Language learning through TV: the RAI offer between past and present

Deborah Cappelli
Università di Firenze (<deborah.cappelli@unifi.it>)

Abstract:

In the past, RAI played a fundamental role for linguistic unification in Italy when dialects were still the only means by which Italians were able to express themselves. In fact, the advent of TV has contributed to the spread of Italian by becoming a real language school. However, over time due to a strong marketing of the offer, its commitment to education has gradually diminished to leave more space for information and entertainment programs. Due to the serious emergency that hit the whole world, with the schools closed, it became necessary for RAI to support teachers. TV brings students into contact with various communication contexts; provides them with many inputs, both linguistic and cultural, which can increase their motivation, their active participation in teaching practice and their knowledge. Language learning TV courses can have several functions and advantages, even if originally aimed at a general audience, they can be integrated into school and academic teaching and become part of the program. This does not detract from the role of teachers as it is their task to guide the teaching of the foreign language, taking advantage of television courses.

Keywords: *affective filter, language learning, language teaching, mass media, TV course*

1. Introduction

The development of digital technologies, and the consequent pervasive spread of the web together with new forms of communication, represented a challenge for humanistic studies as well, for research and teaching in the field of literature as much as in those of language and translation. The awareness of the loss of centrality of humanistic knowledge in the face of the prevalence of new technologies and the increasingly persistent developments of science, in fact, not only couldn't prevent a fruitful dialogue between the two worlds during the last twenty years, but has instead encouraged a reflection on the role that linguistic-literary disciplines may and must play in a rapidly changing world.

Unlike in the past, rather than on a theoretical level, the current comparison seems to be engaged on two fronts: the ethical one of individual and social liberties threatened by the omnipresence of technology and the power of science, and a second, more practical front, aimed at renewing research and teaching methods in light of new possibilities offered by technological and scientific progress – we may just think of the relationship between neuroscience and linguistics. Therefore, it seems appropriate to reflect on the current relationships between scientific and linguistic-literary fields, on innovations and differences compared to the past, on technological applications in the field of research and teaching. If on one hand the web has created new communication forms, accelerated and conditioned linguistic transformations, as well as offered tools for translation, it has also stretched its roots – like several scientific and technological discoveries in the past – into the process of literary creation, changing the forms of fruition; on the other hand, archiving processes, databases, linguistic corpora, bibliographic research and organizing tools, digital libraries, digital critical editions, quantitative analysis of the literary text, etc., represent tools and methods of investigation increasingly in use, which pose new challenges and new theoretical and methodological questions to be asked.

It is within this very framework that another instrument comes into play, one that might seem outdated, and instead proves to be both versatile and very up-to-date in the teaching-learning of foreign languages: television. Now more than ever, in a dire time of global emergency when schools are confronted with their own spatial limits, this device seems to be an excellent aid, as well as a useful support for distance learning, which cannot entirely replace in attendance learning. Italy is one of the countries which were most affected by the Covid-19 emergency, being one of the first to be struck and because of the sheer force with which the "pandemic" manifested on its territory. Thus, educational institutions found themselves suddenly facing previously inexperienced problems: schools closed abruptly, universities unable to host exams and dissertations as well as imminent high school and middle school exams. Despite the technological innovations made in recent years, educational institutions didn't seem to be ready yet to complete their entire didactic program through distance learning alone. Issues were many but efforts were made to respond to the emergency as quickly as possible and through all available means. Online lessons have replaced in attendance ones but more constant and, in a sense, more engaging intervention was needed. Until now, tv programs were seen as a simple collection of material that could be reused in the classroom, but why not combining them instead with the teaching program as an integral part of the latter? Naturally, it is no longer possible to distinguish the Web from satellite television nowadays, and this offers the chance of "not having any schedules" and watch programs when we prefer, according to our needs, thus turning into pleasure what may be otherwise experienced as a duty. As for language teaching, RAI television has launched numerous initiatives related to English language, trying to involve not just the individual student – with courses organized by level – but the whole family with offers related to culture and literature, aiming to make language learning more interactive. We shouldn't forget we are living in the age of Netflix, a platform for everyone, offering the chance to watch films in the original language with subtitles in the chosen idiom, which is having a huge success among the audience of every age. All of this seems to suggest an overcoming of traditional methods of language learning in favour of two key aspects: motivation and input.

