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False Friends: a study of the challenges for Italian students

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ABSTRACT

Since the last century, the English language has become essential for communicating in an increasingly globalized world. It is common knowledge that all European languages have a common root, and all these languages influenced each other over the Centuries. These influences have brought similarities between languages, but words with similar phonology have not always maintained the same original meaning, leading to a phenomenon called “false friends”. “False friends” are a linguistic phenomenon that causes various difficulties among Italian students, despite the fact that the study and the practical use of English as a second language have increased over recent years. The aims of this dissertation are many: first, it is important to define “false friends” and explain the phonological proximity between some Italian and English words. Secondly, it will verify how much Italian students are aware of the existence of this phenomenon, which are the most common mistakes they make and how much “false friends” affect the process of learning and comprehension of the English language at different levels of education in the Italian School System. To address these questions, this research will evaluate Italian students at various educational levels, including those in lower stages of education as well as university and postgraduate students. This research will proceed through an identical questionnaire for each selected sample; it will test not only the awareness of the meaning of this phenomenon, but it will also study the quantity and the quality of the mistakes made by Italian students.

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INTRODUCTION

The following dissertation examines the linguistic phenomenon of “false friends”, one of the many obstacles that constantly increase the effort of learning a new language. This study will examine this phenomenon considering two languages: Italian, as a first language, and English as a second language. “False Friends” are a linguistic phenomenon that concerns words from different languages that share a similar sound and/or spelling, but do not share the same meaning, as in the case of other types of words defines as “cognates”. This characteristic can lead second language learners to misunderstand the true meaning of the word, trying to guess it through a parallelism with their first language. Hence the name “false friends”.

This paper will study this phenomenon at a theoretical level, and then continue with a sample study involving students from four different levels of education. The first chapter of this thesis analyses the process of acquiring a second language. This process has been widely studied around the world, and the theories that outline the mental processes underlying it are numerous. In the first chapter, the main strategies for learning a second language are discussed, from the most intuitive to those that require a real study of patterns, and their positive and negative features. The chapter continues with the definition of the phenomenon of “false friends”, with a look at the origin of the term, and then presents a classification of the phenomenon. The classification is based on etymological, phonological, and orthographic differences, or through the distinction between “semantic” and “chance” false friends. The chapter concludes with the difference between “false friends” and “cognates”: the existence of these two phenomena, so closely related to each other, is an aggravating factor in the difficulty for second language learners.

The second chapter of this paper aims to motivate this study by analysing its various parts. To begin, I will explain the reasons behind the choice of the sample: for this study I decided to involve four categories of students from four different levels of Italian educations. The first level is that of middle school, the second is high school, the third

includes university students who are not yet graduates, and finally, people who have already completed higher education. The choice of this sample was guided by several factors: the first, takes into consideration the generational factor, the second takes into account educational advancement, and the third aims to study the impact of features such as exposure and personal motivation in the learning process.

To avoid confusion between the four levels of education, I decided to create a temporary website that could direct each individual to the correct link on “Google form” based on their current educational level. Within the site, some instructions were provided: firstly, general indications were given on who was conducting the study; secondly, it was explained to the candidates that, in order to participate, they needed to be between the ages of 11 and 30; after that, the research objective was described; and then the distinction between the four different links provided was explained.

The questionnaire was divided into four parts: in the first part, students were asked to provide a self-evaluation of their personal experiences and to evaluate their approach to the language. In the second part of the test, candidates had to translate 10 sentences, each containing a false friend or a cognate. The third part consisted in five multiple-choice sentences, in which the respondent had to choose the word, from those proposed, to insert within the sentence. In the last exercise, instead, candidates were given five words and for each one they had to choose the meaning from the solutions proposed.

The third chapter of this paper discusses the methodology used to analyse the results of the study. The questionnaire was divided into four sections, each of which was designed to measure a different aspect of the participants’ ability to recognize and avoid false friends. The Google Form system automatically generated percentages and graphs for the answers of each student, as well as for the overall results of each level of education, except for the open-ended questions. For that part of the questionnaire, I analysed each answer, considering only the translation of the false friend, as that was the aim of the study. In the first part of the questionnaire there were also open-ended questions: in this case, I decided

to group the answers and calculate the percentage manually. In addition, graphs were created to visualize the overall results, showing the comparison of the answers of the four educational levels. The chapter ends with a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER ONE: EXPLORING FALSE FRIENDS – DEFINITIONS, ORIGINS AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

The goal of this first chapter is to give a definition of the phenomenon of false friends, as well as the origins of the term, and to outline the circumstances that may have contributed to this linguistic feature. I will take into consideration the process of learning new vocabulary, the different strategies and stages of this process and the role of the native language and of memory during the process of acquisition of new vocabulary. The phenomenon of false friends is explored in order to understand its dynamics. False friends are all also categorized according to their etymology, orthography and/ or phonetic characteristics. This chapter will describe the peculiar linguistic phenomenon of true friends and cognates, as well as the distinctions between these and false friends, and will investigate whether cognates are a helpful source to speed up the L2 learning process.

1.1 VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

One essential aspect of learning a new language is vocabulary acquisition. This topic has been studied extensively over the past few decades, and there are many theories that try to understand the mechanisms and strategies of vocabulary learning (Schmitt, 2002; Huckin and Coady, 1999). According to Schmitt (2019), The process of vocabulary acquisition is a linear process that starts with the “no knowledge” of the word, it then evolves into a “receptive mastery” of the word and then reaches the final “productive mastery” stage in which a word has been fully understood and is used with no complications. The main difficulty of this process is in the passage from receptive to productive.

There are two main processes of vocabulary acquisition: incidental and explicit learning (Schmitt, 2002; Huckin and Coady, 1999). “Explicit learning focuses attention directly on the information to be learned, which gives the greatest chance for its acquisition” (Schmitt, 2002: 120), but this process alone makes it difficult for students to learn an adequate amount of vocabulary for communication purposes as it would require a long

period of time to memorize a sufficient number of words (Schmitt, 2002). The second process of vocabulary acquisition “is called ‘incidental’ learning because it is a by-product, not the target, of the main cognitive activity, reading” (Huckin and Coady, 1999: 182). Incidental learning has many advantages, such as:

(a) it is contextualized, giving the learner a richer sense of a word’s use and meaning than can be provided in traditional paired-associate exercises, (b) it is pedagogically efficient in that it enables two activities—vocabulary acquisition and reading—to occur at the same time, and (c) it is more individualized and learner-based because the vocabulary being acquired is dependent on the learner’s own selection of reading materials (Huckin and Coady, 1999: 182).

Although guessing (an incidental strategy) is a good strategy during the process of learning new vocabulary because of its many advantages, it is also important to specify the many disadvantages of this method, which include: imprecision during the process of interpretation; the need for accurate monitoring due to the misleading meaning words may have; the slowing down of the reading process; the fact that the effectiveness of guessing is valid only when the context and the meaning of the text has been fully understood and the previous and following words are known, and there is thus a need of good reading strategies. Moreover, once the meaning of the word has been guessed correctly, this does not mean that the word has been memorized (Huckin and Coady, 1999).

Reading is an effective strategy for encountering countless unfamiliar new words that stimulate the process of guessing meaning, which is the main focus of incidental acquisition (Huckin and Coady, 1999). Written language uses a property of language and a vocabulary extension that do not occur in the spoken language, but according to Schmitt (2002), in order to be able to guess the meaning of unknown words, it is necessary to learn a large number of words through explicit learning first (Schmitt, 2002). Although reading has been shown to be crucial to the vocabulary learning process, it is not the only success factor: it is relevant to stress the importance of attention to the meaning and form of the words while students are reading new words in a text, because in order to trigger the acquisition process, the student must be aware of the words they encounter (Ellis, 1994, in Huckin and Coady, 1999:183). Once the meaning of the previously unknown word has been discovered, the learner must undergo another complex process:

memorization. According to studies in psychology, the best way to long-term memorize a word is to deep process it by using more mental processes, while techniques that involve less mental effort, such as the repetition of the same word over and over again, are not equally effective on long-term results (Schmitt, 2002). An example of a technique to deep process words is the Keyword Method (Ellis and Beaton, 1993); “This technique works by combining elements of phonological form and meaning in a mental image” (Schmitt, 2002: 121). This method is described as receptive learning: it is an association starting from a word from a foreign language to a word in the native language, and it is one of the most effective methods to memorize words of foreign languages (Ellis and Beaton, 1993).

There are many techniques that can be used to learn new vocabulary, but first it is important to understand the context of the student: their culture, their language level, their learning inclination and preferences, their motivation, the text used and their cooperation (Schmitt, 2002). In a class full of beginners, it may be better to use an easier and more immediate technique such as repetition, even though it is less effective on long-term results (Schmitt, 2002). Another important aspect is the student’s awareness of method and progression: a good language learner must be able to control their own personal development in language and vocabulary acquisition, in other words, they need metacognition (Griffith, 2008). Metacognition is the key to critical assessment of personal skills and development, which can lead students into a more controlled, conscious, and successful learning process. The more students understand their strengths and weaknesses, the more effective the process of learning a new language will be. According to Schmitt (2002), metacognitive strategies are only one of the many strategies that can be used during the learning process.

In 1997, Schmitt published a list of 58 different techniques for the vocabulary learning strategies; this list divides them in two main categories that sum up the process of discovering, understanding and memorizing a new word : “(1) strategies that are useful for the initial discovery of a word's meaning, and (2) those useful for remembering that word once it has been introduced” (Schmitt, 2002: 135). This list has a further division; all the 58 different methods are organized in five categories: determination strategies,

social strategies, memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies. Determination strategies (DET) are used when a person has no support from more expert tools, and “this can be done through guessing from one's structural knowledge of a language, guessing from a L1 cognate, guessing from context, or using reference materials” (Schmitt, 2002: 135). Social strategies (SOC) are a more interactive method, occurring when the student directly asks for the meaning of a specific word. Memory strategies (MEM) include many mnemonic methods, such as: connection, association, images, maps, and the keyword method. Cognitive strategies (COG) are very similar to memory strategies, but they are not focused on mental processing, but rather use tools such as repetition, word lists and the use of notebooks and physical objects. The metacognitive process (MET) is based on the awareness of the learning process, so the students decide which method is more effective for them, the words worth learning and self testing.

<i>Strategy group</i>	<i>Strategy</i>
<i>Strategies for the discovery of a new word's meaning</i>	
DET	Analyze part of speech
DET	Analyze affixes and roots
DET	Check for L1 cognate
DET	Analyze any available pictures or gestures
DET	Guess meaning from textual context
DET	Use a dictionary (bilingual or monolingual)
SOC	Ask teacher for a synonym, paraphrase, or L1 translation of new word
SOC	Ask classmates for meaning
<i>Strategies for consolidating a word once it has been encountered</i>	
SOC	Study and practice meaning in a group
SOC	Interact with native speakers
MEM	Connect word to a previous personal experience
MEM	Associate the word with its coordinates
MEM	Connect the word to its synonyms and antonyms
MEM	Use semantic maps
MEM	Image word form
MEM	Image word's meaning
MEM	Use Keyword Method
MEM	Group words together to study them
MEM	Study the spelling of a word
MEM	Say new word aloud when studying
MEM	Use physical action when learning a word
COG	Verbal repetition
COG	Written repetition
COG	Word lists
COG	Put English labels on physical objects
COG	Keep a vocabulary notebook
MET	Use English-language media (songs, movies, newscasts, etc.)
MET	Use spaced word practice (expanding rehearsal)
MET	Test oneself with word tests
MET	Skip or pass new word
MET	Continue to study word over time

Source: Schmitt, 1997.

Figure 1: “Vocabulary learning strategies (VLS)” (Schmitt, 1997 in Schmitt, 2002: 134). This image represents the five groupings of the 58 different VLS.

There are many methods for acquiring new vocabulary; from intuitive approaches to more intricate ones that require greater cognitive efforts, including those that can be learnt in academic context. In fact, despite students' natural use of certain effective language learning strategies, they appear to also gain great advantages from those strategies that they acquire in L2 academic contexts (Huckin and Coady, 1999; Griffith, 2008; Schmitt, 2002).

1.2 ORIGINS AND DEFINITIONS OF FALSE FRIENDS

Learning a second language (L2) is a long process that depends to some extent on the age at which one begins learning: experts claim that there is a so-called "critical period", which is a necessary step in language acquisition, both for L1 and as L2, but it occurs at different ages: for the first language, it occurs around the fifth year of a person's life, while for the second language, it occurs around adolescence (Graffi and Scalise, 2002). When a person approaches a second language after puberty, their second language proficiency is unlikely to reach the same level of their L1 (Graffi and Scalise, 2002).

The language acquisition process starts from three different starting point: in the first case, a person starts with their first language (L1) as a basis; in the second case, from the so-called "universal grammar", the instinct that drives children to learn language; or they can use the L1-guided general grammar (Graffi and Scalise, 2002). It is now clear how important the L1 is when learning a L2: the L1 can often serve as a basis, as a benchmark, when learning new grammatical rules or learning new vocabulary, but comparing approaches between two languages can often lead new learners to make several mistakes. For example, according to this theory, if a learner only uses their L1 as a starting point, then most of their errors may be caused by negative transfer; a learner that instead does not take their L1 as a basis will more probably make "development" mistakes, like a child who is learning a first language (Graffi and Scalise, 2002).

One obstacle that beginners – and sometimes experts – encounter when learning a second language is the linguistic phenomenon of "false friends". The term "false friends" was

first coined by author Maxime Koessler and professor Jules Derocquigny in their 1929 book “Les faux amis, ou, Les trahisons du vocabulaire anglais (conseils aux traducteurs)”, although there may have been an intuition about this phenomenon centuries ago. It is not uncommon for good language learners to encounter lexical ambiguity when learning a new language. When a student encounters a new word, a natural method they can use to memorize and extract its meaning is to guess it following their instinct. This intuitive approach can be a great aid not only in learning new words, but also in memorizing them (Schmitt, 2002). The guessing process can also be a deceiving tool because sometimes the meaning of a word in a language is not the same as in another one (Huckin and Coady, 1999). How many times does an Italian teacher have to point out to their students that the English adverb “actually” is not remotely near to the Italian meaning “attualmente” (as “now”, “at this moment”), but it is instead used to underline that something has really happened? This is the case of false friends. False friends are a well-known linguistic phenomenon that occurs when two or more words in different languages have the same pronunciation and/or spelling, but their meanings are completely different (Chamizo-Dominguez, Brigitte Neirlich, 2002).

Before starting to talk about false friends, we have to consider the difference between synchronic and diachronic language studies. Synchronic studies adopt two or more languages that belong to the same epoch of time, without a temporal element, while diachronic research focuses on changes in language over time (Graffi and Scalise, 2002). It may be preferable to study the phenomenon of false friends synchronically because taking into consideration the time factor makes the discourse much more complex, and it is not useful for the aim of this study.

Throughout history, populations and cultures have come into contact with each other in various ways; when this happens, it often results in the transfer of words, phrases, and grammar rules from one language to another (Thomason, 2001). This transfer can occur through different linguistic phenomena such as calques, borrowings, or inheritance (Chamizo-Dominguez and Nerlich, 2002 ; Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008). A calque is a word formation process, which arises from the process of borrowing, consisting of taking

the structure of words from another language as a “model” to coin a new word (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008). An example could be the word “star”, as in “movie star”, that was used as a model for the Italian calque “stella (del cinema)”. Borrowing is a phenomenon in which a foreign word is adopted into a specific language (Chamizo-Dominguez and Nerlich, 2002; Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008). The examples among the English and the Italian language are many: words such as “sport”, “bar”, “film” are currently used by Italians on a daily basis. Inheritance on the other hand is a case in which a word gets inherited from the original language. All these phenomena can be related to the sphere of transfer from which false friends arise (Chamizo-Dominguez and Nerlich, 2002; Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008).

In order to underline key-concepts and words, it is possible to say that: learning a new language is a long process that requires different strategies, and the first intuitive method that a student uses is guessing, according to the incidental acquisition (Schmitt, 2002). False friends are a linguistic phenomenon that can misguide learners in the process of learning; this happens because their orthography and/or phonetics are similar between two languages, but the meaning differs from one another. False friends are the result of transfer, which is the linguistic manifestation of the meeting and the conditioning of two languages, more specifically it is the influence of one language on another (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008).

