeting historically, demographically, economically, socially and culturally diverse features. According to Rodríguez-García, amongst these models (*Integration-incorporation models*), the main three are those of: assimilation; pluralism; and institutionalization of precarious migratory status (Rodríguez-García, 2010, pp. 251–271).

1.3.1   THE ASSIMILATIONIST MODEL

Even if the assimilationist model found its historical expression in the American "melting pot", it only really emerged on European soil. In fact, as Ambrosini (2011) explains, the

assimilationist model derives from the French liberal tradition and is based on both respect and the sharing of common ideals and traditions. Being or becoming part of a community means sharing and respecting the social norms and rules of the host country. In such a scenario, policies encourage the quick cultural homologation of newly acquired members. It is a more "republican" view of the nation, perceived as a political community open to the acquisition of new members, provided that they abide by the rules of democracy and adopt the hosting country's culture (Castles & Miller, 1993, as cited in Ambrosini, 2011, p. 233). A democratic state, for instance, needs to grant citizens equality and freedom. For these reasons, as Melotti (2004) explains, in the public sphere, in exchange for French citizenship and naturalization, foreign citizens should be willing to flatten and repress their own specificities and uniqueness as they learn the host country's language, assimilate its culture, acquaint themselves with its laws, customs and traditions, thus resembling the host country's native-born citizens and becoming totally absorbed into its culture (Melotti, 2004, pp. 16–18).

The model, as Ambrosini (2011) states, makes naturalization easier for individuals deprived of their roots and willing to emancipate from communities of origin characterized by stronger traditions: a few years of residence, no previous convictions, an advanced knowledge of the hosting country's language, history, culture and constitutional foundations help achieve this goal. For those who could not, or did not want to naturalize, they for most part would have meanwhile given birth to French native-born citizens. The second generations of immigrants automatically acquire citizenship under the *ius soli* principle, which states that those who are born on the host country's soil acquire the host country's nationality. In those countries, *ius soli* was therefore already a consolidated reality (Ambrosini, 2011, pp. 223–224). In this model, preserving one's own differences is relegated to one's private life: the only context and dimension the state acknowledges for is practising one's own customs and traditions.

A study conducted in 2011, based on data from the TeO ("Trajectoire et Origines") survey, with a sample of immigrants living in many French cities, showed that transnationalism (any kind of contact with an individual's country of origin, including phone calls, messages of any kind as well as watching TV programmes or listening to

local radio stations etc.) is linked to an individual's socio-economic integration for a many reasons[2]. As a matter of fact, transnationalism can be found both when integration fails, thus pushing the immigrant to return to their country of origin, or when an individual is well integrated and has a good socio-economic situation. What is more, the data collected show that transnationalism does not diminish as years go by. What actually diminishes is the number of cross-border practices across generations: the first generations tend to keep a closer link with their country of origin as they have lived there for longer than the second generations, for whom the transmission of cultural values and traditions of the country of origin implemented by their parents does not compensate enough to keep those links alive (Beauchemin et al., 2011, p. 20). One of the two most controversial aspects of this model, Colombo (2018) explains, regards the difference between the private and public spheres, usually well separated within the concept of multiculturalism, even where the divide between the two is not always well-defined. There is also the requirement to follow universally retained norms and rules for the sake of equality in public life, which is to be obtained by means of transparency, rationality and impartiality, and does in reality unmask the prevailing culture's intent to subtly impose themselves as a model to look up to (Colombo, 2018, p. 55; Green, 1999, pp. 1202–1204; Rodríguez-García, 2010, pp. 253–255).

1.3.2   THE PLURALIST MODEL

The pluralist model may be traced back to the Anglo-Saxon tradition and can be found in British, Dutch and Canadian policies. Unlike the assimilationist model, the pluralist model does not rely upon the equality of all citizens, rather on granting minorities more autonomy: immigrants can form associations, teach their customs and traditions in schools, and practice those traditions in public so long as they do not break any democratic rules or overrun other people's freedoms. For its part, the state needs to ensure compliance with democracy without limiting or suffocating the minorities' need and efforts to display their specificities. This model, Melotti (2004) explains, grants cultural differences higher protection as it allows cultural minorities to continue to exist and live

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[2] The TeO survey was conducted jointly by INED and INSEE. Data collection took place between September 2008 and February 2009. More details on the survey at htt://teo_english.site.ined.fr/(in English) and even more details at htt://teo.site.ined.fr/fr/ (in French).

with other minorities in the host country. This approach favours the coexistence of differences, and it is frequently referred to as the "salad bowl", to stress the variety of its ingredients and the taste and colours they bring, or "glorious mosaic", where every tile adds up to the final picture while retaining its own identity (Bernardi, 1996; Glazer, 1997, as cited in Colombo, 2018, p. 60).

The British model, Renzo Guolo (2009) explains, rests upon a balance of strength and collective negotiation amongst the identities acting in the space they share, with particular emphasis on ethnicities and religions, making it a pluralist science where groups meet and collide and finally make arrangements that are prone to change. The state merely acts as a "guarantor in the agreements" amongst its groups. The concept of freedom is linked to that of autonomy and that of recognition of collective rights rather than that of equality the assimilationist model of France rests instead upon (Guolo, 2009, pp. 3–4). The United Kingdom is an example of this, as it accepts Islamic Court's judgments on divorce, domestic abuse and inheritance disputes as forms of arbitration. There are Sharia Courts in London Birmingham, Manchester, Bradford, Edinburgh and Glasgow, and they all belong to the Muslim Arbitration Tribunal of Nuneaton. The Arbitration Act of 1996 provides legal value to arbitrations where its parties give judges the power to render judgments. So long as these conditions apply, the judgments of an Islamic Court may be transposed by the ordinary courts of the UK or the High Court. This is also done to avoid social cohesion issues such as that of having to choose between loyalty to religion and loyalty to the state. Such recognition does not however embrace the whole *shari'a* body of laws, and in particular it rejects corporal punishment and forms of oppression against women that are contrary to fundamental rights (Guolo, 2009, pp. 3–4; Marotta, 2013; Negri et al., 2018; Odorisio, 2021).

However, this model is not exempt from issues. In fact, as Melotti highlights, even if the state acknowledges its country's minorities, this model ends up emphasizing differences between those minorities and their (dominating) host community. Foreign communities' display of specificities enjoys a lower degree of display compared to those of indigenous communities, unveiling the latter's dominance (Melotti, 2004, p. 23). Another risk may also be that of emphasizing differences amongst ethnic minorities, thus strengthening

relationships with some communities rather than others, ending up creating first and second class immigrants (Colombo, 2018, p. 58; Mathieu, 2018, pp. 46–48; Rodríguez-García, 2010, pp. 254–256; Singh et al., 2003, pp. 5–7).

1.3.3 THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF PRECARIOUS MIGRATORY STATUS MODEL

This model was implemented in Germany after World War II, between the mid 1950s and the early 1960s, and differs quite a lot from the other two models, which are apparently more inclusive (Melotti, 2004, pp. 29–30). Ambrosini (2011) explains that this model perceives immigration as an incidental phenomenon of people called to work because they are needed to meet specific market demands, but who are not supposed to put down roots: they are expected to return to their country of origin or else it would be possible to send them back when no longer useful. At first, their residence permit is linked to their work permit, and once dismissed they are automatically expelled and repatriated. In some cases, like in Germany, immigrant labour shifts were attempted, thus implying refusal to renew their residence permit after a few years of residence, replacing them with new immigrants when necessary.

This model sees immigrants as temporary guests, or rather "guest workers" (*Gastarbeiter),* that is "visitors" hosted for work purposes only. It is purely functional to the needs of the host country, where the integration of workers is kept to a minimum: equal pay and working conditions that could include the presence of dormitories; poor investments in the teaching of language or the taking of other social measures (Ambrosini, 2011, p. 222). Such efficient integration in the job market is however counterbalanced by total exclusion from German society and culture: immigrants are perceived as different, aliens that cannot be compared to the dominant community, even more so if theirs is a fixed-term permanence. Encouraged to associate to keep their cultures alive, and their children encouraged to learn the language and traditions of their parents' home countries so as not to lose their ties with those countries where they were supposed to return to, it was virtually impossible for them to obtain citizenship, as it was even denied to their Germany-born children. For the same reasons, not even third generations could be

naturalized (Colombo, 2018, pp. 58–59; Guolo, 2009, pp. 4–5; Melotti, 2004, pp. 29–31; Riphahn, 2004, p. 3; Rodríguez-García, 2010, p. 253).

However, in 2000 new immigration policies were adopted that introduced *ius soli* in Germany as well, and the early years of the 21st century witnessed a return of the model of labour immigration revived by borrowing an expression ("admission as a seasonal worker") from the vocabulary used in the field of production models, whereby workers are admitted for a few months only to meet the demand of labour in some specific sectors[3]. As Ambrosini (2011) writes, in the softened language of the European Union institutions it is also referred to as "circular migration" to stress the need to repatriate migrants to their country of origin on a regular basis before being readmitted into the host country (Ambrosini, 2011, p. 223). The main issues raised by the institutionalization of precarious migratory status model relate to the fixed-term kind of permanence of immigrants and the idea of a cultural belonging nature that builds on "blood ties", inextricably inborn and inherited from shared ancestors, memories, values and traditions.

1.4   MULTICULTURALISM: CRUCIAL AREAS FOR DISCUSSION

After analysing the concept of difference and the phenomenon of multiculturalism, I believe it is crucial to focus on the main areas for discussion raised by multiculturalism. The areas within which the debate on multiculturalism rapidly has proved long and wide mainly concern language, identity and freedom of religion, and they will be dealt with in this section.

1.4.1   INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

The debates that focus on language, on the definition of social realities and on the negative representations of minorities are quite recent. Giusti (2009) states that language is a means used to identify individuals as belonging to the geographic or social community in which they find themselves by a different accent or a misuse of terms. This may suffice for them

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[3] For further details, see DIRECTIVE 2014/36/EU OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers ,https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32014L0036, and Martines, F., 2017, Gli Strumenti dell'Unione Europea per promuovere la migrazione circolare tra obiettivi di sviluppo e interessi economici degli Stati membri, *federalismi.it*, 1, https://www.federalismi.it/.

to be labelled as "coming from elsewhere" or belonging to a "different" social group. What is more, products or materials that are part of a well-defined social reality are named using specific vocabulary, and as such may have a neutral, positive or negative connotation (Giusti & Regazzoni, 2009, p. 89). It is little wonder that language may appear as offensive for a given group of individuals, usually disadvantaged or belonging to a minority, who may claim the right to be addressed using specific terms. In such circumstances, there is a need to refer to individuals or groups belonging to minorities using terms that may are not offensive and avoid the belittling associated with certain behaviours, labels and representations, hence the expression "inclusive" language, used to stress the importance of such a need (Giusti & Regazzoni, 2009, pp. 89–90). The expression "inclusive" language is used to pinpoint a cultural or ideological orientation set out to respect anyone, in an attempt to avoid offending any category of people. Such an orientation implies that opinions or designations need to be free of prejudice regarding race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, physical and mental disabilities in both (language) form and substance (Moller, 2019, pp. 2–3).

Some terms, such as slurs, are labels that may be filled with negative moral judgement, identifying differences depending on the so-called "normality" of the "white able-bodied heterosexual". Such terms tend to be replaced by other collocations, in order to avoid, for example, the identifying someone based solely on the colour of their skin or stigmatizing them for having physical or mental impairments (Andrews, 1996, pp. 389–391; Chiurco, 2013, p. 8; Tsehelska, 2006, p. 21).

Moreover, as F. Houghton and S. Houghton (2018) explain, discriminatory language is nowadays broadly and subtly stuck in our heads so much so that it is sometimes hard to realize if we are being discriminatory towards someone. Suffice to think of terms such as "whitelist" and "blacklist". Whereas the term whitelist is used to include all that is deemed as good and reputable, the term blacklist is used to indicate the opposite. The dichotomy between black and white, meaning good vs. evil, is apparent and is socially accepted. Similar expressions include: "black sheep" and "black market", where the adjective "black" has a negative connotation, in that it stands for "illegal", "ill-famed",

"untrustworthy", and "outcast" (Harlow, 2015, p. 28; Houghton & Houghton, 2018, p. 528; Masocha, 2017, p. 160).

Needless to say the meaning of a term may be positive or negative depending on the context, as sociolinguist Vera Gheno (2021) explains: one only needs to think of those terms which are nowadays obsolete as they are deemed offensive most anywhere, even if in some communities they are used with pride to claim a sense of belonging (Gheno, 2021).

Similarly, although I am unable to analyse feminist and LGBTQ+ movements in depth in the present study, I believe it is worth mentioning the battles these categories of people are carrying out as they also defend language from sexism, thus standing up for a more inclusive language. Feminist movements still protest against the use of the masculine gender when addressing all mankind, claiming it contributed to building a reality where the masculine gender is dominant. Such a use of language, Vera Gheno states, fosters a male-dominated culture which is well rooted, yet not insurmountable. In fact, nowadays, in modern Italian society the female gender is used as well, and even placed before the male gender (i.e. "dear ladies and gentlemen"). However, women are not the only ones being excluded from the language that is commonly used. Amongst those people who feel excluded are those that do not fall within the "man/woman" classification, such as those belonging to the LGBTQ+ community (gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, intersex etc.) (Gheno, 2021). This is quite a complex question, and proposals were made, such as that of Luca Boschetto (2015), who suggests the use of the "*schwa*" in favour of a more inclusive and gender-neutral language. The schwa, Boschetto explains, is an indistinct vowel of the International Phonetic Alphabet identified through the use of a symbol (ə) that does not exist in the Italian vocabulary, except in its dialects and regional languages (see /Nàpulə/ in Neapolitan), due to its neutral, unrounded and accent free sound which might help overcome gender discrimination (Boschetto, 2015; Gheno, 2019, pp. 167–168; Lavinio, 2021, pp. 37–38).

Chiurco (2018) stresses the importance of language as a powerful tool for social change which can be used to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudice. As already discussed, non-

discriminatory language is about all language forms and in particular that vocabulary that does not stereotype, label, belittle or delete, but rather respects the dignity of each person regardless of their social, economic and juridical status. Therefore, a more inclusive use of language plays a fundamental role in the struggle against some of the phenomena that affect our multicultural societies, such as racism, anti-Gypsyism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, discrimination on grounds of disability etc. (Chiurco, 2018, pp. 8–13). The use of inclusive language is growing across multicultural societies, and language experimentation and transformations are in constant development, especially in the recent years.

1.4.2 LINGUISTIC IDENTITY

Another very heated debate stemming from multicultural societies concerns the learning of the host country's language, and the role of the migrants' own language(s) of origin. Often, in our contemporary societies we tend to think that learning the host country's language is core to social inclusion and is essential to access labour, education and healthcare. Linguistic assimilation is believed to be the road to a proper social inclusion. (Extra & Barni, 2008, p. 17; Piller & Takahashi, 2011, p. 374). Piller (2011) highlights how linguistic assimilation is associated with social inclusion, whereas linguistic diversity is associated with social exclusion. Such a thought tends to spread with mass migrations to the New World in the 21st century, where linguistic assimilation would foster both social inclusion and a greater economic prosperity. In Europe, nationalism and the "one nation-one language" feeling favoured monolingualism to the detriment of multilingualism, which, unlike the first, would often pair up with terms and expressions such as "cohesion", "inclusion" and "social justice", and was as such perceived as a cause for social breakdown (Piller & Takahashi, 2011, p. 374). The onset of liberal democracies of the second half of the 1990s strengthened the belief that migrants had to learn the host country's (local) language. As Piller (2010) once again shows, the reports developed globally stressing the importance of the English language in English speaking countries such as Australia for the purpose of employment abound. The fact that migrants that were born and raised in an English speaking country have more chances to find a job compared to those who were not shows how important language is when it comes down to finding a job (Piller & Takahashi, 2010; Val Colic-Peisker & Farida Tilbury, 2007, p. 17).

With regard to the social inclusion/exclusion dichotomy, Piller (2011) raises another issue, that of the monolingual bias of institutions. In fact, she points out that despite the debates raised over the need to implement linguistic recognition as well as multilingual political plans with a view to fostering social inclusion and safeguarding linguistic minorities, most institutions remain monolingual. Such an issue, spread amongst many European countries, had already been raised between the 1960s and the 1970s by most civil rights and emancipation movements supporting diversities. These movements enhanced and celebrated bilingualism and multilingualism as they blamed the monolingualism of institutions, believed to penalize and discriminate against language minorities and non-standard language varieties. Such a monolingual mindset is often identified by sociolinguists as the linguistic ideology primarily responsible for exclusion across polyglot peoples (Piller & Takahashi, 2011, pp. 377–378), and can also be found in the teaching of the host country's language, which, as Haznedar, Peyton and Scholten (2018) explain, remains the most widely taught to the detriment of the migrants' own language(s). The focus thus remains on the language that needs to be learned and developed so that it enables migrants to integrate into society as soon as possible. A multicultural and inclusive approach should however support the development and knowledge of all of the languages the migrant knows and uses (Haznedar et al., 2018, p. 159). Allowing migrants to practice and develop their own language of origin as well helps them maintain a link with their culture and country of origin, and at the same time enriches the host country's people with plurilingualism, which, as some studies show, may benefit the learning of foreign languages (Avermaet & Gysen, 2006; McAreavey, 2010, pp. 13–14; Plutzar & Ritter, 2008, p. 8). A Finnish study carried out within the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reveals that students proficient in their own native language got the best results in Finnish as a foreign language (Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2014, cited by Haznedar et al., 2018, p. 160).

As Plutzar and Ritter (2008) highlight, it is common for migrants to think and express themselves using their language of origin, and gradually shift to the local language only afterwards. Such a language learning and integration process should be supported to show

respect for the identities of migrants and to help them adapt to their new environment (Plutzar & Ritter, 2008, pp. 9–10).

1.4.3 RELIGION

The freedom of religious expression is another crucial area for discussion raised by multiculturalism, and is probably the most debated. In particular, as Colombo (2018) states, such issues are often intertwined with the request for the recognition of a specific identity that would entitle believers to practice traditions that build on values and beliefs of their minority, which might at the same time be in conflict with those of the dominating community. That is why many Western liberal states confine such behaviours to the private sphere of those belonging to cultural minorities, in an attempt to maintain public order (Colombo, 2018, pp. 74, 102). This does however imply some limitations: first, it is hard to keep the private and public spheres separate in a clear way; secondly, this basically only applies to minorities, whereas the majority community is not subject to those restrictions (Modood, 2014, pp. 16–17, 25).

As for religious beliefs, one prominent example is posed by the many Islamic women's requests to be free to wear their traditional headgear (the hijab): the debate, brought into the open in 1989, when in Criel, France, one day three Islamic girls went to school wearing their hijab. The school authorities then requested the three girls to take off their hijab, but the girls refused to do so, so they were expelled from school (Colombo, 2018, p. 74). After that, many other Islamic girls followed the three girls' footsteps: in 1999, 17 students were expelled from public schools all over France for wearing their hijab (Hamdan, 2007, p. 4). Such a seemingly trivial anecdote raises crucial issues. As Colombo (2018) explains, the hijab cannot be considered as a simple fashion-imposed garment, and that would be contrary to the expectations of the protagonists of this story. Such a request is strongly symbolic as it regards the recognition of the girls' own identity, whose desire is to be seen and accepted in school as Muslims (Colombo, 2018, p. 75).

All of this clashes against the stand of a country like France, which supports the secularism of state schools and argues that in the public space everyone should be treated

the same. The hijab issue therefore appears at the same time both as a request for identity recognition and a challenge to the rules of the country in question (Hamdan, 2007, p. 7). In 2004, all of this led former Prime Minister of France, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, to approve the first French law banning religious symbols in school, with special regard to the hijab. No government has tried to change that law since then, as it fits the law on the secularity of the State of 1905 (Ginori, 2021). On the contrary, in 2010, under Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency, a new law banned the use of the *niquab*, the full Islamic veil, in the public space, as it would prevent identification (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2010; Magri, 2021). Islamic terrorism and gender equality have contributed to exacerbating such restrictions, even though such positions were widely criticised in that they were perceived as excuses aimed at suppressing the large Islamic community of France (Hamdan, 2007, pp. 4–11). Today this debate is still heated: in 2018, the UN stated that the banning of the *niquab* clashes against the right everyone has to freely display their religious belief, and that all of this risks marginalizing Islamic women by confining them home instead of protecting them (Ginori, 2018). What is more, many students, influencers and models protested against the banning of the veil by creating campaigns in favour of those women wanting to wear their veil, as one slogan goes "Beauty is in diversity as freedom is in hijab" (BBC, 2021; Europatoday, 2021).

Similar issues are posed by the requests for recognition of polygamy in Italy, where bigamy is a crime (Mancuso, n.d., pp. 115, 123), and by the requests, made by the Indian Sikhs of Great Britain, to wear their traditional headgear when they drive a motorcycle and so be exempted from the use of a helmet or other more radical and controversial practices implying symbolic and physical violence, including scarification or genital mutilations, which have been unlawful in the UK since 1861, and still are as stated by The Female Genital Mutilation Act of 2003 (Di Pietro, 2006, pp. 26–27). The symbolic recognition of the importance of belonging to a specific group, for the full development of individual identity as well as for the subsequent commitment to protecting such differences from being suffocated and absorbed by the majority, jeopardized western social life patterns based on equality, individual freedom and on the principle of democracy in such a way that is hard to solve (Colombo, 2018, pp. 57–76).

The debate over the different models of multiculturalism has raised questions of social justice, equality and full participation and recognition of minorities in community life, with constant reference to the meaning attributed to differences, to the distinction between the public and private spheres, to the definition of common rules, to the position of power of the dominant group and the responsibilities that come with it.

2 PADUA AND OTHER MULTILINGUAL CITIES

This chapter focuses on multilingual cities. To do so, a definition of multilingualism needs to be provided, and this can only attained by briefly retracing the history of this phenomenon. An overview of the main features of a multilingual city and an analysis of some of the main factors affecting urban centres, with particular regard to the demographics as well as to the institutional support and control factors of the city of Padua and the district of Arcella, will follow.

2.1 MULTILINGUALISM AND MULTILINGUAL CITIES

Providing a definition of the term multilingualism, may be difficult and misleading. In fact, quite often, in our everyday language, this may simply refer to the ability of an individual to communicate in more than one language. However, it can also refer to the coexistence of more languages in a given territory.   To avoid creating ambiguity, I will refer to the terms multilingualism and plurilingualism based on the definition provided by the Council of Europe, which reads as follows:

> 'multilingualism' refers to the presence in a geographical area, large or small, of more than one 'variety of language' i.e. the mode of speaking of a social group whether it is formally recognised as a language or not; in such an area individuals may be monolingual speaking only their own variety. […] 'plurilingualism' refers to languages not as objects but from the point of view of those who speak them. It refers to the repertoire of varieties of language which many individuals use, and is therefore the opposite of monolingualism; it includes the language variety referred to as 'mother tongue' or 'first language' and any number of other languages or varieties. Thus in some multilingual areas some individuals may be monolingual and some may be plurilingual (Beacco, 2007, p. 8).

Multilingualism thus refers to the ensemble of languages of different communities that are spoken in a given geographical area. Language varieties spoken in a multilingual city are numerous, especially if one considers varieties such as the language spoken at kindergarten to interact with children, the language of commerce or even the informal language spoken with friends. Since counting all language varieties spoken in a given

area can be misleading and unproductive, it is generally acknowledged that an urban centre may qualify as multilingual whenever it records the presence of speakers of languages belonging to two or more distinct communities. However, multilingualism may often be invisible. In fact, as King (2018) states, in most big cities, minority languages that do not belong to the host city are commonly used in smaller communities such as the family, thus confining their use to the private sphere, with rare forays into the public sphere. Nonetheless, in most recent years, hearing languages other than the majority language spoken in a given area or seeing those graphically represented, even by means of different writing systems and alphabets, has become familiar. Citizens are unknowingly surrounded by multilingualism, and amongst the most striking examples are ethnic shops, which are now welcomed and have become an integral part of our cities (King, 2018, p. 8). Ultimately, I will try to unveil when multilingual cities have begun to be talked about and when urban centres have become to be populated by different cultures and languages.

First of all, it is important to remember that multiculturalism is no recent phenomenon, as urban centres trace back to ancient times. It is enough to recall that the dynamism of urban multilingualism is recounted in the most famous myth of the Tower of Babel, where monolingualism was replaced by the use of many different languages. Even though in this biblical story multilingualism represents punishment, in ancient societies it was instead widely accepted. In most urban centres, contact between people from different cultural, social and economic contexts, and thus speaking different languages, were commonplace, and contributed to the vitality of urban multilingualism "VUM" (King & Carson, 2015, p. 18). In fact, as Blanc (2008, as cited in Sachdev & Cartwright, 2015, pp. 19–20) explains, if we were to draw a line of the evolution of ancient multilingualism, this would start from the Proto-Elamite (historical period tracing back to the 3000 B.C.), would then cut across the Egyptian, Sumerian, and Aramaic through to the Greek and Roman Empires. Amongst the examples of multilingualism cited by Blanc (2008), there is the Rosetta Stone. Written in two languages and three registers, the Rosetta Stone represents a class of bilingual officers born to mediate between the local population speaking Egyptian Arabic and the administrative community, mostly made up of immigrants, who spoke Greek instead. Another multilingual context was the Roman

Empire, as described by Rochette (2011, as cited in Sachdev & Cartwright, 2015, p. 20), where Latin was never imposed, not even on new colonies. This is the philosophy that favoured multilingualism, especially thanks to the general trend of translating documents from Greek into Latin, which favoured the spread of bilingualism in many regions. It is nonetheless unproductive to rely on writing as a measure of the spread of multilingualism and multiculturalism, as writing remained for long a privilege of the few. A clearer picture of this is instead provided by the oral use of all languages spoken by all peoples and communities belonging to the Roman Empire. The coexistence of Vulgar Latin and Romance languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, Romanian are evidence of the rise and spread of multilingual societies. Other multilingual and multi-ethnic societies could be found in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the Russian Empire and in the Ottoman Empire, which were all led by a specific ethnical group, but at the same time displayed strong ethnical, religious and linguistic tolerance (Sachdev & Cartwright, 2015, pp. 20–21).