Informal learning is a part of everyday life: it is not necessarily intentional and the person involved may not recognize it as functional to their knowledge and competences. At the end of 2007 the High Level Group on Multilingualism established by the European Commission produced a final report where it defined motivation as "the key to success" in language learning and stressed the necessity to integrate it with free time activities. Mass-media strongly motivate

people to learn languages through modalities which go beyond the official educational methods. Furthermore, if on the one hand, TV programs and series may arouse interest in other cultures and stimulate motivation to learn or revise languages, the internet provides a support for language learning through websites presenting teaching material, webquest, exercise-books and educational portals. TV programs with subtitles are also effective language learning tools as they favor functional literacy and passive multilingualism by presenting a given language as it is used by its native speakers (Borello *et al.* 2016). However, this is not the first time that tv proves to be of use in didactics and it is therefore useful to rediscover its importance and update it to the modern means available, namely the connection to the Web.

2. Learning Italian through TV

In the period from the moment of the unification of Italy to the First World War, a large portion of Italian population spoke and understood only one of the local dialects, whereas the Italian language, although not completely unknown, was used only by a limited high cultured-circle and on special occasions. Over time, however, the desire of people to understand and be understood began to grow. Through borrowed forms of popular culture, such as puppet theater, opera and serial publication, people realized that Italian was something different from the dialect they used every day: thus, the first impulses towards the will of knowledge began to show. However, they were fictional dramas spoken in a language different from the one that people used every day and even though they were useful sources for a large portion of the population for learning pieces, phrases, Italian language expressions, these bits alone weren't enough for the mastering of the language. Fascism and the monarchic state inherited two thirds of the population who couldn't speak Italian and 60% of the population with no elementary school certificate, the latter actually belonging only to an "élite" (De Mauro 1969). This condition lasts a whole century in Italy; the harsh reality of migration was what taught to Italians the importance of education in order to save their children from the same fate of exploitation. On the eve of the First World War, in the years when migration was more intense, the percentage of illiterate fell from 70% to 40% (De Mauro 1963). The numerous personal initiatives encouraged one of the largest and most spontaneous cultural processes in the history of Italy, which was further supported by industrialization.

The years from political unification (1861) to the birth of the republican democratic state (1946) were characterized by the social stratification of the country: if on one hand the exclusive use of dialect persists among the population and Italian is still little known, on the other hand the need for educating, knowing and mastering Italian language starts to develop through various experiences. The bourgeoisie, especially that from large cities, starts to use spoken Italian, a language unknown outside of Florence and Rome. An Italian which was focused on understandability in journalistic writing and literature, still too rich in archaising stylistic attitudes. During the Giolittian period, a number of measures allowed elementary school to work more efficiently, this combined with the push for education coming from the lower classes and from emigration, and eventually all children attended first grade to abandon school immediately afterwards, a trend which went on in the following decades. With the advent of republic and with the changes in social, economic and cultural life, Italian linguistic reality began to shift. The great internal migration that brought a large part of the population from rural areas to the large cities and from the south to the north of the country, gathered together populations of different dialects and encouraged them to try and understand each other. The level of school education began to rise among the new generations; by the 1950s,

almost 100% of the boys obtained primary school certificate and in the 1960s unified middle school became available (De Mauro 2018). Furthermore, a new unforeseen and unconsidered element came into play: the advent of television which, not without resistance from Italian society. Suddenly flooded the houses of a country which was still 66% dialect-speaking with a waterfall of spoken Italian, as if everyone already knew the language. That wasn't really the case, but through this the idiom began to spread. Even though in the early Twentieth Century, in Italy as in many other countries, radio had a considerable importance, especially due to the Fascist propaganda, it still remained an expensive item for a long time. The linguistic influence of collective listening moments through loudspeakers cannot be underestimated but the radio did not have the penetration and therefore the impact achieved by television broadcasts in the second half of the Century. When new production techniques made it possible to reduce the cost of devices increasing their spread "già la televisione trionfava e catturava l'attenzione con quella forza e capacità di seduzione fino all'ipnosi che Aldous Huxley aveva previsto e descritto fin dal 1932 in *Brave new world*" (De Mauro 2014: 92).

Much of television broadcasts were made while ignoring the overall linguistic and cultural reality of viewers to whom they were addressed. Thus, if on one hand reactions and rejections occurred, at the same time it is hard not to see the great effect it had on people, as they found themselves exposed to the advertising of articles they were not used to, thus giving birth to new needs. The Italy of dialects seemed outdated, even in the most remote towns films arrived that had premièred in Rome and Milan, television spoke to everyone through the same speeches. But such great optimism was not confirmed by the facts, as the social framework of mass civilization was more complex than previously believed: Italian reality was still 50 years behind from a cultural standpoint.