1.3 CLASSIFICATION

Once it is clear what the concepts of false friends are, where they come from, and from which angles to study them are clear, it is possible to define how to classify these constructs. In his book “Semantics and pragmatics of False Friends”, Chamizo-Dominguez (2008) gives a categorisation of False Friends based on many factors, but the most important features to look at while subdividing these lemmas are: orthography, phonology and etymology. In his book, the first distinction between false friends is that between homographs and homophones, followed by their distinction based on etymology. The definition of the term ‘homograph’ can be found in its etymology: it is the union of ‘homo’ meaning ‘the same’ and ‘graph’ meaning ‘written’, so “when false friends are

spelled the same or very similar, they are called homographs” (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008: 3).

In the English language, an example of homographs can be found in the word ‘bow’, this word identifies different things, such as the arc, the tie, but also the verb ‘to bow’. In an interlingual context, an example of a homograph false friend is in the English word ‘estate’, as ‘property’ and pronounced /ɪ'steɪt/, while in the Italian language the word ‘estate’ has a different meaning and a different pronunciation: it means ‘summer’ and it is pronounced /e'state/. On the other hand, the definition of homophones is the union of the word ‘homo’ as ‘the same’ and ‘phone’ meaning ‘sound’, so homophone false friends are words that sound the same or similar in two or more languages, although their written forms may or may not be similar. In English, the words ‘see’ and ‘sea’ share the same pronunciation but a totally different meaning. An example of this in an interlingual context can be found in the word “terrific”, which in English is pronounced /tə'rif.ɪk/ and its meaning is ‘excellent’, while the Italian word ‘terrificante’ means ‘scary’ and it is pronounced /terrifi'kante/. In order to sum up and clarify the difference between homographs and homophones, it is possible to say that, taking two or more words from different languages, the meanings are always different, what changes is either the pronunciation or the spelling.

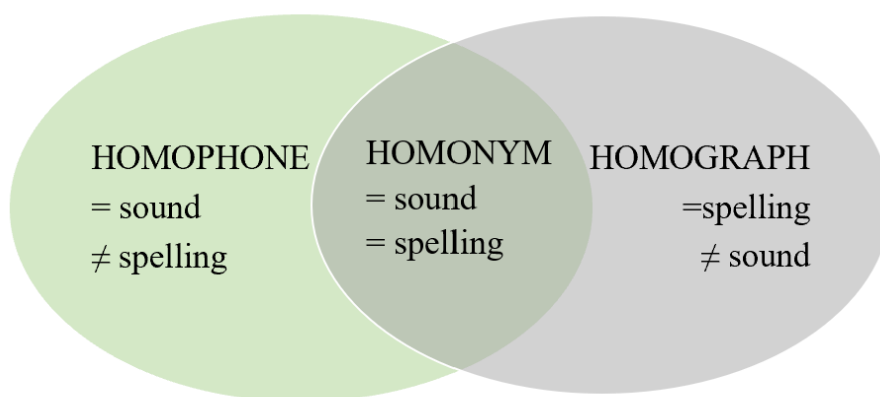


Figure 2: a visual representation of the similarities and differences between homograph, homophone, and the role of homonym

Another way to classify false friends is to consider etymological factors. As mentioned earlier, history is a key factor in the emergence and development of false friends, because the basis of this linguistic phenomenon is the interference between cultures and

languages. While it is important to look at the past tense of specific words, it is important to remember that these studies have been made synchronically.

Once the concept of “word”; and the perspective from which we study it become clear, false friends can be further divided into two other categories: Chamizo Dominguez and Brigitte Nerlich (2002) also make the distinction of False Friends to chance false friends and semantic false friends. Chance false friends are words belonging to different languages that are written and pronounced in the same or similar way, but their similarity cannot be explained through semantics or etymology (Chamizo-Dominguez and Nerlich, 2002). The equivalent of chance false friends in two different languages can be found in the definition of homonymy in one language (Chamizo-Dominguez and Nerlich, 2002). Homonymy is a term referring to those groups of words in a language that are written and pronounced the same, but they have different meanings (Chamizo-Dominguez and Nerlich, 2002). According to Tom McArthur (1992: 483) homonymy happens when:

One of two or more words that are identical in sound or spelling but different in meaning. There are three kinds: those that sound and look alike (bank¹ a slope, bank² a place for money, and bank³, a bench or row of switches); homophones, that sound alike but do not look alike (coarse, course); and homographs, that look alike but do not sound alike (the verb lead /li:d/, the metal lead /led/)

There is no explainable reason for the existence of chance false friends, as they are the result of random variation (Chamizo-Dominguez and Nerlich, 2002). They can even occur between unrelated languages, and the farther apart two languages are, the higher the likelihood of encountering this linguistic phenomenon rather than a semantic false friend (Chamizo-Dominguez and Nerlich, 2002).

Semantic false friends are words from different languages that are spelled and pronounced the same or similar but are etymologically related. This happens for two reasons: they may have the same origin, or they may be the result of borrowing from one language to change the meaning of another (Chamizo-Dominguez and Nerlich, 2002). Semantic false friends are more common in closely related languages, but this relationship makes it more difficult for learners to spot the countless false friends. This difficulty arises from the large number of word exchanges; the majority of them share the same meaning and

signifier, so it can be more challenging to realize the difference between the two of them (Chamizo-Dominguez and Nerlich, 2002).

The equivalent of semantic false friends in one language can be found in polysemy, which is the capacity of a word to have different meanings but, unlikely what happens with homonymy, they are bonded etymologically (Chamizo-Dominguez and Nerlich, 2002). An example of a polysemic word in English is the word ‘bright’, which can mean both ‘intelligent’ and ‘shining’ and this may deceive a second language learner.

Semantic false friends undergo a further division. They can be also subdivided into: full semantic false friends and partial semantic false friends (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008). The former recognizes words belonging to two or more different languages, which have completely different meanings, while the latter recognizes words from two or more languages, which may have similar meanings but in one language a particular word can have a different meaning depending on the context development (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008). An example of a full semantic false friend can be found in the English word ‘topic’ and the Spanish word ‘topico’, these two words have the same root, but they developed a totally different meaning over time; while an example for a partial semantic false friend exists in the English and French word ‘inexcusable’ and in the Spanish word ‘inexcusable’, because even though the two words share the same root and meaning, in Spanish it also developed a metaphorical meaning (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008).

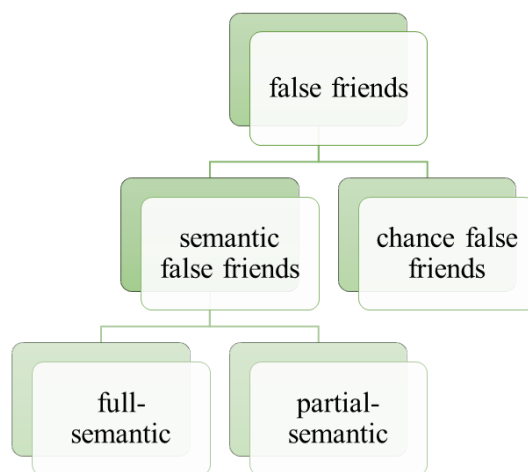


Figure 3: A visual representation of the hierarchy distinction of false friends (Dominguez and Nerlich, 2002).

In order to develop and improve their language skills, learners need more resources than just memorizing exercises. False friends are only one of several linguistic peculiarities that can confuse second language learners. While words in several languages can be similar or even the same, their meanings can vary in some ways. This phenomenon focuses on these differences, and their distinction highlights how challenging false friends can be for language learners, especially in light of the existence of cognates, also known as true friends.

1.4 FALSE FRIENDS AND COGNATES

English and Italian originate from the Indo-European language family, but they belong to different branches: Italian is part of the Italic branch, while English is part of the Germanic one (Graffi and Scalise, 2013). This closeness explains their similarities, but it is important to remember that their sameness goes beyond their ancestral languages: the political, economic and cultural dominance of English, and the primary role played by USA since the last century, has driven a great multitude of cultures to adopt some of their cultural habits, including some vocabulary, into their own. This has happened for example, with the Italian language: the strong influence of English has brought new words into the Italian vocabulary (Graffi and Scalise, 2013) such as the word 'sport'. Learning new vocabulary in a second language is a long process that requires persistence, method, dedication, and intuition (Griffith, 2008). An important lesson that new language learners must face at some point during this long journey is that instinct can be an important ally, both in detecting deceits, such as in the case of false friends, or in understanding that the meaning of some words is exactly what you expect when comparing them to your mother tongue, as in the case of cognates (Otwinowska and Szewczyk, 2017).

While false friends are words from two or more languages that may be graphically or phonetically similar or identical, but not identical in meaning, cognates are two or more words from different languages that have similar or identical spellings and share the same meaning. The existence of cognates is of great help to second language learners, and

considering that cognates are easily recognizable and simple to remember, they help to speed up the process of learning new vocabulary (Otwinowska and Szewczyk, 2017). Otwinowska and Szewczyk (2017) analyse the process of second language acquisition when it comes to false friends and cognates, questioning whether cognates are as helpful as it seems compared to false friends. According to some studies in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the speeding up of the learning process only happens when the learner is fully aware of the closeness of the two words, and the method of intuition causes them to be deceived while facing false friends (Otwinowska and Szewczyk, 2017: 975). This leads experts to theorize that cognates are not always a tool to quicken the learning process, because learners often fail to understand whether a word is a cognate or not, and sometimes, after being warned of the existence of false friends, they may be suspicious of cognates (Otwinowska and Szewczyk, 2017: 977). The authors conducted an experiment on Polish students learning a second language, testing whether learning a cognate is indeed easier than learning false cognates (also known as “false friends”). The results of this study demonstrated that the process is actually easier: the subjects of the test, in order to memorize and/or understand the deceit behind a false friend, had to undergo a mental process of realization that the meaning of a false friend did not correspond to the word belonging to their L1, and they had to turn off the instinct of association between L1 and L2; and only then could they learn the true L2 meaning (Otwinowska and Szewczyk, 2017: 977).

Once the differences between false friends and cognates have been defined, it is possible to subdivide cognates. Frunza and Inkpen (2009) created a classification of cognates into three more specific groups: cognates, near cognates and generic cognates. Cognates are words which are identical both in the structure and the meaning, an example could be the English word ‘nature’ and the French one ‘nature’ (Frunza and Inkpen, 2009: 3); partial cognates “behave as cognates or as false friends, depending on the sense that is used in each context. For example, in French, “facteur” means not only “factor”, but also “mailman” (Frunza and Inkpen, 2009:3). Genetic cognates are words from related languages that share the same etymology, but because of the changing of languages over time, they may be different in the form and/or the meaning, an example could be the French word “père” and the English word “father” (Frunza and Inkpen, 2009:3).

To conclude, the term false friends is used to refer to similar words with different meanings between two different languages, while cognates are based on similar words from different languages that also have the same meaning and etymology. Evidence shows that related words are easier to learn and remember, which aids in the learning process and vocabulary growth.

CHAPTER TWO: THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC ADVANCEMENT, EXPOSURE, AND MOTIVATION IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the methodology behind the sample selection process. The primary focus is on underlying the research's goals and how these objectives influenced the criteria for selecting participants. It will outline the process that guided the selection of the sample, highlighting any specific factors that played a crucial role in shaping the research's scope. At the end of the chapter, the questionnaire will be dissected into its constituent parts, to provide a detailed analysis of each section, in order to shed light on the reasons behind the questions posed, as well as the methodology employed to collect data directly from the chosen sample.

2.1 THE AIM OF THE STUDY

False friends are a well-known linguistic phenomenon that occurs when two or more words in different languages have the same pronunciation and/or spelling, but their meanings are completely or partially different (Chamizo-Dominguez, Brigitte Neirlich, 2002). While this may seem like a simple concept, the reality is that false friends are much more complex than they appear on the surface. In fact, the definition of false friends includes many intricate parts and subtle differences that require a deeper exploration to fully understand.

As outlined in chapter one, false friends can be categorized based on several different factors, but their division is primarily based on phonology, graphology, and etymology. False friends can be subdivided into various categories such as homographs, homophones, chance false friends, semantic false friends, and homonymy, depending on the specific factors that lead to the differences between the words. Homographs and homophones are types of false friends that differ respectively in spelling and pronunciation (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008). Chance false friends, on the other hand, happen when two words share similar appearance or sound but are not etymologically

related (Al-Athwary, 2021). Semantic false friends, which are further divided into full semantic and partial semantic; these occur when two words have different meanings that are related in some way, which may lead to confusion for second language learners (Al-Athwary, 2021). False friends are an important aspect of language learning and communication in multilingual contexts. Understanding the intricacies of these linguistic phenomena can help language learners avoid confusion and improve their ability to communicate effectively in a second language.

The aim of this study is to investigate the linguistic phenomenon of false friends between Italian and English and the difficulties that this phenomenon can cause among Italian students belonging to different educational levels. By analyzing the errors made by the students, the study will provide insights into the difficulties they face when learning the two languages. The study aims to identify the most common false friends that Italian students use when speaking English and by analyzing the reasons behind these errors to understand which are the most commonly used and misunderstood among the sample chosen for this study. The sample includes people belonging to different stages of their academic career, to demonstrate how the educational level, exposure and personal preferences can influence the process of second language acquisition. The participants will be asked to complete a translation test in which there are either true cognates (i.e., words that have the same meaning in both languages) and/or false friends.

The results will be analyzed to see which false friends cause the most confusion and which factors (e.g., orthography, pronunciation, semantic proximity) influence the students' choices considering their personal and academic status. The study's findings could have practical implications for language teaching and learning, as they could inform the design of more effective teaching materials and strategies that address the specific challenges of false friends. Moreover, the study could raise awareness among Italian students of the risks and opportunities of multilingualism and give them a more reflective and critical approach to language use.

In summary, the aim of the study is to shed light on the linguistic phenomenon of false friends between Italian and English, analyze which are the false friends most commonly used by Italian native speakers and to provide insights on how to improve language education and intercultural communication by highlighting the mechanism behind the mistakes.

2.2 THE SAMPLE

False friends are a well-known linguistic phenomenon that occurs when two or more words in different languages have the same pronunciation and/or spelling, but their meanings are completely or partially different (Chamizo-Dominguez, Brigitte Neirlich, 2002). This can lead to misunderstandings, especially in cross-cultural communication. A sample of participants from various levels of education was chosen to investigate this phenomenon among Italian students. In this section I will explain why this age range was selected and how it can provide valuable insights into the impact of education, exposure, and time on false friends.

Firstly, the educational range was chosen because these groups of people belong to generations who have been educated to have English as a second language and are more exposed to the language. In Italy, students start learning English in primary school, and it is a mandatory subject in high school and university. Therefore, when starting middle school, most Italian students have been studying English for a few years and have a basic understanding of the language. As they progress through their studies, they become more proficient in English and are exposed to a wider range of vocabulary and expressions. By the end of their academic journey, some of them may even have been working in an international context where English is the main language used. Therefore, this range is ideal for studying false friends among Italian students.

Secondly, the different stages of education can provide valuable insights into the impact of education on false friends. Middle school and high school students may have a basic understanding of English but may not have encountered many false friends yet. University students, on the other hand, have a more advanced knowledge of English and

may have encountered more false friends in their studies. Postgraduate students and university students may have a higher level of proficiency in English and may have experienced false friends in their work or academic environments. By including participants from different stages of education, the study can explore how education affects the ability to recognize false friends.

Lastly, these groups of students can also show how academic advancement, motivation and exposure can make people more aware of false friends. As participants grow older and have more exposure to the English language, they may become more familiar with the differences between English and Italian and may be able to recognize false friends more easily. This can be especially true for those who have worked or studied in international contexts where English is used on a daily basis. By studying participants in this age range, the study can explore how exposure to the English language over time can impact the ability to recognize false friends.

In conclusion, the academic range was chosen for a study on false friends among Italian students because this group of people is at different levels of second language learning, more exposed to English, and includes participants from different ages and stages of education. By focusing on this range, the study can explore the impact of education, exposure, and time on the ability to recognize false friends. This research can help improve cross-cultural communication and prevent misunderstandings caused by false friends in different languages.