If multilingual societies have ancient roots, why do they appear as a recent phenomenon at the core of political debates? As Blackledge (2000) states, between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 20th century, and especially starting from the French Revolution (1789), nation-states started to develop as a result of the ever spread process of nationalization that rests upon the "one nation – one language" philosophy. In the 20th century, most countries would officially recognize one language, the national language, or even repress any language minority. This is where multilingualism, which characterized older societies, was replaced by ideological monolingualism. Although this trend soon took a downturn, embracing new language policies aimed at promoting multilingualism and recovering language minorities did not seem very easy, and so it is yet today. This is probably due to the recent rediscovery of monolingualism and to the strong support provided by nationalist ideologies. However, once the Cold War ended, and as the end of the 20th century started to loom, the monolingual hegemony started faltering due to, amongst other things, the onset of globalization, the increased movement of people, ideas and assets, and not least the strong technological development (Blackledge, 2000). These changes broke down national barriers (Stoicheva, 2015, p. 100), both virtual and physical, thus leading to a comeback of more heterogeneous

societies as well as multicultural and multilingual contexts. This is when urban centres started repopulating with people belonging to different cultures and languages, thus once again triggering the debate over multiculturalism and multilingualism (Sachdev & Cartwright, 2015, pp. 21–22). What then are the main features of these new multilingual urban contexts? How do we recognize a multilingual city? The answers to these questions will be dealt with in the following section.

2.2   FEATURES OF MULTILINGUAL CITIES

In this section, I will analyse some of the features that give some cities a greater multilingual character compared to others, and will dwell longer on those factors that make it possible to assess the degree of multilingualism of a given city, including those aspects linked to its history, geography, demographics, social status, and institutional support.

2.2.1   THE ROLE PLAYED BY HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

As mentioned above, the ancient societies where multiculturalism and multilingualism existed were numerous. It is therefore no accident that today some cities are characterized by a longstanding multilingualism coming from those past realities. It stands to reason that those urban realities where multilingualism is all but a recent phenomenon boast a greater multilingual character as compared to others where this phenomenon took root only later. Based on some Multilingual City Reports published by LUCIDE[4], Rome is amongst those cities boasting a great multilingual character. The capital of Italy has a huge historical patrimony, and it is at the same time the seat of the Vatican, and therefore a favourite destination of tourists coming from all over the world (Evangelisti et al., 2015). Another city boasting quite ancient multilingualism is Varna, in Bulgaria. This city is characterized by a complex history of multilingualism linked to its varied generations of colonists that settled there: Thracians, Greeks, Romans, and even Ottomans, thus making it one of the most important tourist destination (Tankova et al., 2015).

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[4] The LUCIDE network (Languages in Urban Communities: Integration and Diversity for Europe) was funded by the European Commission under its Lifelong Learning Programme. It is composed of universities and civic partners, and represents 18 cities (13 in Europe and 5 others between Canada and Australia). For more details, see: https://www.languagescompany.com/projects/lucide/.

Another aspect that plays a fundamental role in the degree of multilingualism of a city is its geographic position. Cities boasting strategic positions favoured the meeting and clash of more civilizations. Due to its geographic position, Limassol, a harbour city in the south coast of the island of Cyprus, boasts a rich multilingual history, including French under the Medieval period, Italian under the Venetians, Turkish under the Ottomans, and English under the British Empire up to the present day. Today, for the same reasons, other languages such as Russian and Chinese have joined its territory (Council of the European Union, 2014; Papadima-Sophocleous et al., 2014). Another important city for its geographic position is Strasbourg. Situated in an area, that of Alsace, which has always been contended due to its geographic position between France and Germany, it finally found its borders within France only at the end of World War II. Coming to symbolize the reconciliation between the two countries, in 1949 Strasbourg became the seat of the Council of Europe and of another twenty European institutions, thus contributing to its already strong multilingual character (Hélot et al., 2015).

2.2.2   THE ROLE PLAYED BY DEMOGRAPHICS

A city's multilingual character is particularly affected by demographics, as it strongly depends on the size of the city, the migration flows it records and the mobility of its population. As regards size, the greater the number of its inhabitants the higher the chance for a city to be populated by speakers of more languages, be they mother tongues, foreign languages or local dialects. However, as Stoicheva (2015) states, the ethnolinguistic diversity of a city does not vary merely depending on the figures and size of a community, but also on their proportion and distribution. The multilingual character of a city may be enriched by three factors linked to mobility: migration flows; any agreement made which might have facilitated the movement of people; and the mobility linked to education and tourism. Migration flows, past and recent, are strongly connected to a high degree of multilingualism. Suffice to think of cities such as Hamburg, London or Melbourne, which were formed and further developed following multilingual migration flows. Today's migrants have a strong multilingual impact as well, contributing to language diversity (Stoicheva, 2015, p. 88). Within cities, hundreds of languages and language groups can be tracked (i.e. 190 in Hamburg, 183 in Madrid, 233 in London). It is however worth

mentioning that these figures are always understated since language varieties and dialects are not counted (Sachdev & Cartwright, 2015, p. 42).

As Stoicheva (2015) describes, another phenomenon that contributed to the growth of urban multilingualism is the free exchange of individuals and goods. An example of freedom of movement is represented by the Schengen area. This agreement, signed in 1985 between some European member states, favoured both mobility and the exchange of individuals across European Union member states, thus enlarging the number of languages and cultures that would progressively add up to the ones already existing as other member states joined the agreement (Stoicheva, 2015, p. 100). Last but not least, equally important to the vitality of a city's multilingualism is tourism and study related mobility. As Stoicheva explains, even if tourists and international students are considered as temporary migrants, they have a strong impact on a city's multilingual character. This category may also include some migrants and refugees, especially those who make a stopover in a city as they reach their final destination. Cities with prestigious universities attract a great number of international students, as well as scholars, graduates and academics. What is more, exchange programmes such as Erasmus+ are now deemed socially necessary to complement a good quality educational path (Stoicheva, 2015, p. 101).

Another transitory phenomenon, which is often deemed as a major cause of multilingualism, is tourism. As King (2018) states, there are valid reasons for considering tourists as fundamental agents as regards the image of a multilingual city, since they represent a large group of people "occupying" a given urban space who are constantly present in the urban context so as to often influence the city landscape (King, 2018, p. 12).

2.2.3   PRESTIGE AS A FACTOR OF MULTILINGUAL VITALITY

Even though demographics is essential to the vitality of a city's multilingualism, the prestige of a language plays an important role as well. As Sachdev and Cartwright (2015) state, the status of a language rests on and is determined by historical, social and economic factors, and it can vary depending on the context where that language is used. An example

of this, which I have already hinted at, and that can be found in Sachdev and Cartwright's paper (2015), traces back to nationalism (one language – one nation), which is a context where national languages have been strongly socially recognized, thus increasing their prestige compared to other minor linguistic variants. Suffice to think of how an individual is nowadays perceived in a formal context, when they do not speak the Italian language, but an Italian dialect instead. After the rise of globalization and the development of new technologies, other languages rose to the status of prestigious languages right beside national languages. The English language, for instance, has reached a very high social status in today's society, up to the point of "invading" dimensions that are, without limitation, related to culture, trade, education and many more. What is more, the English language has become a lingua franca, thus making the spread of bilingualism easier in non-English-speaking countries (Sachdev & Cartwright, 2015, pp. 43–44).

Other languages that are well-known and are often appreciated in curricula are other European languages such as French, German, and Spanish. Such "prestigious multilingualism", King (2018) explains, is in itself a form of multilingualism that concerns those individuals who have a high level of education, which is deemed as necessary to have greater job opportunities or a reach a higher social status. Such a multilingual display is the "face" of a city linked to tourism and labour market. However, a city may have a second, less visible, "face" too, which is made up of all those languages that are considered to be less prestigious, as is normally the case with the so-called "new immigrants"' mother tongues. Nonetheless, these languages are becoming more and more visible and are starting to have an impact on urban areas (Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica, 2020a). This distinction between more prestigious vs. less prestigious languages has an impact on all monitoring and support institutions, be they formal or not, and on the image of society (King, 2018, p. 8; Sachdev & Cartwright, 2015, p. 44).

2.2.4 ISTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND CONTROL FACTORS

Normally, "institutional support and control factors" is an expression used to include both formal and informal institutions which operate in the spheres of education, politics, religion, culture and media (Sachdev & Cartwright, 2015, p. 44). As Sachdev and

Cartwright (2015) state, in a democratic country, the most important institutions are normally managed by the majority, thus exercising their control over minorities. Only a few states recognize linguistic minorities and support them. They are in fact usually ignored, and in most Western countries, monolingualism is inherited by way of nationalistic traditions. Public education, social and cultural institutions, and media are normally monolingual, and as such speak the country's official language. For instance, all over Europe, the languages used in school are the official, namely national, ones(Sachdev & Cartwright, 2015, p. 45). Foreign languages are taught at school due to the promotion the European Union made of multilingualism, which can summed up as follows using the EU's own words:

> […] to adopt and improve measures aimed at promoting multilingualism and enhancing the quality and efficiency of language learning and teaching, including by teaching at least two languages in addition to the main language(s) of instruction […] (Council of the European Union, 2014).

However, only the most prestigious foreign languages, such as English, French, German and Spanish, are normally taught in school, recently joined by Russian and Mandarin Chinese (Eurostat, 2017). Such a political selection, Sachev and Cartwright write, encourages the integration of minority languages within the most common and thus dominant opinion, which in the past, through an assimilationist approach, led to the phasing-out of languages and cultures belonging to minorities. Despite this trend, many institutions have made efforts to meet the needs of minorities, especially as far as social care, healthcare and township are concerned. In fact, linguistic minorities that are not recognized usually evolve locally. This is where local agencies and organizations take steps to meet the communicative needs of these communities (Sachdev & Cartwright, 2015, p. 45). Even if these activities do not affect the status and rights of minority languages, they are a practical and fundamental tool for the management of the linguistic diversity of the city. Amongst the most important language policies recorded by Skrandies (2015), which are supported by local organizations, be they private or public, are: the use of other languages by public institutions to transmit special information to citizens or foreign visitors that do not speak that country's official language; language schools, be they dedicated to the teaching of the host country's official language or those of minorities; foundations promoting festivals or cultural activities of their host cities;

organizations or companies supporting and selling products in different languages (i.e. books, audio-visual materials); the adoption of strategies aimed at supporting language diversity and integration (Skrandies, 2015, pp. 126–127).

2.2.5   THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF CITIES

The study of the Linguistic Landscape (LL) of cities is quite a recent subject matter that is rapidly growing. It is a wide field embracing several disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, semiotics, political science, geography and urban planning (Dixson, 2015, p. 5; Van Mensel et al., 2017, p. 423). The first scholars who attempted to provide a definition of "linguistic landscape" were Landry and Bourhis (2016):

> The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. (Landry & Bourhis, 2016, p. 23).

Even if this definition seems to fit the concept of linguistic landscape well, Gorter (2013) highlights how the latest technological advances have contributed in increasing the number and type of signs (i.e. "electronic flat-panel displays, LED neon lights, foam boards, electronic message centres, interactive touch screens, inflatable signage, and scrolling banners (Gorter, 2013, p. 191). It therefore focuses on urban spaces and audio-visual characteristics that can be found within a city: the term "landscape" does in fact often include audio and visual aspects. However, in the definitions provided by Landry and Bourhis (2016), we may clearly distinguish between "landscape" and "soundscape". The latter refers to all that we hear and listen to in a given urban context, from private or public conversations through to radio or television broadcasts. The term "landscape" instead refers to all visual aspects, such as signs, panels, billboards, street art, graffiti, advertisements, instructions or directions.

A distinction is made instead between public and private signs: public signs include all those panels and advertisements one can find in public spaces such as city halls, universities or urban parks; private signs do instead include those belonging to retailers, associations, businesses, transport agencies etc. that normally greatly absorb and reflect the language diversity of a given place (Landry & Bourhis, 2016, pp. 25–27). What is

more, as Carson (2016) believes, in the study of the linguistic landscape of cities and of the vitality of multilingualism, liminal spaces and "transgressive discourses" play an important role. Liminal spaces are delimited areas that include temporary signs, such as notice board messages, newspaper posters, event advertising etc.; "transgressive discourses" include instead all those non-conventional signs such as unauthorized graffiti (Carson, 2016, p. 70).

What kind of linguistic information do we however take out of an urban context? As Gorter (2006) states, "the language signs in the cities can be taken as the literal panorama a spectator will see when walking the streets, but that same view reflects somehow the language composition of the inhabitants (and probably visitors) of the city." (Gorter, 2006, p. 82). In fact, Landry and Bourhis (2016) believe that the first kind of information the study of language landscape provides us with helps us define and narrow the geographical territory of a specific language group. We may retrieve more by analysing signs and panels: most of these are written in the dominant group's language, normally the national or official language of that country, which is a clear indication of the fact that with a view to benefiting from goods and services we will have to use that language. Nonetheless, linguistic territories are all but homogeneous, and that explains why the study of the "landscape" of a city provides us with information about other languages used in that area, on its communities and their distribution. We may grasp and appreciate the prestige and social status only by examining the position and formatting of the translated content. For instance, on a panel, the most prestigious language of a given territory, that is the one that is most often used, precedes those that are deemed as minor, that is those that are used less frequently, which appear written right below and with a smaller font (Landry & Bourhis, 2016, p. 26). Cenoz and Gorter (2006) too underline the importance of studying the linguistic landscape.

The linguistic landscape may offer insights into the sociolinguistic context and on the use of different languages in a given territory, as well as on the relationship between those languages. There seems to be a two-way relationship between the linguistic landscape and the sociolinguistic context: on one hand, the linguistic landscape displays the strength and the status of the various languages that are present in a given sociolinguistic context;

on the other hand, the linguistic landscape helps build the sociolinguistic context "because people process the visual information that comes to them, and the language in which signs are written can certainly influence their perception of the status of the different languages and even affect their own linguistic behaviour" (Bogatto & Helot, 2010, p. 276; Cenoz & Gorter, 2006, pp. 67–68).

In a city, we are surrounded by numerous signals and messages, and by simply looking at the language context of that city we may retrieve much information. As Jacobs (1961) writes, cities are an intertwining of persons, ideas and different languages, and their architecture reflects these diversities:

> [City's streets] make a visual announcement (very useful to us for understanding the order of cities) that this is an intense life and that into its composition go many different things. They make this announcement to us not only because we may see considerable activity itself, but because we see, in different types of buildings, signs, store fronts or other enterprises or institutions, and so on, the inanimate evidences of activity and diversity (Jacobs, 1961, p. 378).

2.3   PADUA

In this section I will approach some of the features connected to the multilingualism of the city of Padua, with special focus on the district of Arcella and on the city's institutional support and control factors.

2.3.1   THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF PADUA

With almost one million inhabitants (209,420 units as of 31 December 2020) (Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica, 2020a), Padua is the most populated amongst Veneto's provinces. To record Padua's multilingualism vitality, it is imperative to look closely at all available data on tourists, students, and foreign residents and at their distribution as well.

2.3.2   TOURISM IN PADUA

Padua is an important tourist destination, because of its artistic and natural heritage: it does in fact host mountains, the sea, lakes and Spa areas. Based on the data of the

"Annuari del Comune di Padova"[5], the city has seen a progressive increase in the number of tourists, Italian and foreigners alike, who walk through Padua or stay there: 728,041 arrivals in 2019 alone, of which 335,350 were foreigners. The total presences for the same year were instead 1,657,672, of which 704,547 were foreigners. The first three European countries that chose Padua as a tourist destination in 2019 were Germany (24,871 arrivals; 58,126 presences), France (19,089 arrivals; 40,532 presences) and Spain (16,769 arrivals; 36,835 presences), whereas the three main non-European countries were the United States of America (21,468 arrivals; 53,491 presences), China (33,721 arrivals; 55,016 presences) and India (32,284 arrivals; 37,737 presences) (Comune di Padova, 2019). Even if tourists are normally considered as temporary migrants, and thus do not carry much weight for statistics purposes, in the case of a tourist city like Padua they are also important, especially as far as multilingualism is concerned.

2.3.3 THE UNIVERSITY OF PADUA

Padua is not only a tourist destination, but above all a university city. Established in 1222, the University of Padua has always been a record-breaking one: it boasts the first botanical garden managed by a university in the whole world (established in 1545 it was designated a UNESCO heritage site in 1997); the first anatomy theatre (inaugurated in 1594); the world's first female graduate (Elena Lucrezia Cornaro). What is more, its university continues to enjoy great prestige, and still ranks at high levels both nationally and internationally for the quality of teaching, research and services (Università degli Studi di Padova, 2022b). In fact, despite the pandemic, the CENSIS[6] once again ranks the University of Padua at the top of Italian universities for the academic year 2020/2021, closing in on second place on the list of the biggest universities (those with more than 40,000 students) (Censis, 2021). Every year, the University of Padua receives about 60,000 students, and in the 2020/2021 academic year it totalled 63,031 students, of which 3,943 were international students (Ministero dell'Università e della

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[5] Padua's Statistical Yearbook provides all relevant information related to the city's demographics, economy, society and environment with a view to updating the knowledge of the territory and assess its evolution, while also providing quality statistics.
[6] The CENSIS (Centro Studi Investimenti Sociali) is a socio-economic research institute carrying out studies that focus on economics, territory developments, contingency plans and cultural initiatives in vital areas of society such as education, employment, welfare, healthcare, media, communication, government activities and public security.

Ricerca, 2021)[7]. What is more, the University of Padua does not only attract students, but teachers too. Amongst the activities addressed to professors there are seminars and workshops in the EMI (English Medium of Instruction) field which are organized each year by the CLA (Centro Linguistico di Ateneo), the University Language Centre. For almost a decade, the CLA has proved to be a national leader in the EMI field by implementing training courses for teaching in English for professors which are held by both international and domestic experts (Università degli Studi di Padova, 2014). Padua's multilingualism owes this mainly to the attendance of international students and professors that choose Padua every year carrying with them their thoughts, language and culture from all four corners of the world.

2.3.4   PADUA AND ITS RESIDENT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The data on foreign residents made available in the Statistical Yearbooks of the "Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica del Comune di Padova"[8] show that in the last 20 years the number of resident international students has increased exponentially:
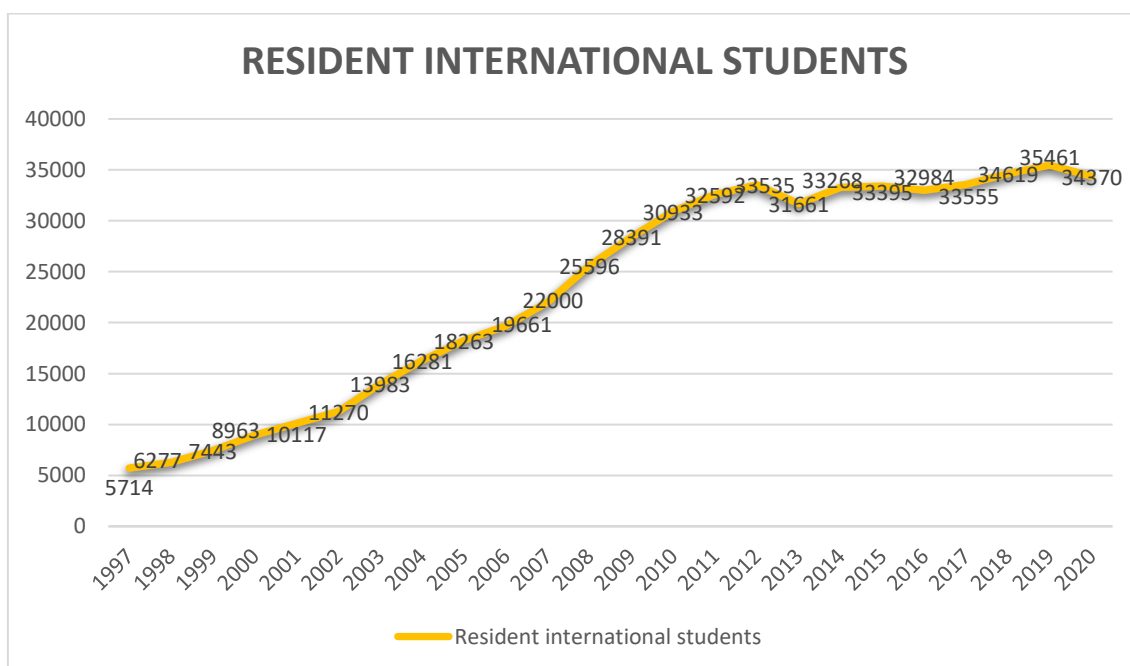
Figure 1 – Resident international students (Annuari Statistici del Comune di Padova)

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[7] The MUR (Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca) is a department of the Italian Government that is responsible for the administration of both university and research.

[8] Padua's programming, control and statistics sector manages the surveys conducted by the National Statistics Programme on the permanent census of the population as well as on housing, demographics, consumer prices and road accidents.

Looking at the graph, we note that from 2000 through to 2020, the number of resident international students has increased by 383%, even if the percentage increase has gradually gone down. In fact, it went from + 104% in the 2005 - 2000 span down to + 3% in the 2020 - 2015 span. From 2019 through to 2020, the percentage of resident foreigners over the total of residents decreased from 16.8% to 16.4% (Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica, 2020b, p. 3). Despite this slight decrease, the number of foreign residents recorded between 2010 and 2020 is quite stable.

Based once again on Padua's Statistical Yearbook, it is possible to understand the most representative foreign citizenships of the city. The following graph shows the number of foreign citizens residing in Padua from 2008 through to 2020, grouped by nationality:

Figure 2 – Most represented foreign citizenships
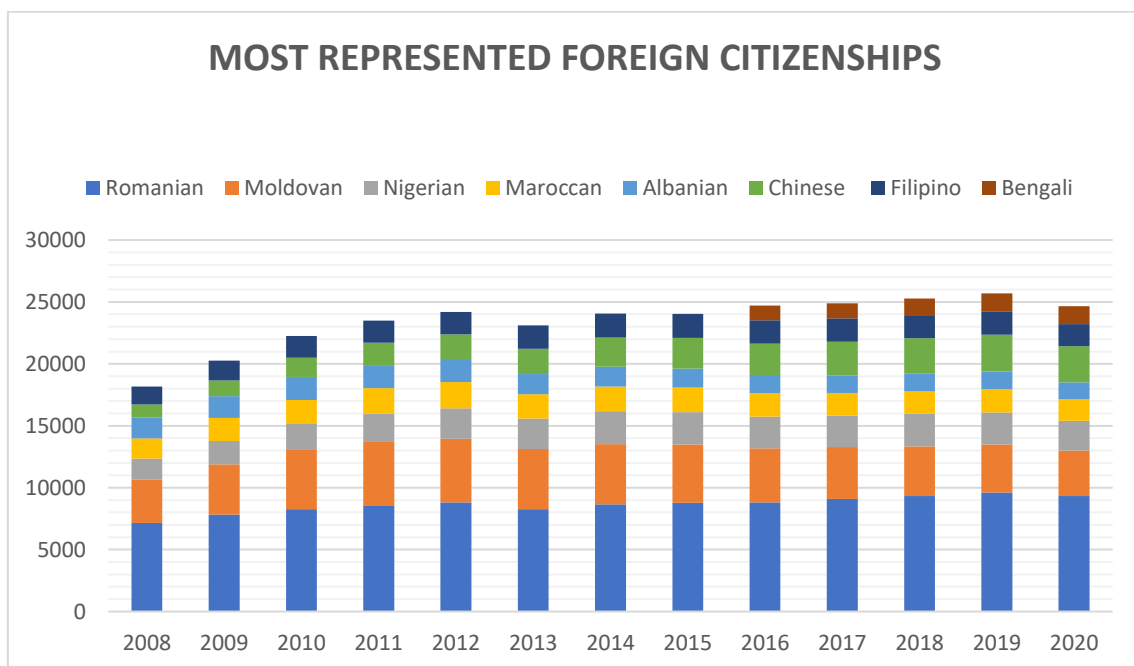(Annuari Statistici del Comune di Padova)

From the graph, it can be concluded that the largest foreign community in the city of Padua for the years shown are Romanians, followed by Moldovans, regardless of the latter's decrease recorded between 2013 and 2020. Another well-rooted community in Padua are Nigerians, whose numbers have increased over the years. What is more, it is

possible to note a slight decrease in the Albanian community and a significant growth of the Chinese community (2931 Chinese citizens as of 2020). In a few years, the Chinese community almost matched that of Moldovans. Finally, Figure 2 shows the settlement of the Bengali community starting from 2016, which is set to increase. The figure below represents data gathered in 2020 showing that the main foreign communities are not equally distributed across the districts of Padua:

FOREIGN RESIDENTS PER DISTRICT

Legend: Centre, North, East, South-East, South-West, West

Values shown: 10%, 33%, 18%, 16%, 8%, 15%
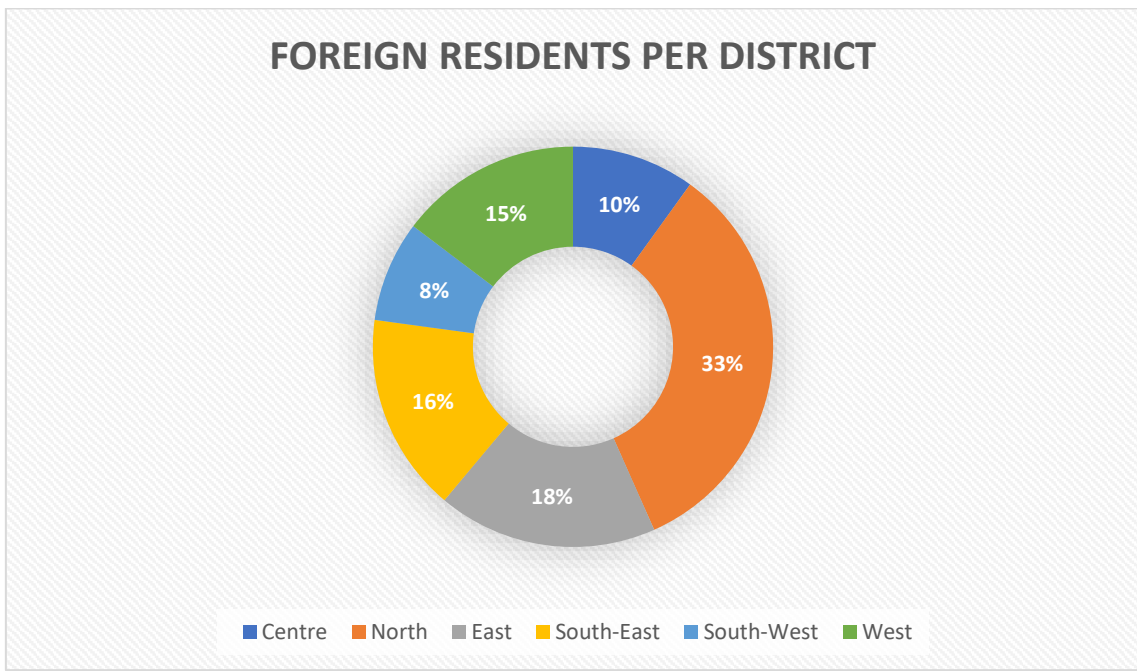
Figure 3 – International residents per district
(Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica, 2020b)