As for the construction of a uniform language favoured by the media, the discussion on unitary popular Italian must be reread in terms of more mature linguistic and sociolinguistic theories. Code variation is generally seen as a constitutive property of the speaker's linguistic knowledge. The linguistic variation linked to the different way of expressing oneself in relation to communicative situations, the relationship with the interlocutor and the purposes of the issuer, is inherent in normal interaction (Fishman 1975). Knowledge of the social norms that govern variation makes a linguistic expression understandable in a given context (Gumperz 1973). Furthermore, attention to new media reflects the need to guarantee the right of access to the greatest number of people, in addition to the fact that new media constitute an important channel of contact towards cultural diversity (Baldi and Savoia 2007). Education becomes the strategy to support the learning of emerging features in the context of a multicultural reality, seen as enhancing the autonomy of the individual.

Television broadcasts brought to light the existence of different ways of using language and made everyone aware of technical and special uses of the language – that were new if compared to their rural background – which workers suddenly had to master in their workplaces and beyond. As the terms became of common use they were imposed with little transparency (as happened more clearly in the 80s and 90s in several fields from mechanics to chemistry).

From the 1960s the school began to expand, young people started to attend elementary school, high school and even university, but the struggle to speak, read and write wasn't over yet and involved all Italian democratic forces. A century after the unification of Italy, television set out to teach Italian language to 26 million Italians who still in 1961 could only speak dialect. Starting from 1954, television entered homes with unprecedented power, to make Italy it was surely necessary Italian language, but to make Italian language it was necessary Manzoni and TV as well. That was the era of drama, the kind of TV show Italians could relate to and appreciate

the most, and through which they could learn a language that still wasn't common to them, thus Renzo and Lucia, Don Rodrigo's thugs and Don Abbondio came into play. The dialogues of the betrothed spread Alessandro Manzoni's Tuscan-influenced Italian as – according to the linguist Tullio De Mauro (1968) – the success of the tv serial lies in its accessibility or in the linear discourses of simple people. In other words, the conquest of language occurs together with the conquest of culture.

The first television quizzes began to pique spectators' curiosity and spark their need for knowledge, and as TV anchors used a comforting Italian filled with set phrases, the viewers ended up empathizing more with the clarity of the host than with the knowledge of the contestant. By then the die was cast, so many expressions were spread with great efficiency, by Mario Riva, by Walter Chiari, by Peppino de Filippo. The linguistic penetration of television medium vanquished all competitors: learning Italian even by watching "Canzonissima" show was the conscious aim of television audience. "Canzonissima" featured one of the most typical forms of television speech of the time, according to the linguist Sergio Raffaelli (1994) the motto of TV is to inform, entertain, educate, and television became the greatest and unmatched tool of language education.

This was made possible above all thanks to the relevant and innovative figure of Alberto Manzi, a pedagogist, who was the first to teach courses of reading and writing in Italian in the Sixties, through the famous TV show he hosted, "Non è mai troppo tardi" ('It's never too late'). It was a real Italian language teaching course for the illiterate, carried out through the installation of 2000 televisions in as many listening points scattered throughout Italy. The program was designed by Oreste Gasperini, Alberto Manzi and Carlo Piantoni and was aired by RAI from 1960 to 1968, first on Rai 1 then on Rai 2. The broadcast was created with the support of the Ministry of Education with the aim of teaching to Italians who couldn't read and write despite having surpassed school-age. These were real lessons, given by Manzi to classes made up of illiterate adults, where modern teaching techniques, now defined as multimedia, were used, such as videos, audio supports, object lessons, and above all the many sketches and drafts done by Maestro Manzi himself, with rapid strokes of charcoal pencil on a large sheet blackboard.

The broadcast was aired in pre-evening time, so that workers were also able to watch. 484 episodes were aired until May 10th, 1968, the year in which it could eventually be suspended thanks to the increase in attendance to compulsory school. A few years earlier, in 1958, a pilot project which would last until 1966 had already been created and titled as "Telescuola", a substitute program, i.e. aimed at allowing the completion of compulsory education cycle for youths residing in areas without secondary schools. A highly innovative project, with a daily audience of 4 million. In the period from 1965 to 1966 the teacher Ilio Guerranti took care of the broadcasts dedicated to 3rd, 4th and 5th classes. "Non è mai troppo tardi" had an important social and educational role, contributing to the cultural unification of the nation and significantly lowering the illiteracy rate. In fact, thanks to these distance lessons, almost one and a half million people could get an elementary school certificate, the project was also a great international success, as similar projects were carried out by as many as seventy-two countries. In the years 1990-1991 a remake of the transmission was aired on Rai 3, Gianni Ippoliti was chosen as the host and the elderly were the protagonists. In 2004, a Rai Educational show took up the title of the program modified in "Non è m@i troppo tardi" using the modern symbol of the snail to anticipate the subject of the program: digital literacy education.