2.3 ACADEMIC ADVANCEMENT, PERSONAL MOTIVATION AND EXPOSURE

There are many factors that contribute to the process of second language learning. This research will focus on the importance of academic advancement, personal motivation and exposure while testing students from different backgrounds and educational levels on their language skills. Exposure is a crucial factor in second language acquisition. Being exposed to a language in a variety of contexts helps learners to develop their listening and speaking skills, as well as their reading and writing abilities (Muñoz, Cadierno, 2021). It

is essential that exposure to the second language also occurs outside of the classroom environment, as the classroom setting alone is limited both in quality and quantity (Muñoz, Cadierno, 2021). While a more directed and prolonged academic program (up to higher levels of education) may contribute to a greater development of certain language dimensions, it has been shown that academic instruction alone is limited compared to less formal activities such as videogames and social networks (Muñoz, Cadierno, 2021). Therefore, it is important for learners to exploit informal language learning opportunities outside of the classroom setting, as demonstrated by several resources (Muñoz, Cadierno, 2021).

In addition to exposure, motivation is also essential for language learning. Learners who are intrinsically motivated to learn a new language are more likely to persist in their efforts and achieve success (Griffith, 2008). This kind of motivation is an important tool to improve one's language acquisition, because "choice, acknowledgment of feelings, and opportunities for self direction were found to enhance intrinsic motivation because they allow people a greater feeling of autonomy" (Deci & Ryan, 1985 in Deci & Ryan, 2000: 70). While intrinsic motivation is an important factor in second language acquisition, it is not the only useful factor to help learners achieve success in their language goals.

Extrinsic motivation can also play a crucial role, particularly in certain contexts such a career or academic fields. (Griffith, 2008) It is important to underline that not every kind of extrinsic motivation is equally effective. Research suggests that extrinsic motivation based solely on external rewards, such as monetary incentives, may not be as effective in promoting long-term engagement and commitment to language learning as motivation that is more self-determined and aligned with personal goals and values. In fact, "research revealed that not only tangible rewards but also threats, deadlines, directives, pressured evaluations, and imposed goals diminish intrinsic motivation because, like tangible rewards, they conduct toward an external perceived locus of causality" (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 70). Nonetheless, in many educational contexts, certain types of extrinsic goals are positively valued and can be powerful motivators for learners.

In summary, exposure to a second language in different contexts is essential for language learners in order to develop their skills. While academic advancement contributes to language acquisition, informal environments (like video games and social networks) are equally important. Intrinsic motivation is crucial for language learners to persist in their efforts and achieve success. However, extrinsic motivation also plays a vital role in certain contexts such as career or academic fields. It is important to note that not every type of extrinsic motivation is equally effective, and rewards alone may not promote long-term engagement. Nonetheless, certain types of extrinsic goals can be powerful motivators for learners in many educational contexts.

2.4 METHODOLOGY OF THE TEST

The aim of the test is to study the relationship between various factors. The focus of the test is the recognition of false friends, and it will explore how different factors (such as time, level of education, exposure, and personal interest to the language on second language learning) impact the ability of individuals to recognize these words. To avoid misunderstandings and considering the young age and basic level of English proficiency of a significant number of participants, the general information and instructions for the test will be provided in both English and Italian.

At the beginning of the test, the candidates are informed that the intention of the study is to test their translation abilities between English and Italian. However, the true focus of the test is to test their ability to recognize false friends. To avoid the candidates' suspicion and encourage accurate responses, it is preferable not to reveal the true focus of the test, as this would draw their attention to the possibility of false friends, potentially influencing their answers. The general information about the test also guarantees the sample's anonymity as well as the prohibition of the use of any kind of vocabulary.

Once the sample of people in the age range of 11 to 30 is chosen, the first step in creating this test is to gather information about the students' education and exposure to English. This can be done by asking each student which level of education they are currently

attending (middle school, high school, university, or postgraduate) and how often they are exposed to English (for example, on a daily or weekly basis). This information will be helpful to understand their personal point of view on their language level and how much they have been exposed to the English language. For this reason, the test will start by asking respondents to complete a few personal information on their level of education, their daily exposure to the language and personal experiences abroad, preferably in anglophone countries. These questions will be asked exclusively in Italian to avoid any misunderstandings, especially for those with a low level of English proficiency, and will include both “yes/no”; answers and a couple of “semi open-ended questions” where they will be asked to specify some context to a few possible answers, allowing a more personal explanation to their current language level.

The test consists of three sections, each designed to assess the students’ ability to recognize false friends between Italian and English. The first section will contain open-ended questions, where students must provide the Italian translation to 10 sentences; the second section will consist of multiple-choice questions; and the third section will contain pairs of words that look or sound similar but have different meanings, testing the students’ ability to recognize false friends.

The first task of the test will consist in the full translation of 10 sentences from English to Italian; this kind of exercise will provide an objective valuation on the English proficiency of each candidate. To make the test more challenging, some pairs of words will also be cognates, to test whether the candidate is able to distinguish them from false friends.

The second part of the test, will use “multiple-choice” item, as “language researchers will be very familiar with the multiple-choice item format because of its popularity in standardized L2 proficiency testing” (Zoltán Dörnyei, Tatsuya Taguchi, 2010: 26). In this section of the test, candidates will be required to fill the blanks of five different sentences using pairs of words provided, and to choose the correct answer by selecting the word

that matches the given Italian translation at the end of each sentence. The word at the end could be a false friend, a cognate, or a word with a completely unrelated meaning. This section has the purpose of understanding if the presence of a context, in this case a full sentence, will help the candidate to detect the correct answers.

In the final part of the test, the candidate will be given 5 English words; for each word there will be a couple of Italian word: one will be the correct translation of the English correspondent; the other could be either a false friends or a cognate, or simply one with a random meaning that could be related to the English one. For example, in the fifth sentence of the last exercise, the task is to translate the English word “ironic”: candidates must choose between the correct Italian translation “ironico” and “ferrosol”, which means “related to iron”.

In conclusion, testing Italian students between the ages of 11 and 30 on false friends between Italian and English can be a useful tool in understanding their language proficiency and identifying areas where they may need more practice. By analyzing the results of the test, the goal is to identify the factors that are most crucial in determining an individual’s proficiency in a second language. For example, an initial hypothesis is that individuals who have been exposed to the language for a longer period will be more likely to recognize false friends than those who have had less exposure. Similarly, those with a higher level of education in the language are expected to perform better on the test than those with less education.

2.5 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

This section introduces the questionnaire that will be conducted on the sample. To distinguish the results, a personalized questionnaire will be provided to each age range (one for middle school, one for high school, one for university students and one for post graduates). However, it is important to note that all age ranges will be presented with the exact same set of exercises, including the sentences and tasks. This choice was made to

ensure consistency in the testing process and to enable a clearer comparison of the outcomes directly across the different age groups.

CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS EXTRACTION AND EVALUATION

In this chapter, I will present the method chosen for data extraction from the questionnaire; it will also report and compare the research findings, and finally, provide concluding remarks.

3.1 METHOD FOR EXTRACTING RESULTS

When it comes to research, one of the key and most important aspects is the method of data extraction. The sample selected for this research includes a total of 136 students, comprising: 21 from middle schools, 36 from high schools, 34 from universities, and 45 who have obtained at least one degree. To optimize this process, I created a website to direct each individual participant to their respective link to categorize them and extract distinct survey results. Within this website, candidates encountered a brief explanation of the research purposes; the same explanation was added as the instruction to the questionnaire itself. At the bottom of the website, four distinct links were provided, each directing respondents to the questionnaire dedicated to a specific educational level. This approach allowed for a precise division of the sample into the four education categories: middle school, high school, undergraduate and postgraduate, allowing the extraction of the results for each level. This method was used to guarantee a high quality of data collection and facilitate comparisons between different educational backgrounds.

The decision to use this method was guided by several considerations. Firstly, it aimed to increase the clarity and relevance of the research experience for participants. By offering an explanation of the study within the temporary website, candidates understood the research objectives before proceeding to the questionnaire. This ensured that participants approached the survey with a clear perspective, increasing the quality of their responses. The use of the four dedicated links, each aligned with a specific educational level, allowed a more clear analysis by dividing the data into the four distinct categories of middle school, high school, undergraduate and postgraduate. Consequently, it facilitated the exploration of patterns within each educational level. Additionally, thanks to this method,

I was able to organize, interpret, and compare results more efficiently, as the data was promptly categorized by educational level.

In conclusion, the use of a temporary website with dedicated links for different educational levels is a pragmatic approach to data extraction. This method facilitated a more profound understanding of language attitudes and learning preferences across different educational levels, leading to more comprehensive research results.

3.2 RESULTS

The first part of the questionnaire includes a series of personal questions aimed at understanding the cultural background and English language affinity of each educational group.

- 1) Question number one: the first question was designed to make sure that the research findings were not influenced by participants from different educational levels. The results revealed that every participant clicked on the correct link, confirming that there was not interference with the results.

1. Middle school:

1) Che grado d'istruzione stai frequentando al momento?
21 risposte

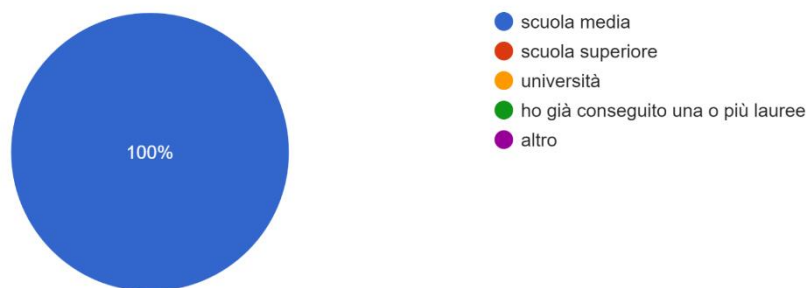


Figure 1: Answers to question 1 from middle school students.

2. High school:

1) Che grado d'istruzione stai frequentando al momento?

36 risposte

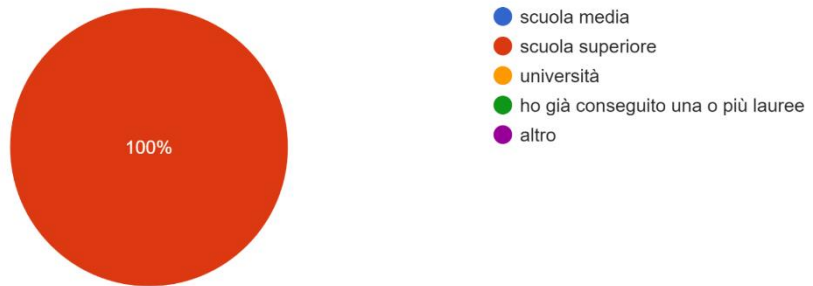


Figure 2: Answers to question 1 from high school students.

3. University:

1) Che grado d'istruzione stai frequentando al momento?

34 risposte

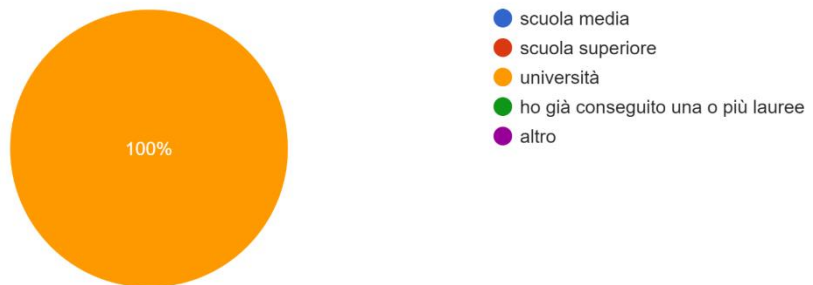


Figure 3: Answers to question 1 from University students.

4. Postgraduate:

1) Che grado d'istruzione stai frequentando al momento?

45 risposte

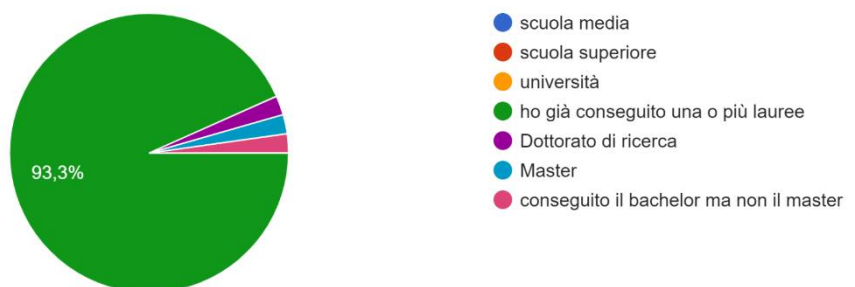


Figure 4: Answers to question 1 from postgraduate students.

2) Question number two: The second question asked students to identify their language level: A1 (beginner), A2 (post beginner), B1 (intermediate), B2 (upper intermediate), C1 (advanced) and C2 (mastery). This question was asked to assess how students perceive their language proficiency and whether it aligned with their actual language skill.

1. Middle school:

2) Che livello di lingua inglese pensi di avere?

21 risposte

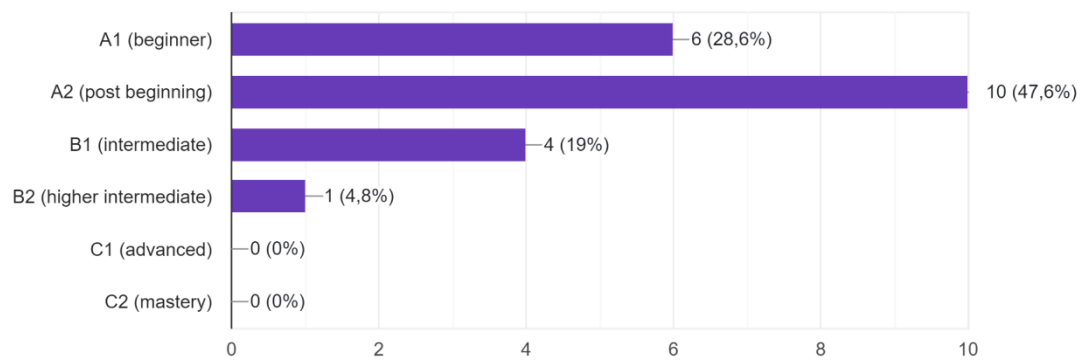


Figure 5: Answers to question 2 from middle school students.

2. High school:

2) Che livello di lingua inglese pensi di avere?

36 risposte

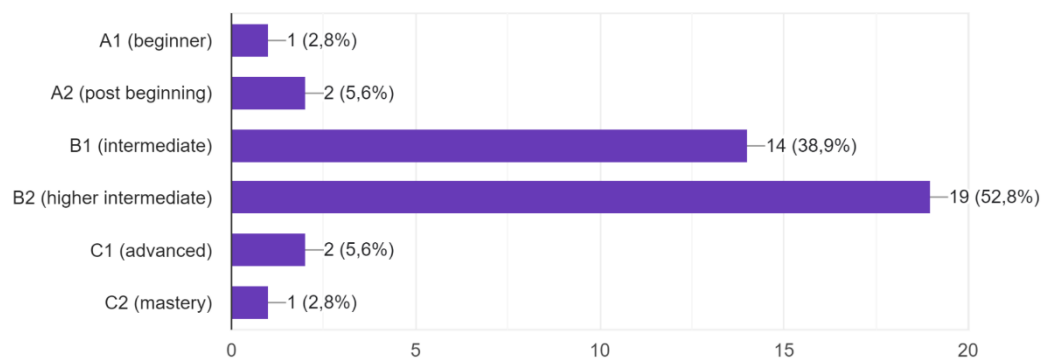


Figure 6: answer to question 2 from high-school students.

3. University:

2) Che livello di lingua inglese pensi di avere?