The highest percentage of foreigners in the city of Padua (33.40%) is concentrated in the North end district of Arcella, followed by the East end district (17.75%) and the South-East end (16.05%) (Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica, 2020b, p. 5). With 39,473 residents, Arcella is the second most populated district of the city (Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica, 2021). Due to the high number, and density, of inhabitants (about 6000 inhabitants/sq km), it may be considered as a stand-alone district, so much so it is often defined as a "city within the city" (Segatto & Giacomini, 2018, p. 70).It is therefore important to see the main foreign communities populating the district of Arcella in detail:
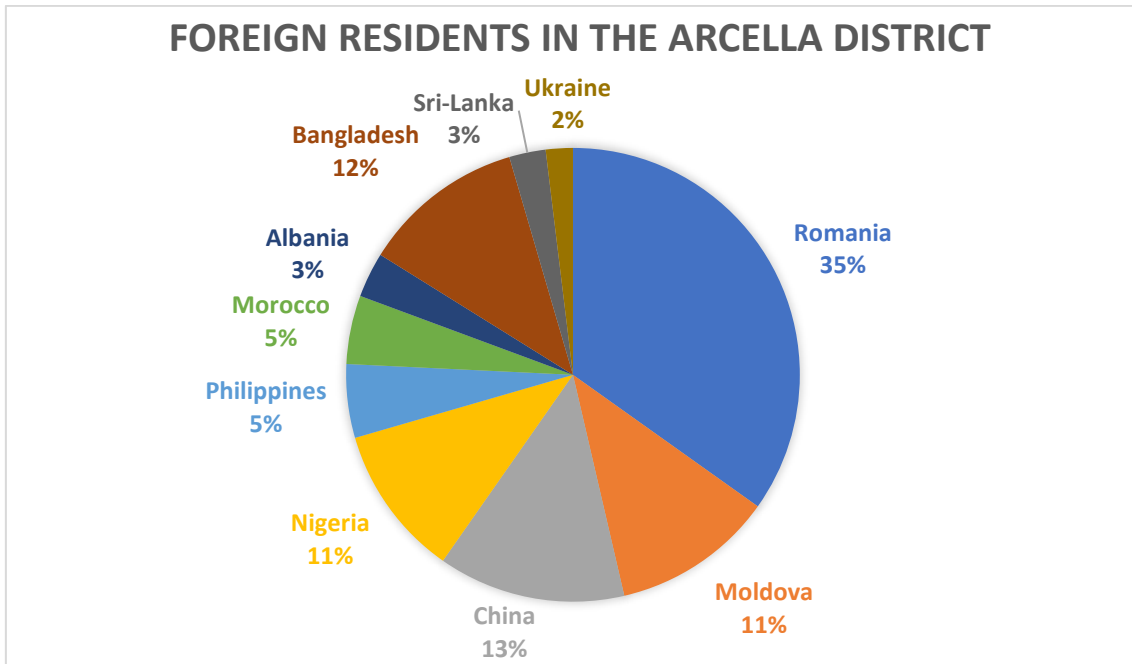
FOREIGN RESIDENTS IN THE ARCELLA DISTRICT

Figure 4 – Foreign Residents in the Arcella District

(Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica, 2020a)

The graph clearly shows that the largest community is still that of Romanians, in the Arcella district as well. However, it must be noted that the Chinese and Bengali communities are particularly concentrated in the district of Arcella, thus taking the general urban trend, whereby the second largest community is that of the Moldovans, which is in this case as large as that of the Nigerians (Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica, 2020a). What is more, by observing the communities within the city of Padua, we may extrapolate interesting data: 73.45% Bengali, 41.35% Chinese and 40.88% Nigerians reside in the district of Arcella (Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica, 2020b, p. 5). We may therefore conclude that with the highest percentage of foreigners in the city, the district of Arcella has demographic characteristics that may affect the linguistic variety of the territory.

2.3.5   PADUA'S ISTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND CONTROL FACTORS

As already explained, all institutional support and control factors concern the formal and informal institutional solutions adopted to deal with multilingualism and multiculturalism as far as education, politics, religion and culture are concerned. It is therefore necessary

to see if and how the city of Padua has responded to the growth of new foreign communities on its territory.

One of the effects of Padua's multiculturalism and multilingualism is offered by the "Commissione per la Rappresentanza delle Cittadine e dei Cittadini Stranieri residenti a Padova"[9]. Set up upon election of the municipal representatives of foreign citizens residing in Padua in 2011, the Commission stimulates the active participation of foreign citizens so far as the choices of the city administration are concerned, and is at the same time an important tool to give a voice to the many new citizens inhabiting the city and contributing to its economic and productive system. This official organism is made up of 16 members elected as representatives of all foreign communities in the territory, and it lasts 5 years (Commissione per la Rappresentanza delle Cittadine e dei Cittadini Stranieri residenti a Padova, 2013, p. 6; Comune di Padova, 2021). The last round (July 2021) saw the election of four Filipinos, two Pakistani, one Indian, two Sri Lankan, one Chinese, one Albanian, two Bengali, one Nigerian, one Moroccan, and one Ivorian. The largest turnout was offered by the Bengali population, followed by the Filipinos and the Pakistani, and the most attended polling station was that of Arcella (1641 voters), followed by that of the city centre (580 voters) (PadovaOggi, 2021).

What is more, the Municipality of Padua often collaborates with local cultural associations with the aim of promoting crossovers between communities. In fact, often multiculturalism is promoted by local organizations, and many of the associations and cooperatives help foreigners find a job and learn the Italian language, thus favouring their integration, while also caring for their origins and culture at the same time by organizing events aimed at familiarising people with the traditions and cultures of the foreign communities of the territory. Most of these associations are hosted in the district of Arcella, and amongst them the most active are: "Arcellatown", "Il Sestante", "Le Mille e Una Arcella", "Orizzonti", "Unica Terra", "Popoli Insieme" and many others. Many other interesting cultural events proposals come from the municipal office named after

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[9] The Commission representing resident foreign citizens in Padua is an official organism of the city of Padua representing non-European and stateless foreign citizens, and acting as an advisory body for the Mayor, the City Council, Committees and all administrative organisms, it is responsible for the collection of all needs and requests to be turned into proposals aimed at improving integration policies by increasing involvement in public affairs.

"Progetto Giovani". Its main services are addressed to young people aged 15 to 35 and mainly focus on culture, besides offering guidance on training, employment, and aid work opportunities abroad; courses, seminars and workshops aimed at promoting social cohesion, aggregation, and cultural insight are offered as well (Comune di Padova, 2022). Another indicator that is useful in order to measure the dynamism of multilingualism is offered by the school curricula, which for the most part use Italian as a common language, with the exception of the "Scuola Internazionale Italo Cinese"[10], where teaching is bilingual (Italian and Chinese), and "The English International School" (English). In all other high schools, teaching is in Italian only, whereas foreign language teaching (lectureship) normally has a dedicated number of hours, and lessons are given by natives of that foreign language, even if the trend of most schools, such as the "Istituto Dante Alighieri" or the "Liceo Concetto Marchesi", is that of offering courses related to the most prestigious languages only (English, Spanish, German, French and, in limited cases, Chinese). Languages of the largest foreign communities inhabiting the city of Padua, like Romanian, are not considered at all.

By contrast, the Degree course of Languages, literature and cultural mediation of the University of Padua provides teaching of a wider range of languages such as Slovenian, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, Serbian, Croatian, Dutch, and Portuguese, all taught in Italian or in that foreign language. The University of Padua also offers theatre workshops in foreign languages (in English, French, German, Italian, Russian, Romanian and Spanish) for all students (Università degli Studi di Padova, 2022a). What is more, the CLA offers all students enrolled the chance to follow language courses for English, French, German, Spanish and Chinese with the collaboration of the Istituto Confucio Padovano (Istituto Confucio all'Universita' di Padova, 2022). Moreover, the del CLA Web Site makes it possible to freely enrol in a series of conversation sessions called "Conversazioni CreAttive", where small groups talk in one of the foreign languages proposed, as well as in the so-called "Tandem Face2Face" where two students with different mother tongues talk or use other means to improve their respective foreign

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[10] The International Italian-Chinese School of Padua is the first European bilingual (Italian-Chinese) college with Chinese as a second language, and the only one to be approved by the MUR (the Italian governmental department responsible for the administration of both university and research). Hosted in the district of Arcella, it includes Kindergarten, Primary School, Middle School, and High School (both linguistic and scientific curricula), awarding legally recognized licences and certificates.

language (Università degli Studi di Padova, 2014). Last, private language schools in the area mostly focus on English and other prestigious European languages only, whereas only a few others also focus on languages that are less commonly found in secondary schools curricula, such as Arabic, Chinese, Portuguese and Russian. Languages like Romanian and Moldovan are instead totally neglected, thus relegating the teaching of these languages to private tutoring. Amongst Padua's private language centres are: the "Bienvenue", the "Centro Diffusione Lingue", the "Idea Scuola di Lingue" and the "Sandwich Padova".

In conclusion, nowadays most cities can be defined as multilingual, even if some are more accustomed and show a greater focus to multilingualism than others. Some cities build their multilingualism on geographical and historical grounds, and others on tourism and economy. The various features analysed in this dissertation, such as the demographic analysis and the institutional support and control factors, are fundamental to assess the vitality of urban multilingualism (VUM) of a given city. Owing to its prestigious University and to its tourist attractions, the city of Padua is a multilingual city in its own right, and in the past few years it registered an important increase in the number of international students. In fact, the city counts various cultural associations promoting social cohesion, aggregation and cultural exchange, especially in the district of Arcella (owing to its high percentage of foreign citizens), as well as various schools of languages, even if teaching is for most part limited to European languages.

3   INTERCULTURAL MEDIATION

In this chapter, I will address the topic of intercultural mediation (or linguistic and cultural mediation), and I will outline the skill set of a trained intercultural mediator, with a focus on the role s/he plays in the communicative process. To this aim, I will start by providing a description of the concept of communication, focusing on both the agents involved in the communicative process and the issues raised with respect to the process of understanding. An analysis of intercultural mediation as a discipline will follow, and the history of its onset up until the creation of the Italian national ad hoc legislation will be provided. I will finally introduce the role of the intercultural mediator with special focus on his/her skills, traits and competences.

3.1   THE COMMUNICATIVE PROCESS

Communication has always been subject to investigation in all its features using different approaches by different disciplines. Amongst these are: linguistics, semiotics, sociology, and psychology (Lotto & Rumiati, 2013, p. 16). Likewise, various models have been used to describe the structure of communication, including the one proposed by Shannon and Weaver (1949), which paved the way to the process of formalization of the knotty communicative process. Shannon and Weaver perceive communication as a system where a source of information transmits a message to a recipient. The said message is processed by a transmitter and converted into a signal through a channel. Signals are sent to a receiver that encodes them into a message before they hit the recipient [Figure 3.1] (Shannon & Weaver, 1949, p. 7).
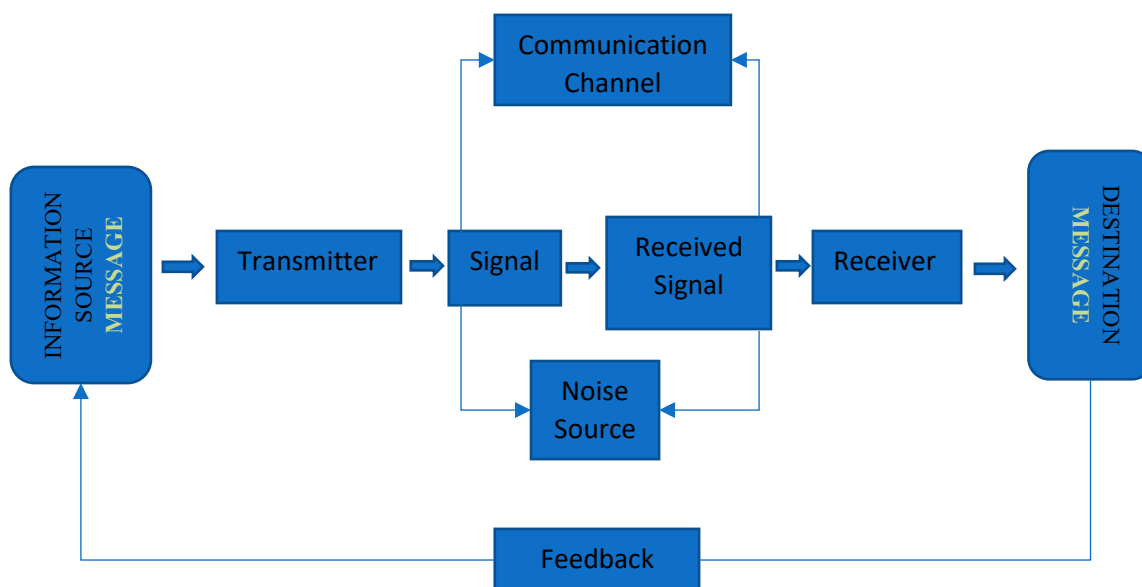
Figure 3.1. Shannon and Weaver's model of communication

(Shannon and Weaver, 1949)

Transmitter and receiver respectively encode and decode the signal. For communication to take place, signals need to be converted into a code that is familiar to both the transmitter and the receiver. What is more, as Lotto and Rumiati (2013) explain, the linear model introduces the concept of noise, meant as a force that can meddle with the correct transmission of the signal. Noises may come from the outside, and are as such liable to prevent the grasp of what is being uttered, or from the inside, such as those that are connected with the functioning of both the transmitter and the receiver, or rely on psychology, such as those that interfere with the ability to express or understand a message (Lotto & Rumiati, 2013, p. 16). The most linear type of communication, as Castiglioni (1997) explains, may take place through one channel alone (i.e. sending and receiving orders). The most complex type instead, which is far more widespread, is two-way communication, which is one which is established between transmitter and receiver as they interact, so that each prompt meets a response. This process is called feedback (Castiglioni, 1997, p. 49; van Ruler, 2018, p. 369). Even though this model remains one of the most relevant, as Lotto and Rumiati explain, it does not allow for two central aspects of interpersonal communication: the intentionality and the expression of a message, which are core to determining the aim of communication, as well as the context

where messages are transmitted, as they can in fact be interpreted differently based on the context in which they are produced (Lotto & Rumiati, 2013, pp. 17–18), that is to say the pragmatic aspect of language.

3.1.1   PRAGMATICS

The discipline that analyses the *utterances* used in a given speech context is called pragmatics. It studies the purposes and achievements in a social situation where language is used as a lever for action (Balboni, 2012, p. 24; Bianchi, 2011, pp. 4–5). In his book called *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin (1962), one of the language philosophers who played a key role in the discipline of pragmatics, states that "actions speak louder than words", thus underlying the pragmatic sense and the social function of utterances, which are in fact even used to perform institutional acts, such as marriage, christening, acts of war, threats, etc. Therefore, when we speak we perform explicit or implicit speech acts. Explicit speech acts are those that directly hit the target, whereas implicit speech acts make use of turns of phrase, rhetorical questions, and forms of address to gradually lead the interlocutor towards the target (Austin, 1962, pp. 12–13; Bianchi, 2011, Chapter 3.2). What is more, Austin distinguishes acts between constative and performative, the former being used to describe a situation or event, which can be true or false, the latter consisting in utterances that incite action (Balboni, 2012, p. 24; Bayat, 2013, p. 214). Austin (1962) distinguishes three kinds of speech acts:

- the locutionary act, consisting in making a statement;
- the illocutionary act, representing the action that is being performed as one speaks (i.e. "I christen thee"", "I vow" etc.;
- the perlocutionary act, dealing with the consequences and effects of a speech act on the interlocutor (i.e. threats, encouragements, persuasive acts etc.) (Austin, 1962, pp. 92–101; Gasparatou, 2016, p. 320).

Amongst Austin's successors there is American Philosopher John Rogers Searle, who in his work of 1969, "Speech Acts", classifies speech acts into five categories:

- representative or assertive acts, such as decisions and judgments, which are based on the interlocutor's trust or mistrust of a given utterance (i.e. proclaiming, advocating);

- directive acts, leading the interlocutor to do something (i.e. requesting, ordering);

- commissive acts, where the speaker commits to do something (i.e. promises, oaths, and bets);

- expressive acts, namely those that rely on the interlocutor's reaction (i.e. greetings, congratulations, and thanks)

- declarations or performative acts, namely those producing an effect in a given institution (i.e. hirings/dismissals and declarations of war) (Bayat, 2013, p. 214; Kurdghelashvili, 2015, p. 306; Searle, 1969).

It becomes apparent that the meaning of an utterance is not thoroughly expressed by the literal sense of the words it is made up of, but also by what the speaker means (intended meaning) and what his/her interlocutor understands. To this aim, by introducing his concept of the cooperative principle back in 1975, British philosopher Paul Grice stated that to pursue effective communication, the following four maxims need to be applied:

1. maxim of quantity, aiming at providing the right quantity of information needed in a conversation (neither more nor less than is required);

2. maxim of quality, aiming at providing a genuine contribution to the conversation, not a spurious one;

3. maxim of relation, ensuring all the information provided is relevant to the current exchange;

4. maxim of manner, ensuring clarity of expression / avoiding obscurity of expression, ambiguity and unnecessary prolixity: (Davies, 2007; Ephratt, 2012, p. 63; Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 55).

Finally, in order to grasp the meaning of an utterance, another important component of a communicative process is the context where that utterance is expressed. As Andorno (2005) explains, the relevant context needed to interpret and produce utterances is made up of three main components: shared knowledge, that is all social and cultural beliefs on how the world works that speakers share or believe they are sharing; the communicative setting of a linguistic event, that is the time-space situation "hosting" a given linguistic event, including relations between participants as well as their expectations and purposes; the linguistic context (or co-text), that is the conversation underway and the knowledge it has generated (Andorno, 2005; Bianchi, 2011, Chapter 3.2).

As shown, a communicative process thus consists of various features, such as the interlocutors involved, the communication channel used, the context and all external elements interfering with the process (i.e. linguistic aspects, purposes and functions of the messages conveyed). Castiglioni (1997) describes communication as a very complex task, and it can be both verbal and non-verbal. Verbal communication may be both written and oral, and in order to identify objects, events, feelings and situations, it makes use of words in an attempt to convey information etc. Non-verbal (or extra linguistic) communication exhibits a number of signals which greatly differ based on their nature and intricacy, and share the fact that they are not identified by words, be they written or spoken (Castiglioni, 1997, p. 50). Even if verbal communication allows us to accurately express extremely complex information, it is not as immediate as non-verbal communication, where the sending of non-verbal signals is a guarantee of communication (Phutela, 2015, p. 45).

3.1.2   NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Non-verbal communication exploits different types of code, including kinesics (i.e. facial expression and posture), proxemics (i.e. haptics and body contact), and paralinguistics (i.e. loudness or tone of voice, volume, pauses and silences).

3.1.2.1 KINESICS

Kinesics is probably the broadest code system, as it is made up of different signals, intentional or encoded (i.e. by pointing or using sign language) as well as saccades (i.e. spontaneous facial expression and posture), and it involves all muscles. Suitner (2013) breaks kinesics into three parts: facial expression, eye gaze, and gestures (Suitner, 2013, p. 67). Facial expression works as a test bench for our feelings and emotional states: in a nutshell, it is our most expressive body part, as Hans (2015) explains. In fact, if it is easier for us to control some expressions, a few others inadvertently break in and reveal our emotional state. The cultural setting may as well help us to interpret some facial expressions. Suffice to think of smiling and its different meanings, ranging from joy to complacency, through to embarrassment, nervousness and mischief (Hans & Hans, 2015, p. 48; Suitner, 2013, p. 68).

Eye gaze plays an important role as well. As Hans explains, its main and most immediate role is to establish a connection with the object of attention. Interlocutors in fact establish their connection through eye contact, which is at the same time a key factor in their speaking turns, as it allows them to prompt or solicit each other as they interact, without disrupting their communication flow. Eye gaze also helps us pick signals coming from our interlocutors (i.e. if they are bored or interested) (Hans & Hans, 2015, p. 48). Pavan (2010) explains how eye gaze is core to communication in that it also relies on the human eye shape, which, as opposed to that of other animal species, makes our eye gaze extremely visible, thus showing where we are actually looking. This also clearly shows the role eye gaze plays in coordination where social interaction occurs. In fact, we tend to spontaneously follow the others' eye gaze to catch what might have grabbed their attention with a view to understanding and anticipating their behaviour and modulating our own to gain potentially interesting insights (Pavan, 2010, pp. 319–330, 2011, pp. 6–12).

Last, we find gestures, which according to Anolli (2002) fall into six categories: gesticulation, pantomime, emblems, deixis, body movements, and sign language (Anolli, L., 2002, cited in Suitner, 2013, pp. 68–69). Gesticulation is made of those gestures that allow us to illustrate a concept as it is meanwhile being verbally expressed. Cultural logics often add up to this, thus making it clear that gesticulation is culturally defined, especially when it comes to the quantity of gestures (suffice to think of how greatly Italians recur to this non-verbal type of communication). Pantomime is used to portray the dynamics of an event or situation (suffice to think of those party games where one needs to verbally guess what the other is representing without recurring to verbal language). Emblems are instead conventional gestures that carry a precise meaning (i.e. Italians invite silence by taking their index finger to their lips). Deixis is used to divert the interlocutor's attention (usually by pointing our index finger or by nodding). Body movements are repeated movements (i.e. tapping fingers, shaking legs) which usually are a manifestation of anxiety and help stay focused. Last, sign language is an actual non-verbal language which is as such codified and shared by a specific community of people (Ozyurek, 2012, pp. 627–632; Suitner, 2013, pp. 68–69).

3.1.2.2 PROXEMICS

Proxemics is all about the way we manage interpersonal space. It is probably the signal we can more easily measure compared to all others, since it is based on the actual physical distance between all interlocutors, and as such can be measured in inches. Distance, explains American anthropologist Edward Hall, is an important source of information when it comes to assessing the relationship between interlocutors. After studying and measuring the distance between American interlocutors, Hall (1966) delineated four zones of interpersonal distance that characterize Western culture:

- intimate (0-18 inches) – it is the distance of close relationships, where bodies touch and stimulate all sense organs. It is the place of affections;

- personal (18-48 inches) – it is the distance used in conversations with friends, relatives and associates. It begins about an arm's length away, thus allowing us to establish a physical contact with our interlocutors, without any big efforts. Tactile and olfactory stimuli are barely present, and the interpersonal space is often defined as a "protective bubble";

- social (48 inches - 12 feet) – it is the distance reserved for strangers and new acquaintances, thus not allowing us to establish a physical contact with our interlocutors, and as such providing great freedom of movement. Breaching this gap often generates a strong feeling of unease. Tactile and olfactory stimuli are normally absent;

- public (greater than 12 feet) – it is the distance essentially reserved for larger audiences (speeches, lectures and theatre, etc.). It usually implies voice amplification (by means of devices such as microphones, megaphones or loudspeakers, if needed). It primarily stimulates the auditory and visual systems. (Hall, 1966, pp. 117–125; Sul & Migliore, 2021, pp. 75–76).

This classification, explains Suitner, mainly applies to the culture studied by Hall (namely, that of Americans in the 1960s) (Suitner, 2013, p. 70).

3.1.2.3 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

English psychologist Argyle (2013) carried out studies on the degree of cultural variation in facial expression, posture, eye gaze, etc. Even though some facial expressions that are linked to emotions are very similar across cultures (one only needs to think of emotions

like happiness, anger, disgust, sadness, contempt, fear, and surprise), there can also be variations. Cultures, explains Argyle, stand out based on how much these facial expressions are freely expressed or repressed. In Japan, for instance, facial expressions are almost absent as they are controlled, and laughter or smile may be used to hide anger and sorrow. Cultural variations especially occur in specific situations: one may or may not grieve when they attend a funeral, or else show enthusiasm when awarded, or pout as they lose in gambling, etc. (Argyle, 2013, Chapter 4; Tiechuan, 2016, pp. 2–5). Non-verbal language differs across cultures especially with regard to gestures. According to Peppoloni (2018), a case in point is shaking one's head left and right along the transverse plane repeatedly in quick succession. This means disagreement in many cultures, but not in Bulgaria, where it actually means the opposite. Another gesture, the most popular Italian one, that consists in keeping your fingers together, with tips touching and pointing upward means "What do you mean?", whereas in Egypt it means "Be patient" and in Greece "That's just perfect". With regard to hands and arms, Italians are known for shaking them way too much, and this is perceived by Anglo-Saxons as ridiculous or grotesque, if not even aggressive and loud (Peppoloni, 2018).

However, proxemics and interpersonal distance vary across cultures as well: in one of his studies, Argyle investigates the differences between the Japanese and the Arabic cultures. For instance, in Japan, people seldom touch in public, and that also regards handshaking. On the flip side, body contact is accepted in crowded spaces such as in trains and buses, where people often sleep as they lean against each other. In private, they instead tend to establish a strong and repeated physical contact, especially as they heat up or as they sleep etc. Privacy is not an issue, and sharing the same bedroom or bathing together do not have the same sexual implications as in other cultures. What is more, spatial behaviour relies on shape: in Japan, young people must walk behind the elderly, and wives behind their husbands.

The Arabic culture shows very different parameters. Normally, Arabs speak loudly and close. However, in public, whereas male subjects touch each other's upper arm with their right hand or playfully slap each other's right hand as they talk, or even hug and kiss each other's hands, cheeks and beards after a long absence or at formal occasions (i.e. a

wedding), and then hold each other's hands before they say goodbye, female subjects show the exact opposite. Privacy at home is kept to a minimum, as they do not love to stay by themselves, even if they tend to prefer spacious rooms with minimalist furnishing (Argyle, 2013, para. 4).