The massmediologist Monteleone (2003) claimed that the great popular success of the series must be attributed to the teacher Alberto Manzi, who should get the credit for allowing thousands of illiterates to get an elementary school certificate. We could say that television truly

was a language school, in fact – according to Tullio De Mauro (1977a) – listening to television on a daily basis had the same effect as 5 years of elementary school and as such contributed to the creation of national identity. He highlights the fact that television, as well as radio, determined the diffusion of a common Italian, understood as a repertoire of stylistic varieties, different from that of the rhetorical and bookish tradition of the official and public Italian that goes up to the years of the Second War World. Furthermore, it identifies a direct relationship between the simplification of media language and the type of language used in schools, as we see in the *Dieci tesi* for democratic language education (2007). The *Dieci tesi* pursue an idea of linguistic education detached from the literary language of traditional teaching and attentive to the language spoken by millions of people. In particular, the traits of traditional linguistic education, seen as an obstacle to socio-cultural progress, include the lack of interest in linguistic uses motivated by the context or communication purposes and the orientation towards meta-grammatic teaching (Baldi and Savoia 2005). The Italian language written and spoken by few gave way to looser and more colloquial forms thanks to the contribution of television in trying to establish a direct relationship with the entirety of readers. Television offers a wide variety of uses representing a real school of language and communication for Italians (De Mauro 1973).

Unfortunately, the major role that RAI played in the 1950s and 1960s as a public service vanished in the following decades; for a long time now, RAI has no longer fulfilled the function of a great cultural agency and many accuse it of not having a mission anymore. It's a television which is no longer content with a mere representation of the world, but wants take part in its construction, and a decisive role is played by the advertisement market (Buonocore 2005:66). Baldi and Savoia clearly state that:

> I numeri non lasciano dubbi a tale riguardo. Nel 1980 la Rai raccoglie 148 miliardi di pubblicità […] In Italia un momento cruciale è segnato, pertanto, dal passaggio ad un sistema finanziato dalla pubblicità. Questo cambiamento corrisponde alla diminuita importanza della natura pubblica del servizio, finanziato dal canone. Tuttavia, l'affermarsi della televisione commerciale caratterizza in generale le società occidentali, nelle quali emerge una televisione organica alle grandi multinazionali. (Baldi and Savoia 2005: 220)

The negative turning point occurred with early '90s laws and regulations on radio and television system (Mammì Law) which favored the development of national commercial networks and which, combined with the rules on advertising sales, also pushed RAI TV to follow the path of marketing leading to a progressive decrease in quality, in an attempt to win a wider audience and, consequently, a greater advertising revenue. In 1994 Chomsky reflects on the changes that have occurred in the Italian television system:

> Quello che sta accadendo di questi tempi in Italia [...] è quasi una caricatura delle tendenze […] dell'evoluzione del potere in generale e dei media in particolare. Questi fenomeni hanno […] carattere globale […] da alcuni decenni l'internazionalizzazione dell'economia si è accelerata, e questo ha portato a una grande concentrazione del potere nei grandi agglomerati industriali transnazionali. (Chomsky 1994: 26)

If we leave aside some exceptions/staples, confined within the niches of Public Service which, both in entertainment broadcasts and in those of greater cultural content, still maintain a high level of quality, generally speaking there it is undoubtful that the race towards the search for audience has pushed quality down to the point of leading public networks to produce completely non-educational broadcasts, in the wake of private ones. After all, we may just look at what might seem like a small detail: the lack of respect of other's speech times, talking over each other, continuous interruptions, the shouting. Television from the '50s and '60s, despite having

known cases of sensationalism in conversation, showed a high respect for speaking times and opposing views, to the point that many were to argue that this really could educate Italians to dialogue and effective exchange. A detail that is not negligible in this case: respecting speech times means to have respect for the other and real interest in listening, which are both key qualities for many aspects of civil life. Today's television in general opposes those models with oppression, with "conversations" – if they can be still called like that – turning into actual fights, following scripts and guidelines that are in many cases specifically aimed to achieve this goal. In many TV political debates it is evident that speeches are especially aimed to the dismantling of other's arguments, to the point of not even letting the others speak, flooding them with interruptions, with the primary objective of preventing them from making a point that stands.