34 risposte

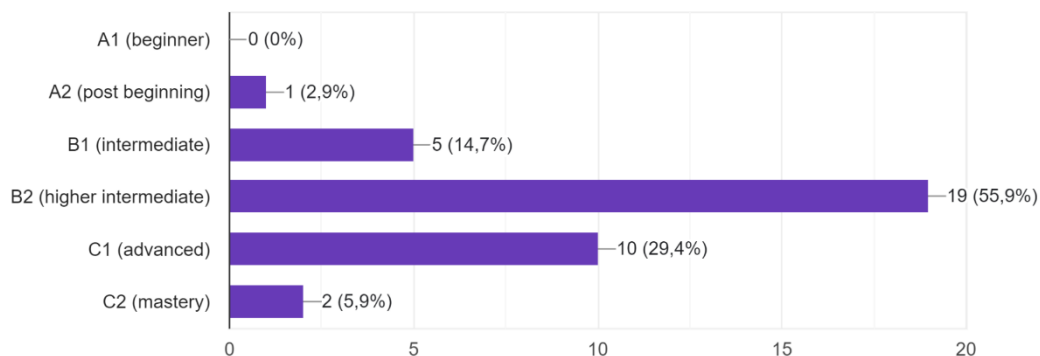


Figure 7: Answers to question 2 from University students.

4. Postgraduate: the second question revealed that most postgraduate students believe they have a language level between B2 (higher intermediate) and C1 (advanced)

2) Che livello di lingua inglese pensi di avere?

45 risposte

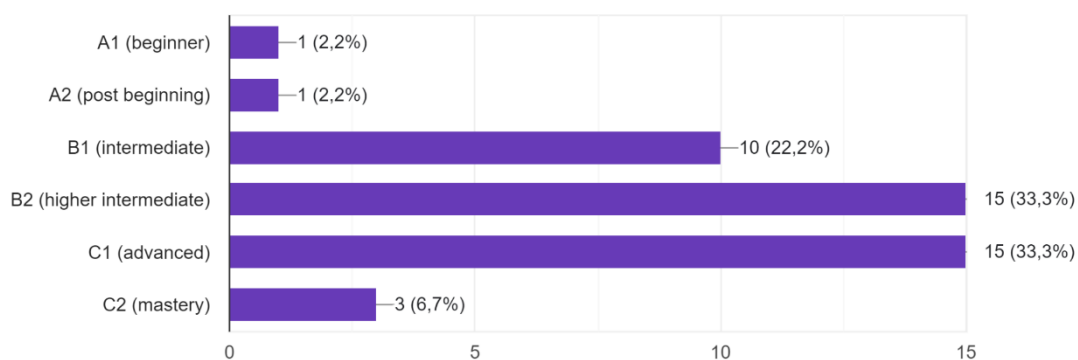


Figure 8: Answers to question 2 from postgraduate students.

These responses reveal how, as academic studies progress, the students' language proficiency level increases proportionally. Starting with middle school students, they perceive their level of preparation as moderate to low, mostly placing it

between A1 and A2, arriving at university and postgraduate students who, in the majority of responses, position their level between B2 and C1.

3) Question number three: the third question aims to assess the amount of academic exposure to the language and how this is perceived by the participants.

1. Middle school:

3) Da quanti anni studi la lingua inglese?

21 risposte

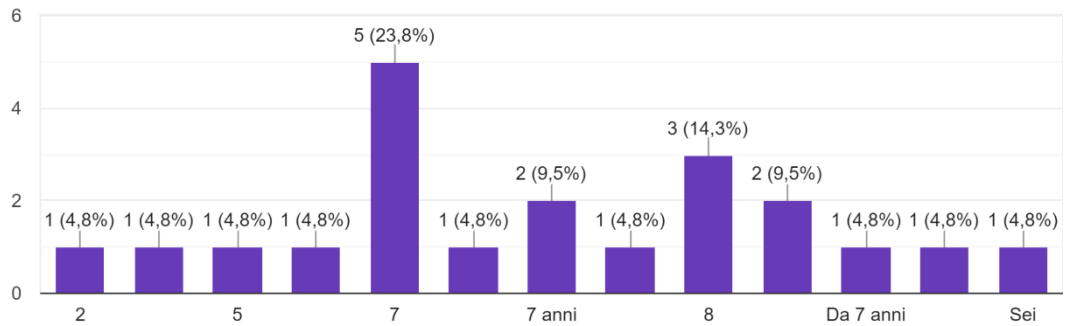


Figure 9: Answer to question 3 from middle school students.

2. High school:

3) Da quanti anni studi la lingua inglese?

36 risposte

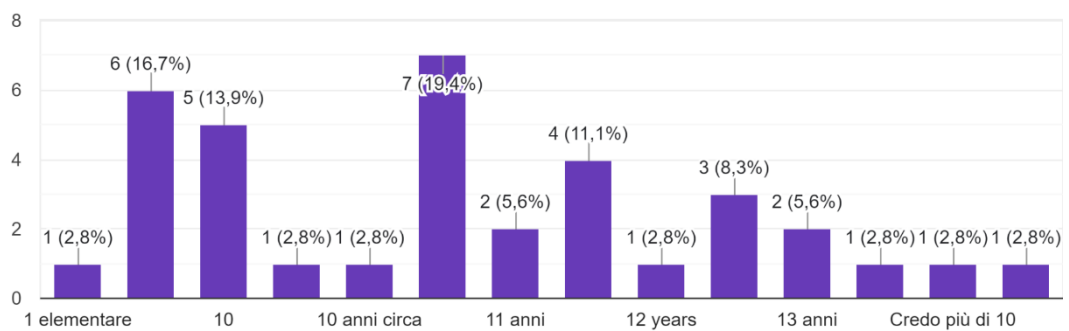


Figure 10: Answer to question 3 from high school students.

3. University:

3) Da quanti anni studi la lingua inglese?

45 risposte

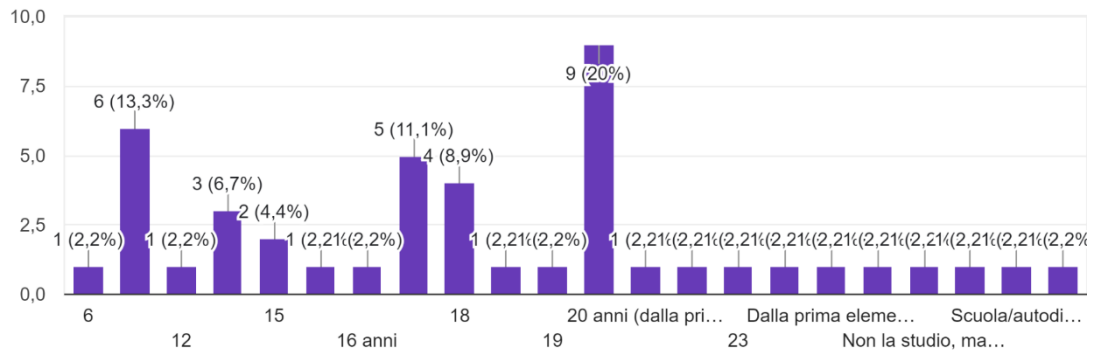


Figure 11: Answer to question 3 from University students.

4. Postgraduate:

3) Da quanti anni studi la lingua inglese?

34 risposte

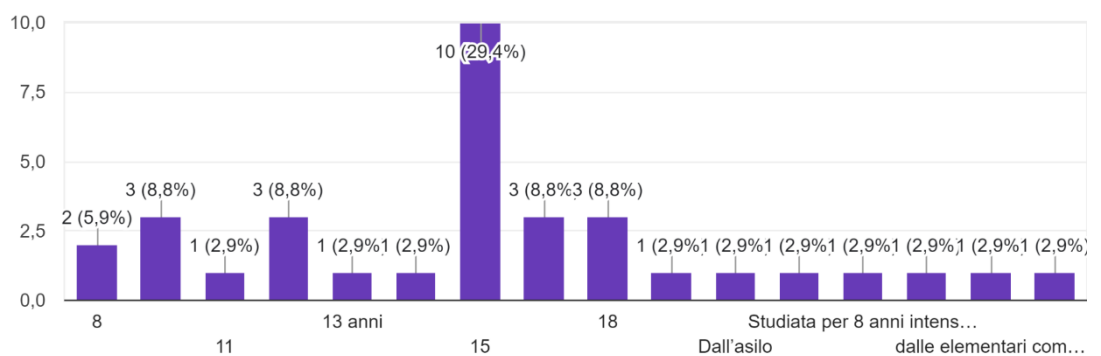


Figure 12: answer to question 3 from postgraduate students.

4) Question number four: the fourth question seek to examine the significance and the influence that, according to the participants, the Italian educational system has on their language preparation.

1. Middle school:

4) Utilizzando una scala da 1 a 6, dove 1 rappresenta il livello più basso e 6 il livello più alto, ti pregherei di indicare il punteggio che ritieni sia più... influito sul tuo apprendimento della lingua inglese:
21 risposte

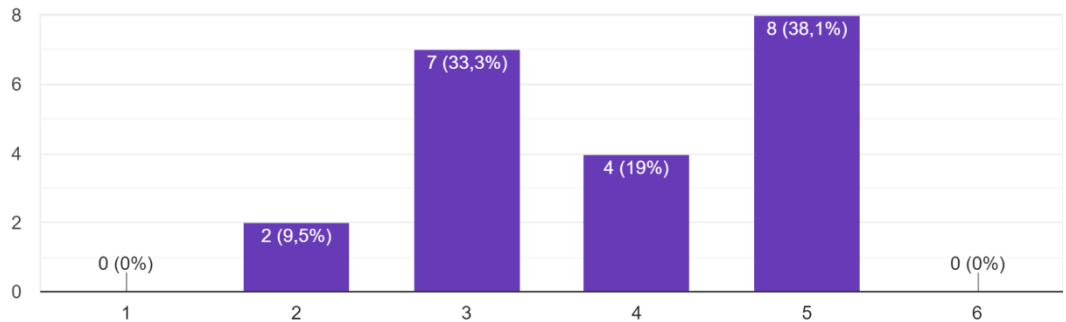


Figure 13: Answer to question 4 from middle school students.

2. High school:

4) Utilizzando una scala da 1 a 6, dove 1 rappresenta il livello più basso e 6 il livello più alto, ti pregherei di indicare il punteggio che ritieni sia più... influito sul tuo apprendimento della lingua inglese:
36 risposte

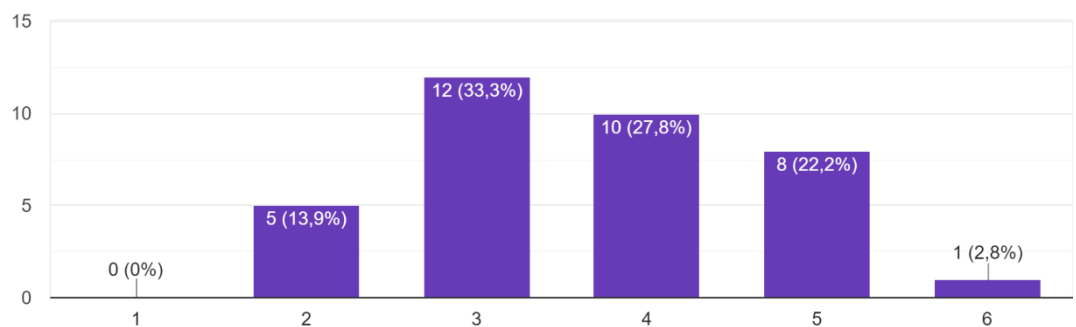


Figure 14: Answer to question 4 from high school students.

3. University:

4) Utilizzando una scala da 1 a 6, dove 1 rappresenta il livello più basso e 6 il livello più alto, ti pregherei di indicare il punteggio che ritieni sia più... influito sul tuo apprendimento della lingua inglese:
34 risposte

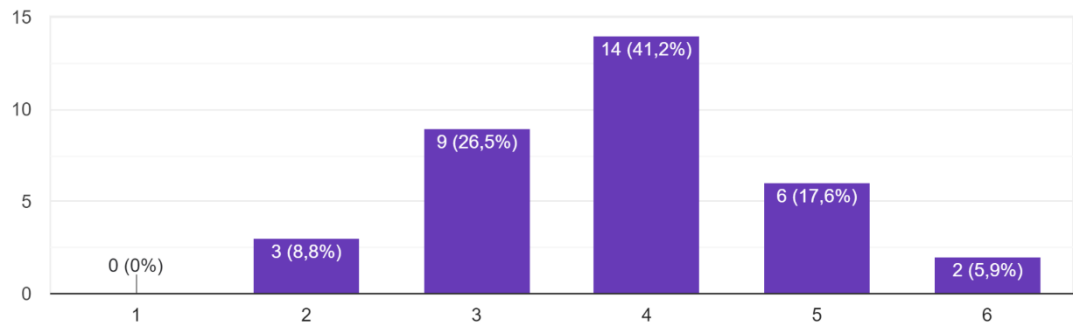


Figure 15: Answer to question 4 from University students.

4. Postgraduate:

4) Utilizzando una scala da 1 a 6, dove 1 rappresenta il livello più basso e 6 il livello più alto, ti pregherei di indicare il punteggio che ritieni sia più... influito sul tuo apprendimento della lingua inglese:
45 risposte

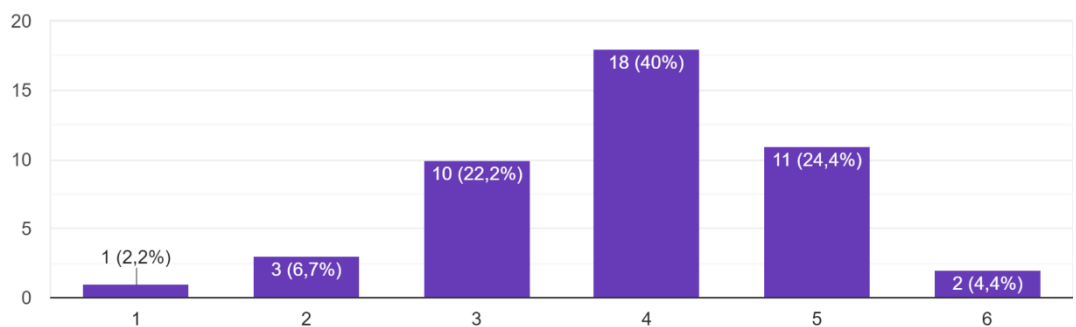


Figure 16: Answer to question 4 from postgraduate students.

These graphs demonstrate how, according to students, as academic levels progress, the influence and importance of education diminishes its impact on students. Middle school students, when compared to students from other categories, exhibit a stronger attachment to the school system.

5) Question number five: the fifth question aims to assess the amount of exposure to the English language outside the school system, by examining how each category has been more directly exposed to the language through a period of residence in an English-speaking country:

1. Middle school:

5) Hai mai passato un periodo di permanenza in un Paese anglofono superiore alle due settimane?
21 risposte

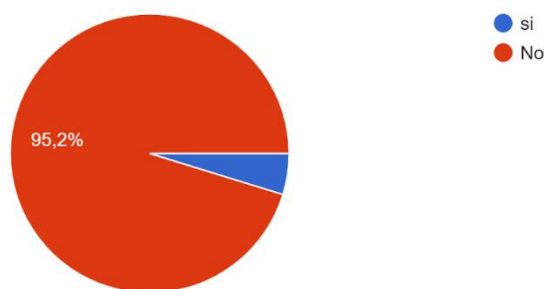


Figure 17: Answer to question 5 from middle school students.

2. High school:

5) Hai mai passato un periodo di permanenza in un Paese anglofono superiore alle due settimane?
36 risposte

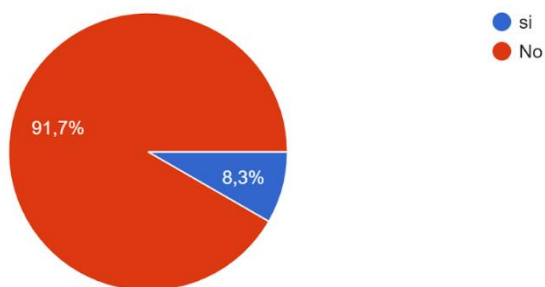


Figure 18: Answer to question 5 from high school students.

3. University:

5) Hai mai passato un periodo di permanenza in un Paese anglofono superiore alle due settimane?
34 risposte

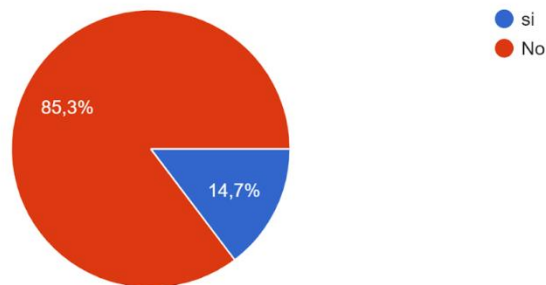


Figure 19: Answer to question 5 from University students.