Despite this, it is important to highlight that these distinctions depict an essentialist approach. As Holliday (1999) states, the essentialist view describes "culture as a concrete social phenomenon which represents the essential character of a particular nation" (Holliday, 1999). Thus, as Bradley (2018) writes, this approach is based mainly on the characteristics which differentiate national cultures and fundamentally distinct kinds of people. However, an essentialized view of social groupings can lead to the kind of reductionism found in stereotyping (Bradley, 2018, p. 4; Nathan, 2015, p. 104). The non-essentialist view criticises the essentialism describing the culture "as a movable concept used by different people at different times to suit purposes of identity, politics and science" (Holliday, 1999). Therefore, as Holliday (1999) describes, the non-essentialist view admits a more flexible view of "culture", in which the social world is not divided in well-defined groups, but rather, is made up of a seamless melange of human groupings, any of which may be characterised and understood as "small culture" (Bradley, 2018, pp. 6–7; Holliday, 1999).

As natural as it may seem, the communicative process is instead a complex one. Non-verbal communication needs special care, as it varies across cultures (as on the case with the Japanese and the Arabs in the examples above), and as it is for most part spontaneous it may lead to misunderstanding in the eyes of those belonging to a different culture. Peter Drucker's famous words "The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said" (Moyers, 1989) still hold true.

3.1.3   INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

As Celce-Murcia (2007) explains, with the introduction of the expression "communicative competence" in the early 1970s, linguist and anthropologist Dell Hymes takes up Chomsky's notion of "competence", that is a set of finite rules allowing to generate an infinite number of utterances, and at the same time highlights how linguistic

competence in no guarantee for communicative ability, which also demands extra-linguistic and socio-cultural components (Celce-Murcia, 2007, p. 42). Balboni defines communicative competence as a mental reality resulting in performance meant as the real world linguistic output which reflects in the occurrence of communicative events within social contexts where those who use language in practice perform an action. Our minds comprise three core sets of language skills:

- the linguistic competence, which translates into the ability to understand and produce utterances that are well-structured in terms of phonology, morphology, syntax, vocabulary as well as at the textual level;

- extra-linguistic competences, which translate, for instance, into the ability to understand and produce body gestures (kinesics), assess the communicative impact of interpersonal distance (proxemics), use and recognize the communicative value of objects (objectemics) and clothing (vestemics);

- the socio-linguistic competence, both pragmatic and (inter)cultural (Balboni, 2012, pp. 25–27; Celce-Murcia, 2007, pp. 47–50; Fauziati, 2015).

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) concerns the knowledge of both linguistic and extra-linguistic aspects along with the cultural values characterizing communication, especially at the intercultural level. Intercultural communication occurs when factors pertaining to different cultural groups meet. It is defined by Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) as "the symbolic exchange process whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities attempt to negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation within an embedded societal system" (Piller, 2017, p. 4; Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012, p. 24). In the new social context, in which people of different languages interact, Byram (2013) introduces "intercultural competence" as a complement to "communicative competence," improving the notion of what it is to be competent for communication with speakers of different languages and creating the term "intercultural communicative competence" (Byram, 1997, p. 3; Byram et al., 2013)

As Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) state, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is the ability to interact with people from very different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Having intercultural communicative competence means being aware of diversities and of cultures other than one's own, and knowing it is possible to develop such abilities (Caon,

2012; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 4; Tonioli & Brichese, 2015, p. 416). Deardoff (2011) explains that the process of developing intercultural competence is a constant and ever-changing one. One who desires to develop these skills must be endowed with critical thinking, open-mindedness, and curiosity, and must be able to see things from another point of view. A deeper cultural knowledge implies a broader contextual and holistic understanding of a culture, thus including historical, political, and social contexts. Such an intercultural competence puts us in a position to better understand and manage communication at the intercultural level in an attempt to avoid possible misunderstandings and conflicts (Deardorff, 2011, p. 68).

3.2   INTERCULTURAL MEDIATION

In order to manage intercultural relations, a few key requirements need to be taken into account. As Liddicoat (2014) suggests: "intercultural mediation is a form of bringing languages and cultures into contact for individuals and groups through a sharing of understanding of cultural practices, values, norms, etc." (Liddicoat, 2014, p. 260). Intercultural mediation, otherwise known as linguistic and cultural mediation, is thus the task that shortens linguistic and cultural distances between two or more people belonging to different countries and cultures, which aims at facilitating interpersonal relations by outwitting potential misunderstandings that might lead to conflicts. As Machetti (2017) explains, the terms "mediation", "mediate" and "mediator" are not a recent addition to our vocabulary and have quite a complex and long history (Machetti & Siebetcheu, 2017, p. 13). I will therefore try to sum up the main steps of the reflection undertaken on these terms across disciplines over centuries.

3.2.1   A BRIEF HISTORY OF MEDIATION IN ITALY AND EUROPE

The term "mediation", strictly related to "medium" (means) and derived from the Latin "medatio" and "mediator", explains Machetti, first appeared in the 17th century, and indicated the intervention of a third party wherever two or more other parties needed to achieve mutual agreement. The original semantics of the Latin term was kept in Italian, where it is still nowadays connotated as the intervention of a bridging figure between parties within a context where there is a risk of a potential conflict. That of business transactions seems to be the privileged context for such a conflict since ancient times,

when merchants started negotiating between parties any time they needed to trade, buy or sell an item (Dendrinos & Dendrinou, 2006, pp. 11–12; Machetti & Siebetcheu, 2017, pp. 13–16) .

Europe discovered the concept of mediation between the 1970s and the 1980s (Castiglioni, 1997, p. 106; Cestaro, 2009, p. 19). As Cestaro highlights, in old immigration countries, such as France and England, the role of the intercultural mediator is that of an agent preventing conflicts and facilitating immigrants relationships, especially in the social, health-related, cultural and educational services. France started using foreigners professionally in social contexts in the early 1970s with interpreting tasks in the Paris metropolitan area (Cestaro, 2009, p. 20). In the early 1980s, explains Machetti, the notion of "mediation culturelle" stands out, and new professions such as that of "mediateurs" or "adultes-relais" emerge, with a clear preference for foreign-born female subjects or else foreign female subjects born in France, that set up voluntary associations aiming at taking charge of the needs of people in immigrant areas, mainly helping them access health and educational services. In fact, their main tasks were reception, orientation, and accompanying, even at a distance, of women and families residing in immigrant areas, and their inclusion in group activities. "Accompanying at a distance" meant a prior assistance phase which took place outside the administration offices, mainly over the phone, where information on the drawing-up of administrative documents was provided. Direct follow-up was instead provided in municipalities, tax assistance centres, social care homes, health units, schools etc. (Cestaro, 2009, p. 20; Machetti & Siebetcheu, 2017, p. 62).

In Italy, explains Cestaro, a country of immigration since the 1960s, it is only around the early 1990s that concepts such as mediation, be it linguistic or intercultural, stood out. The onset of similar expressions in everyday language was not accidental, as it coincided with the spread of the migratory phenomena that started intensifying in those years, and the subsequent settlement in the host country and the start of the process of family reunification. This all urged Italy to find ways to manage all foreigners residing in its territory, since they gradually went from transitional (i.e. the old immigrants referred to as "Gestarbeiter") to permanent, thus becoming an important structural component of the

country's economic, social and cultural fabric. What is more, explains Cestaro, such a component not only stood out in different spheres of both social and professional life, but was at the same time at the core of both encounters and clashes with the autochthonous inhabitants of those lands, due to the misunderstandings that originated from the distance of their respective linguistic and cultural codes. It is right within that socio-cultural context, where differences started becoming an issue, that intercultural mediators emerged as the most effective response to the intricacy that originated from the clash between languages, ethnicities, and religions (Cestaro, 2009, pp. 17–18).

In Italy, explains Castiglioni (1997), the discipline of intercultural mediation and the figure of the mediator stemmed from the need to facilitate the way non-European guest workers interacted with the host country's care facilities, which was mainly voiced by both private and public social health workers. To meet this demand, in the 1990s, vocational training courses were organized in a few Italian cities, including Milan, Turin and Bologna. In Milan, the first course was organized in 1989/1990 by Associazione Naga financed by the European Social Fund and Regione Lombardia. The aim of the course was to set up a group of foreign operators residing in Milan, mainly made up of women, and for most part immigrants, who could help Italian operators (i.e. physicians, social workers, nurses, etc.) communicate with all foreign residents, without compromising fundamental rights, such as the right to health that the Italian constitution guarantees to all individuals residing in the Italian territory (Castiglioni, 1997, p. 106). This would at the same time fill a gap that long existed in the health sector, where professionals were not prepared to respond to the needs of foreign visitors.

In his attempt to trace the historical-evolutionary process of mediation in Italy, Cestaro (2009) retraces the historical path delineated by Favaro and Balsamo (2006) in their "Atlante della mediazione linguistico culturale. Nuove mappe per la professione di mediatore" (An Atlas on Linguistic and Cultural Mediation. New Maps for the Mediator)[11], which helped him detect a few phases that are core to the development of

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[11] For more information, see Balsamo F. (2006), Autonomia e rischi della mediazione culturale, in Luatti L. (a cura di), Atlante della mediazione linguistico culturale. Nuove mappe per la professione di mediatore, Milano, FrancoAngeli, pp. 70-81, and Favaro G. (2006), I paradossi della mediazione, in Luatti L. (a cura di), Atlante della mediazione linguistico culturale. Nuove mappe per la professione di mediatore, Milano, FrancoAngeli, pp. 25-36.

intercultural mediation in Italy. The first phase he detects concerns "experimenting and creativity" and is characterized by the first pilot projects carried out by the very first mediators within the sphere of that which was named after "voluntary mediation" (Johnson, 1996 cited by Cestaro, 2009, p. 21). This occurred in the late 1990s, when the first studies on mediation appear, and the mediator is, depending on the case, labelled as a cultural, linguistic, or intercultural one. As Cestaro highlights, all of these labels did at the same time help shape the many facets and skills of the mediator (Cestaro, 2009, p. 22). In Italy, the first occurrence of the role of the mediator appears in the ministerial circular no. 205 of 26 July 1990, "Scuola dell'obbligo e gli alunni stranieri. L'educazione interculturale" (Compulsory Education and Foreign Students. The Role of Intercultural Education), where the expression "mediatori di madre lingua"[12] was coined (Machetti & Siebetcheu, 2017, p. 67); in 1998, the first official reference to mediation in multicultural contexts is made within an Italian framework law that reads as follows:

> […] stranieri, titolari di carta di soggiorno o di permesso di soggiorno di durata non inferiore a due anni, in qualità di mediatori interculturali al fine di agevolare i rapporti tra le singole amministrazioni e gli stranieri appartenenti ai diversi gruppi etnici, nazionali, linguistici e religiosi.[13]

The second phase is characterized by the spread and consolidation of mediation. Cestaro reports that during that period the number of associations and Co-ops committed to providing mediation services had increased along with the number of vocational training courses for both novice mediators and/or the former "volunteer mediators". Since the early 2000s, universities too started investing in the training of mediators with newly created Bachelor programs, master's degrees, and postgraduate courses in the field of mediation (Cestaro, 2009, p. 22). As happened for the title to be assigned to the figure of the mediator, explains Machetti, university courses come in multiple names: "Mediazione linguistica" (Language Mediation), "Mediazione linguistica e culturale" (Linguistic and Cultural Mediation), "Comunicazione interlinguistica" (Interlingual Communication) to

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[12] Trans. "mother tongue mediators"

[13] Trans. "foreigners holding a residence permit, with a duration of no less than two years, as intercultural mediators to facilitate the relations between individual authorities and foreign residents belonging to different ethnic, national, linguistic and religious groups". (Italian) Legislative Decree no. 286 of 25 July 1998, "Testo unico delle disposizioni concernenti la disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero" (*trans*. "Consolidated law of dispositions concerning control of immigration and rules on the status of foreigners").

name a few (Machetti & Siebetcheu, 2017, p. 72) . As Cestaro points out, the intervention of universities is an important indicator of the development and consolidation of mediation as a discipline. In fact, this makes it possible to expand mediation to Italians, thus escaping the sphere of those professions that were a prerogative of immigrants. (Cestaro, 2009, pp. 22–23).

The third and last phase pointed out by Cestaro is that of "professional reflection and self-reflection". In fact, despite these new achievements, mediators found themselves isolated due to the lack of lifelong learning programs. While being included in virtually all contexts where regulations regarding the management of immigration are present at a regional level, the training and subsequent employment of intercultural mediators are not closely connected (Cestaro, 2009, p. 23). As a matter of fact, between 2000 and 2006, many regions, including Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Lazio, Liguria, Piedmont, the Autonomous Province of Bolzano and the Aosta Valley, all captained, in 1997, by Tuscany (Casadei & Franceschetti, 2009, p. 4) , envisaged the figure of the mediator with a specific resolution, clearly indicating its tasks, competencies, training and scope.

The next step was that of removing all gaps in the national legislation by detecting professional, ethical and educational quality standards to better define the role of the mediator, as well as to accredit training institutions and to create job opportunities by way of ad hoc job placement activities. As Cestaro points out, a major contribution to the recognition of this new professional profile was made by the CNEL[14] by way of their 2009 paper "Mediazione e mediatori interculturali: indicazioni operative" (Mediation and Intercultural Mediators. A Practical Guidance), which updates the previous paper, adopted in 2000, titled "Politiche per la mediazione culturale. Formazione ed impiego dei mediatori culturali" (Cultural Mediators Policies for Education. Training and Employment) (Cestaro, 2009, p. 24). It is nonetheless worth mentioning other important institutional activities such as the paper issued on 21 December 2009 by the interinstitutional working group at the Ministry of the Interior titled "Linee di indirizzo

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[14] The CNEL (Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro) is Italy's national Council for Economics and Labor. Provided for in art. 99 of the Constitution of the Italian Republic, coming into force on 1st January 1948, it is made up of representatives of the economic and labor categories, representatives of councils and economic public bodies, and people experienced in work or production problems.

per il riconoscimento della figura professionale del mediatore interculturale" (Guide Lines for the Recognition of the Profession of the Intercultural Mediator), and the exploratory research study titled "Il mediatore culturale in sei Paesi europei (Italia, Francia, Germania, Grecia, Regno Unito e Spagna): ambiti di intervento, percorsi di accesso e competenze" (The Cultural Mediator in Six Countries - Italy, France, Germany, Greece, United Kingdom and Spain. Scope, Training and Skills) carried out by the ISFOL[15] (Casadei & Franceschetti, 2009).

The latest national attempt made to regulate the situation with regard to the role of the intercultural mediator is the Italian draft law no. 384 of 21 March 2013 "Disciplina della professione di mediatore interculturale" (Discipline of the profession of intercultural mediator), denouncing once again the lack of national legislation with regard to this professional figure, while also making an attempt to provide a description of this role by setting out its tasks and requirements, which I will tackle in greater detail in section 3.3.

3.2.2   MEDIATION AND THE CEFR

As we challenge ourselves in trying to answer the two questions: "What is mediation?" and "What does the mediator do?", the most influential language policy document of the Council of Europe, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)[16] comes to our aid.

In the 2001 text, the notion of mediation was introduced in the teaching and assessment of languages as one of the four modes of communication along with

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[15] The ISFOL (Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei lavoratori) is Italy's national Institute for the Development of Vocational Training of Workers, a national research institute with a specific focus on vocational education and training, employment and social policies, with a strong commitment to promoting employment, social inclusion, skills and human capital development as well as at fostering growth and innovation. It reports to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, provides support to the central government and local authorities, and is also entrusted with the management of relevant national contracts in its fields of expertise.

[16] Put together by the Council of Europe as the main part of the project "Language Learning for European Citizenship" between 1989 and 1996, and recommended to set up systems of validation of language ability, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (abbreviated as CEFR or CEF or CEFRL) is a guideline used to describe achievements of learners of foreign languages across Europe and in other countries. Its six reference levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) are becoming widely accepted as the European standard for grading an individual's language proficiency. For more information, visit: www.coe.int/lang-cefr

understanding, speaking, and writing. However, the concept of mediation is not fully explored in said text, and ends up being considered as a synonym for translating and interpreting: " […] language competence is activated in the performance of the various language activities, involving reception, production, interaction or mediation (in particular interpreting or translating). […]"(Council of Europe, 2001, p. 14); and as such does not seem to make room for meanings negotiation: "[…] the language user not concerned to express his/her own meanings, but simply to act as an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly – normally (but not exclusively) speakers of different languages. […]" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 87).

Machetti (2017) explains that the connection between mediation and both translation (the act of transferring in writing a given content from a source language into a target language) and interpreting (the act of verbally transferring a message from a source language into a target language) is a point for debate within the scientific and professional communities of reference.[17] In particular, as they suffer the lack of an ad hoc legislation, intercultural mediators feel the need to draw a line between these disciplines (Machetti & Siebetcheu, 2017, p. 34). As Dendrinos (2006) explains, any social actor needs to negotiate the meanings expressed through the languages involved in a given communicative process, or else they will not be able to participate in that process; therefore, whereas translators and interpreters need to strictly stick to the text or message that is being translated or interpreted, and as such are not authorized to change its register or reroute it to resolve a conflict, mediators need to actively participate in the communicative exchange, thus becoming themselves interlocutors (Dendrinos & Dendrinou, 2006, p. 17). That said, in Dendrino's words, the mediator may be seen as:

> a social actor who monitors the process of interaction and acts when some type of intervention is required in order to help the communicative process and sometimes to influence the outcome; a facilitator in social events during which two or more parties interacting are experiencing a communication breakdown or when there is a communication gap between them; a meaning negotiator operating as a meaning-making agent especially when s/he intervenes in situations which require reconciliation, settlement or compromise of meanings. To play his/her role effectively, the mediator is

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[17] With regard to the differences between mediation, translating and interpreting, see: (Katan and Taibi, 2021, Chapter 1; Liddicoat, 2016, pp. 355–358; Mack, 2005b, pp. 7–8; Pokorn and Mikolič Južnič, 2020, pp. 81–90).

required to interpret and create meanings through speech or writing for listeners or readers of a different linguistic or cultural background. Here, the mediator takes on an active role as: an arbiter or arbitrator of meaning. That means that s/he must decide on the meaning of something said or written – meaning that interlocutors cannot understand or meaning they misunderstand – and help event participants out (Dendrinos & Dendrinou, 2006, p. 11).

In consideration of these "gaps", in 2016 a new document titled "Developing illustrative descriptors of aspects of mediation for the CEFR" was drafted with the purpose of integrating and broadening the concepts of mediation expressed in the CEFR text of 2001 by introducing concepts such as the "re-formulation" (of a text) and the "re-construction" (of meanings), by stressing the constant interaction between the social and personal dimensions of users of different languages, thus involving their cultural dimension: "Passing from one language to another necessarily involves passing from one culture to another or from some cultures to other cultures" (North & Piccardi, 2016, pp. 5,9-10).

Last, as society shifts towards multiculturalism, the teaching of foreign languages faces a constant change as well. In April 2020, a companion volume to the CEFR explains how the concept of mediation evolved to include contributions aimed at helping spread a better understanding of its scope and nature, and at the same time promote plurilingualism and multiculturalism (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 11).

> In mediation, the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes across modalities (e.g. from spoken to signed or vice versa, in cross-modal communication) and sometimes from one language to another (cross-linguistic mediation). The focus is on the role of language in processes like creating the space and conditions for communicating and/or learning, collaborating to construct new meaning, encouraging others to construct or understand new meaning, and passing on new information in an appropriate form. The context can be social, pedagogic, cultural, linguistic or professional (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 90).

By looking at this excerpt, it is therefore apparent how mediation is now being associated with words such as "bridge", "culture", "meaning construction and conveyance", as well as "profession", which lay the basis on which in the following sections I will analyse the skills and characteristics of the mediator.

3.3 THE INTERCULTURAL MEDIATOR: CHARACTERISTICS AND REQUIREMENTS

Even if based on what has just been summed up that of the intercultural mediator turns out to be a professional figure with blurred and out of focus outlines, in the coming sections I will try to analyse its skills and competencies. Before doing so, an overview of the communicative process where a mediator intervenes is in order.

3.3.1 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND MEDIATION

Langer describes mediators as "bridge builders, wall vaulters or frontier crossers" (Langer, 1995). In fact, the mediator is often described as a bridging figure that is able to create a link between two or more people, languages, and cultures – in a nutshell, two or more worlds apart. S/he helps interlocutors belonging to different places bridge those communication gaps that language and culture barriers concur to create. This all makes the communicative process described in the previous sections more complex, and the mediator becomes a third interlocutor in the triangle that is thus formed [Figure 3.2].
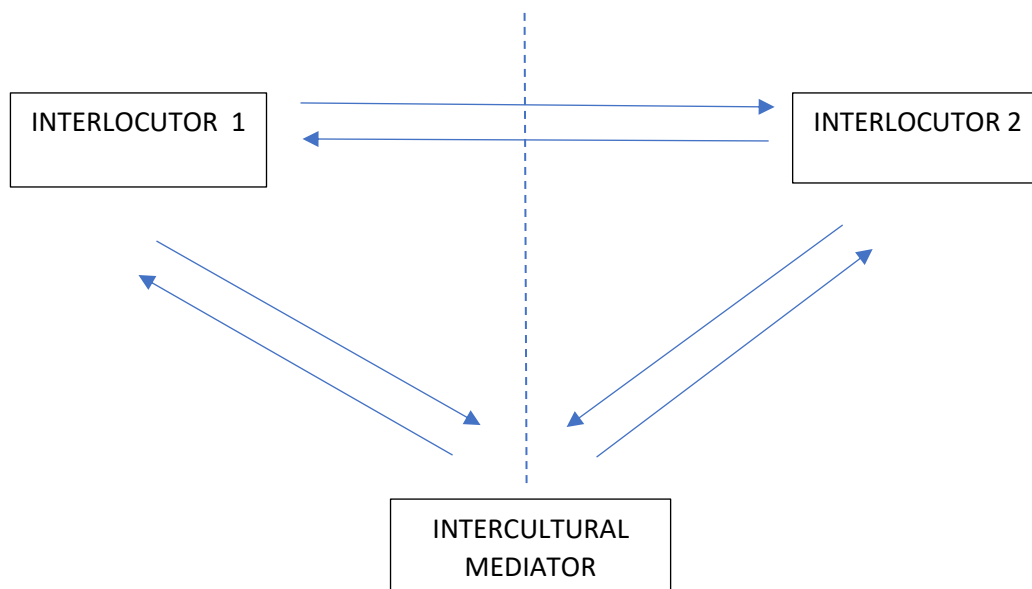
Figure 3.2 – Intercultural mediation (Castiglioni, 1997)

Such a communication pattern, explains Castiglioni (1997), is characterized by the fact that interlocutor 1 and 2 belong to different cultures and/or their cultures differ to a lesser

or greater degree, which in itself is a barrier (represented by a dotted line in Figure 3.2) that needs to be rubbed against in order to trigger the desired communicative process. The intervention of the mediator should help break that barrier, "blow the wall open" without making it disappear, as s/he needs to be constantly aware of the fact that not all differences can be minimized, and that a solution to the conflict may be unbalanced. Mediating is all about building a bridge to allow for a better reconciliation between sometimes conflicting expectations and interests that cannot always be linguistically and culturally transferred without negotiating (Castiglioni, 1997, p. 55).

A more recent and complete mediation pattern is the one proposed by Tonioli in 2016. It also builds on the "triangle communication" pattern introduced by Castiglioni, yet without losing sight of the intercultural communication pattern set forth by Balboni and Caon (2015)[18], and it seems to fit well into all those situations where a mediator may operate.

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[18] For more information, see: Balboni P.E., Caon F., 2015, La comunicazione interculturale, Venezia, Marsilio.
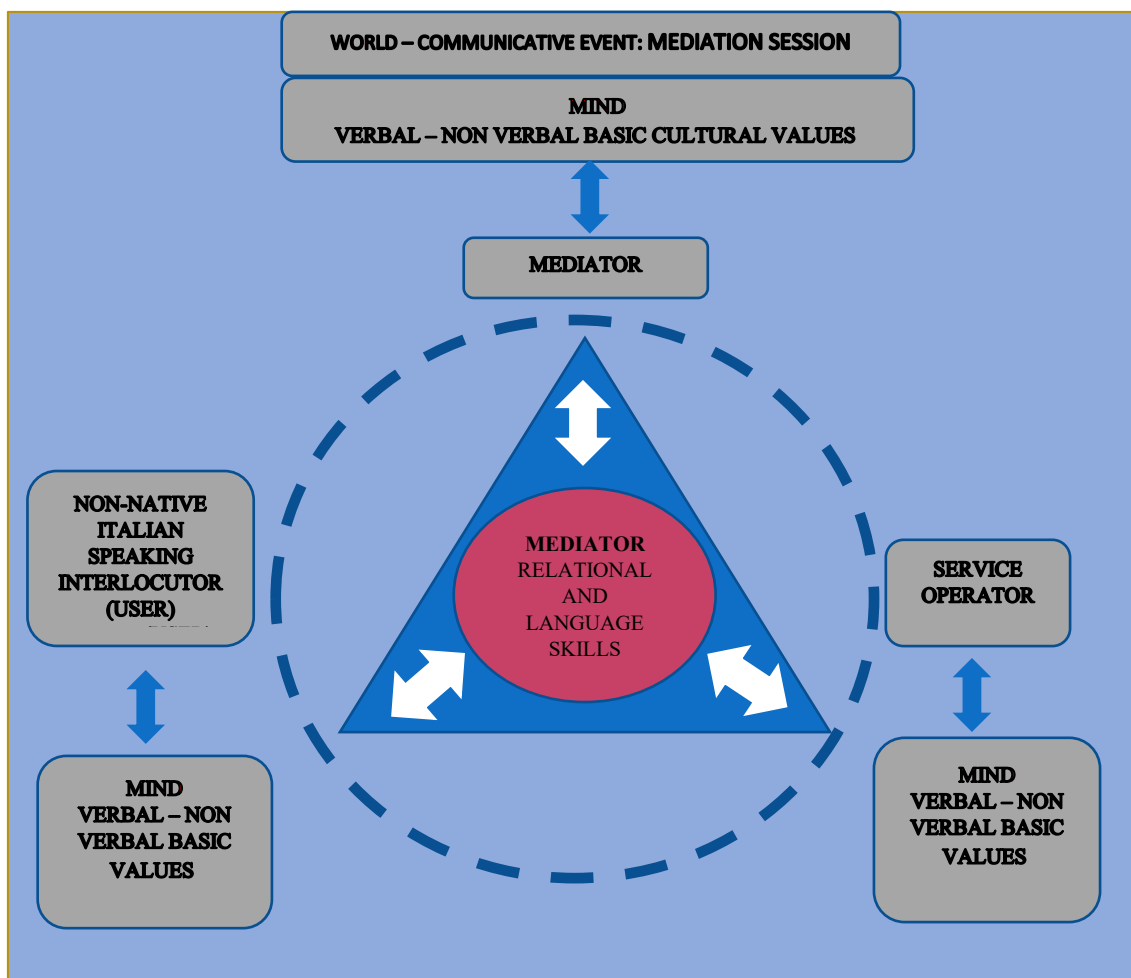
Figure 3.3. Proposed model of interlinguistic and intercultural mediation

(Tonioli, 2016, p. 83)

Based on this model, mediation represents a communicative event that occurs in the world (the world being represented by the wider blue box that frames the whole diagram in Figure 3.3). Its participants are at least three: a non-native Italian speaking interlocutor acting as a user needing information, an (Italian) service operator providing the information requested, and a mediator. Each participant has their own mind and skill sets that help them use a whole series of verbal and non-verbal features based on their own language, culture and values. The features linked to each of the interlocutor's language, culture and values influence the way each participant sees and interprets reality around them, which in turn influences each one of them as they start the communicative process with the other interlocutors (said communicative process being represented by the blue

double arrows in Figure 3.3). Within said communicative process, all participants interact by exchanging messages (the exchange of messages being represented by the blue dotted circle in Figure 3.3) and using their linguistic and extra-linguistic characteristics as well as their own basic values (represented by the white double arrows in Figure 3.3).