Talk shows are among the most popular genres of the moment, with a very high level of TV ratings and this is where the overturning of the educational perspective that characterized early television truly becomes evident. Eco, in 1983 made a distinction between paleotelevision and neotelevision, he identified the main features of the first as being a pedagogical contact with the spectator, a structural flow of the programming and a socializing training space, while those of the second were the dimension of daily life, togetherness and a continuous flow of the programming.

It appears that the degeneration is precisely due to the lack of any interest from television to develop a different format; brawls seem to "pay" off far more in catching the audience attention. The relationship between Public Service and school system in some countries, and especially in Great Britain with its BBC, has been much closer, as opposed to RAI, which didn't prove to be very responsive in the face of the flourishing of many projects aimed at schools by RAI Educational. This is a serious shortcoming, as the potential of the television medium used to be, and still is, enormous both in regard to teacher training as well as adult education. BBC still dedicates about a third of its production volumes to education and culture, with a wide use of the internet. RAI's absence from the educational scenario, as well as from the Web's platforms, has certainly played a decisive part in the overall drop of the country's cultural level. There seems to be no real awareness of the role played by television in the Italian context, which is very different from the British one or from that of other large European countries. A scenario in which the sources to draw on for both individual and collective cultural growth are far more numerous and better organized.

RAI maintains a scarce pedagogical and cultural production, almost exclusively confined to its thematic channels which, for various reasons, are watched by a small audience. In recent times, in addition to entertainment and fiction the offer has been increasingly focusing on information. Despite having had an all-news network for years, Rai has maintained several news formats on its mainstream networks, for a total of 'news time' which is three times the amount of time occupied by news in BBC's schedules. A reduction in this respect would free up resources and space in the Public Service for programs that could very well be focused on culture. In other words, RAI's offer is very skewed toward the information side; we would need more culture and less news; it would suffice to take a look at the schedules from the first decades of RAI to see what public TV could and should actually do (De Mauro 2015).

3. School at home: lessons on TV and online on RAI channels

Characterized by unidirectional transmission through the ether, distance teaching through the radio and television media is several years outdated by this time. Radio and television were first replaced by audio and video tapes (often sold as attachments to newspapers and maga-

zines), then by CDs and locally used software, and eventually by web-based technologies. Now that digital means and streaming are significantly changing radio and television language, it is probable that the foundations have been laid for the recovery of these two media from a didactic standpoint. Thus, it would be interesting to examine the new communication opportunities for radio and television broadcasters and, in anticipation of an experimentation, to hypothesize the possibilities of exploitation in regard to the development of receptive skills by L2 foreign language students.

In these years, the internet and DTT technologies have radically modernized the use of radio and television: users may stream TV channels from all over the world and can even create a customized web radio in just a few clicks. News information is changing accordingly, adapting its contents to the new technological means available to the audience. The potential positive educational effects of radio and television media remain to be investigated in the light of these innovations: to teachers and students of foreign languages, in fact, the net represents a huge – and free – repository for original content which was unimaginable up to a few year ago. The advent of the internet and the general availability of flat and broadband connections have radically changed the work of newsrooms and radio-television broadcasters, now also called to the task of updating the homepage of their website in real time and 24h. It really was a needed change: in fact, fewer and fewer people manage to find the time to read through an entire newspaper; in our country, it is mainly the elderly who still only read paper newspapers, while two out of three internet users declare to keep themselves informed also (or only) through the internet. TV broadcasters, such as radios, use the network to deliver customizable content to a global audience.

Recently, with the transition to digital, broadcasters have more frequencies available; many of them took advantage of this to extend their offer, adding other flow channels on the radio model alongside the generalist main channel. Digital allows for new features that undermine the static nature of television. For example, in Spain Antena 3 broadcasts the "The Simpsons" cartoons in Spanish and English, while TV3 viewers can watch "Dragon Ball" even in Japanese. It is not a function to be underestimated: many Romanian young adults born in the eighties attribute their good knowledge of English to the fact that cartoons until recent years were not dubbed, while there is no doubt that the Maltese understand Italian well not only for the presence of numerous elements of Latin origin in their language (especially from Sicilian dialect), but also because their televisions can pick up the Rai signal.