4. Postgraduate:

5) Hai mai passato un periodo di permanenza in un Paese anglofono superiore alle due settimane?
45 risposte

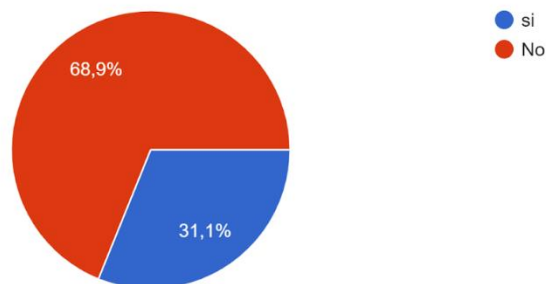


Figure 20: Answer to question 5 from postgraduate students.

These responses demonstrate that exposure increases as students advance in their academic levels. In fact, 31.1% of students who have already obtained a degree have spent a minimum of two weeks in an English-speaking country, compared to 4.8% of middle school students.

6) Question number six: This question was posed with the aim of assessing participants' involuntary exposure time to the English language through various means. Students were given an open-ended response opportunity, allowing them

to openly express their daily routines and pushing them to reflect on their daily exposure to the English language.

6) Sei esposto involontariamente in modo regolare alla lingua inglese (attraverso i social, la televisione, i videogames, ...)? Se sì, come?

1. Middle school: 90.4% (19 votes) of students affirmed that they are involuntarily exposed to the English language regularly through the internet, social media, video games, videos, or by talking directly to native English speakers, while 9.5% (2 votes) declared that they are not exposed involuntarily to the English language.
2. High school: 94.4% (34 votes) of students affirmed that they are involuntarily exposed to the English language regularly through the internet, social media, television, video games, videos, by reading articles, in their own household, or by talking directly to native English speakers, while 5.6% (2 votes) declared that they are not exposed involuntarily to the English language.
3. University: 91.2% (31 votes) of students affirmed that they are involuntarily exposed to the English language regularly through the internet, music, television, work environment, books, social media, video games, videos, or by talking directly to native English speakers, while 8,8% (3 votes) declared that they are not exposed involuntarily to the English language.
4. Postgraduate: 97,8% (44 votes) of students affirmed that they are involuntarily exposed to the English language regularly through the internet, social media, music, video games, videos, television, academic articles, books, manhwa, during their academic lessons, work environment, or by talking directly to native English speakers, while 2,2% (1 votes) declared that they are not exposed involuntarily to the English language.

7) Question number seven: this question aims to verify how and to what extent students voluntarily expose themselves to the English language every day.

7) Ti esponi volontariamente in modo frequente alla lingua inglese (guardando film in inglese, parlando con madrelingua, giocando a giochi/videogiochi, ...)? Se sì, come?

21 risposte

1. Middle school: 81% of middle school students voluntarily expose themselves to the English language, while 19% do not;
2. High school: among high school students, there is a significant increase in the percentage of exposure to the English language, with 94.4%, while only 5.6% do not choose to expose to it;
3. University: the percentage remains stable among university students, with 94.1% giving an affirmative response, while 5.9% confirmed that they do not expose themselves to it;
4. Postgraduate: another increase in affirmative responses comes from postgraduate students, reaching 97.8% affirmative responses, compared to 2.2% negative responses.

8) Question number eight: the eighth question was asked with the aim of pushing students to self-evaluate their personal inclinations toward the English language, in order to understand generational attitudes towards the language on a personal level.

1. Middle school:

8) Ti ritieni particolarmente portato alla lingua inglese?

21 risposte

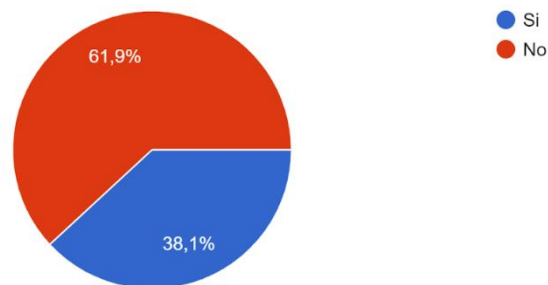


Figure 21: Answer to question 8 from middle school students.

2. High school:

8) Ti ritieni particolarmente portato alla lingua inglese?
36 risposte

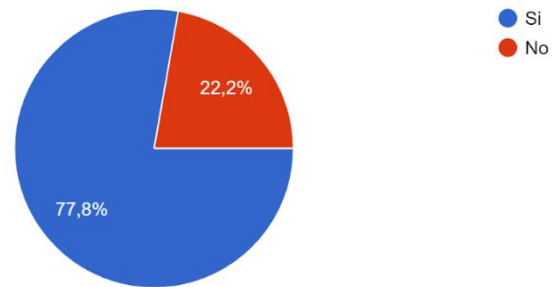


Figure 22: Answer to question 8 from high school students.

3. University:

8) Ti ritieni particolarmente portato alla lingua inglese?
34 risposte

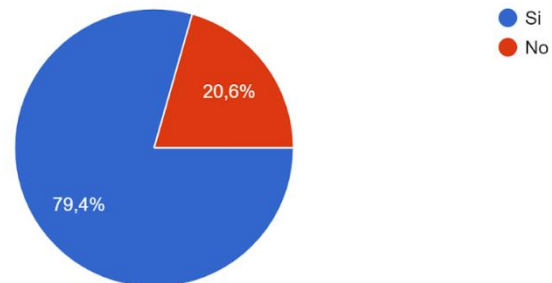


Figure 23: Answer to question 8 from middle University students.

4. Postgraduate:

8) Ti ritieni particolarmente portato alla lingua inglese?
45 risposte

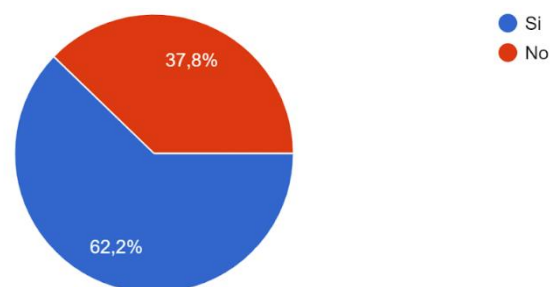


Figure 24: Answer to question 8 from postgraduate students.

38.1% of middle school students feel they have a good relationship with the English language, while 61.9% do not believe they are particularly inclined toward its study. Among high school students, there is a significant increase in the percentage of students who feel inclined towards the study of the English language, with 77.8%, while only 22.2% do not believe they have a particular inclination toward it. The percentage remains stable among university students, with 79.4% giving an affirmative response, while 20.6% confirmed that they do not feel inclined towards the study of English. The numbers decrease in affirmative responses comes from postgraduate students, reaching 62.2% affirmative responses, compared to 37.8% of negative responses.

The second part of the questionnaire, to facilitate the result analysis, will examine only the individual words related to the subject of this study, whether they are false friends or cognates. Analysing the interpretations and errors in each sentence translated by every student would require a new research area, which is not addressed in this study.

9) Question number nine: the students were asked to translate the following sentence 'This is a terrific web site'. The focus is on the word 'terrific', which is a false friend as the appropriate translation in Italian would be 'great/extraordinary/wonderful' and not 'terrificante/spaventoso':

1. Middle school: 9.5% gave the right translation, 85.7% did not recognise the false friend and they translated it using 'terrificante' or 'spaventoso', 4.8% gave the wrong translation and 0% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
2. High school: 30.5% gave the right answer, 55.6% did not recognise the false friend, 11.1% gave the wrong answer and 2.8% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
3. University: 64.7% gave the right translation, 32.4% did not recognise the false friend, 2.9% gave the wrong answer and 0% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.

4. Postgraduate: 60% gave the right answer, 26.7% did not recognise the false friend, 13.3% gave the wrong answer and 0% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.

10) Question number ten: the task given to the sample was to translate the following sentence 'I am actually saying something very different', and the focus is on the adverb 'actually', which is a false friend due to the fact that the correct translation would be 'in realtà/effettivamente', but the word is spelled similar to the Italian adverb 'attualmente', which means 'currently/at the moment'.

1. Middle school: among the 21 students, only 4.8% gave the correct answer, the 42.8% did not recognize the false friend and they translated the word as 'attualmente', the 14.3% did not answer and the 38.1% wrongly translated the word.
2. High school: among the 36 students, 63.9% got the right answer, 11.1% did not recognize the false friends, 8.3% gave a wrong translation and 16.7% did not answer or did not translate the adverb in the sentence.
3. University: among the 34 students, 82.3% gave the right answer, 2.9% did not recognise the false friend, 0% gave the wrong translation and 14.7% did not answer or did not translate the adverb correctly.
4. Postgraduate: among the 45 students, 77.8% gave the right answer, 4.4% did not recognise the false friend, 0% gave the wrong answer and 17.8% did not answer or did not translate the adverb correctly.

11) Question number eleven: the sentence to translate was 'Crude oil is literally liquid death', the focus is on the words 'crude oil' that push the students to think that the translation could be 'raw oil' as this false friend sounds and appears like the Italian words 'olio crudo'.

1. Middle school: 19% gave the right answer, 76,2% did not recognise the false friend, 0% gave the wrong answer and 4.8% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.

2. High school: 38.9% gave the right answer, 47,2% did not recognise the false friend, 2,8% gave the wrong answer and 11,1% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
3. University: 47% gave the right answer, 53% did not recognise the false friend, 0% gave the wrong answer and 0% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
4. Postgraduate: 53.4% gave the right answer, 42,2% did not recognise the false friend, 2.2% gave the wrong answer and 2.2% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.

12) Question number twelve: the sentence to translate was ‘My parents lived there 15 years ago’, and the false friend is the word ‘parents’, which sounds like the Italian word ‘parenti’, meaning ‘relatives’.

1. Middle school: 71.4% gave the right answer, 28.6% did not recognize the false friend, 0% gave the wrong answer and 0% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
2. High school: 94,4% gave the right answer, 2,8% did not recognise the false friend, 0% gave the wrong answer and 2.8% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
3. University: 100% of the 34 students gave the right answer.
4. Postgraduate: 100% of the 45 students gave the right answer.

13) Question number thirteen: the sentence to translate was ‘I have so many good memories of my teenage years in my camera!’ and the false friend is the word ‘camera’, which is a false friend because similar to the Italian word ‘camera’ that means ‘room’.

1. Middle school: 33.3% gave the right translation, 61.9% did not recognise the false friend, 0% gave the wrong translation and 4.8% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.

2. High school: 72.2% gave the right answer, 25% did not recognise the false friend, 0% gave the wrong answer and 2.8% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
3. University: 88.2% gave the right translation, 11.8% did not recognise the false friend, 0% gave the wrong answer and 0% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
4. Postgraduate: 88.9% gave the right answer, 11.1% did not recognise the false friend, 0% gave the wrong answer and 0% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.

14) Question number fourteen: the sentence was ‘The corpses were dressed in civilian clothes’ and the false friend is the word ‘corpses’ that does not mean ‘corpi’ as ‘bodies’, but rather ‘cadaveri’.

1. Middle school: 23.8% gave the right translation, 28.6% did not recognise the false friend, 42.9% gave the wrong translation and 4.8% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
2. High school: 47.2% gave the right answer, 16.7% did not recognise the false friend, 22.2% gave the wrong answer and 13.9% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
3. University: 76.5% gave the right translation, 11.8% did not recognise the false friend, 2.9% gave the wrong answer and 8.8% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
4. Postgraduate: 62.2% gave the right answer, 15.6% did not recognise the false friend, 20% gave the wrong answer and 2.2% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.

15) Question number fifteen: ‘The article eventually appeared three years later’ was the sentence and the false friend was ‘eventually’.

1. Middle school: 19% gave the right translation, 33.4% did not recognise the false friend, 19% gave the wrong translation and 28.6% did not answer or did not translate the adverb correctly.

2. High school: 22.2% gave the right answer, 22.2% did not recognise the false friend, 5.6% gave the wrong answer and 50% did not answer or did not translate the adverb correctly.
3. University: 52.9% gave the right translation, 5.9% did not recognise the false friend, 20.6% gave the wrong answer and 20.6% did not answer or did not translate the adverb correctly.
4. Postgraduate: 57.8% gave the right answer, 4.4% did not recognise the false friend, 11.1% gave the wrong answer and 26.7% did not answer or did not translate the adverb correctly.

16) Question number sixteen: the sentence was ‘They pretend to tell you too much’, and the false friend is the word ‘pretend’, which cannot be translated as ‘pretendono’, as ‘claim’, but as ‘fingono’.

1. Middle school: 9.5% gave the right translation, 76.2% did not recognise the false friend, 9.5% gave the wrong translation and 4.8% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
2. High school: 44.4% gave the right answer, 44.4% did not recognise the false friend, 8.4% gave the wrong answer and 2.8% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
3. University: 85.3% gave the right translation, 5.9% did not recognise the false friend, 8.8% gave the wrong answer and 0% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
4. Postgraduate: 71,1% gave the right answer, 15.6% did not recognise the false friend, 8.9% gave the wrong answer and 4.4% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.

17) Question number seventeen: in the sentence ‘The numbers are changing very rapidly here’ there is not any false friend, but it was added in the questionnaire in order to prevent suspicions on the true subject of the research.

1. Middle school: 95.2% gave the right translation, 0% gave the wrong translation and 4.8% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
2. High school: 97.2% gave the right answer, 0% gave the wrong answer and 2.8% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
3. University: 100% gave the right translation.
4. Postgraduate: 100% gave the right answer.

18) Question number eighteen: in the sentence ‘She had behaved like a sensible mother’, the false friend is the word ‘sensible’, which corresponds phonetically and graphically to the Italian word ‘sensibile’, but it means ‘reasonable’ and not ‘sensitive’.

1. Middle school: 9.5% gave the right translation, 71.4% did not recognise the false friend, 4.8% gave the wrong translation and 14.3% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
2. High school: 13.9% gave the right answer, 58.3% did not recognise the false friend, 16.7% gave the wrong answer and 11.1% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
3. University: 23.5% gave the right translation, 56% did not recognise the false friend, 17.6% gave the wrong answer and 2.9% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.
4. Postgraduate: 17.8% gave the right answer, 53.3% did not recognise the false friend, 26.7% gave the wrong answer and 2.2% did not answer or did not translate the word correctly.

The third part of the questionnaire was designed to verify whether the students were able to guess the meaning of the words with multiple choice answers. For this reason, they were given short sentences that contained a blank space to fill with the given option, and the meaning of the word to add was marked in brackets.

19) Question number nineteen:

1. Middle school:

1) He is very _____and friendly. [gentile]
21 risposte

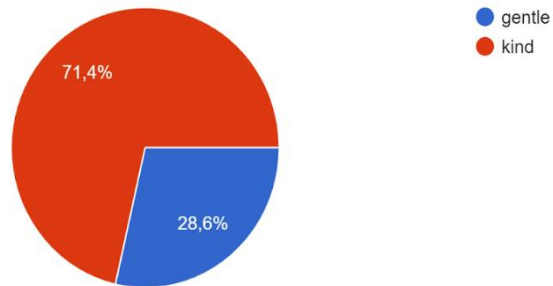


Figure 25: Answer to question 19 from middle school students.

2. High school:

1) He is very _____and friendly. [gentile]
36 risposte

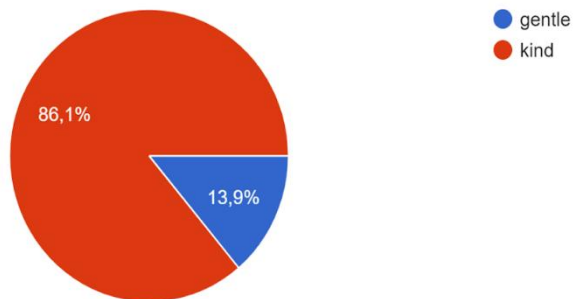


Figure 26: Answer to question 19 from high school students.