All of these features clash in the communication flow and end up converging towards the centre of the triangle, eventually becoming the basis upon which meanings are assigned to the messages exchanged in the communicative process. The mediator is at the apex of the triangle, as s/he is a participant just like all other interlocutors involved in the communicative process; yet, at the same time, the mediator is also at the centre of said triangle as, unlike all other participants, s/he also acts as a facilitator by managing the communication flow generated between user and operator, and recurring to their relational and language skills (the white double arrows represent the communication flow as mediated by the mediator as well as the direction of the communication flow between participants) (Tonioli, 2016, pp. 83–84).

It is now possible to better understand and set out the characteristics that make the mediator interact with two or more different systems while also enhancing the interlocutors' strengths in a reciprocity and exchange based system that takes into account all rules of life and social structures each participant brings into the communicative process (Luka, 2005, p. 203).

3.3.2   SKILLS, CHARACTERISTICS AND SCOPE OF THE MEDIATOR

The distinctive prerequisite of an intercultural mediator is his/her belonging. If this first applied only to minority cultures, represented by immigrants, thanks to all investments made in the training of this emerging profession, especially at the university level, it now concerns the host country's native citizens as well (i.e. Italians, in our case) (Cestaro, 2009, p. 25). A distinctive trait of the intercultural mediator that seems to reconcile most of the definitions of this figure that have been offered so far is their deep knowledge of at least one foreign language and of the culture of its speakers, in addition to the mediator's own mother tongue and culture (Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro, 2009, p. 3). As Mack (2005) affirms, a mediator's curriculum needs to focus on foreign

languages and on the ability to translate in writing and verbally. Torrese (2000) believes a mediator needs to be able to listen, interpret, translate and decode (Torrese, 2000 as cited in Mack, 2005).

Herrmann et al. (2001) explain that the mediator needs to have a good cultural and subcultural knowledge of the communities s/he intends to mediate for, and know how these communities may react during the mediation process. Mediating is not a mere transposition of a message, be it written or spoken, from one source language into a target language, but the operation of facilitating the communication process between two or more people that do not simply speak a different language, but belong to different cultures. The interlocutors' background therefore matters as well, since it is closely related to the way they perceive reality around them (Herrman et al., 2001, p. 145; Paine et al., 2016, pp. 15–16). This makes it easy to understand how an intercultural mediator needs to develop communicative and relational skills too. As Luka (2005) points out, communication is key to a mediator's successful negotiation, and this also means empathizing with all interlocutors involved in a communicative process, and it cannot disregard the personality and temper of those involved in the mediation process, especially when prejudice and stereotypes arise. That is why a good intercultural mediator needs to learn how to break the pattern by discarding preconceived ideas to express themselves at their best, to join the conversation without getting involved, to move from one interlocutor to the other, yet maintaining impartiality, to be each of the interlocutors and none at the same time.

Luka and Tonioli (2016) also stress the role non-verbal communication plays in the communicative process, thus making it an important skill to be developed by an intercultural mediator. Eye gaze, for instance, is crucial as it helps build trust with our interlocutors. Gestures and posture may have instead a different meaning across cultures, so the mediator needs to be able to modulate any intercultural difference and improve understanding, which could be easily impaired if certain extra-linguistic differences are ignored (Luka, 2005, p. 208; Tonioli, 2016, pp. 66–71). The 2006 paper by Conferenza

delle Regioni e delle Province Autonome[19] titled "Riconoscimento della figura professionale del Mediatore interculturale" (Recognition of the professional figure of the intercultural mediator) makes a clear reference to another ability a mediator needs to develop: bring out the needs of all interlocutors so as to identify the best strategy to be adopted to successfully resolve a conflict (Conferenza delle Regioni e delle Province Autonome, 2009, p. 9). Last, mnemonic skills and the ability to regroup and categorize information are core to the profile of a good mediator, and need to be constantly trained by way of memorization exercises and information-gathering techniques and sentence analysis (Herrman et al., 2001, p. 144; Luka, 2005, p. 209).

However, the skills mentioned so far (linguistic, extra-linguistic, mnemonic, communicative, relational, socio-cultural and psychological) are not comprehensive to define an intercultural mediator. As Luka (2005) points out, they in fact need to be preceded by an intimate knowledge the mediators need to have of themselves, which they can develop only by analysing their own characteristics and isolating shortcomings and weaknesses in order to achieve a balance that is usually a prerogative of social workers, and that those having mere language skills tend to underestimate. A mediator may in fact also be addressed in critical moments of the lives of the interlocutors s/he assists, such as birth, death and sorrow, where understanding is a key element. In those moments, the mere act of translating across languages is not enough if not accompanied by a certain degree of empathy that allows the mediator to pick the cultural background (resulting from experience, attitudes, traditions and culture) of the interlocutors they assist, and to reproduce it (Luka, 2005, pp. 207–209). Furthermore, as Catarci (2016) suggests, mediators need to be flexible, consistent, considerate, honest and mostly humble, since an unfriendly behaviour may prompt tensions and hostilities that often put up barriers against the building of a collaborative interaction (Catarci, 2016, p. 130). Last, Luka reminds that beyond training and lifelong learning, mediators need to learn to question themselves and not to take anything for granted, aware of the fact that the world keeps changing fast (Luka, 2005, p. 210).

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[19] Similar to the US National Governors' Association, the Conferenza delle Regioni e delle Province autonome is a body that coordinates the Presidents of the Regional governments and those of the autonomous provinces with the aim of fostering inter-regional discussion for the set up and spread of "best practices" and improving the relationship and dialogue with both the central government the European Union.

Ultimately, in consideration of the current multicultural settings of our societies, even if this professional figure has primarily been envisaged in the field of healthcare upon request of health workers, as reported by the CNEL, nowadays it is needed to fulfil a role in administrative, corporate, socio-cultural, judicial, security, work, school and training contexts [20] (Catarci, 2016, p. 129; Consiglio Nazionale dell'Economia e del Lavoro, 2009, p. 6). That of the mediator is therefore an essential figure for the success of intercultural relations, as s/he stands out for his/her ability to listen, understand, and bring different worlds together, while preserving their peculiarities.

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[20] For more information on the various contexts where intercultural mediation applies in Italy, see: Machetti, S. & Siebetcheu, R., Che cos'è la mediazione linguistico-culturale, Il Mulino, 2017, pp. 77-166.

4   MULTI-ETHNIC POST OFFICES: THE UP PD 7 CASE

This chapter is dedicated to Padua's multi-ethnic post office (UP PD 7) case study, with a focus on its multi-ethnic staff. However, before exploring and analysing all relevant data, I believe it is appropriate to briefly review the developments of Poste Italiane S.p.A., and then reveal how the *uffici postali multietnici* (multi-ethnic post offices) project, which includes Padua's UP PD 7 post office located in the Arcella district, developed. Last, I will dwell on this particular case study in an attempt to outline the features of this "new" category of multicultural employees by way of the qualitative analysis of the data collected from semi-structured interviews.

4.1   A QUICK OVERVIEW OF POSTE ITALIANE S.P.A.

Today, Poste Italiane S.p.A. is no longer a mere postal service company. It is a reality rooted in many areas, amongst which are delivery, logistics, asset management, financial and insurance services, telecommunications, and payments (Poste Italiane, 2022). In addition, according to a statement made by its Managing Director Matteo Del Fante, by the end of 2022 Poste Italiane S.p.A. should venture into the market of energy and power (Il Corriere della Sera, 2022). Mocavini (2015) states that there is no other company in Italy capable of adopting so many varied and diverse tasks. In fact, if on one hand Poste Italiane S.p.A. manages Italy's public postal service, on the other hand it acts as an insurance undertaking, just as much as it collects savings on behalf of *Cassa Depositi e Prestiti S.p.A.*[21], whilst acting as an autonomous financial institution. What is more, while it behaves as a company (i.e. taking care of innovation and new technologies), it also carries out tasks that are normally the prerogative of public authorities (i.e. renewal of permits) (Mocavini, 2015, pp. 1–2). Poste Italiane S.p.A.'s evolution goes hand in hand with the main steps that made it one of Italy's leading companies.

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[21] Founded in 1850, the Cassa Depositi e Prestiti Group, together with shareholders, the Ministry for the Economy and Finance and banking foundations, is the Italian Development Finance Institution aiming to become a key strategic player in promoting sustainable development on a global scale by way of its support to the innovation, growth and internationalisation of small, medium and large enterprises, offering companies its financial and industrial expertise. For more details, see: https://www.cdp.it/sitointernet/en/homepage.page

In 1862, one year after the Unification of Italy, the *Regie Poste* (Italy's Royal Post) came into being. By Law no. 604 of 5 May 1862, all postal service companies throughout the various *Regni* (kingdoms of Italy) were merged into one single Central Administration, and a flat rate valid throughout the country was established (Investire.biz, 2022; La Stampa, 2012; Poste Italiane Spa, 2022). Another important year for Poste Italiane S.p.A. was 1875, when the *Casse di Risparmio Postali* (postal savings banks) were established, thus strengthening the synergy between *Cassa Depositi e Prestiti* and the postal administration: the *Casse di Risparmio Postali* served as a collector for the users' savings, which were then redirected to the *Cassa Depositi e Prestiti*. Additionally, this is the year the *Libretti di Risparmio Postale* (postal savings books) came into being (Mocavini, 2015, p. 7; Poste Italiane Spa, 2022).

In 1889, as Mocavini (2015) reminds us, another event capable of transforming the organization of Poste Italiane S.p.A. occurred: an ad hoc Ministry, the *Ministero delle Poste e dei Telegrafi* (Ministry of Post and Telegraph) was established with the purpose of providing the whole Italian territory with a capillary offices network where it was possible for users to send and receive correspondence (including that which was transmitted via telegraph), make and receive phone calls, as well as performing banking operations. In 1924, former Prime Minister of Italy Benito Mussolini decided to merge all competences and responsibilities pertaining to the railway system, the merchant navy and the postal & telegraph services into a single Ministry, the *Ministero delle comunicazioni* (Ministry of Communications) as he believed it was urgent and necessary to place communication back at the heart of Italy's strategy for economic growth. However, in 1944 the pre-Fascist political and administrative set-up was resumed, and the *Ministero delle Poste e dei Telegrafi* was resurrected and renamed *Ministero delle poste e delle telecomunicazioni* (Archivio Centrale dello Stato, 2010; Mocavini, 2015, pp. 8–11). Mocavini (2015) points out that such a re-establishment did not quell the debates over the efficacy of the postal administration as opposed to the set-up of a newly dedicated economic public body. The Italian Government then decided to take charge of all public services (helped by a workforce of a hundred thousand employees spread over nearly twelve thousands counters) to sustain its country's economic, social and cultural growth (Giuntini et al., 2004, pp. 179–180; Mocavini, 2015, p. 11).

As Giuntini (2007) highlights, another innovation in the second post-war period was represented by airmail. Even if it already existed since the Great War - the first airmail experiment was carried out in 1917 (Poste Italiane Spa, 2022) -, in the second half of the century it experienced a true quantum leap that soon made it the absolute protagonist of the national and international postal storyline (Guntini, 2007, pp. 150–151). Between the 1950s and the 1960s, due to a strong increase in correspondence and freight traffic, the volume of mails rose from about 3 billion in the 1950s to 5 billion in the 1960s (Poste Italiane, 2021). Of course, such a new trend needed innovations aimed at, for instance, as Giuntini (2007) points out, modernising mail sorting by way of a progressive mechanization and automation process that could expedite deployment time and streamline delivery. To this end, on 1 July 1967 the *CAP* (postal code) was officially introduced (Guntini, 2007, p. 163; Poste Italiane, 2021).

However, as Mocavini (2015) reports, the most significant changes for society occurred in the early 1990s. The constant major deficit the postal service caused to the detriment of the State coupled with Europe's new requirement to remove barriers to free competition between private parties in public service provision brought about an intervention of reform under Law no. 487 of 1 December 1993, then converted into Law no.71 of 29 January 1994, which converted the postal and telecommunications administration into an economic public body named "Poste Italiane", and at the same time established that by 31 December 1996, "Poste Italiane" would turn into a joint stock company (Mocavini, 2015, pp. 12–13). As a matter of fact, as Giuntini (2009) points out, such a conversion was completed only after the CIPE[22] decision of 18 December 1997,

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[22] Founded in 1967, the Comitato interministeriale per la programmazione economica e lo sviluppo sostenibile (CIPESS), formerly Comitato interministeriale per la programmazione economica (CIPE) is a collegial body of the Italian government chaired by Italy's Prime Minister and composed of the most experienced Ministers charged with responsibilities in the field of economic growth. It provides views and advice on, and allocates financial resources for, a whole bunch of strategic projects mainly concerning: cultural heritage, education, employment and business support (i.e. industrial innovation, relocation prevention, business internationalization), environment (i.e. sustainable development), infrastructures (i.e. safety of school buildings), mobility (i.e. investment plans and agreements of the main private and public highway concessionaires, such as Autostrade per l'Italia and Trenitalia), power (i.e. decrease in greenhouse gases emissions, recharging of vehicles powered by electricity), research and technological innovation, safety, and social policies (i.e. allocation of the financial resources of the national health fund). For more details, see: https://www.programmazioneeconomica.gov.it/il-cipe/

that made it operational as of 28 February 1998. What is more, it also introduced another important change, namely the adoption of a universal postal service for all citizens alike throughout the European Union (Giuntini, 2009, pp. 17–19).

As Conte and Lavista (2009) explain, following the new joint stock company establishment, a new phase of modernisation of the most traditional financial services offered by Poste Italiane started with the introduction of: a computerized management of *buoni postali* and *libretti postali* (postal bonds and savings books); optional payment of pensions via credit on postal books and accounts; and mostly the so called BancoPosta. This marked the beginning of investments for Poste Italiane, thus making more room for banking and financial products. In 2003, to widen the offer, Poste Italiane enters the insurance industry, with products such as Poste Assicura, a subsidiary of Poste Vita. These innovations totally reversed the trend of Poste Italiane's operating results, and saw the commercial department of BancoPosta grow to become its most profitable. In fact, the main innovations that followed were recorded in this area via the introduction of: the BancoPosta online service; a wider range of personal loans and mortgages, made possible through an agreement with Deutsche Bank; new investment services; the first ever prepaid card in 2003 (yet today one of Poste Italiane's main assets); and PosteMobile, Poste Italiane's mobile phone flagship product (Conte & Lavista, 2009, pp. 94–99). Last, on 27 October 2015, Poste Italiane S.p.A. went public, and is now divided into four main groups: Posta e Pacchi distribuzione , insurance services (Gruppo Poste Vita), financial services (BancoPosta) and payment methos and telecommunication (PostePay) (Poste Italiane Spa, 2022). Today, it keeps innovating and expanding in new business sectors. In 2021, it debuted in the car insurance market, and by 2022 it will break into the power market (Il Corriere della Sera, 2022; Turco, 2021).

The company has thus become a deeply rooted reality in more areas, going well beyond the area of correspondence, and this has thoroughly redesigned its industrial mission making it one of Italy's main actors capable of offering a broad range of services that are strategic to the country's growth, such as logistics, electronic payments, telecommunications, savings, insurance and investments, which are built on globally

recognized brand trust, physical infrastructure capillarity, communication and leadership in the provision of financial services.

4.2   MONO AND MULTI-ETHNIC POST OFFICES PROJECT

Some documents and reports issued by Poste Italiane S.p.A. witness the company's intention to start a new project, in April 2014, designed to meet the changes and evolutions occurring in Italy's social environments that were mainly the result of the ever growing foreign communities throughout the country. Named "mono and multi-ethnic post offices project", it aimed at helping foreigners who could not speak Italian, thus facilitating their access to and understanding of all needed information. This led to the creation of specialized post office counters where a new service model dedicated to foreign citizens was offered. All the staff operating behind these counters were expected to communicate fluently not only in the most common European languages (i.e. English, French, Spanish, etc.), but also in the most widespread languages across the communities of foreign citizens present in the Italian peninsula. The success of this initiative, experimented for the first time in Rome's post office located in via Marsala (near the Termini station, one of the most densely populated areas of the city, having the highest concentration of foreign citizens) convinced Poste Italiane to open an extra 32 multilingual counters in other cities across Italy, with almost 90 multilingual employees: from Turin to Palermo, Padua, Lecce, Milan, Florence, Naples and many more (Bruno, 2021).

The *mono and multi-ethnic post offices project* defined two new post office models:

-        the mono-ethnic post office is dedicated to specific communities of citizens, mainly concentrated in some areas of the city with a strong concentration of one single ethnic majority: this is the case with the UP Prato 4 post office, given the prevailing concentration of the Chinese community in Prato, where an Italian member of staff fluent in Chinese is currently employed (Postenews, 2022);

-        the multi-ethnic post office is instead dedicated to all main ethnic groups present in a given city, and mostly located in high-traffic areas: this is the case with the post offices UP Roma 158, where Chinese, Egyptian, French, and Romanian member of staff are employed (Postenews, 2021), or the UP PD 7.

The staff operating in these post offices is mixed: there are in fact both counter assistant and mono/multi-ethnic employees, depending on the communities mainly represented in a given area. In all cases, the Italian staff is present too.

Once inside the post office, users may help themselves via the interactive terminals, usually located at the entrance, which offer more languages to choose from. Similarly, they can also choose the language of the member of staff they wish to interact with. All informative materials and signage in the post office are drawn up, where possible, in most of the languages of the major ethnic groups represented in that area, or at least in those that are most widespread. Even if Poste Italiane mostly relies on its already employed staff, which is tested on the languages required, it may, if need be, resort to a new selection of Italian or foreign staff personnel by addressing the external market (Poste Italiane, 2014; Poste Italiane Spa, 2016, p. 3). As witnessed by the UP PD 7 multi-ethnic post office, which I will illustrate below, this project is definitely an inclusive and ambitious one.

4.3   CASE STUDY: PADUA'S MULTI-ETHNIC POST OFFICE "PADOVA 7" (UP PD 7)

The purpose of this study is to compare a multi-ethnic post office with a conventional one by analysing its location, premises and management. In particular, my field of investigation focuses on Padua's only multi-ethnic post office: Padova 7 (UP PD 7). Special focus has been placed on linguistic, extra-linguistic, and interpersonal characteristics and skills of its multi-ethnic employees. The method of investigation of this study relies on ethnographic research, which is intended to outline the characteristics of both this multi-ethnic post office and its employees, and draws on qualitative research tools such as participant observation, documents analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The latter are a kind of interview in which the interviewer asks participants of the study questions without having a predetermined plan regarding the content or flow of information to be gathered. Participants are thus given considerable control over the course of the interview, which is however conducted by the interviewer, who needs to make sure that the interview flows in the chosen direction as defined by the study he/she has established in his/her research project (Addeo & Montesperelli, 2007, p. 38; Braun &

Clarke, 2006). Their flexible structure played a key role in my research, in that they have allowed me to delve into focus areas and to collect opinions and comments on a few aspects that had not been considered at the preparation stage. The tools used in my investigation are: a camera, a recorder, semi-structured interviews, and a notepad that I have used to jot down notes, impressions and reactions of all participants. My research included four respondents: the postmaster and three multi-ethnic employees. The latter were hired as multi-ethnic employees in 2015, and for simplicity's sake, in my interviews, I will refer to the multilingual employees by "employee (1)", "employee (2)" and "employee (3)" respectively, numbered according to the order they were interviewed.

On 8 June 2022, I examined the exterior of the UP PD 7 building to capture on camera specific features of interest, and I then moved inside to conduct two semi-structured interviews (one with the employee (1) and another one with the employee (2). On 9 June 2022, I interviewed the employee (3) and the postmaster in the same premises. Over the next three days, I faithfully transcribed the contents of these interviews, and I then dedicated myself to their in-depth analysis. All data collected were examined by way of thematic analysis, by highlighting, regrouping and commenting on the issues raised in the course of the interviews. The most common topics concerned the post office premises (both external and internal) and how they are managed, interactive terminals, the nationality of most of its foreign users, users documentation, the employees' education and training (with a focus on their language and cultural skills), their employment procedure (with special focus on their job interviews for the role of multi-ethnic employee and all linguistic and extra-linguistic requirements), as well as their feedback for improvement. Furthermore, comments and explanations regarding the various topics addressed are also provided by Poste Italiane S.p.A.'s department dedicated to the multi-ethnic post offices project.

As we saw in Chapter 3, Padua is a destination city for many students and foreign visitors alike, and by analysing the distribution of the foreign population in the city, we noticed it was mostly concentrated in the Arcella district (33.40%) (Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica, 2020b). It is therefore no coincidence that Padua's only multi-ethnic post office, "Padova 7" (hereafter referred to as "UP PD 7") is located in this

district. According to the documents and records made available by Poste Italiane and to a few online newspaper articles, UP PD 7 joined the multilingual project in 2015 with its multilingual staff made up of five employees, including: two Albanians, two Moroccans, and one Italian. They are all fluent in their mother tongue, and have a good command of both English and French (Ansa, 2015; PadovaOggi, 2015). What is more, as shown in Poste Italiane's guidelines summed up in Chapter 4.2, by way of the interactive terminals, users can also choose the language of the member of staff they wish to interact with. In fact, as is the case with UP PD 7, the terminal will print out queue number tickets in Albanian, Arabic, English, French, and Italian (PadovaOggi, 2015; Poste Italiane Spa, 2016, p. 55).

4.3.1 UP PD 7: STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT

4.3.1.1 EXTERNAL FAÇADE

UP PD 7 is located in via Tiziano Aspetti no. 156, in front of the bus stop of the "Dazio" tramway, at the heart of the Arcella district of Padua (Figure 1). Were it not for a sign on its entrance leaving no doubt as to its multi-ethnic nature with welcome messages in 11 languages (Albanian, Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Italian, Philippine, Polish, Russian, Romanian, and Spanish), this post office would look similar to many others (Figure 2). Even if Poste Italiane S.p.A. declared that the multilingual poster is a universal sign and therefore remains the same for all multilingual post offices, in this case the languages displayed on the poster reflect the current demographics based on Padua's largest foreign communities.[23]

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[23] Poste Italiane S.p.A's internal communication.

Figure 1 UP PD 7 - External façade

Figure 2 UP PD 7 - Entrance

The first three foreign languages displayed on the sign (Figure 3) follow close behind Italian, and are those I have hinted at in Chapter 2 (English, French, and Spanish), usually found in most study plans and school of languages for their "prestige" as the most spread European languages. What is more, written large is "Welcome", thus identifying the English language as the *lingua franca* of our modern communication society in the age of globalization (Ondelli, 2018). Romanian follows close behind Italian, as a result of the prevalence of the Romanian community in Padua compared to all other foreign communities in that area (8655 Romanian residents already in 2014) (Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica, 2020b). Following shortly after is Russian, which along with Romanian is spread throughout the basin where Padua's second largest community, the Moldovans, is concentrated, as shown in chart 2.2. Then Albanian, Arabic, Chinese, and Philippine follow respectively, as shown in chart 2.2, where it is also apparent how they have played a prominent role amongst foreign communities since 2014 (Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica, 2021). Amongst the largest cultures in Padua is the Nigerian one, which is well integrated also thanks to their command of English, which is amongst Nigeria's official languages (Treccani).

Figure 3 UP PD 7 - Multilingual sign

4.3.1.2 INTERIORS

Right at the entrance, UP PD 7 looks just like any other post office: a waiting room with chairs, employees' monitor display, and a financial consultants' room. A closer look may however help spot a few signs in English, French, and Spanish too. This is the case with the sign placed right outside the financial consultants' room enumerating all services offered (Figure 4). The postal services poster placed close to each employee reads in English, besides Italian. (Figure 5). Possibly due to space constraints, in these two cases all services provided are in the most common European languages in an attempt to reach the widest possible audience within a limited space.