Only in this moment of serious global emergency, RAI has proved to be attentive to the educational needs of students of all ages, who stayed at home due to the closing of schools, reinforcing their programming and therefore connecting the Italian cultural world with television through the contribution of the most skilled teachers. A new show schedule with 100 lessons of 30 minutes and a special programming dedicated to students having to prepare for state certification exam: RAI, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, takes the field with #lascuolanonsiferma and makes content available for professors and students. "At school every day, despite everything else" this is the title of a collaboration project between the Ministry of Education and RAI to support all young (as well as older) students struggling with a dramatically different school year than usual. The coronavirus really did put a strain on the brand new skills required for teachers to teach and students to learn. We are talking about 10 million people who had to reinvent a whole new world of didactics which was never known before, as lessons were suspended and schools of all levels closed on March 4th. In this new world, the Web has a strong presence, but the same is also true for television, which, not surprisingly, has seen a significant increase in audience ratings.

The slogan "RAI #lascuolanonsiferma (school won't stop), a TV as great as a school" summarizes the ambition of the project and provides that Rai will make available to students and teachers alike a new schedule dedicated to school, with an offer aimed at all ages and with particular attention to those who will face a never-before-seen state certification exam. The Public Service offer will focus on RAI Cultura (including RAI Scuola and RAI Storia – RAI 3), RAI Ragazzi and RaiPlay with a vast repertoire of products and educational programs taken from Rai Teche. In particular, about 100 lectures will be held, lasting 30 minutes each, given by professors and teachers chosen by the Ministry of Education and preceded by a brief introduction, useful for identifying the education field as well as its setting within the program of study. Featured subjects are: Italian, Classical Languages and Civilizations, Philosophy, Human Sciences, History, Chemistry and Biology, Physics, Mathematics, Foreign Languages, Physical Education, Computer Science, Sciences, History of Art, Sculpture, Painting, Fashion, Graphics, Astronomy, Earth sciences.

Of particular interest is the proposal addressed to students having to face the final high school exam test. On April 27 "Scuola@Casa Maturità" (School@Home High School Diploma) started airing every day at 10 AM and 3 PM a series of 30-minute lectures given by university professors, lecturers from Crusca and from Lincei Academy to help students face the final test. The topics of these lessons are chosen by teachers of secondary schools with a long experience in the exam commissions: teachers will analyse the subject of the lesson, answering with their competence and using an approach that will be useful to final year students, also taking into account the characteristics that the exam will have.

Finally, a particular commitment should be noted in RAI 3's offer in regard to a 43 episodes-broadcast which began on April 27, airing from Monday to Friday at 3.20 PM, hosted by Edoardo Camurri with #Maestri. Each time, two cultural protagonists are interviewed, academics as well as communicators for a total of 86 lectures from as many teachers who will be identified and involved by the Ministry of Education. This is without a doubt a great commitment from the Public Broadcasting Service which today, more than ever, is called upon to perform one of its most crucial institutional tasks: supporting the social cohesion of a country having youth and the whole world of education and culture as one of its fundamental pillars. This is an obligation under the Service Contract stipulated in normal circumstances but, unfortunately, we are now in extraordinary circumstances that require interventions and resources of equal importance. There has been much debate in regard to this and the Parliamentary Supervisory Commission on RAI had to write to its managers reporting a disorganized, excessively fragmented and dispersed character referred to the educational and informative offer. Now, to some extent, this project made up for this. Perhaps it was a late effort, but what is important now is not wasting any more time and assign to the Public Service the role that it deserves. Once before, in the second postwar period, Rai contributed to Italian literacy and, all in all, it succeeded in its commitment, thus even in this occasion it mustn't be any different.

It is appropriate to say that classrooms never close on RAI Scuola channel, which is always improving its programming for students, teachers and families that can be seen on TV (channel 146 Dt, 133 of Tivusat and 806 of Sky Italia), or accessed from RAI Scuola website and RAI Cultura web portal, where the educational offer is divided into subjects and features hundreds of specific contents from various disciplines. As for TV, the space dedicated to scientific subjects has been increased. Among the offers: "Newton", the new program of in-depth analysis and scientific information, "Lezioni di Coding" (Coding lessons) for the learning of principles of computer science and computational thinking, "I Lincei per il Clima" (The Lincei for Climate), lectures on climate change given by professors from Lincei Academy. There's also

room for English-language programs aimed at learning and improving the language, in line with the CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning methodology, recently adopted also by Italian school.