3. University:

1) He is very _____ and friendly. [gentile]
34 risposte

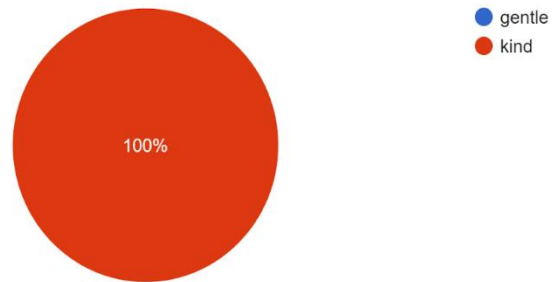


Figure 27: Answer to question 19 from University students.

4. Postgraduate:

1) He is very _____ and friendly. [gentile]
45 risposte

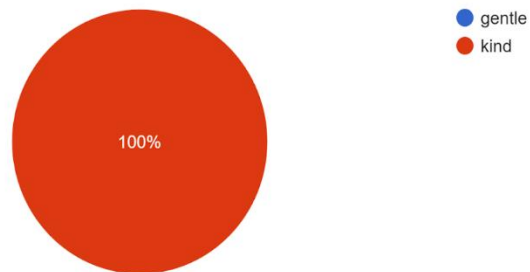


Figure 28: Answer to question 19 from postgraduate students.

20) Question number twenty:

1. Middle school:

2) The last meeting I _____ was awful [ho assistito]
21 risposte

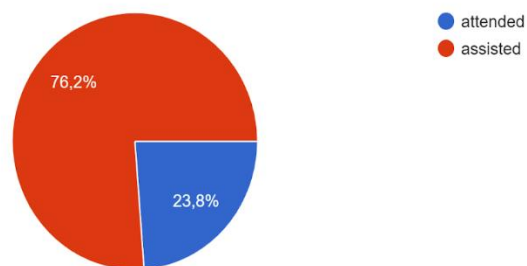


Figure 29: Answer to question 20 from middle school students.

2. High school:

2) The last meeting I _____ was awful [ho assistito]
36 risposte

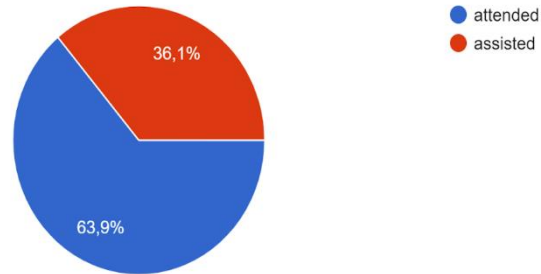


Figure 30: Answer to question 20 from high school students.

3. University:

2) The last meeting I _____ was awful [ho assistito]
34 risposte

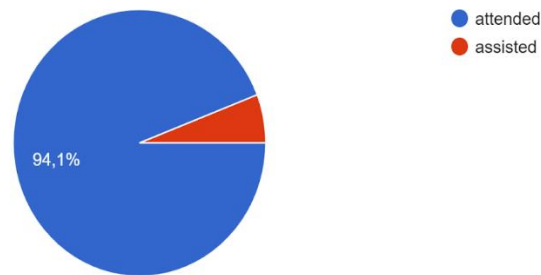


Figure 31: Answer to question 8 from University students.

4. Postgraduate:

2) The last meeting I _____ was awful [ho assistito]
45 risposte

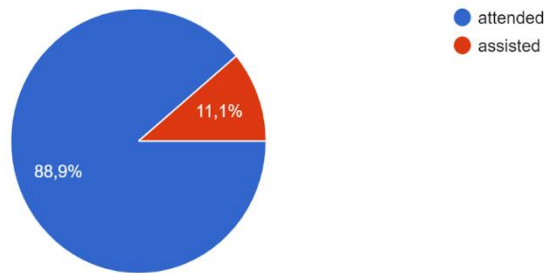


Figure 32: Answer to question 20 from postgraduate students.

21) Question number twenty one:

1. Middle school:

3) The _____ is another cup of coffee [cura]
21 risposte

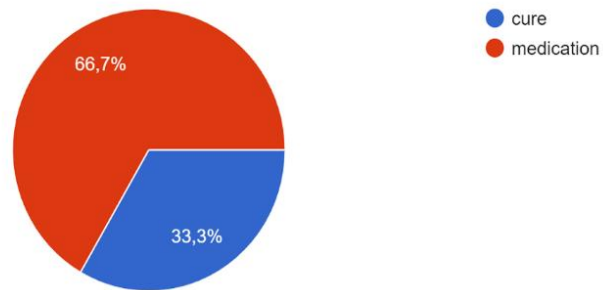


Figure 33: Answer to question 21 from middle school students.

2. High school:

3) The _____ is another cup of coffee [cura]
36 risposte

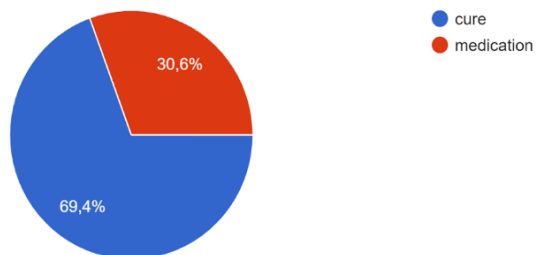


Figure 34: Answer to question 21 from high school students.

3. University:

3) The _____ is another cup of coffee [cura]
34 risposte

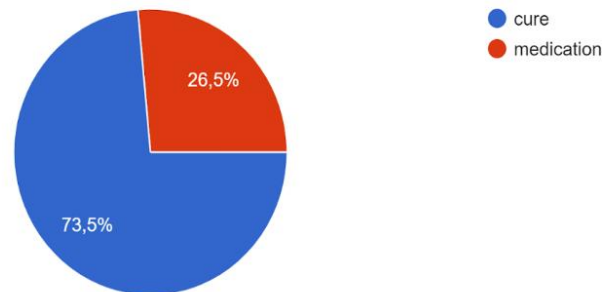


Figure 35: Answer to question 21 from University students.

4. Postgraduate:

3) The _____ is another cup of coffee [cura]
45 risposte

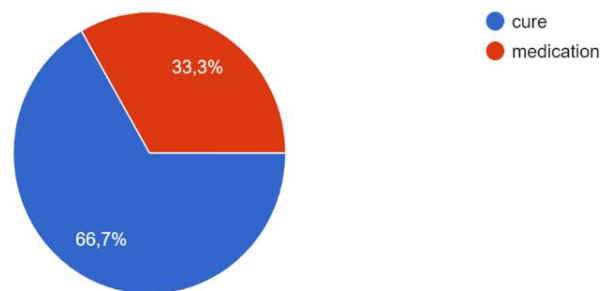


Figure 36: Answer to question 21 from postgraduate students.

22) Question number twenty two:

1. Middle school:

4) Each _____ is different as is each family [fattoria]
21 risposte

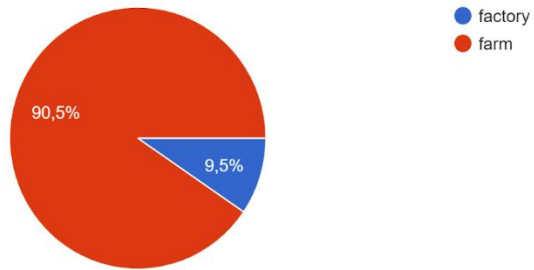


Figure 37: Answer to question 22 from middle school students.

2. High school:

4) Each _____ is different as is each family [fattoria]
36 risposte

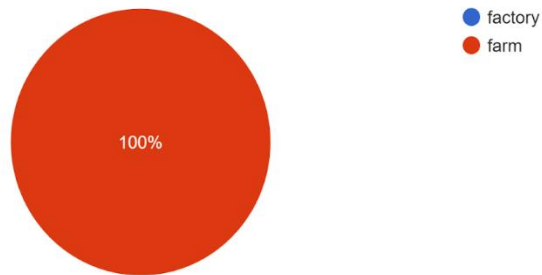


Figure 38: Answer to question 22 from high school students.

3. University:

4) Each _____ is different as is each family [fattoria]
34 risposte

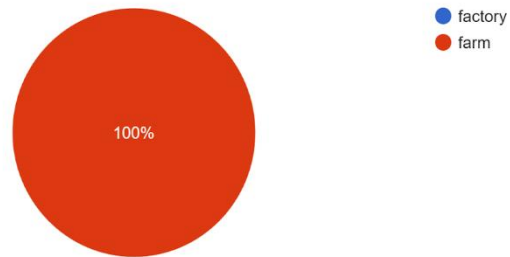


Figure 39: Answer to question 22 from University students.

4. Postgraduate:

4) Each _____ is different as is each family [fattoria]
45 risposte

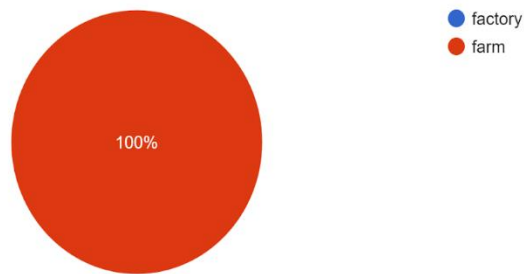


Figure 40: Answer to question 22 from postgraduate students.

23) Question number twenty three:

1. Middle school:

5) The town hosted a huge _____ to honor the occasion [celebrazione]
21 risposte

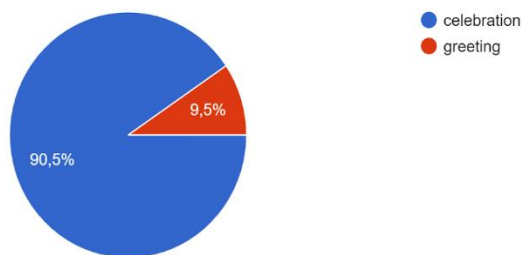


Figure 41: Answer to question 23 from middle school students.

2. High school:

5) The town hosted a huge _____ to honor the occasion [celebrazione]

36 risposte

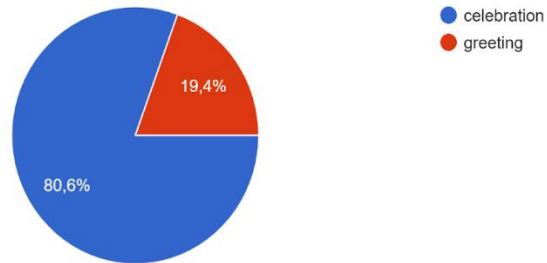


Figure 42: Answer to question 23 from high school students.

3. University:

5) The town hosted a huge _____ to honor the occasion [celebrazione]

34 risposte

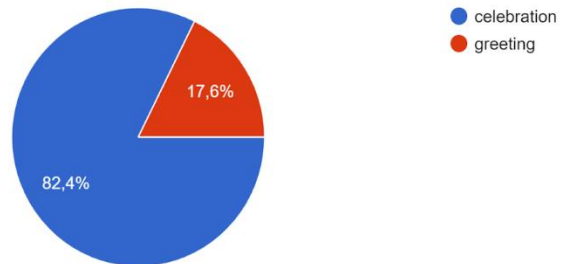


Figure 43: Answer to question 23 from university students.

4. Postgraduate:

5) The town hosted a huge _____ to honor the occasion [celebrazione]
45 risposte

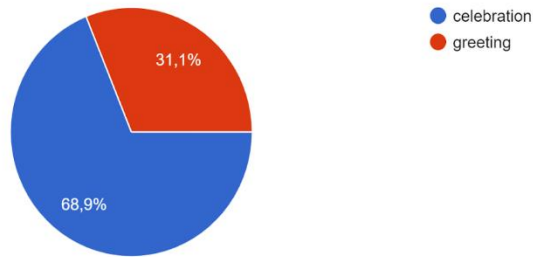


Figure 44: Answer to question 23 from postgraduate students.

The fourth and last part of the questionnaire was designed with the purpose of not providing sentences within a context. Instead, candidates were asked to provide the meaning of certain words by choosing from the given options. This choice was made to assess whether the absence of context would impact the pattern of responses. All five parts of this section of the questionnaire include false friends.

24) Question number twenty four:

1. Middle school:

Ingenuity
21 risposte

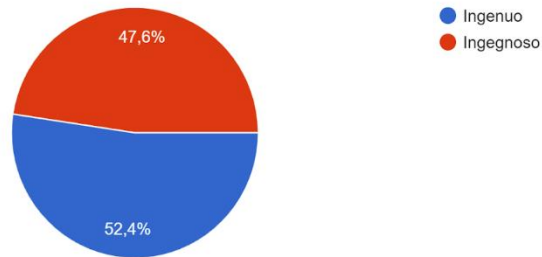


Figure 45: Answer to question 24 from middle school students.

2. High school:

Ingenuity
36 risposte

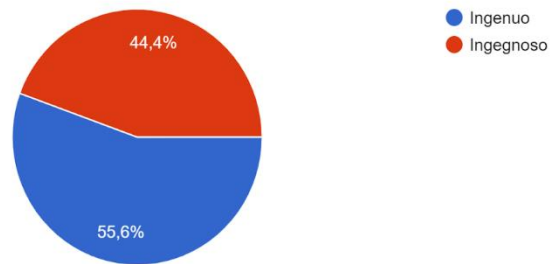


Figure 46: Answer to question 24 from high school students.

3. University:

Ingenuity
34 risposte

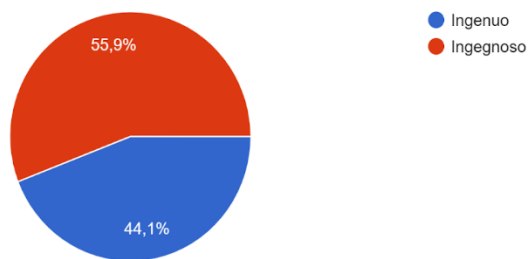


Figure 47: Answer to question 24 from University students.

4. Postgraduate:

Ingenuity
45 risposte

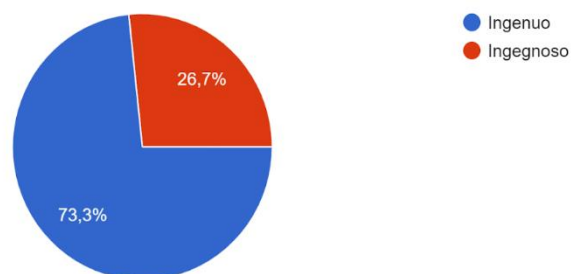


Figure 48: Answer to question 24 from postgraduate students.

25) Question number twenty five:

1. Middle school:

Rumor
21 risposte

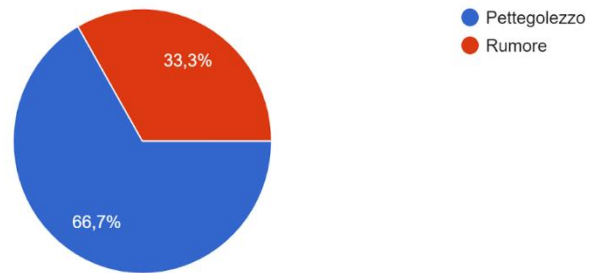


Figure 49: Answer to question 25 from middle school students.

2. High school:

Rumor
36 risposte

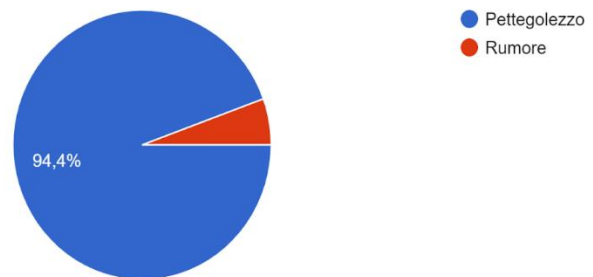


Figure 50: Answer to question 25 from high school students.

3. University:

Rumor
34 risposte

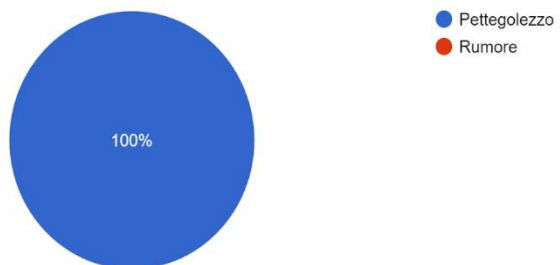


Figure 51: Answer to question 25 from University students.