Figure 4 UP PD 7 – Signs outside the Financial Consultants' room
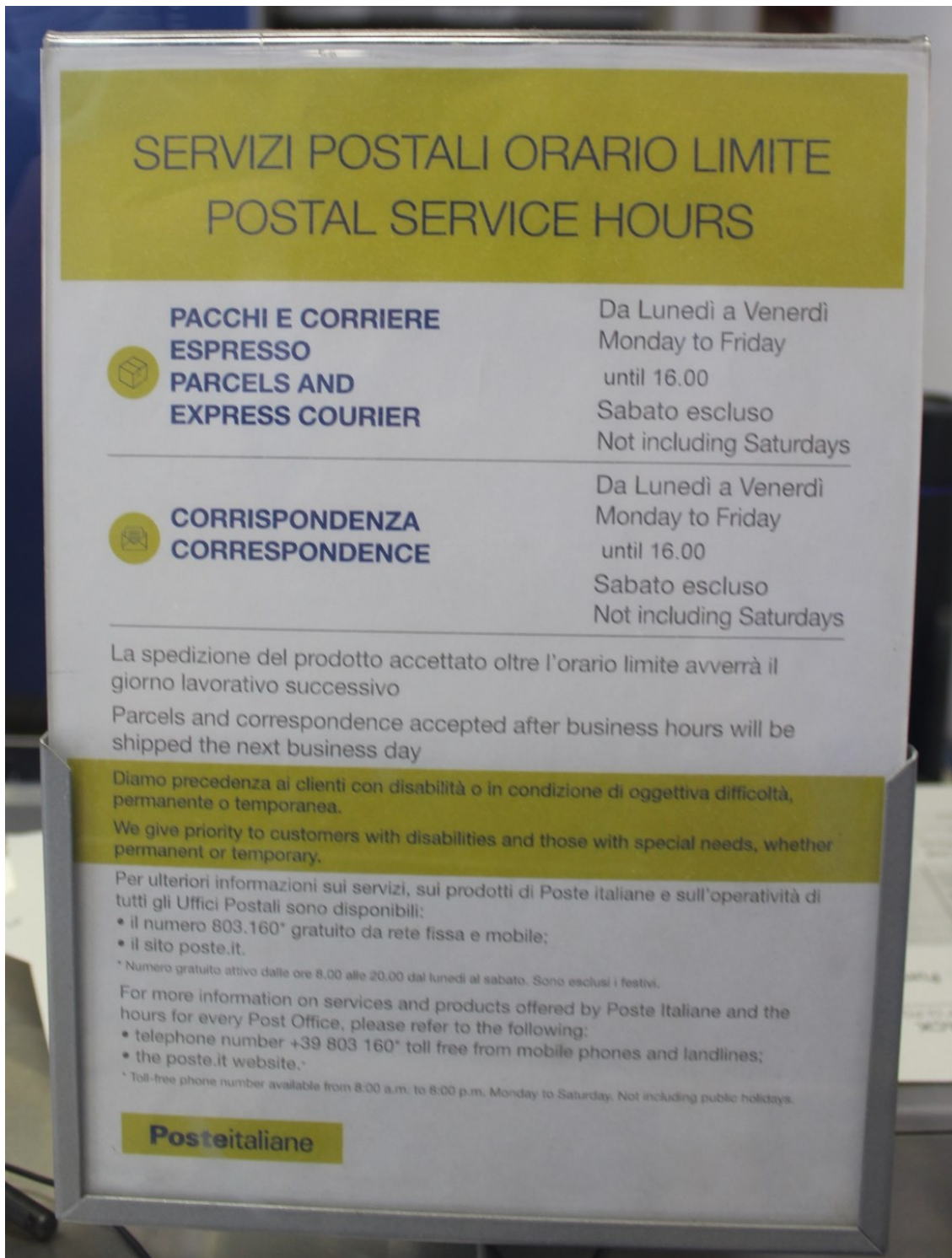
Figure 5 UP PD 7 – Postal services poster beside each employee

4.3.1.3 LANGUAGES SPOKEN

As I have hinted at right at the start of this chapter, according to the documents and records made available by Poste Italiane S.p.A and to a few online newspaper articles, already in

2015 the UP PD 7 multi-ethnic staff of the Arcella district could speak Albanian, Arabic, English, and French, besides Italian. This information was confirmed by the interviews I conducted, where Spanish and Portuguese too actually made an, albeit timid, appearance, as the first and third interviews with the employee (1) and the employee (2) respectively suggest:

I: eravamo in cinque in verità *R: Ah, cinque. E che lingue parlavate?*	**I:** Actually, there were five of us. **R:** Oh, five. And what languages did you speak?
I: arabo, albanese, francese, inglese e anche spagnolo.	**I:** Arabic, Albanian, English, French, and Spanish too.

In the third interview instead, employee (2) hints at Portuguese as the other additional language:

I: [...] ehm eravamo in 5, due albanesi, due arabo/francese/inglese e ehm uno era francese e portoghese… insomma ricordo che parlava anche portoghese.	**I:** […] Um… there were five of us: two Albanians, two Arabic/French/English, and one French/Portuguese… well, that one spoke Portuguese too, I think.

Most certainly, in 2015 there were five newly hired multilingual employees: two Albanians, two Moroccans, and only one Italian, who also spoke French, and maybe Spanish or Portuguese as well. According to the information supplied by Poste Italiane S.p.A.' main office, the Spanish or Portuguese language were not part of the project in PD 7, anyway one of them could also speak one of these languages (Poste Italiane S.p.A., 2022). They were all fluent in English, and the two Moroccans were fluent in French too. Today, of those five employees, only three still work there, two of them now being employed as financial consultants and one is however soon leaving UP PD 7 and will join another post office, just like the remaining two, who have already moved. All this did not however change the languages that are most spoken at UP PD 7, thus confirming the company's care for the continuous development of their foreign clientele, which remains composed of: Albanians, Arabs, English, and French. Nevertheless, Poste Italiane S.p.A.'s multi-ethnic post office project managers state that the Albanian language no

longer belongs to the project because, as the UP PD 7 multilingual employees witness, the Albanian community is well integrated and prefers to speak in Italian.[24]

4.3.1.4 UP PD 7 MOST ASSIDUOUS USERS' NATIONALITIES

Based on the data analysed in Chapter 2.3.4, Padua's foreign residents remained mostly unchanged between 2014 and 2020, and so did the largest foreign communities (Romanians, Moldovans, Nigerians, Moroccans, Albanians, and Philippines). On the contrary, the number of Chinese grew by 25%, and the Bengali population started to grow as of 2016. The perception I have had as I interviewed some of the participants when asked the nationalities they mostly interact with reflects the concentration of the foreign populations residing in the territory, with the exception of the Pakistani community, which is named by both employee (1) and employee (2), even if it is not in the records of the registry office of the city of Padua, as the three interviews below show:

- Employee (1) interview:

R: ok, di quale nazionalità sono solitamente le persone che entrano in ufficio postale?	**R:** I see. What are the nationalities of the most assiduous users of this post office?
I: beh, qua da noi sono molto variegate… abbiamo <u>nigeriani</u>, <u>pakistani</u>, abbiamo quelli del <u>Bangladesh</u>… marocchini in verità pochi, non tantissimi… qualche <u>tunisino</u>, e… <u>cinesi</u>, <u>albanesi</u> e… basta.	**I:** Well, here they are quite mixed… we have <u>Nigerians</u>, <u>Pakistani</u>… <u>Bengali</u>… very few Moroccans actually, not so many… a few <u>Tunisians</u>, and a few Chinese and Albanians… that's all.
R: sono molti...	**R:** There are many, aren't there?...
I: sì, perché copriamo tutto il bacino dell'Arcella che è abbastanza… però diciamo che i nigeriani sono la maggior… la maggioranza…	**I:** Yes, because we cover the whole Arcella area… which is quite large… Nigerians are however the majority…

- Employee (2) interview:

R: *e le persone, le nazionalità con le quali ti interfacci quali sono?*	**R:** What about the people's nationalities you most interact with?
I: *mh, c'è un po' un mix, non c'è una categoria specifica…*	**I:** Um, they are quite mixed… there is not one specific category…
R: *quelle più frequenti, di solito chi entra nella saletta?*	**R:** What are the most assiduous… who walks into your room more frequently?
I: *beh, qui siamo in una zona che è multietnica come abitanti, quindi ci sono tutta la parte dell'africa diciamo, della Nigeria, poi tutti i paesi, la Romania, la Moldavia, albanesi, quindi non è proprio specifico come nazionalità…*	**I:** Well, this area is quite multi-ethnic… many come from Africa, especially from Nigeria… then there most countries like Romania, Moldova… and then the Albanians… so there is no prevalent nationality actually…

- Employee (3) interview:

R: *e qual era la maggioranza delle nazionalità che entravano in ufficio?*	**R:** …and for most of those who walked into the office, what was their nationality?
I: *io ho percepito, io allora ehm… ho percepito che la maggioranza della clientela era, e secondo me ehm era di nazionalità araba, marocchini, Libia, siriani, cioè insomma, specialmente quando siamo iniziati perché poi magari si sono aggiunti tantissimi del Bangladesh, che però parlano in inglese, ehm tantissimi pakistani, ma parlano inglese, i nigeriani parlano in inglese, ehm Senegal e Camerun parlano in francese, insomma c'erano anche clienti albanesi ma devo dire che ehm la clientela albanese, a meno che non fosse il genitore che era venuto qua per stare con il figlio*	**I:** Well, I believe most customers were Arabs, Moroccans, Libyans, Syrians… that's my perception at least... especially when we started off, and then many Bengali joined, who speak English… and many Pakistani, who also speak English.. just like the Nigerians…and many from Senegal and Cameroon, who speak French instead… and a few Albanians too, unless they were parents who came here to stay with their children and grandchildren, for most part they spoke Italian… at least my generation did […]

o con i nipoti, la mia generazione parlava italiano [...]	

4.3.1.5 INTERACTIVE TERMINALS

As one walks into UP PD 7, right on their right hand side one will find interactive terminals printing out queue number tickets (Figure 6). The main screen serves the purpose of selecting the type of product of interest and print out the corresponding queue number ticket. To do so, one only needs to insert a card issued by PostePay or, where applicable, by scanning their delivery notice QR code. On top right of the same screen, one can change language, which is set on Italian by default, and choose from a selection of two: Spanish and Chinese (Figure 7).

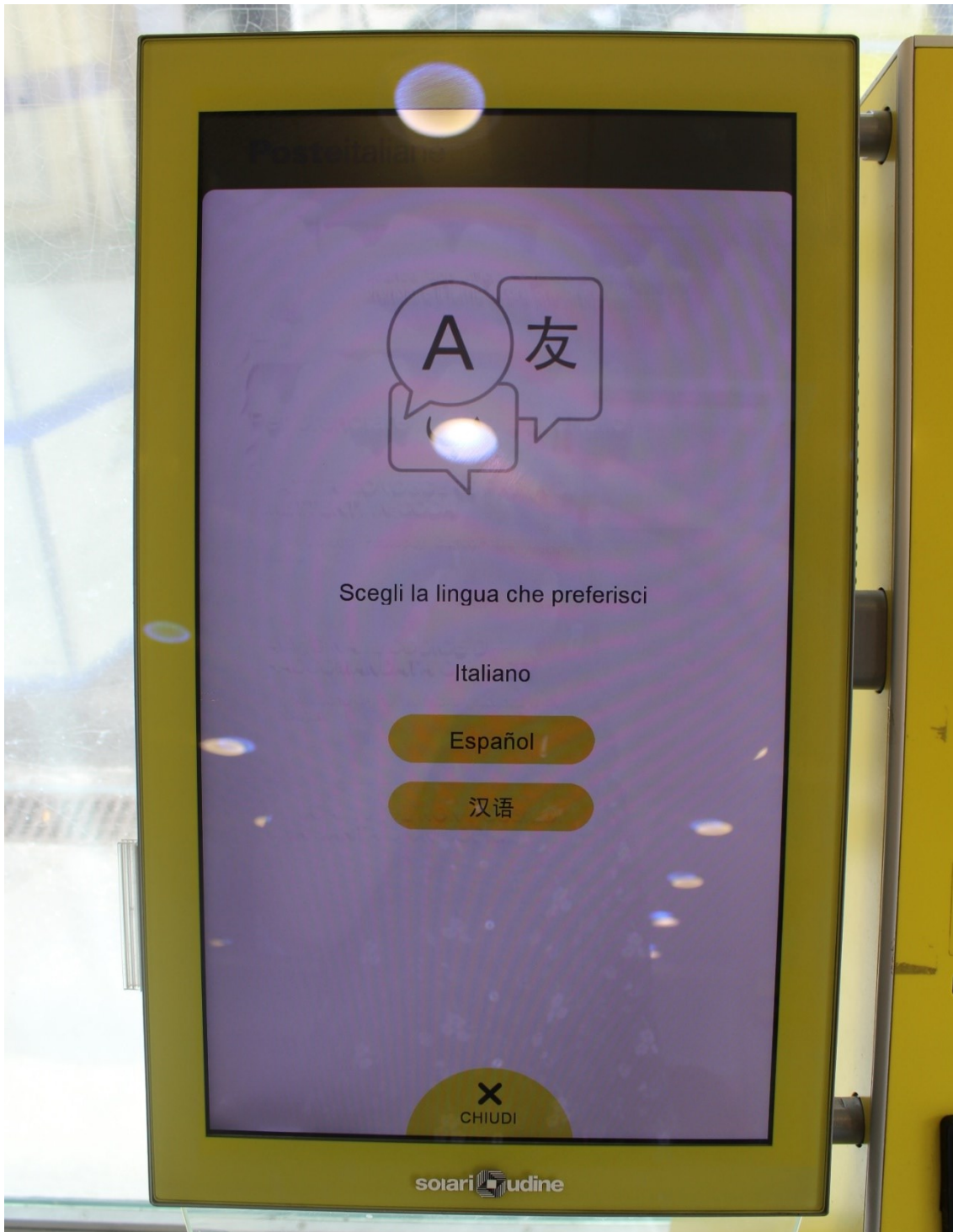Figure 6 UP PD 7 - Interactive terminals

Figure 7 UP PD 7 – Languages available at the interactive terminals

By selecting one of the two languages displayed, all information and services available are automatically displayed in that language. Even if one would expect to find the three languages spoken inside the poste office (Albanian, Arabic, and French), the interactive

terminals is set up for the two most spoken language in the world (in addition to Italian). The lack of the *lingua franca* par excellence, namely English, is a bit surprising, whilst the presence of Chinese is interesting, especially because, based on the data in Chapter 2.3.4, the Chinese language represents one of Padua's fast growing communities. All postal workers participating in this project report that the interactive terminal is updated on the basis of the needs of the clientele, possibly with the aid of a multilingual employee. However, in this case, the terminal has been momentarily disabled due to COVID-19 restrictions, and it is currently being restarted and updated with the needed foreign languages and service quality goals in mind.[25] As a consequence of that, at present, users cannot choose from any of the foreign languages that are currently spoken at UP PD 7 (Albanian, Arabic, English and French). However, this was not the case in the past. In fact, as shown in the interviews below, back in 2015, when UP PD 7 actually became a multi-ethnic one, the interactive terminals presented the user with languages first. Here is how the employee (1) replied in the first interview:

R: *e come funziona quando prendevano il numero da gestore attese?*	**R:** …and after they got their queue number ticket, what followed?
I: *Ecco, quando ci hanno assunti <u>c'era il gestore attese in tutte le lingue che noi parlavamo</u>. Quindi uno entrava, voleva parlare in arabo? Schiacciava arabo e veniva direttamente da me.*	**I:** Well, when we first got hired the <u>interactive terminal would actually speak all of the languages spoken</u> (inside the post office). So, if someone (for instance) wished to speak Arabic, they would first have to choose that language, and in that case I would personally serve them.

Even in the employee (3) interview that follows, it is clear that the way interactive terminals were managed has meanwhile changed:

| **I:** <u>*sai il totem, il totem che da tutti i bigliettini era in base alla lingua non era più in base al servizio [...] quindi ehm… quindi la persona entrava e sul totem*</u> | **I:** <u>I mean, the interactive terminals would first present the users with all available languages</u>, <u>not the services</u> […] so <u>the user</u> |

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[25] Poste Italiane S.p.A's internal communication.

vedeva lingua albanese e quindi sceglievi la lingua…	would just walk inside, see (say) Albanese and choose that one…
R: ok, ognuno diciamo rispondeva di tutti i servizi?	R: I see, so every employee could then serve the user on all services in the language they chose?
I: Bravissima, infatti è la cosa bella di quell'ufficio, che tutti sapevano fare tutto, cioè non era una cosa che mh che se prendi quel numero potevi fare solo questo, potevamo fare con quella lingua tutti i servizi della spedizione, al bonifico, all'apertura virtuale di un libretto piuttosto di PostePay insomma… tutte queste cose qua ehm…	I: Exactly! The good thing about that post office was that everyone could do anything… I mean, it did not depend on the service chosen, um… We could help with all services with that language, from shipping to wire transfer through to opening up a PostePay account… I mean, all these things …
I: poi ehm adesso, poi ad un certo punto si è rimodificata questa cosa, nel senso che non c'era più l'entrata con le lingue	I: then it changed again, and now the user can no longer choose the language first.
R: e come vi siete gestiti poi?	R: …and how did you comply with that?
I: allora, non ricordo il periodo preciso in cui è avvenuto… però ricordo che praticamente il cliente veniva "cosa devi fare" cioè prendi il servizio, cioè devo fare la spedizione, devi fare un bonifico ecc. e se uno andava dalla collega che doveva far la spedizione iniziava a parlare albanese, diceva "ah, ma aspetta un attimo che ti mando dalla collega" o "aspetta un attimo che ti chiamo la collega" piuttosto che...	I: Well, I can't actually remember when this precisely happened um… but I remember customers coming to us and we would ask them: "What do you need to do? A shipment? A wire transfer? You need to select the service first"… and if a customer addressed a colleague that could help on shipping then they would start speaking Albanese (for instance), and that colleague would tell them "Wait, you need to speak to my colleague…" or "Wait, I am going to call that colleague"

So, in 2015, with the launch of this project, all interactive terminals were to present users with languages first and then print out the queue number ticket based on the language chosen by the user so that they could then use that language to interact with the employee that would assist them. At some point, the way customers were managed changed in favour of the service rather than the language. It is apparent that, as shown by the interviews below, when the customer and the employee cannot communicate because of language barriers, the customer is redirected to the multilingual employee. This organizational change tends to allow for post office employees to use their specific professional qualification to their greatest capacity with the support of the on-site multilingual employees. Moreover, the foreign market's needs are constantly changing, and as a result priority is being given to both entry order and service in place of the language. This mechanism is also confirmed by the postmaster in the course of the interview:

R: ci sono delle caratteristiche di questo ufficio, di gestione ad esempio diverse rispetto agli altri uffici? Come il gestore code ad esempio? Prima si sceglieva direttamente la lingua, oggi non più, se un cliente che parla solo francese non capita con la sportellista multilingue come la gestite?	**R:** Does this office have some peculiarities compared to others as far as customers management is concerned, for instance? Once the user could choose their language from those made available by the interactive terminal. This is no longer the case today: if a customer only speaks (say) French, they may end up interacting with an employee who does not speak French. – How do you deal with that?
I: […] per cui tendenzialmente non gli facciamo prendere un altro numero perché logicamente il cliente dovrebbe poi aspettare i clienti che ci sono… ehm... tendenzialmente la collega o il collega che conosce la lingua interviene a supportare l'altro collega…	**I:** […] normally, we simply do not ask them to queue again… um… and the colleague that speaks that language comes to their aid.

4.3.1.6 EMPLOYEES' MONITOR DISPLAY

Another striking fact about UP PD 7 that I have only learned through the interviews is the existence of a particular kind of monitor display for employees. In 2015, when the interactive terminal was based on language selection, all employees monitor displays would not only show the number and service, but also the multilingual employee's name.

- Employee (3) interview:

I: mi ricordo che agli inizi nell'ufficio, sopra gli sportelli dove compaiono i numeri c'erano scritti anche i nostri nomi… e quindi uno anche semplicemente perché vede il nome [...], che è un nome marocchino, insomma il nome proprio d'origine, è bello, cioè mi mettevo appunto nei panni di questi signori che magari anche per una questione di comprensione ehm…	**I:** I recall that at the start (of the project), above the employees there would hang displays showing our names alongside the numbers… and it felt good to see your name displayed, …(as in my case) […], which is a Moroccan name… I mean, it made me walk in these (local) people's shoes, who were somehow given the chance to share and understand…

- Employee interview (1):

I: Quindi uno entrava, selezionava l'arabo e arrivava direttamente da te operatore, anche perché avevamo anche i nomi sopra	**I:** So, a customer would just walk in, choose (say) Arabic, and an employee speaking that language would come to them, and they knew who he/she was as the display would give our names.

These interviews offer an insight into how the mere fact of displaying an employee's name was welcomed by both the employees and the customers, as it helped reduce any cultural distance between the two. Nevertheless, today this is no longer the case, because during the COVID-19 pandemic, the post office was rearranged to accommodate work shifts or days of absence. The employee's name is however still displayed on their badges.[26]

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[26] Poste Italiane S.p.A's internal communication.

4.3.1.7 SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Another question I asked in the course of my interviews was about the printed information material about Poste Italiane's products and services made available at the post office. My aim was to find out if any supporting documentation was available for customers besides the support offered by multilingual employees inside the office. Again, interviews offered a glimpse of how things have changed since the start of the project. Now, a few documents about specific services like MoneyGram [27] and the kit for issuing residence permits for instance are bilingual (Italian/English), whereas the remaining printed documents are available in Italian. In the past, they were instead drafted in other languages as well, like Arabic for instance:

R: bene, ti faccio altre due domande. Ci sono dei documenti scritti in lingua, hai supporto cartaceo in lingua straniera?	**R:** …good. I have two more questions: are there any documents drafted in any foreign language? Is there any printed documentation available for foreigners?
I: adesso no. Prima c'era anche la modulistica… tipo il MoneyGram c'era scritto anche in arabo. Adesso non ci sono più, sono scritti in italiano e inglese.	**I:** Not at this time. Before, we had paperwork and forms (translated into several foreign languages)… MoneyGram was in Arabic too, for instance. Now this is no longer the case... they are drafted in Italian and English.

According to employee (3), in UP PD 7, but not only there, one could find forms in more languages including Chinese, even if very few people spoke that language:

R: e la documentazione com'era? C'era supporto cartaceo in lingua?	**R:** …and what was the documentation like? Was there any printed supporting material for foreigners?
I: si, si ricordo che venivano dei ehm… del materiale diciamo, sia pubblicitario	**I:** Yes, I recall some… um… information material was delivered to the office… mere marketing material and some about

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[27] MoneyGram is an American cross-border P2P payments and money transfer company based in the United States with headquarters in Dallas, Texas.

che sia per le spedizioni, che per… ricordo spedizioni, telefonia…	shipping and telecommunications… if memory serves me well…
***R:** anche in albanese?*	**R:** In Albanian as well?
***I:** sì sì sì sì sì, anche anche tipo tutti i servizi, quelli di spedizione del denaro tipo MoneyGram erano in tutte le lingue, ma anche addirittura, non vorrei adesso dire una sciocchezza, ma mi ricordo anche i moduli del MoneyGram erano in tutte le lingue cioè francese, inglese, ehm avevamo anche il cinese ma nessuno di noi parlava cinese quindi non capivamo niente, però ecco ricordo questa cosa sia sulla telefonia, sia sulle spedizioni, sui… sui soldi insomma…*	**I:** Yes, of course, about all services available… the one about money transfer services like MoneyGram was in all languages, and probably… if I'm not wrong, MoneyGram forms were in all languages… I mean, in English, French, …um… and Chinese too… none of us spoke Chinese, so we actually couldn't understand a word… but I clearly remember this thing about telecommunications and shipping… and about money, I mean…

According to Poste Italiane S.p.A., this change was motivated by both cost reduction and the country's digitalization process underway. The multilingual printing of all products and services documentation material for a single multilingual post office has very high costs, and adequate support is already provided by multilingual employees, who also help out customers when they need to clear up the contents of any given document or form they need to read or fill in. Moreover, the company is heavily investing in the digitalization and dematerialization of documents, a decision motivated by the current socioeconomic and environmental developments.[28]

4.3.2 MULTILINGUAL EMPLOYEES' JOB INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

Another issue I dealt with in my interviews was that of the structure of the job interview all UP PD 7 multilingual employees had to face before they were recruited. In particular, I focused my questions on how the job interview was structured, and on the skills and requirements needed for their role. All of the three interviews that follow clearly show that the job advertisement for that role was for the position of front desk clerk and the

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[28] Poste Italiane S.p.A's internal communication.

additional requirement that was made clear was the knowledge of one of the languages needed (Albanian and Arabic). Three steps would then follow: the first one consisted in a written test on general knowledge and reasoning; the second one consisted in written test on the knowledge of the English language; the third and last one aimed at testing (always in written form) the language the candidate applied for. If all of the three written tests proved successful, an interview would follow. This interview was to take place in Mestre with a remote connection to Poste Italiane's headquarters of Rome, where a Human Resource Manager and a mother tongue assistant for the language to be tested sat. The job interview was mainly carried out by manager's mother tongue assistant so that he/she could better assess the candidate's knowledge and command of that language. The interviews I carried out clearly show that the emphasis of the job interviews, besides verifying that the candidate possessed the necessary qualifications for the role of front desk clerk, was on language fluency. This part of the interview aimed at verifying the complete and total mastery of the foreign language and the ability to deal with all levels of fluency in that language, which also explains why generic conversation had taken place. What is more, I have noticed a difference between the interview of the Moroccan employee and that of the Albanian employees.

While, as shown in the interview that follows, in the case for the job interview with the Albanian employees there seem to have been staged simulations to assess how the candidate would react under certain circumstances, besides other more general questions on their culture, in the case with the Moroccan employee, there seems to have been neither technical question on Poste Italiane's products and sale, for instance, or questions on the Arabic culture: the candidate reported the interview was deeply focused on assessing their level of knowledge of the Arabic language and how they had learned it.

- Employee interview (2)

R: ok, e l'orale?	**R:** I see. And what about the job interview?
I: uguale, magari ti chiedevano domande più specifiche ma chiacchierando per far	**I:** Just the same. They would maybe ask something more specific, but it was just another way to chat so as to make sure I

venir fuori se sei sul serio nato in Albania, se hai studiato ecc.	was actually born in Albania, and to learn more about my education, etc.
R: ok, ti hanno anche chiesto informazioni relazionali, culturali?	**R:** I see. Did they try to dig into your culture?
I: quello si, assolutamente.	**I:** Yes, of course!
R: tipo?	**R:** What kind of questions did they ask to this aim?
I: adesso non mi ricordo le domande specifiche, però assolutamente sì. Sia a livello per quanto riguarda la cultura… come ti porresti nei confronti dei clienti, anche proprio esempi "cosa faresti in questo caso" ad esempio…	**I:** I can't remember now… but yes, they did ask about my culture and tried to figure out how I would deal with customers… I mean, by way of practical examples like: "what would you do if…?"