Furthermore, from the large RAI Cultura archive, "Cronache con Cristoforo Gorno" (Chronicles with Cristoforo Gorno) and "Passato e Presente" (Past and present) with Paolo Mieli retrace the ancient, medieval, modern, nineteenth and twentieth century history. The TV program "I grandi della Letteratura Italiana" (Great personalities of Italian literature) features the verses and words from the greatest Italian authors narrated by Edoardo Amurri. Concerning philosophy, "Café Filosofico" (Philosophical café) hosts the most relevant Italian philosophers, gathered to explain the development of Western thought through the great themes and the great thinkers that characterized it. For art history, the best of "Italia, Viaggio nella Bellezza" (Italy, a journey into beauty) was put on schedule, a program created in collaboration with Mibact, together with "StrinArte", art history lessons by Claudio Strinati, and "I Segreti del Colore" (The secrets of color) the history of Italian art through the experience of institutes for restoration and art academies. As for the online programming, Rai Scuola offers every morning, through its websites and social channels, *Scuola@Casa News* (School@Home News), a newsletter featuring useful informations for schools, teachers, students and families to simplify distance education work. The project continues on the path started by Rai Scuola (www.raicultura.it/ speciali/scuola2020) through the ten episodes of *Scuola@Casa*: an introduction to distance teaching methods and tools, available within the special *Scuola2020* on RAI's websites Cultura and Rai Scuola and also featured in Rai Play's offer. A specific offer of contents was also launched for the RAI - MIUR agreement #lascuolanonsiferma and for the preparation of the final high school exam.

As for the teaching of languages, the only linguistic programming featured in RAI's offer is focused on the English language. English language courses are part of Rai Scuola and are divided into three 30-minute time slots, dedicated to three different targets: children (primary school), teens (first grade secondary school) and young adults (high school and university), to which an additional space dedicated to the whole family is added on Saturdays and Sundays.

The programs dedicated to kids are now the following:
• "Tracy e Polpetta" (Tracy and Meatball) is a fun sitcom designed for the English learning of kids. The protagonists are a ten-year-old English girl, Tracy, her magical talking bin, Bill the Bin, and two characters who live with her and speak Italian: the mole Polpetta and Van Ruben, the ghost of a pirate who lived in the 17th century. Each episode deals with an important topic such as civil coexistence, diversity, environmental protection, education.
• Dedicated to primary school children, "Il Divertinglese" ('FunEnglish') is designed to encourage the learning of basic elements of English language through cartoons spoken in the original language, DIY, games, quizzes, songs and sitcoms.
• "Christmas Tales from America", a three-episode event featuring the staging of three classic short stories from American literature dedicated to Christmas: "The Thin Santa Clus, The Gift of the Magi, The Luckless Santa Claus", all spoken in English language.
• "Dixi's Simple Songs", a series of thirteen 2-minute episodes where Dixi's friends experience adventures based on well-known traditional song lyrics, much appreciated by kinds and families alike.
• "Fumbleland", an innovative program mixing animation with live footage to teach children elements of English language in a funny way. The fantastic island of Fumbleland is the place where spelling mistakes made by children in English live. The eccentric teacher Mrs. Spelling is assigned the task to set off and go teaching on Earth.

• "Peppa Pig", Peppa is a lovable and funny pig living with her little brother George, mom and dad. Peppa's is a traditional family that, presenting realistic dynamics and situations with simplicity and humour, manages to dispense precious teachings to children on values such as friendship, kindness, loyalty, and family bonds.

• "Small Potatoes", the protagonists of this series are a group of singing potatoes travelling around the world singing and making new friends. Each episode, following a different musical style, presents a song and two brief, simple dialogues in English between the co-lourful protagonists. Subtitles allow children who already know how to read to sing along with the music, making the show even more engaging.

• "Twirlywoods", the Twirlywoods are a family sailing through the universe of fantasy abo-ard a beautiful red ship, every day landing in a different place, who end up venturing into the real world and making surprising discoveries. Children will discover new objects and concepts together with their heroes, by learning their names in both English and Italian.

The current offer for older audiences is the following:

• "Perfect English", a program dedicated to teenagers, designed to improve the pronun-ciation and understanding of the basic structures of English language. By visiting the most significant and characteristic locations in Great Britain and taking a cue from real situations, youth can learn English phonetics and their distinctive sounds.

• "The Language of Business" is an upper-intermediate/advanced didactic series for lear-ning English from the language of economics, business and finance, giving insights into corporate job through practical examples as well as analysing the specific terminology used in various production and commercial sectors. Through interviews, videos and the lead of a presenter, the program sheds light on terms and circumstances of use, so that the viewer can easily learn the lexicon of business. Subtitles and visual excerpts help understanding and memorization. For the topics covered and methodologies used, the series is suitable both as a refresher for professionals as well as for school use.