4. Postgraduate:

Rumor
45 risposte

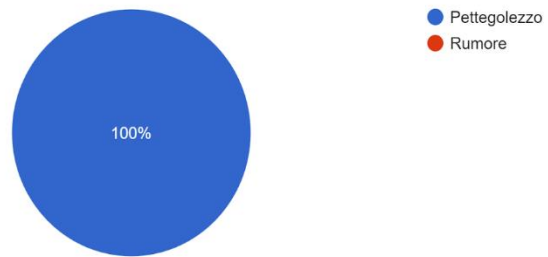


Figure 52: Answer to question 25 from postgraduate students.

26) Question Number twenty six:
1. Middle school:

Adjust
21 risposte

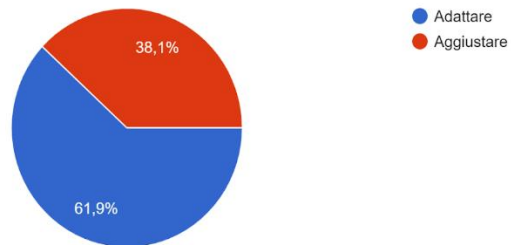


Figure 53: Answer to question 26 from middle school students.

2. High school:

Adjust
36 risposte

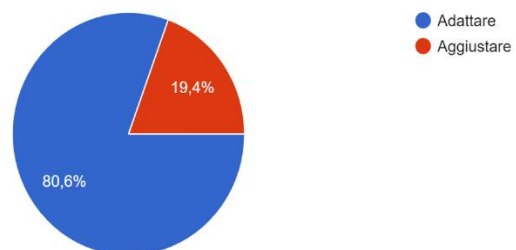


Figure 54: Answer to question 26 from high school students.

3. University:

Adjust
34 risposte

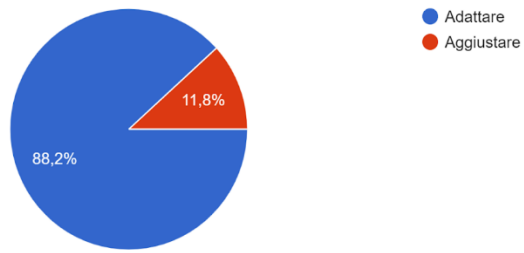


Figure 55: Answer to question 26 from University students.

4. Postgraduate:

Adjust
45 risposte

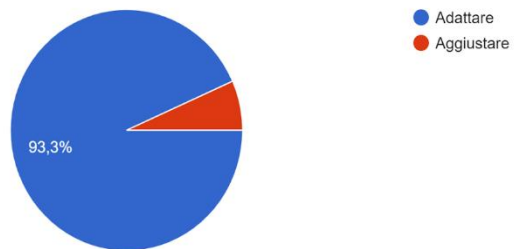


Figure 56: Answer to question 26 from postgraduate students.

27) Question number twenty seven:

1. Middle school:

Morbid
21 risposte

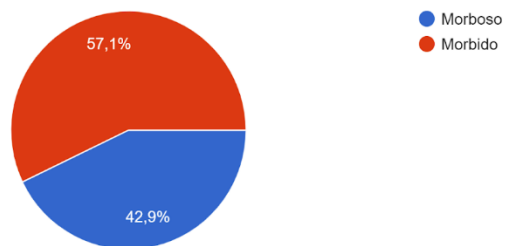


Figure 57: Answer to question 27 from middle school students.

2. High school:

Morbid
36 risposte

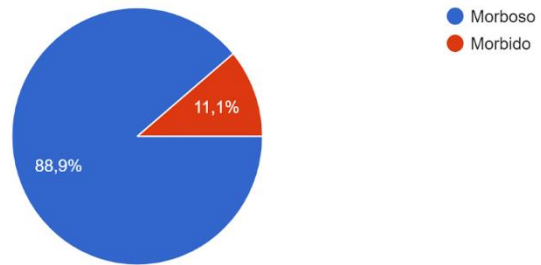


Figure 58: Answer to question 27 from high school students.

3. University:

Morbid
34 risposte

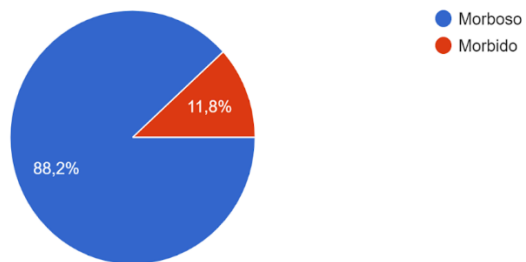


Figure 59: Answer to question 27 from University students.

4. Postgraduate:

Morbid
45 risposte

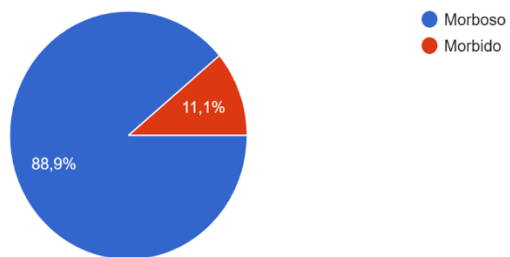


Figure 60: Answer to question 27 from postgraduate students.

28) Question number twenty eight:

1. Middle school:

Ironic
21 risposte

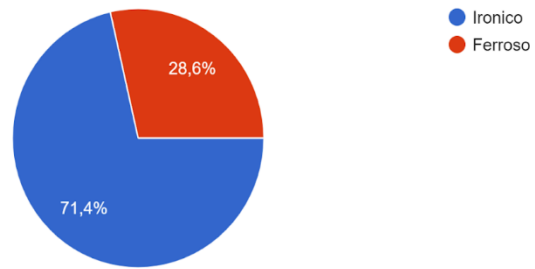


Figure 61: Answer to question 28 from middle school students.

2. High school:

Ironic
36 risposte

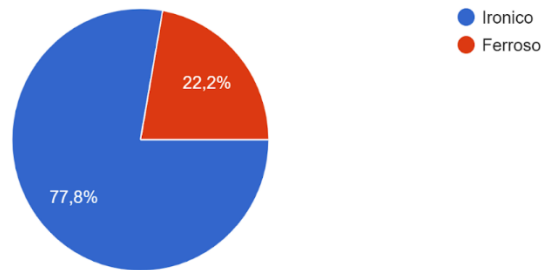


Figure 62: Answer to question 28 from high school students.

3. University:

Ironic
34 risposte

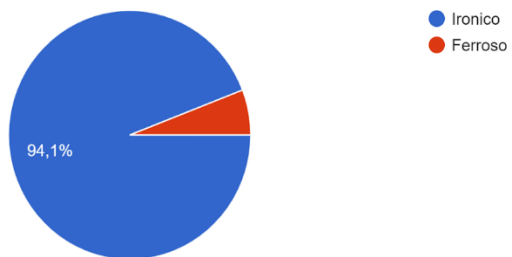


Figure 63: Answer to question 28 from University students.

4. Postgraduate:

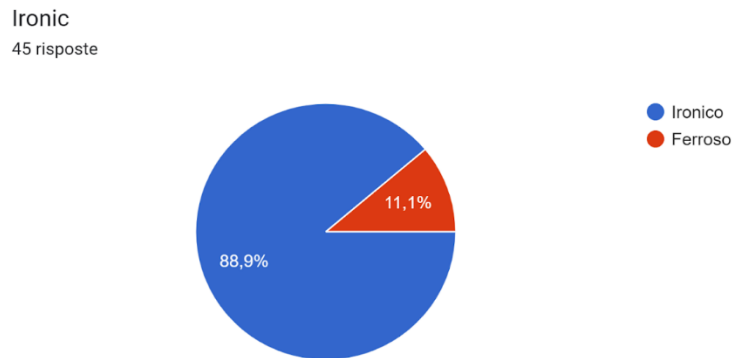


Figure 64: Answer to question 28 from postgraduate students.

3.3 FINAL EVALUATION

Students' responses highlight how exposure to the language and academic advancement are indeed key factors for a deeper and more profound understanding of the language. The results of this questionnaire reveal a significant disparity among the three educational levels considered. The sample from middle schools exhibited a limited mastery of the language in the majority of their responses, showing numerous signs of poor recognition of false friends. Even when compared to a close educational level, such as high schools, the gap between the two becomes evident. High school students demonstrated a greater mastery of the language and a higher ease in recognizing such linguistic phenomena. In fact, in many cases, their results were close to those of university or postgraduate students.

The first eight questions of the questionnaire aimed to assess both the respondents' personal perception of their English language proficiency and their daily, voluntary, and involuntary exposure to the language. The results indicated that, as the level of education advances, students tend to assign less importance to their academic language education. Instead, they reported increased voluntary exposure to the English-speaking world through various means (such as social networks, movies, books, etc.) or even within their academic and/or work environments (English-language courses, foreign colleagues, research papers, etc.).

I created the following chart to illustrate visually the difference in responses between the four education levels: what stands out the most is the gap between medium to high education levels (from high school and above) compared to the lower level.

QUESTION NUMBER	MIDDLE SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL	UNIVERSITY	POSTGRADUATE
9	9.5%	30.5%	64.7%	60.0%
10	4.8%	63.9%	82.3%	77.8%
11	19.0%	38.9%	47.0%	53.4%
12	71.4%	94.4%	100.0%	100.0%
13	33.3%	72.2%	88.2%	88.9%
14	23.8%	47.2%	76.5%	62.2%
15	19.0%	22.2%	52.9%	57.8%
16	9.5%	44.4%	85.3%	71.1%
17	95.2%	97.2%	100.0%	100.0%
18	9.5%	13.9%	23.5%	17.8%
19	71.4%	86.1%	100.0%	100.0%
20	23.8%	63.9%	94.1%	88.9%
21	33.3%	69.4%	73.5%	66.7%
22	90.5%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
23	90.5%	80.6%	82.4%	68.9%
24	47.6%	44.4%	55.9%	26.7%
25	66.7%	94.4%	100.0%	100.0%
26	61.9%	80.6%	88.2%	93.3%
27	42.9%	88.9%	88.2%	88.9%
28	71.4%	77.8%	94.1%	88.9%

Figure 65: the graph above shows the percentage of right answers for each question, from question 9 to question 28.

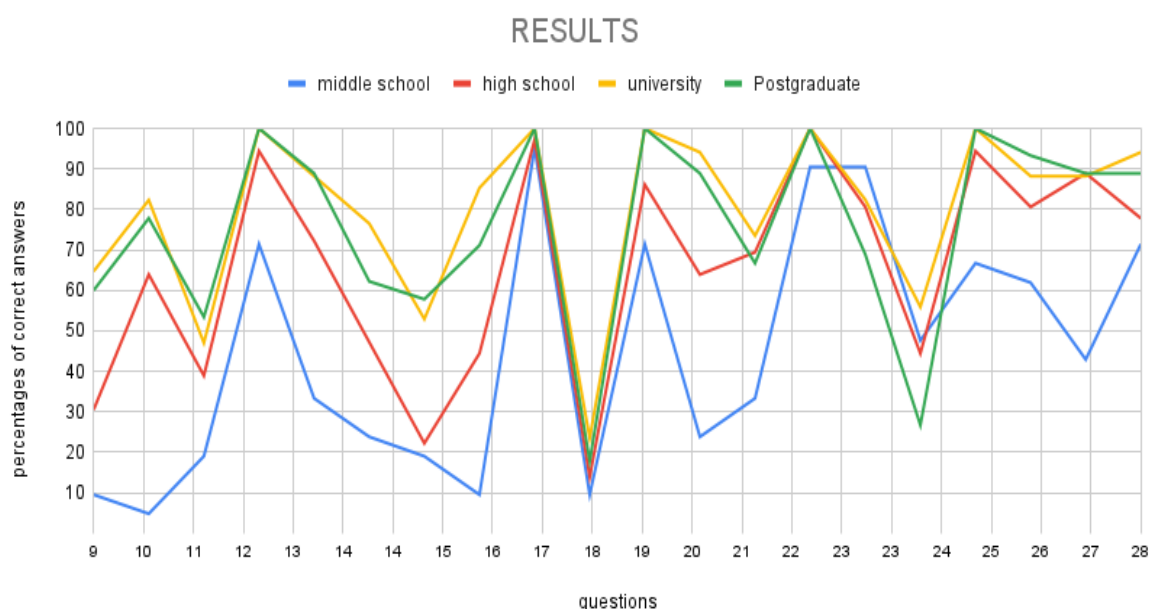


Figure 66: this image shows a graph containing all the percentage of correct answers from question 9 to question 28.

Middle school students demonstrated a limited mastery of the language, but the results align with their initial self-assessment, as they placed themselves at an A2 level on the evaluation scale (question 2), despite claiming constant exposure to the language (questions 6 and 7). Their responses in the three sections of the test focusing on practical exercises highlighted that the higher the words belonged to a basic vocabulary of the English language, the higher the correctness percentage in their answers.

However, they faced significant challenges in the first exercise, which consisted in the translation of ten sentences. Many students abstained from responding or provided highly inaccurate answers, and only a small percentage of students successfully identified and translated the false friends contained in them. The highest correctness percentage was achieved in the only sentence without a false friend (question 17, “rapidly”, 95.2%), while the lowest percentages were obtained in homonyms, such as “terrific” (9.5%) or “actually” (4.8%), as well as in homographs like “sensible” (9.5%) or “pretend” (9.5%).

In the second exercise, which involved multiple-choice questions, the results demonstrated a better proficiency compared to the previous exercise. Most responses were highly positive, likely due to the words being part of common usage even at lower language levels (“kind”, “farm”, “celebration”). In this exercise, respondents showed the ability to recognize false friends when the words were familiar to them at their language level. However, for questions with words which are slightly more formal in register, they confirmed their limited language proficiency, attributing the meaning of unfamiliar false friends to words whose sound closely resembled an Italian word with a more or less similar sound.

In the third exercise, middle school students achieved markedly better results than in the two previous exercises. Despite the more formal register of this exercise, they approached or even surpassed their peers from other academic levels, especially in exercise 24. This might indicate two additional possibilities: first, they understood the test objective and gave answers that were more aligned with their intention to provide the correct response rather than an instinctive one; second, they might have used devices (electronic or paper-based) to help in translation, despite the test instructions explicitly requesting avoidance of such tools.

High school students achieved better results compared to their middle school counterparts but still lagged behind those of university or postgraduate students.

In the first exercise, involving multiple-choice completion, high school students encountered greater difficulties with homographs belonging to a medium to formal register, such as “pretend”, “sensible”, “crude oil”, and the homonyms “terrific”. Even with the adverb “eventually” which could be considered a homophone, they exhibited a poor recognition of the false friend, despite the word belonging to a lower linguistic register than what they claimed to possess (B2).

In the second exercise, results improved considerably, with challenges primarily observed with homographs like “attend” and “cure” while they showed almost no hesitation with words belonging to a medium to low register, such as “farm” or “kind”.

In the third exercise, there was a slight decline compared to the previous exercise, although the results remained very good. The most negative result was observed in sentence 24 with the translation of the homonym “ingenuity” guessed correctly by only 44.4% of the students.

The best results, although not perfect, were achieved by students with a university background. These individuals reported being immersed in a multilingual environment on a daily basis, both in their personal lives and at the workplace. They also showed how the academic environment diminished its dominance on them, and the personal immersion in a multicultural context, both physical and mediatic, allowed them to improve their language skills. Moreover, a significant 31% of them (postgraduate) had spent a minimum of two weeks in an English-speaking Country, in contrast to the 8% of high school students who had done so.

In the first exercise, respondents expressed a greater mastery of the language. The only exercise in which they obtained poor results is exercise 18, involving the translation of the homograph “sensible” where only 23.5% of university students and 17.8% of postgraduates managed to guess the correct meaning of the false friend.

The second exercise once again reflects the accuracy of their self-assessment regarding their English language proficiency. The percentages of correct responses are significantly higher compared to their peers at other education levels, demonstrating how increased exposure to the language, both academically and personally, aids in improving their proficiency. No particular difficulties were demonstrated in recognizing homonyms, homographs, or homophones.

The third exercise maintains the level demonstrated in the previous exercises, except for the recognition of the homonym “ingenuity” as observed in their high school counterparts. However, there is a drastic drop of 26.7% among postgraduate students.