- Employee interview (3):

R: erano sempre domande generiche, oppure ti chiedevano anche cose sulla cultura albanese?	**R:** Did they ask generic questions or did they ask about the Albanian culture?
I: no, no, certo era più, appunto, più concentrato sulla cultura, come sei venuta a conoscenza dell'albanese, però ovviamente le ho detto "sono madrelingua" poi appena mi ha sentito parlare ovviamente il signore non ha avuto dubbi che conoscessi l'albanese e poi ehm mi ha detto, ma ehm <u>sei del sud, del nord, per capire un attimo anche se a livello geografico capivo, cioè sapevo cos'era l'Albania e quant'altro</u>… Quindi sì, nel senso che entrava, entrava nel merito <u>di che albanese parlavo cioè, parlavo cioè sono un dialettale o</u>…io in	**I:** no, it was more focused on my culture, on how I had learned Albanian, but I have simply replied that Albanian is my mother tongue, and it didn't take long for them to realise as I started to speak… then they asked me…um.. <u>if I was from the north or the south side of Albania to figure out if I knew the territory</u>… That had to do with my knowledge of the Albanian language too… I mean, if I only spoke a dialect or if I was actually raised in Tirana… my parents um… my mother especially speaks standard Albanian… so we never spoke any dialects at home… so I speak

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realtà sono cresciuta a Tirana, i miei genitori ehm… principalmente mia mamma parla proprio l'albanese ufficiale diciamo, quindi a casa non abbiamo mai parlato dialetto, quindi parlo l'italiano ehm l'albanese quello scritto, conosciuto, ufficiale quindi tra l'altro aveva una cadenza più dialettale la persona che mi faceva il colloquio ahaha e infatti mi disse "mamma mia parli un albanese perfetto" ehm quindi non c'è stato nessun problema puoi appunto, è entrato un po' in merito di come dicevo, appunto, sei dell'Albania del centro ma conosci altri paesi, altre città, insomma…	Italian… ehm Albanian as it shows in the written form… I mean, the official language… In addition, the interviewer had a more pronounced accent, indeed he told me: "Oh my, you speak a perfect Albanian!"… um… so, I mean, it became clear… then, like I said before, they asked about my exact provenance… if I came from central Albania and if I knew other neighbouring countries and towns…

As the last excerpt of my interview shows, in this case, the mother tongue assistant that conducted the job interview wanted to assess the candidate's cultural and geographic competences about her country of origin. Moreover, it is interesting to notice how they dwelled on the candidate's country linguistic variants. It is probably easier to find speakers of a dialect rather than of a standard variant of any given language, so more attention was being paid to recruiting someone that could speak the standard variant of that language.

4.3.3   UP PD 7 MULTILINGUAL STAFF

Another aspect I have tried to cover in my interviews is about the extra-linguistic skills of the employees, which I have broadly dealt with in Chapter 3.3.2, especially so far as communication and interpersonal relations are concerned, with focus on those skills and competences that make a good cultural mediator. To this purpose, I have simulated situations with foreign customers to observe how they would deal with that.

4.3.3.1 MULTILINGUAL EMPLOYEE (1)

The employee (1) serving at UP PD 7 was born and raised in Morocco until the age of 8. She then moved to Italy with her family, where she resumed her studies and obtained a master's degree in Eurasian and Mediterranean languages and culture (CdLM *Lingue e Letterature dell'Eurasia e del Mediterraneo),* with majors in Arabic and Turkish. She declares that she has a good command of Arabic, English, French, Italian, Turkish and of the Moroccan dialect. Moreover, she declares that she has spent a few months in England even if not as part of the Erasmus project, which she did not apply for. She tells she had many jobs, including teaching Arabic at a technical institute for tourism and held evening courses of Arabic for adults. She joined Poste Italiane's UP PD 7 in 2015 as a multilingual employee, where she currently works in the same role.

Her interview leaves no doubt as to her good intercultural and communicative skills. In fact, she reports that the Moroccan culture envisages ways of interacting with people that differ from those pertaining to the Italian culture, and that she behaves differently depending on the person she needs to interact with. What is more, she notices she behaves differently when she approaches a Pakistani man, which makes her adopt a colder and more professional attitude. These statements shed light on the awareness the respondent has about the cultural differences that exist between Moroccans, Turks and Italians, for instance, and on how this leads her to tailor her behaviour accordingly. Amongst the experiences she recounts, there is one about the differences she noticed between people from the former colonies of Africa, depending on whether they come from English or French speaking colonies:

| *I: io ho imparato una cosa che forse può aiutarti, nel senso come questione di cultura… avendo studiato un po' di geografia culturale, per l'Africa in particolare, con tutte le colonie che ci sono state, no? Quindi delle volte mi faccio degli studi personali, quindi vedo le colonie inglesi, le colonie francesi le colonie… e vedo come le persone si* | **I:** I have learned one thing that may be of help to you so far as culture is concerned. As I have studied cultural geography, with special focus on Africa and all of its colonies, over the last 7 years, I kept carrying my own personal research and found out how people coming from an English-speaking colony of Africa behave differently from those coming from a |

comportano e ho imparato in questi 7 anni che quelli che hanno avuto la colonia francese, oltre al fatto che sono diversi anche nei modi, cioè hanno dei modi diversi, rispetto a come potrebbe essere uno della Nigeria o potrebbe essere del Congo, o che ne so, quello che è... hanno un modo un po'... sono un po' supponenti [sussurrato].	French-speaking colony: for instance, the French have different ways from, say, someone coming from Nigeria or Congo… they are a little bit opinionated [*whispering*].

She went on to say that, for instance, she changes her strategy if she needs to interact with someone from Cameroon, since they prefer to speak Italian and misbehave when they are approached in French:

I: *E tante volte non vogliono parlare in francese, vogliono parlare in italiano anche se non lo parlano bene e quindi se tu gli parli in francese tante volte, uno addirittura una volta mi ha risposto "io lo so l'italiano"... non lo so, si sentono un po' denigrati [...] che non è integrato. Che non sei integrato...*	**I:** ...and many times they don't want to speak French at all! They want to speak Italian, even if they do not master it… so, if you address them in French… I mean, once one person interrupted me saying: "I definitely can speak Italian, thank you." …I believe they feel somewhat belittled […], I mean, not well integrated…

This shows her empathy and ability to adapt to her speaker. Moreover, it clearly shows how she tends to speak the language her interlocutor chooses or prefers. She definitely tries to meet her customer's needs, making them comfortable by speaking the language the know best.

Another strategy the employee adopts when there is no printed documentation in a given foreign language, is taking notes and sum-up the information her customer needs to help them better understand. Even then, she asks her customers what language her notes had better be, since they might opt for Italian, for instance, when those notes are meant for their children who, having been born in Italy, master the Italian language more than that of their parents.

Last, she suggests that Poste Italiane should organize courses on its products and services in each foreign language to improve the service the multi-ethnic staff are called to offer. This would help her stay current on all those technicalities and terms she needs to perform at her best. Such an advice also denotes her awareness of how language changes with time and depending on context, and at the same time highlights how important it is for a good cultural mediator to keep abreast, as I have explained in Chapter 3.3.2 (Luka, 2005, p. 210).

4.3.3.2 MULTILINGUAL EMPLOYEE (2)

Employee (2) was born in Albania, and then moved to Italy at the age of 10. She however attended high school in Albania, then she returned to Italy, where she settled down for good, after she graduated in Business Economics (CdL *Economia aziendale*). She did not have any experience abroad as she was a working student, and right after graduating she worked in an accountancy firm and in a store in Venice that sold Carnival masks, where she claims having improved her English a lot. She claims she is fluent in Albanian, English, and Italian, and can speak some Spanish too. She started working for Poste Italiane in 2015 as a multi-ethnic employee, and now she is a financial consultant.

As for her cultural skills, I believe the following excerpt from her interview is worthy of note:

I: Ogni paese ha i propri pensieri sulla vita, le proprie necessità, i propri bisogni… io che faccio la consulente, per esempio, abbiamo la protezione e quindi ogni paese ha le proprie paure, sono diverse da paese a paese…	**I:** Each country sees life differently, and focuses on different needs… As a financial consultant, I, for instance, promote safety… each country has their fears…
R: interessante, noti che ci sono dei bisogni diversi a seconda della nazionalità	**R:** …that sounds interesting. You are saying that there are different needs based on nationality…
I: assolutamente sì	**I:** Yes, definitely.

The respondent claims she is aware that needs vary based on the socio-cultural setting any given person was raised or lives in, and this all varies depending on both country and

culture. As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, all needs and their fulfilment are strictly connected to the anthropological view of culture. Sciolla (2012) even ranks them among the main components of culture, just as much as eating, sleeping, dressing, etc. (Santipolo, 2002, p. 188; Sciolla, 2012, p. 17). Moreover, the respondent seems to show the gift of bringing out the needs of their interlocutors so as to adopt the best strategy and find the best solutions for them, just as I have pointed out in Chapter 3, where such a gift was described as essential to an intercultural mediator's set of skills (Conferenza delle Regioni e delle Province Autonome, 2009, p. 9). In the excerpt that follows, she instead shows minimal care for extra-linguistic cultural differences such as, for instance, non-verbal communication:

R: ok, noti delle differenze comportamentali tra persone di paesi diversi?	**R:** I see… so, did you spot any behavioural differences across people coming from different countries?
I: in che senso?	**I:** What do you mean by that?
R: non so, ad esempio noi italiani siamo rinomati per gesticolare molto	**R:** For instance, for us Italians… we have a reputation for gesturing…
I: ah, quello si perché ogni paese ha il proprio modo, poi dipende dalla persona…	**I:** Uh, OK, I get what you mean… yes, definitely, for each country has their own ways… but that also depends on the individual...
R: e tipo la cultura albanese ha una gestualità particolare?	**R:** …do Albanians have any particular gesture?
I: no, dipende… le persone sono tutte persone a prescindere dalla nazionalità quindi… mh no..	**I:** Um… not really… but, again, that depends on the person… people are people, despite their nationality…
R: quindi la gestualità albanese ad esempio c'è?	**R:** So Albanians don't have any particular gestures…
I: mh no, no… ce l'hanno soltanto gli italiani mi sa ahaha	**I:** Um, no… I believe only Italians have that! [*laughing*]
R: ahahah anche i turchi ad esempio hanno dei gesti che indicano qualcosa,	**R:** [*laughing*] Turks too have gestures carrying a particular meaning… some

alcuni simili ai nostri ma con significati diversi.	actually resembling ours, but carrying different meanings....
I: si, ma quello anche l'americano penso abbia qualcosa di diverso, penso sia normale	**I:** Yes, but that belongs to Americans as well… I believe it is normal…
R: certo, normale e bello. Era solo per capire se avevi notato delle differenze tra le varie nazionalità che passano in ufficio	**R:** Of course, normal and beautiful to have. I only meant to understand if you had spotted any differences across the nationalities you get to interface with in the office…
I: no, sinceramente no.	**I:** Not really.

The respondent's answers denote she is aware of the existence of extra-linguistic differences across nationalities, but she cannot seem to spot any that are linked to the gestures Albanians most frequently resort to. Moreover, employees (2) believes some non-verbal behaviour does not largely depend on the culture of origin, but rather on personal characteristics. As some supporters of the non-essentialist approach believe, culture goes beyond a country's borders (Bradley, 2018; Holliday, 1999).

In the following excerpt, it is in fact clear how she pays much attention towards the linguistic difficulties a foreign customer may experience, so much so as to start speaking only after the customer, so that she understands what language he/she feels more comfortable with. If this is not the case, she starts by asking what language they prefer to use. She claims the customers' reaction to her approach is highly positive, as this makes them feel at ease and reassured:

I: bene, sono contenti perché se capiscono di più sono più tranquilli, magari anche di non essere fregati perché hanno un po' la paura di essere fregati perché non sanno benissimo la lingua	**I:** They are happy about that since that puts them in a position to understand better… as they fear scams are around the corner, especially for those who do not know the language well…

So far as printed documentation is concerned, she admitted adding some information in one of the languages she speaks, if need be, even if that is hard to do due to the large amount of information material concerning some financial products. This leads her to sum-up the main information orally making sure the customer understands.

R: ok, va bene. Ti faccio un'altra domanda. Hai del supporto cartaceo anche in lingua?	**R:** I see. Do you have any printed documentation at hand translated into any foreign language?
I: no, <u>il supporto cartaceo è in italiano</u>. Non abbiamo in altre lingue.	**I:** No! <u>Printed documentation is available in Italian.</u> We do not have any available in other languages.
R: e se uno non sa l'italiano come ti comporti?	**R:**…and what if a customer does not speak Italian? How do you deal with that?
I: <u>glielo spieghiamo</u>! parliamo in inglese, gli spiego e di solito gli scrivo qualcosa	**I:** <u>We explain it to them</u>! We explain in English, and write down some notes for them…
R: ah, e in che lingua gli scrivi?	**R:** Oh, and what language do you write in?
I: no, non è che scrivo la lingua, non potrei neanche tradurre 60 pagine di ogni foglio informativo… ma tipo i numeri, le cifre, quello che deve pagare, cosa copre, i massimali ecc.	**I:** No, I do not write in any language… I could not even do that every time since each document is up to 60 pages or so… I just write down numbers, the amounts they need to pay, thresholds and ceilings, etc.

4.3.3.3 MULTILINGUAL EMPLOYEE (3)

Employee (3) was born and raised in Albania until the age of 19, when she moved to Italy to attend university. She graduated in Economics and Business (CdL *Economia e Commercio*) and obtained two postgraduate masters, one in Banking Systems and the other in Financial Crisis Management (MUI *Crisi Finanziaria* e *Sistema Bancario*) with English-taught courses. After completing her studies, she covered different roles in the fields of economics and banking, where both the Albanian and the Italian languages were

required. She speaks fluent Albanian, English, and Italian. She joined Poste Italiane in 2015 as a multi-ethnic employee.

Again, the respondent reports that she speaks the language the customer prefers, including Italian even when the customer does not know it well, if she is addressed using Italian, justifying her choice as follows:

I: io continuo in italiano quando vedo che parlano italiano, anche se vedo che fanno errori, io li lascio fare errori, perché passare in un'altra lingua mi sembra di offenderli… infatti mi vengono i brividi perché anche agli inizi io avevo tanta paura di sbagliare in italiano e se qualcuno mi correggeva mi faceva piacere però d'altra parte mh… un po' per orgoglio mh… quindi io se comunque li capisco li lascio parlare nella lingua che mi parlano, cioè non cerco io di cambiare	**I:** If they start off with Italian, I go on with Italian, even if I realize they do not know it well, since I fear they may be offended if I ask them to switch language. Actually, the thought almost makes me cringe as I recall when I started speaking Italian and was afraid of making mistakes, and if someone corrected me I was pleased on one hand, and on the other, uh… may I was too proud… so, as long as I understand them, I just let them speak the language they start off with… I mean, I do not even try to persuade them to switch language…
R: *se invece uno entra e ti inizia a parlare in albanese diretto?*	**R:** …and what if somebody steps in and starts speaking Albanian right away?
I: ah beh, continuo in albanese… io li lascio molto scegliere, cioè se è una lingua che capisco non ho problemi, cioè uno inizia a parlarmi in francese, che… mmmh no, nel senso che mi è un po' difficile capire a comprendere quello che sta dicendo però no, se mi inizia con una lingua di quelle tre che conosco io lascio stare, non ho nessun problema, insomma è interscambiabile per me il discorso…	**I:** Oh, well, I go on with Albanian… I just give them utmost freedom… I mean, as long as they speak a language I know well… except if someone starts speaking, say, French, um… as I find it hard to understand… If they instead start off with one of the three languages I know well, I won't interrupt them… I mean, that makes no difference to me…

It is interesting how the staff for most part try to put customers at ease by letting them speak the language they prefer, so long as they fall within those the staff speak too, without even trying to switch for fear of offending them. Empathy is thus at the core of the staff priorities when it comes to dealing with customers, and it clearly shows how this has to do with the employee's past personal experience. As I have mentioned in Chapter 3, where the set of skills of a good intercultural mediator was outlined, Luka (2005) dwells on the importance of emotional and empathic communication, in that all participants need to be fully involved for the success of the mediation process, which goes beyond speaking a foreign language, but rather speaking our interlocutor's own language (Luka, 2005, pp. 207–209).

The following excerpt shows the respondent's ability to immediately step into the shoes of the user and understand the issues any foreigner is faced with under special circumstances:

R: *Da quando lavori qua, hai mai notato delle differenze tra le varie etnie?*	**R:** Have you ever spotted any differences across ethnicities in the course of your activities?
I: *si!*	**I:** Sure I did!
R: *e ti comporti diversamente*	**R:** And do you change your attitude accordingly?
I: *cerco di essere comunque ehm la me di sempre, con comunque una veste professionale, è ovvio che se [...] che magari è una ragazza albanese che ormai oltre che cliente viene a farti gli auguri della festa nazionale e quindi te lo fa in albanese perché ti conosce... ti sfugge quel sorriso in più ovviamente però non per questo cioè se uno è senegalese e io non faccio il servizio, ovvio che no oppure... non ho nessun problema voglio dire, anzi, in questo devo dire essendo una persona*	**I:** Um… I always try to be myself, I mean, professionally… however, […] if a relationship with an Albanian girl turns from professional to confidential, once she for instance gives me wishes for a national holiday, and does so in Albanian, I add a more confident smile… but of course this does not mean that I don't comply with a Senegalese's requests if they come to me… on the contrary, I understand the difficulties someone with a far off culture has, so I

comunque che è venuta qua ehm… con un'altra etnia alle spalle capisco la difficoltà quindi non ho nessun tipo di limite a dire "ah, è arrivato questo, il pakistano… con il quale devo parlare in inglese", assolutamente…	am not going to hold a grudge thinking "here is yet another Pakistani trying to speak English…"

Last, I believe the respondent's advice for a better service is worth noting, as she stresses the need to add someone speaking Romanian and Chinese. She has in fact on one hand spotted many Romanians and Moldovans amongst the clientele (they are in fact Padua's largest foreign populations), and on the other hand found the difficulties the Chinese have when they need to:

I: *"l'etnia con più difficoltà perché loro non parlano altre lingue, cioè loro non parlano niente quindi con coloro… è impossibile, cioè ehm…".*	**I:** They are the ethnicity with the greatest difficulties as they do not speak other languages besides their own, so it becomes almost, um… impossible.

The postmaster too agrees on the need to add someone speaking Chinese:

I: *poi c'è invece la comunità cinese, quella che… che lì potrebbe invece essere implementata anche perché qui a Padova appunto c'è una grossa comunità, dopo Prato, è la seconda comunità cinese più grande d' Italia, per cui avere un operatore che magari parla la lingua cinese potrebbe essere un valore aggiunto, ulteriore a quello che già c'è...*	**I:** …then there is the Chinese community… that one should be implemented, also because here in Padua they are quite a large community, second only to that of Prato, which is the second largest in Italy… so, having an employee able to speak Chinese would actually be an added value…

CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

This study sought to identify the characteristics of multi-ethnic post offices and to examine the linguistic and extra-linguistic skills of multilingual employees. My research question thus aimed at investigating whether Poste Italiane S.p.A.'s multilingual employees were simply expert speakers of the languages they supported or if they were also endowed with those cultural and extra-linguistic skills a good intercultural mediator needs to have to perform his/her tasks. For this purpose, a qualitative investigation was conducted that could rely on semi-structured interviews with a sample of respondents consisting of four employees working for Poste Italiane at Padua's only multi-ethnic post office "Padova 7" (UP PD 7). I have chosen UP PD 7 as a case study for inclusiveness due to its characteristics that make it an ideal setting for assessing our ever-changing, heterogeneous and multicultural societies.

This post office is located in Arcella, which is Padua's district with the highest concentration of foreign residents (33.40 % in 2020), and was created to meet the needs of all types of customers, including Poste Italiane's international clientele. The languages that are most spoken by multilingual employees within UP PD 7 are: Albanian, Arabic, English and French. As I have mentioned before, in 2015 Padua's largest communities in the district of Arcella were, in order, the Romanians, the Moldovans, the Nigerians, the Moroccans, the Chinese and the Albanians (Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica, 2015). Even though the Romanian, the Moldovan and the Chinese languages were not represented within UP PD 7, services were offered in most foreign languages so as to meet the demand of most foreign residents. In particular, English and French served as a lingua franca/second language for the Nigerians and the Moroccans respectively. Compared to the communities present in the territory in 2015, when the multi-ethnic project started, the choice of languages available at UP PD 7 was made with inclusiveness in mind and in consideration of the difficulties the largest communities in the area might have to cope with. Today, based on the data obtained from Padua's statistical yearbook of 2020 as well as on those retrieved from the interviews with the UP PD 7 employees, it appears that the largest communities in that district remain the Romanians are the Moldovans, followed right behind by the Chinese, which is rising quickly alongside the

Bengalese, although at a lower pace. On the contrary, the Nigerians and the Moroccans remain unchanged (Settore Programmazione Controllo e Statistica, 2020b).

The external and internal characteristics of the office premises make it stand out from more traditional post offices. A closer look into the interviews revealed that UP PD 7 has undergone major changes since its start in 2015, as far as its management is concerned. The post office interactive terminal is no longer managed starting from the selection of languages spoken by the staff inside the post office, but rather on the services it offers. Only in case of need will a multilingual employee come to the customers' aid. This new organizational structure allows for Poste Italiane S.p.A.'s various employees to use their specific qualifications, and helps overcome any linguistic barrier. What is more, even though the number of multilingual employees has decreased, the number of languages offered has remained unchanged (Arabic, Albanian, English, and French), in that the two remaining employees area able to cover the four languages. However, currently the interactive terminal does not offer all of its services in all of the foreign languages spoken by the multilingual office employees, but, as Poste Italian S.p.A.'s project director states, during the COVID-19 pandemic the terminal was discontinued, and now needs to be reactivated and updated with all needed languages and services.

As for the job interviews conducted with the employees, the data collected show that they mainly focused on the knowledge of foreign languages. Each candidate was tested on written language production, by means of three tests, two of which were in the candidate's chosen language (in most cases their native language) and in English, and then interviewed in their chosen / native language to test both their language skills and their ability to work as a front desk clerk. All candidates state having been asked questions related to the culture of their country of origin. Moreover, the Albanian assistant/recruiter appeared to be more sensitive to the cultural, geographical, and dialectal aspects of the job . A good command of the language required is a good starting point to interact with a speaker of that language. However, good intercultural and communicative skills are just as important: cultural and extra-linguistic awareness plays a fundamental role in ensuring a successful negotiation free from misunderstanding (Piller, 2017, p. 4).

Last, all multilingual employees of UP PD 7 come from abroad, and the main language they were tested on was their own mother tongue, unlike other multilingual post offices where most employees are native speakers of Italian who can also speak other languages. As I have mentioned before, since the 2000s, in Italy, that of the intercultural mediator became a role that could be carried out by Italians as well, thus ceasing to remain the preserve of migrants (Cestaro, 2009, pp. 22–23). Both foreigners with a good command of the Italian language and Italians with a good command of a foreign language and culture may then be a good fit for the role of multilingual employee. In fact, the three multilingual employees at UP PD 7 are all fluent in Italian, and based on their education and previous work experience, along with their self-confidence in talking about themselves, I am led to believe that they for most part have a good command of English and French as well, especially as far as multilingual employee (1) is concerned, who also would appear to possess greater intercultural communicative competence compared to the other two. In fact, based on some remarks made by multilingual employee (1), it is apparent that she has a good awareness and knowledge of many cultural aspects of the largest communities that may be addressed in UP PD 7, which may make her a good intercultural mediator (Herrman et al., 2001, p. 145). This is probably due to her education, which, compared to that of the other two, that was instead mainly focused on business and economics, helped her develop this extra skill. In fact, as I have shown in the previous chapter, having a strong language background does not make an intercultural mediator. Even if multilingual employee (1) did not attend a university-level intercultural mediator course, she developed intercultural and communicative skills and has acquired a good knowledge of the languages she uses in the workplace and of their cultures of reference. That said, all of the three respondents showed good relational and communicative skills, have an empathetic approach with customers, and problem solving skills: they know how to meet the customer's needs when it comes to choosing what languages should be used, or else make notes for them when no printed documentation is available in the languages the customer knows best. What is more, all interviewees were all able to sum up the main features of most postal products and services and to provide equivalents in their native language both orally and by drawing small tables for their customers, thus showing good analysis and synthesis skills. As I have already mentioned, mnemonic, data collection, and synthesis skills are crucial for a good intercultural

mediator (Luka, 2005, p. 209). All of the characteristics that emerged from the analysis of the interviews conducted outline professional roles in line with the ideal requirements that make a good intercultural mediator, thus making it clear that Poste Italiane S.p.A.'s multilingual employees are far from mere multilingual speakers. Nonetheless, compared to the other two, multilingual employee (1) shows greater intercultural and communicative skills that are the result of an ad hoc education and training, which remain unparalleled.

The multi-ethnic post office project is an ambitious one that tries to keep up with Italy's socio-economic developments in the company's attempt to include all kinds of customers. Today's societies are defined as "superdiverse" (Vertovec, 2019, p. 130) and in constant movement and change. Even if it is not easy for a company to meet all arising needs, this project has proved to be very attentive to the needs of international customers. Interacting with employees who can speak the languages of the largest communities of the city is a true wealth. In the case with Padua, given the importance of the Romanian community and the growing presence of the Chinese community, adding Romanian and Chinese amongst the languages spoken in UP PD 7 could be an asset as it has already been done in other multi-ethnic post offices in Italy. In particular, data show that the Chinese find it hard to even understand English, thus making it clear that a professional figure trained in this language is needed. As I have pointed out in section 1.2.1, companies are supposed to adapt to market changes, not the opposite. That is why Poste Italiane S.p.A. has announced that it is committed to updating the languages spoken within UP PD 7 to meet the needs of their ever-changing clientele. However, as the lingua franca par excellence, it would be highly desirable to speak English in all post offices located in tourist or metropolitan areas. As long as English courses are available in the company's learning platform, it is clear that the company's special focus is on developing communication skills along with products and services. Another asset would be offering to its employees courses on the company's products and services in all of the languages spoken in UP PD 7, so as to familiarize with the terminology that applies to any given product or service, thus making the communication process smoother and clearer. Moreover, with the aim of strengthening their multilingual employees' intercultural and communicative skills, offering them free courses would turn out to be useful for all, as I have already pointed

out in section 3.3.2, but especially for multilingual employees (2) and (3), who have not had an intercultural mediation focused education and training. However, Poste Italiane S.p.A. already offers similar courses to all of their employees, in an attempt to help them to spot and interpret non-verbal communication and to learn using an inclusive and non-discriminatory language. The addition of intercultural elements would help shaping up a more comprehensive multilingual and standard staff, and at the same time make the company more inclusive.

Moreover, considering the ongoing digital and technological developments alongside the climate change crisis, investing in the development of digital multilingual documentation could be an asset. Having the chance to download, for instance, multilingual forms and documentation for certain services directly from the company's website could encourage inclusion and at the same time help the company to respect the environment and to keep up with the country's digitalization process. Finally, Poste Italiane S.p.A stated that the multi-ethnic post office project is undergoing a transformation and that they have planned training and internal communication initiatives that build on the richness of the languages and cultures represented by its multilingual employees. These initiatives are aimed at involving the entire staff of the multi-ethnic post office in an attempt to spread cultural inclusion among all its employees.

ITALIAN SUMMARY

INTRODUZIONE

Sentiamo spesso parlare del termine "multiculturalismo" e sebbene l'utilizzo grammaticale singolare induca, in maniera fuorviante, a considerare il multiculturalismo con una categoria concettuale uniforme e ben definita, in realtà le società contemporanee sono sempre più complesse, eterogenee e fluide. Infatti, oggi ancor più che in passato, è la differenziazione a caratterizzare le nostre società, e ciò accade ad ogni livello, permeando i più svariati settori, tant'è che si parla addirittura di società "superdiverse", e le aziende si vedono costrette a cercare continuamente soluzioni innovative e inclusive per approcciare ogni tipologia di clientela.

Obiettivo di questa tesi è analizzare il progetto "*uffici postali multietnici*" di Poste Italiane S.p.A., che peraltro rappresenta al contempo un fortunato punto di incontro tra la mia formazione universitaria e il contesto lavorativo in cui sono attualmente inserita. In questa analisi, mi soffermerò in particolare sull'individuazione delle caratteristiche principali degli operatori multilingue impiegati in questa nuova tipologia di uffici postali al fine di evidenziarne competenze extralinguistiche, come quelle comunicative interculturali, oltre alle più ovvie competenze meramente linguistiche che essi devono possedere. Analogamente, mi soffermerò altresì sulle peculiarità degli uffici postali multietnici sia sul piano dell'organizzazione interna sia su quello della location e degli interni e degli esterni degli edifici che li ospitano.

L'indagine è stata condotta prevalentemente presso l'ufficio postale multietnico di Padova (UP PD 7) situato nel quartiere dell'Arcella, ricorrendo all'analisi qualitativa dei dati estrapolati dalle interviste semi-strutturate che hanno visto come campioni quattro dipendenti dello stesso ufficio (il direttore dell'ufficio postale e tre operatori multilingue). La tesi si articola in quattro capitoli: nel primo capitolo viene introdotto il concetto di multiculturalismo, evidenziando come sia cambiata nel tempo la percezione delle differenze culturali. Inoltre, vengono analizzati i principali modelli di integrazione adottati da più stati per gestire i flussi migratori, nonché i punti fondamentali di dibattito emersi al sorgere delle moderne società multiculturali. Nel secondo capitolo vengono analizzate le principali caratteristiche delle città multilingue con focus sull'analisi demografica della città di Padova e del quartiere di Arcella. Nel terzo capitolo vengono

invece descritti alcuni degli elementi che entrano in gioco nel processo comunicativo, incluso il ruolo del mediatore interculturale, del quale vengono illustrate competenze e abilità. Infine, il quarto capitolo è dedicato al *case study* di elezione, per l'appunto quello dell'ufficio postale multietnico di Padova (UP PD 7), con focus sugli operatori multilingue che vi hanno trovato impiego, accompagnato da un commento dei risultati dell'analisi delle interviste semi-strutturate condotte, arricchiti da proposte di miglioramento del progetto raccolte dalla viva voce degli intervistati.

LE SOCIETA' MULTICULTURALI

Il concetto di multiculturalismo è strettamente correlato a quello di cultura, ed è stato spesso oggetto di tentativi di definizione anche difformi. Infatti, esperti quali Tylor, Kroeber, Kluchon e Peterson hanno identificato la cultura come un insieme complesso di credenze, tradizioni, regole, costumi e abitudini condivise da una comunità, mentre altri, tra cui Fabietti e Swindler, si sono soffermati maggiormente sulle varie sfaccettature che la cultura acquisisce in ciascun individuo, approdando per l'appunto all'utilizzo di espressioni quali "individui culturali" e "cassetta degli attrezzi" dalla quale questi potrebbero attingere le proprie conoscenze.

Sebbene sino al finire degli anni 60 del secolo scorso i due termini "cultura" e "società" venissero separati da studiosi come Parsons, il quale peraltro ci teneva a distinguere antropologi e sociologi (sottolineando come i primi siano dediti allo studio della cultura e delle società primitive, mentre i secondi a quello dei sistemi delle società moderne), le società contemporanee sono diventate maggiormente complesse e tutt'altro che omogenee. Nel Ventesimo secolo, con i grandi flussi migratori provenienti dall'Europa e diretti verso gli Stati Uniti si inizia a parlare di multiculturalismo e di "*melting pot*", entrambi concetti che avrebbe dovuto identificare il nuovo popolo americano, inteso come prodotto della fusione di elementi culturali ed etnici originariamente eterogenei; in realtà, le città statunitensi furono sino allora costituite maggiormente da quartieri ben distinti popolati dalle diverse comunità straniere. Tuttavia, le società sono cambiate nel tempo e con loro anche il concetto di multiculturalismo. Sono stati infatti svariati i tentativi di definizione delle nostre attuali società: si pensi ad esempio all'espressione "società interculturali", utilizzata per conferire un più ampio senso di interscambio tra le varie culture, o all'espressione "società superdiverse", tesa ad accentuare le

differenziazioni culturali e sociali di ogni tipologia. Di pari passo, molteplici sono anche i significati che vengono attribuiti al concetto di "differenza". Nella metà del Ventesimo secolo, la differenza non era percepita come una ricchezza, bensì come una minaccia. Difatti, sorgono da un lato movimenti contro le discriminazioni razziali e movimenti femministi che lottano per ottenere la parità dei diritti tra uomini e donne, fino ad allora di quasi esclusivo appannaggio degli uomini bianchi occidentali. Dall'altro lato, nascono movimenti radicali che invece non vogliono snaturare le proprie differenze e che rivendicano il diritto di poter manifestare liberamente le proprie peculiarità. Negli stessi anni, anche il mercato dei consumi cambia e si orienta maggiormente verso la differenziazione dei prodotti e la valorizzazione delle unicità, adattandosi ai bisogni e agli interessi della clientela. Negli anni Ottanta, il processo di valorizzazione della differenza viene amplificato dall'accelerazione dei processi di globalizzazione che favoriscono l'interdipendenza delle azioni sociali che avvengono in luoghi distanti tra loro e trasformano le percezioni e le relazioni spazio-temporali. La diffusione dell'informazione in rete e i mezzi di comunicazione di massa consentono di superare le barriere spazio-temporali mediante la conoscenza di altre parti del globo e la condivisione di stili di vita, costumi e idee diversi. Risulta quindi evidente come il concetto di differenza, e di conseguenza anche il concetto di multiculturalismo, abbiano subito forti cambiamenti diacronici e diatopici. Non sono mancate infatti le risposte di più stati per far fronte a questi cambiamenti, accentuati dagli importanti flussi migratori degli anni 60 del secolo scorso.

Tra i modelli di integrazione più utilizzati troviamo il modello assimilazionista, il modello pluralista, e il modello di istituzionalizzazione della precarietà. Il modello assimilazionista deriva dalla tradizione liberale francese e si basa pertanto sulla condivisione e il rispetto di ideali e tradizioni comuni: entrare a far parte di una comunità significa accettare e rispettare le regole e le norme sociali del paese ospitante, ed è ammesso praticare i proprio usi e costumi soltanto nella sfera privata. Il modello pluralista si può ricondurre alla tradizione anglosassone e mira a concedere più autonomia alle minoranze culturali presenti nel paese: gli immigrati possono associarsi, insegnare i propri usi e costumi nelle scuole e praticare le proprie tradizioni anche nella sfera pubblica, a patto che non si violino le regole democratiche e che non si invadano le libertà altrui. Infine, il modello di istituzionalizzazione della precarietà rivendica una paternità

tedesca ed è sostanzialmente diverso dai precedenti: gli immigrati vengono visti come ospiti temporanei, o meglio "ospiti lavoratori" (*Gestarbeiter*), e pertanto residenti fintantoché il tempo loro concesso per lavorare nel paese ospitante non giunge a termine. Difatti, in questo caso gli immigrati sono totalmente esclusi dalla società del paese ospitante e vengono invitati a riunirsi in associazioni per mantenere vive le proprie culture. Varie sono le critiche fatte a questi modelli in quanto è tutt'altro che semplice tracciare una linea netta tra sfera pubblica e privata ed equiparare i diritti e le libertà tra le minoranze e i cittadini appartenenti alla comunità maggioritaria del paese ospitante.

Altre problematiche molto dibattute delle società multiculturali sono l'utilizzo di un linguaggio più inclusivo che non sia discriminatorio nei confronti di alcun individuo, a prescindere dal suo status sociale, culturale o economico. Anche il ruolo della lingua parlata dai migranti rappresenta un terreno piuttosto dibattuto: spesso l'assimilazione linguistica viene associata all'inclusione sociale, mentre la diversità linguistica a una scarsa integrazione sociale. Infine, La libertà di religione costituisce probabilmente la più dibattuta tra le problematiche connesse al multiculturalismo. In particolare, le problematiche sono spesso legate alla richiesta di riconoscimento di una specifica identità rivendicando la possibilità di compiere azioni basate su tradizioni, valori e credenze del gruppo a cui ci si sente di appartenere, col rischio però di entrare in contrasto con le tradizioni, i valori e le credenze della comunità maggioritaria. Difatti, spesso gli stati limitano l'attuazione di questi comportamenti alla sfera privata nel tentativo di mantenere un certo tipo di ordine nella sfera pubblica. Il dibattito sul multiculturalismo pone questioni di giustizia sociale, equità e piena partecipazione e riconoscimento delle minoranze alla vita comunitaria, con continuo richiamo al significato attribuito alle differenze, alla distinzione tra pubblico e privato e alla definizione di regole comuni.

PADOVA E LE ALTRE CITTA' MULTILINGUE

Il multilinguismo è un fenomeno che affonda le proprie radici nelle società antiche. Le civiltà egizie, quelle romane, greche, ottomane e austroungariche erano tutte caratterizzate da multiculturalismo e multilinguismo. Tuttavia, già a partire dalla Rivoluzione francese e ancor più a seguire coi nazionalismi, gli stati iniziano a instaurare la propria lingua ufficiale favorendo il monolinguismo e discriminando le altre minoranze linguistiche. Alla fine del Ventesimo secolo, questo pensiero inizia a diventare sempre

più stretto nelle nuove società moderne e contemporanee, che divengono sempre più eterogenee, fluide e multiculturali.

Varie sono le caratteristiche e gli indicatori che ci forniscono informazioni sul livello di multilinguismo di una città. Tra i più importanti troviamo l'aspetto storico, quello geografico e quello demografico, accompagnati dallo status sociale e dal supporto istituzionale di una città. Roma e Varna, ad esempio, sono due città con aree urbane fortemente multilingui soprattutto per motivi storici. Limassol e Strasburgo invece devono la caratteristica del multilinguismo alle loro posizioni geografiche strategiche, da sempre trafficate e contese. Anche lo status e il prestigio di una lingua influenza il suo livello di utilizzo ed è determinato da motivi storici, sociali ed economici. Inoltre, anche le istituzioni pubbliche e private hanno un impatto sul multilinguismo e sul suo sviluppo e mantenimento. Generalmente, le nostre istituzioni sono caratterizzate ancora dal monolinguismo derivante dalle ideologie nazionaliste, mentre molte sono le organizzazioni e associazioni che, soprattutto a livello urbano e locale, si adoperano a comunicare con le comunità straniere e si impegnano a favorire uno scambio interculturale tra queste comunità e quella del paese ospitante. Anche il paesaggio linguistico urbano ci fornisce informazioni riguardo al livello di multilinguismo di una città che comprende cartelli e insegne, così come pure graffiti e volantini o inserzioni temporanee. In aggiunta, di grande rilevanza sono i fattori demografici che arricchiscono il multilinguismo di una città grazie ai flussi migratori, agli accordi politici ed economici che hanno favorito la circolazione delle persone e alla mobilità legata all'istruzione e al turismo.

Padova è a pieno titolo una città multiculturale e multilingue, e ciò è favorito soprattutto dalla sua dimensione turistica: i laghi, le montagne, le strutture termali e i monumenti artistici rendono questa città meta di molti visitatori, tra cui moltissimi stranieri. Influente in tale prospettiva è anche la sua prestigiosa università, in grado di attirare una vasta mole di studenti e insegnanti da tutto il mondo, arricchendo così la vitalità del multilinguismo della città. Inoltre, Padova è una città che offre buone possibilità di occupazione.

Dal 2000 al 2020, il numero dei cittadini stranieri residenti è aumentato del 383%. Le nazionalità straniere più numerose sono quella rumena, quella moldava, quella nigeriana e, dal 2016, sono cresciute anche quella cinese e quella bengalese. L'area urbana con la più alta percentuale di residenti stranieri della città è il quartiere Arcella, che nel 2020 ne

registrava il 33,40%. Nel quartiere, la comunità rumena si riconferma la più popolosa, seguita da quella cinese, da quella bengalese e infine dalla comunità nigeriana, ormai numerosa quanto la moldava. Non è quindi un caso che proprio nel quartiere Arcella si concentrino varie associazioni e cooperative che aiutano gli stranieri nella ricerca di un'occupazione, offrendo loro anche corsi di lingua italiana e agevolandone l'integrazione. Nonostante ciò, sono svariate anche le iniziative volte a far conoscere alla città le tradizioni e la cultura delle comunità straniere che la abitano. Inoltre, il comune ha istituito una Commissione per la rappresentanza delle cittadine e dei cittadini stranieri della città per favorire la partecipazione dei cittadini stranieri nelle scelte dell'Amministrazione comunale e per dare voce ai tanti nuovi cittadini che abitano la città e contribuiscono al suo sistema produttivo ed economico.

LA MEDIAZIONE INTERCULTURALE

La comunicazione è un processo complesso costituito da vari elementi, tra cui i partecipanti coinvolti, il messaggio che si vuole comunicare, il canale di trasmissione, i possibili rumori che possono disturbare la comunicazione, le interazioni e il feedback tra i parlanti. Di fondamentale importanza sono anche il contesto in cui avviene il processo comunicativo e la funzione e lo scopo degli enunciati o atti linguistici. Inoltre, in un processo comunicativo non si interagisce soltanto tramite la comunicazione verbale, ma anche tramite la comunicazione non verbale. Sono svariati i codici non verbali che vengono utilizzati in una conversazione, e tra questi vi è quello cinetico (ad es. espressioni facciali e postura), quello prossemico (ad es. le distanze interpersonali) e quello paralinguistico (ad es. tono di voce, turni e pause di una conversazione). Per di più, tutti questi elementi possono variare ed essere interpretati diversamente da culture e persone differenti. Per via di tale complessità, nel momento in cui interagiscono persone appartenenti a luoghi e culture diversi si parla di competenza comunicativa interculturale (ICC), intesa come la conoscenza degli aspetti linguistici, extralinguistici e culturali che possono caratterizzare la comunicazione tra soggetti appartenenti a culture diverse. Nelle nostre società contemporanee è fondamentale acquisire questo tipo di competenza, soprattutto per i mediatori interculturali.

La figura del mediatore interculturale nasce tra gli anni Settanta e gli anni Ottanta in Francia e in Inghilterra per aiutare i nuovi immigrati ad interagire con le strutture

pubbliche e quelle sanitarie. Inizialmente, era un ruolo destinato soltanto alle donne immigrate, mentre dagli anni Duemila, grazie alla nascita di nuovi corsi universitari ad hoc nell'ambito della mediazione linguistica e culturale, il bacino di utenza ha finito per coinvolgere anche gli italiani. Tuttavia, a tutt'oggi il profilo professionale del mediatore interculturale presenta contorni sfumati. Assimilata a lungo a quella del traduttore o dell'interprete, quella del mediatore è in verità una figura che valica i confini linguistici, e a differenza delle altre due figure, che devono essere solo discretamente presenti nell'attività comunicativa, ai mediatori linguistici e interculturali è richiesto di partecipare attivamente allo scambio comunicativo, diventando essi stessi interlocutori, poiché autorizzati a intervenire ai fini della buona riuscita del processo comunicativo e negoziale. I mediatori interculturali vengono infatti spesso paragonati a dei ponti che collegano due o più persone, lingue, culture e mondi differenti.

Un tratto distintivo di questa figura professionale è sicuramente dato dalla conoscenza approfondita delle lingue e delle culture delle comunità per cui si sta mediando. È inoltre fondamentale prendere in considerazione anche il background culturale degli interlocutori e delle loro specifiche e personali percezioni. Dunque, divengono indispensabili anche le capacità comunicative e relazionali: per un buon mediatore, la comunicazione è la chiave per il successo di una buona negoziazione. Inoltre, un mediatore dovrebbe instaurare un contatto con gli altri interlocutori, evitando però coinvolgimenti personali e mantenendo una posizione imparziale. Di rilievo è pertanto anche la comunicazione non verbale: il mediatore deve essere infatti in grado di modulare la differenza interculturale, facilitando la comunicazione e agevolando la comprensione, che potrebbe essere compromessa qualora si ignorassero determinate differenze extralinguistiche. Tra le altre abilità di rilievo vi sono inoltre l'abilità mnemonica e la capacità di riuscire a categorizzare e a sintetizzare le informazioni. Infine, un buon mediatore deve riuscire a sfuggire a limiti e schemi inutili, senza farsi influenzare da pregiudizi e stereotipi sociali e culturali, e a non dare niente per scontato, mantenendosi costantemente aggiornato e adattandosi all'evoluzione della società.

GLI UFFICI POSTALI MULTIETNICI: IL CASO DELL'UP PD 7

Per risultare maggiormente inclusive e andare incontro ai vari tipi di clientela, le aziende hanno dovuto adattarsi. Anche Poste Italiane S.p.A., che nel tempo ha subito grandi

trasformazioni, si è rinnovata radicandosi nei più disparati settori di mercato, tra cui quello del recapito, della logistica, del risparmio, dei servizi finanziari e assicurativi, della telefonia, dei servizi di pagamento e, dal 2022, anche in quello dell'energia.

Nel 2014, per rispondere al cambiamento e all'evoluzione del contesto sociale del paese, l'azienda ha avviato il "*progetto uffici postali mono-multietnici*" per consentire alle comunità straniere, sempre più presenti sul territorio, un accesso più agevole ai propri servizi. Inizialmente, questo progetto prevedeva l'attivazione di sportelli specifici in cui veniva offerto un modello di servizio dedicato anche ai cittadini stranieri, presidiati da personale in grado di parlare correntemente non solo le principali lingue europee come l'inglese, il francese e lo spagnolo, ma anche quelle più diffuse tra le comunità di stranieri presenti sul territorio. In tutta la penisola sono stati aperti 32 Uffici Postali Multilingue con un totale di circa 90 operatori di sportello multilingue. Questo progetto definiva due nuovi modelli di Uffici Postali: quello Mono-etnico, dedicato a specifiche comunità in centri o quartieri a forte concentrazione di una singola etnia prevalente, e quello Multi-Etnico, che si propone invece come punto di aggregazione di tutte le principali etnie presenti nel bacino o nella città di riferimento. Per quanto riguarda il funzionamento di questi uffici postali, i clienti, attraverso il Gestore Attese, possono selezionare una lingua tra quelle disponibili con la quale poi anche interfacciarsi con l'operatore multilingue. I materiali di comunicazione all'interno dell'ufficio sono realizzati, dove possibile, nelle lingue riconducibili alle etnie prevalenti, o comunque nelle lingue maggiormente diffuse. Le risorse umane multilingue vengono selezionate mediante prove scritte e colloqui orali.

L'ufficio postale multietnico di Padova (UP PD 7) introdotto come *case study* di questa dissertazione è sito nel cuore del quartiere Arcella, l'area con la concentrazione di residenti stranieri più popolosa della città, e il metodo d'indagine utilizzato è la ricerca etnografica, mediante la quale ho cercato di delineare le caratteristiche dell'ufficio postale multietnico e quelle degli operatori multilingue che vi lavorano avvalendomi di strumenti di tipo qualitativo, tra cui l'osservazione partecipante, l'analisi dei documenti e le interviste semi-strutturate dei quattro partecipanti.

Al suo esterno è presente un cartellone multilingue che informa circa la natura multietnica dell'ufficio postale. All'interno dell'ufficio vi sono altresì cartelloni e indicazioni in inglese, francese e spagnolo. Inoltre, dalle interviste è emerso che all'inizio del progetto era possibile, tramite il Gestore Attese, selezionare già la lingua con la quale interfacciarsi

con l'operatore di sportello. Oggi questo sistema ha subito alcune variazioni, e si è optato per tornare a dare precedenza e priorità all'ordine di entrata dei clienti, con il supporto dell'operatore multilingue solo in caso di bisogno. Un'altra differenza tra l'attuale assetto dell'ufficio rispetto agli inizi è data dalla mancanza di supporto cartaceo in lingua straniera. Dalle interviste scaturisce che inizialmente molti volantini e dépliant venivano stampati anche nelle lingue straniere assegnate all'ufficio. A causa dei continui aggiornamenti sui prodotti, e di conseguenza degli elevati costi connessi alla traduzione e alla stampa, oggi il supporto cartaceo in lingua straniera non è più disponibile, e l'onere di guidare il cliente nella comprensione e nella compilazione dei moduli è delegato agli stessi operatori multilingue. Dalle interviste è peraltro emerso che le nazionalità che maggiormente si recano presso questo ufficio multietnico sono quella nigeriana, pakistana, bengalese, rumena, moldava, cinese e marocchina, a fedele conferma dell'assetto delle rappresentanze straniere maggiormente presenti sul territorio. Non meno importante, è emerso come inizialmente i display di ogni singolo sportello di questo ufficio, oltre a visualizzare il numero da servire, indicassero anche il nome dello sportellista multilingue, ora presente solo sul badge, contribuendo a diminuire maggiormente, a detta degli stessi intervistati, le distanze personali e culturali. Per quanto riguarda il personale multilingue dell'ufficio, nel 2015 gli impiegati multilingue erano cinque (quattro di origine straniera e un italiano). Le lingue parlate nell'ufficio, oltre alla lingua italiana, erano l'inglese, il francese, l'arabo e l'albanese. Ad oggi, permangono solo due operatori multilingue, e le lingue straniere che si continuano a parlare presso l'UP PD 7 sono l'arabo, il francesce, l'inglese e l'albanese. Dalle interviste è emerso che la selezione per ricoprire questo ruolo si componeva di prove scritte e orali. La prova scritta era suddivisa in tre parti in cui venivano verificate anche le competenze linguistiche nella lingua inglese e in quella straniera di elezione. Il colloquio orale era condotto principalmente da un madrelingua della lingua straniera di elezione che aveva il compito di verificare le competenze linguistiche e culturali proprie del candidato straniero.

I tre operatoi multilingue intervistati sono tutti e tre di origine straniera: uno di origine marocchina e gli altri due di origine albanese. Tutti e tre, oltre alla loro lingua madre, parlano fluentemente l'italiano e l'inglese, mentre l'impiegato marocchino parla fluentemene anche il francese e l'arabo, e denota altresì una maggiore sensibilità per via

della sua formazione linguistico-culturale. Inoltre, dalle interviste tutti e tre hanno dato prova di buone competenze comunicative e relazionali, anche sul piano empatico, nonché di ottime capacità di problem solving, dimostrate in particolare nella capacità di sintesi delle informazioni che sono soliti appuntare per i clienti in assenza della disponibilità di documentazione nella lingua di interesse.

CONCLUSIONI E RIFLESSIONI

Il progetto *uffici postali multietnici* è un progetto ambizioso che cerca di stare al passo con gli sviluppi socioeconomici del paese e che vuole includere diverse tipologie di clientela. Per un'azienda, è tutt'altro che semplice riuscire a rispondere a tutti i nuovi bisogni emergenti; tuttavia, questo progetto è molto attento ai bisogni dei clienti stranieri che popolano le nostre comunità. Poter interagire con impiegati che parlano alcune tra le lingue straniere più parlate della città è sicuramente una grande ricchezza.

Dall'analisi di questo studio potrebbe essere necessario implementare presso questo ufficio anche altre lingue, tra cui in particolare quella rumena e quella cinese. Sarebbe altresì utile garantire la comunicazione in lingua inglese in tutti gli uffici postali situati in luoghi strategici con un alto transito di stranieri. Un'altra attività che potrebbe migliorare il servizio riguarda i corsi sui servizi di Poste Italiane S.p.A.: erogarli anche nella lingua straniera parlata dall'impiegato multilingue accrescerebbe le sue competenze linguistiche e migliorerebbe la comunicazione. Inoltre, visti i continui sviluppi tecnologici e digitali e la crisi ambientale, potrebbe essere interessante investire sulla documentazione multilingue digitale. Avere la possibilità di ricavare dal sito dell'azienda, ad esempio, la modulistica o la documentazione su determinati servizi nelle lingue straniere più parlate nel territorio potrebbe favorire l'inclusione di tutti i clienti stando al passo con la digitalizzazione del paese e rispettando l'ambiente. Infine, il progetto sugli uffici postali multietnici è in trasformazione, e sono state messe a punto iniziative di formazione e comunicazione interna che fanno leva sulla ricchezza costituita dalla lingua e dalla cultura degli operatori multietnici, indirizzate a tutti gli impiegati degli uffici multietnici proprio per incoraggiare una "contaminazione culturale" tra gli operatori multilingue e gli altri sportellisti.

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