Despite their broader experiences and better performance compared to high school students, university or postgraduate students appeared to be more reserved in expressing an affinity for the English language. Interestingly, the majority of middle school students

(61.9%) declared that they did not feel inclined towards studying the language. This disparity in attitudes towards English among these different educational groups underscores the complex interaction of factors influencing language acquisition and proficiency.

These results are in line with the initial theories on whether academic advancement and exposure help in the recognition of more subtle grammatical phenomena, in short, it is essential that exposure to the second language also occurs outside of the classroom environment, as the classroom setting alone is limited both in quality and quantity (Muñoz, Cadierno, 2021). This evidence indicates how academic instruction alone is limited compared to less formal activities such as videogames and social networks (Muñoz, Cadierno, 2021), and therefore, it is important for learners to exploit informal language learning opportunities outside the classroom setting, as demonstrated by several studies (Muñoz, Cadierno, 2021). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation also play a great role in language advancement (Griffith, 2008) as they push the students to a more individualistic journey of learning.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to study the phenomenon of false friends between English and Italian among Italian students belonging to four different educational stages.

This dissertation aimed to analyse the difficulties for second language learners when face with linguistic phenomena such as “false friends”, and how this challenge can diminish thanks to academic advancement, exposure and personal motivation.

The results demonstrated the influence of certain factors on the quality of responses. Students who were more academically advanced, and had greater exposure to the language, provided better and more correct answers. These results were coherent with the initial theories: the academic level, the greater exposure and the many different kinds of personal motivation showed an increase in competence.

The results of middle-school students and high-school students revealed a pattern in their errors related to homographs and homophones, while their university and post- graduate counterparts highlighted more random mistakes, especially in the last exercises in which the language register was more formal. Therefore, the results showed a gradual advancement in mastery of the language along with the growth of the educational level.

In each of the four levels of education, candidates highlighted, in the majority of their responses, their continuous exposure to the English language on a daily basis through various means. What stands out the most in their responses concerning their personal exposure is that university students and postgraduates declared that they seek contact with the language by using all the methods listed by other students, but also incorporating additional and more direct ones, not only in the virtual and paper literary world, but also in their work and academic environments. It is essential also to emphasize how, with academic advancement, students feel more detached from the school-based teaching of

the language and more inclined towards their personal experience: this shows how academic preparation is only a starting point for a deeper and more solid language acquisition. The essential element for a more consistent improvement is direct exposure through various means.

This dissertation aims to visually demonstrate the trend of results in its four categories, highlighting how direct exposure to the language is the key element of learning. For this reason, the Italian education system should better guide its students from the early stages of learning a second language, encouraging them through the numerous available means to increase direct exposure to the language.

**AN INVESTIGATION OF ITALIAN STUDENTS'
TRANSLATION ABILITIES FROM ENGLISH TO ITALIAN**

QUESTO TEST È DEDICATO ESCLUSIVAMENTE A STUDENTI DELLE SCUOLE MEDIE/SUPERIORI/UNIVERSITÀ/LAVORATORI CHE HANNO COMPLETATO IL LORO CICLO DI STUDI CONSEGUENDO ALMENO UNA LAUREA.

Se non appartieni a questa categoria, abbandona il test e richiedi l'invio del link corretto

Ciao! Il mio nome è Elena Marini e sto scrivendo la mia tesi universitaria sull'apprendimento delle lingue. Per aiutarmi con il mio progetto, sarei grata se potessi compilare questo breve questionario. È **anonimo** e richiede circa 10 minuti per completarlo.

Il questionario è diviso in quattro sezioni: nella prima ti verrà chiesto di fornire informazioni personali riguardanti il tuo livello accademico e la tua esperienza personale con la lingua inglese; nella seconda dovrai tradurre dieci frasi dall'inglese all'italiano; nella terza ti verrà chiesto di selezionare la parola corretta tra quelle fornite per completare cinque frasi; nell'ultima parte dovrai scegliere il significato corretto di singole parole tra le coppie proposte.

Si vieta l'uso di qualsiasi tipo di dizionario cartaceo o elettronico, poiché l'obiettivo della ricerca consiste nelle competenze personali dei partecipanti al momento del test.

Completando il questionario, accetti che le tue risposte saranno utilizzate a scopo di studio. Qualsiasi informazione personale inserita in questo modulo sarà trattata come confidenziale e rimarrà completamente anonima. Le informazioni che fornisci potrebbero essere citate in forma anonima nel nostro elaborato.

Per eventuali domande sul questionario o sul progetto, ti prego di contattarmi all'indirizzo: elena.marini.6@studenti.unipd.it

Grazie per il tuo tempo!

Hello ! My name is Elena Marini and I am writing my university dissertation on language learning. In order to help me with my project, I would be grateful if you could fill in this short questionnaire. It is **anonymous** and it will take about 10 minutes to complete.

It is made up of four sections: in the first, you will be asked to provide personal information regarding your academic level and personal experience with the English language; in the second, you will have to translate ten sentences from English to Italian; in the third, you will be asked to select the correct word among those provided to complete the five sentences; in the final part, you will have to choose the correct meaning of individual words among the proposed pairs.

The use of any type of paper or electronic dictionary is prohibited, as the objective of the research relies on the personal competences of the participants at the time of the test.

By completing the questionnaire, you agree that your responses will be used for study purposes. Any personal information that is entered in this form will be treated as confidential and will remain completely anonymous. The information you give may be quoted anonymously in our paper.

For any questions on the questionnaire or the project, please contact me at:

elena.marini.6@studenti.unipd.it

Thank you for your time!

PART 1

personal information. informazioni personali.

Che grado d'istruzione stai frequentando al momento?

- scuola media
- scuola superiore
- università
- ho un lavoro in seguito al conseguimento di una o più lauree

Che livello di lingua inglese pensi di avere?

- A1 (beginner)
- A2 (post beginning)
- B1 (intermediate)
- B2 (higher intermediate)
- C1 (advanced)
- C2 (mastery)

Da quanti anni (all'incirca) studi la lingua inglese?

Utilizzando una scala da 1 a 6, dove 1 rappresenta il livello più basso e 6 il livello più alto, ti pregherei di indicare il punteggio che ritieni sia più appropriato per descrivere quanto l'istruzione abbia influito sul tuo apprendimento della lingua inglese:

per nulla

estre

1

2

3

4

5

6

Hai mai passato un periodo di permanenza in un Paese anglofono superiore alle due settimane?

- Sì
- No

Sei esposto involontariamente in modo regolare alla lingua inglese (attraverso i social, la televisione, i videogames, ...)? Se sì, come?

Rispondi scrivendo 'sì' o 'no' all'interno del testo. In caso di risposta affermativa, specifica.

Ti esponi volontariamente in modo frequente alla lingua inglese (guardando film in inglese, parlando con madrelingua, giocando a giochi/videogiochi, ...)? Se sì, come?

Rispondi scrivendo 'sì' o 'no' all'interno del testo. In caso di risposta affermativa, specifica.

Ti ritieni particolarmente portato alla lingua inglese?

- Sì
- No

PART 2

Translate the following sentences - Traduci le seguenti frasi.

Per evitare di falsificare i risultati del test, si ricorda che è VIETATO L'USO DI QUALSIASI TIPO DI DIZIONARIO elettronico e/o cartaceo.

Se non si conosce il significato di una parola, bisogna tentare di indovinare la traduzione seguendo il proprio istinto.

Il test è completamente anonimo.

1) This is a terrific web site.

2) I am actually saying something very different.

3) Crude oil is literally liquid death.

4) My parents lived there 15 years ago.

5) I have so many good memories of my teenage years in my camera!

6) The corpses were dressed in civilian clothes.

7) The article eventually appeared three years later.

8) They pretend to tell you too much.

9) The numbers are changing very rapidly here.

10) She had behaved like a sensible mother.

PART 3

Choose between the two options considering the translation needed located at the end of each sentence.

Scegli tra le due opzioni tenendo in considerazione la traduzione richiesta situata alla fine di ogni frase.

1) He is very _____ and friendly. [gentile]

- Gentle
- kind

2) The last meeting I _____ was awful [ho assistito/sono andato]

- Attended
- Assisted

3) The _____ is another cup of coffee [cura]

- Cure
- Medication

4) Each _____ is different as is each family [fattoria]

- Factory
- Farm

5) The town hosted a huge _____ to honor the occasion [celebrazione]

- Celebration
- Greeting

PART 4

Choose the correct meaning between the two options - Scegli il significato corretto tra le due opzioni

1) Ingenuity

- Ingenuo
- Ingegnoso

2) Rumor

- Pettegolezzo
- Rumore

3) Adjust

- Adattare
- Aggiustare

4) Morbid

- Morboso
- Morbido

5) Ironic

- Ironico
- Ferroso

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RIASSUNTO

Questo elaborato si propone come uno studio di ricerca sul fenomeno linguistico dei “False Friends” e le sue difficoltà per gli studenti madre lingua italiana che studiano la lingua inglese come seconda lingua. I “false friends” sono un fenomeno linguistico che coinvolge due parole, appartenenti a lingue diverse, che condividono la stessa pronuncia e/o lo stesso spelling ma non lo stesso significato.

Il primo capitolo di questa tesi è dedicato allo studio teorico di questo fenomeno linguistico in relazione al suo antonimo, i cosiddetti “cognati”, ovvero parole che condividono la stessa pronuncia e/o spelling e il significato. Al contempo vengono analizzati i metodi diretti e indiretti di acquisizione del linguaggio, che siano di una lingua madre o di una seconda lingua, con l’obiettivo di comprendere in modo più approfondito la permanenza del fenomeno dei “false friends” negli studenti di una seconda lingua.

L’acquisizione del vocabolario di una lingua avviene tramite due processi principali: l’apprendimento esplicito e l’apprendimento incidentale (Schmitt, 2000; Huckin and Coady, 1999). La prima forma di apprendimento è dettata da una attenzione diretta e mirata al vocabolario, mentre la seconda forma si concretizza attraverso la lettura e l’intuizione (Schmitt, 2000; Huckin and Coady, 1999). Tentare di indovinare il significato di una nuova parola è un metodo efficace, ma può al tempo stesso indurre lo studente a imprecisioni ed errori. Esistono diversi metodi di memorizzazione, come il “Metodo delle parole chiave” (Ellis and Beaton, 1993), efficace nella ritenzione a lungo termine. Un altro fattore essenziale è la “metacognizione”, ovvero la consapevolezza e lo studio del metodo educativo che si decide di adottare nel processo d’apprendimento. Schmitt, nel 1997, pubblicò una lista contenente 58 tecniche differenti di acquisizione del vocabolario dividendo tale processo in: strategie utili per la scoperta iniziale del significato di una parola e per il mantenimento mnemonico della parola acquisita. Questa lista subisce poi una ulteriore suddivisione in cinque sottocategorie che l’autore definisce: “Determination strategies” (DET), “Social strategies” (SOC), “Cognitive strategies” (COG), “Memory strategies” (MEM) and “Metacognitive process” (MET).

Il termine “False friends” fu coniato per la prima volta dall’autore Maxime Koessler e dal professore Jules Derocquigny nel loro libro del 1929 “Les faux amis, ou, Les trahisons du vocabulaire anglais”, sebbene ci siano evidenze precedenti di riconoscimento di tale fenomeno. Questo fenomeno linguistico è uno degli ostacoli più comuni nell’apprendimento di una L2, soprattutto quando, nel corso della storia, i due idiomi si sono influenzati a causa di contatti tra le popolazioni, facendo nascere fenomeni linguistici come i “calchi”, i “prestiti” o l’ “eredità” (Chamizo-Dominguez e Nerlich, 2002 ; Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008). Da questi fenomeni nascono i “False Friends”, un fenomeno linguistico che si verifica quando due o più parole in lingue diverse hanno la stessa pronuncia e/o ortografia, ma significati diversi (Chamizo-Dominguez, Brigitte Nerlich, 2002). Chamizo Dominguez e Brigitte Nerlich (2002) hanno creato una distinzione dei diversi tipi di “False Friends”: una prima divisione sta nel riconoscimento della differenza tra “semantic false friends” e “chance false friends”. I primi sono parole di lingue diverse che hanno lo stesso spelling e una simile o uguale pronuncia e condividono una relazione etimologica. L’equivalente di un “semantic false friend” nello stesso idioma è identificabile nel fenomeno della “polisemia”. I “Semantic False Friends” hanno una ulteriore suddivisione in “Full Semantic False Friends” e “Partial Semantic False Friends” (Chamizo-Dominguez, 2008). I “Chance Semantic False Friends” sono, invece, parole appartenenti a lingue diverse che condividono una simile o uguale pronuncia e spelling, ma la loro similarità non può essere spiegata a livello etimologico o semantico (Chamizo-Dominguez and Nerlich, 2002). L’equivalente dei “Chance False Friends” nella medesima lingua può essere riscontrato nel fenomeno dell’omonimia.

Per questi motivi il metodo intuitivo di acquisizione del linguaggio comporta diversi rischi: il significato delle parole, infatti, può non corrispondere alle similitudini con una parola della propria L1 che ha uno spelling o una fonetica simile. Il fenomeno dei “False Friends” si concentra proprio su queste differenze, e la loro distinzione evidenzia le enormi difficoltà che possono rappresentare per uno studente di una L2, soprattutto considerando l’esistenza di un altro fenomeno linguistico: i “Cognates”, anche conosciuti come “True Friends”. I “Cognates” sono parole simili sia a livello grafologico che fonetico, ma anche etimologico. I cognati possono rappresentare una enorme risorsa nello studio di una L2, ma è essenziale che lo studente sia a conoscenza dell’esistenza di questi due fenomeni per un apprendimento più accurato della lingua.

Il secondo capitolo si focalizza sugli obiettivi della ricerca e sul suo sviluppo pratico. Il questionario di ricerca è stato sottoposto a quattro diverse categorie di studenti, divise in base al loro livello scolastico: scuola media, scuola superiore, università e studenti che hanno già conseguito almeno una laurea. Attraverso la creazione di un sito web temporaneo è stato possibile indirizzare gli studenti al questionario relativo al loro livello accademico, seppure il questionario fosse identico per tutte e quattro le categorie; questa scelta è stata fatta per impedire contaminazioni dei risultati e avere quattro sezioni automatiche di raccolta dati. La metodologia del test include una prima fase di domande mirate a verificare la consapevolezza dello studente del proprio livello linguistico e una analisi sulla percezione relazionale che il singolo studente ha nei confronti della lingua. Questo è stato ottenuto attraverso domande dirette riguardanti sia il rapporto personale dello studente nei confronti della lingua inglese, sia attraverso un'analisi più oggettiva che puntava alla verifica dell'esperienza diretta, sia essa quotidiana o sporadica. Nel questionario seguono successivamente tre tipologie di esercizi: traduzione di frasi contenenti "False Friends" o "Cognates", domande a scelta multipla e un esercizio di riconoscimento diretto del "False Friend". Questo capitolo verifica, parallelamente allo studio dei "false friends", il grado di influenza che l'avanzamento accademico, la motivazione personale e l'esposizione alla lingua hanno sugli studenti italiani.

Nel terzo e ultimo capitolo sono mostrati i risultati del questionario per ogni risposta, divisi per grado accademico. Per mostrare un andamento generale delle risposte dei quattro gradi diversi, è stato inserito un grafico che evidenzia quanto l'avanzamento accademico, la motivazione e l'esposizione alla lingua siano parti fondamentali per raggiungere un consolidamento e una sicurezza maggiori nell'uso pratico della seconda lingua. I risultati del questionario mostrano una importante disparità tra i livelli più alti e quelli più bassi di istruzione: gli ultimi, infatti, hanno dimostrato una scarsa padronanza della L2 e del riconoscimento dei diversi "False friends". Il loro approccio era apparentemente legato all'intuizione e all'indovinare il significato della parola in relazione alla propria lingua madre. Al contrario, gli studenti appartenenti a livelli educativi superiori hanno evidenziato una maggiore facilità nel riconoscere tale fenomeno linguistico, ma anche una migliore padronanza della lingua. Le risposte date da quest'ultima categoria di studenti dimostrano un più ampio consolidamento del vocabolario della L2: il loro approccio è più conoscitivo che intuitivo e questa loro

padronanza è dettata da una maggiore esperienza diretta con la L2, sia nel tempo che nella loro quotidianità. I risultati sono infatti in linea con gli obiettivi della ricerca.