• "Edgar Allan Poe – The Last Four Days" is dedicated to the multifaceted American author with his complex personality, who made an essential contribution to the history of world literature, becoming the father of new literary genres, from horror to detective story. Edgar Allan Poe's work is analysed and studied thoroughly in its various aspects, literary, artistic, sociological, psychological and anthropological, through the contribution of experts and scholars. The powerful and evocative prose of the American author is proposed in the original English language through the reading of the most significant passages from his tales, inviting the audience to reflection. The analysis of prof. Fabio Vittorini, lecturer of Comparative Literature at the IULM University in Milan, develops through the six episodes touching on the most significant elements of Poe's life and work, also relating it to different art forms, from painting to comics, from cinema to television. More food for thought is provided by the psychologist Simona Abate, the sociologist Cecilia Costa, the medical historian Andrea Grignolio and the philosopher Benedetto Ippolito.

• "Shakespeare – Everlasting Sonnets", in six episodes of about 15 minutes, is part of RAI Scuola English project aimed at learning and spreading the English language and culture. A native-speaking actor interprets a selection of Shakespearean sonnets by reciting them in the original language, in a location of great impact such as the yard of the former mental hospital Santa Maria della Pietà in Rome, where contemporary artists have painted a series of artistic murals, with the aim of stripping the sonnets of all rhetoric and make them resonate in all their surprising current relevance. The choice of sonnets, twelve in all, was

made among the so called "sonnets of immortality", namely those focused on the transience of all things earthly and man's longing for eternity. Specifically, the sonnets proposed are those marked by the numbers 15, 18, 19, 24, 55, 60, 63, 64, 74, 81, 104 and 116. The sonnets are cleverly arranged according to the themes, two are presented in each episode. This journey into the world of Shakespearean sonnets is led by Maria Del Sapio Garbero, professor of English Literature at Roma Tre University. In every episode, Professor Del Sapio provides the audience with key elements for the understanding of Shakespearean work, and gives a critical comment on the sonnets recited in the episode.

Analyzing the programming, it is interesting to notice that among the many subjects covered, chances to further deepen the linguistic and didactic interests of both teachers and students are not lacking:

• "Dr Hill", a young English researcher who invented Mr. Speech, an electronic device capable of interacting with the brain allowing the user to speak foreign languages automatically. However, the device seems to have taken over Jack, leading him to dangerous and antisocial behavior. To prevent the worst from happening, Jack locks himself up in an improvised lab, looking for a solution. In order to do this, Jack analyses the functions of language and reflects on the complexity of communication.

• "Non è mai troppo presto. I bambini e la seconda lingua" ('It's never too early. Children and the second language'), a new program that aims to answer parents' main questions related to learning an L2 such as: What is the right time to let children approach a second language? Why is it important to learn a second language as a child? What are the most effective methods to encourage children to learn a second language? The program features the contribution of Lucilla Lopriore, associate professor of English Language and Translation at Roma Tre University, trainer of language teachers and author of numerous publications on applied linguistics.

• "Toolbox3", now at its third edition, has returned to the topic of coding: teachers and pupils start playing together with well-known coding tools and end up becoming familiar with the main elements of programming by applying them in class during routine educational activities. RAI Cultura talks about coding at school with Alessandro Bogliolo, coordinator of Europe Code Week, a literacy campaign promoted by the European Commission for the spread of computational thinking. This year's innovation was that of creating a Philosophy series with children, a project aiming to guide children in the development of transversal cognitive skills such as: language, expressive and creative abilities, the capacity of shaping concepts, attention, analysis and synthesis of thinking, problem solving, management of emotions, listening and reflection. All of this is achieved through play and iteration between peers. A philosophy free from the great classic themes, which leverages the imaginary world of children, made up of words, objects, events and stories that adults can describe and enrich. In addition, the program has dedicated ample space to the in-depth analysis of the concept of European citizenship through the eyes of young Italian and foreign students.

• "Memex Doc: Vita da Ricercatore" ('Memex Doc: researcher life'), hosted by Davide Coero Borga, the program ventures into the daily life of those who do research: stories of ordinary enthusiasm. Curious young people, bold experimenters, scholars, a joyful intrusion inside and outside the laboratories, the places they frequent and even into their homes. An expedition to the field since, as Feynman said: "the experiment is the sole judge of scientific truth".

• "Generazione digitale" ('Digital generation'), the protagonists of this talk show are a group of young people dealing with new technologies, teachers and experts from school 2.0, presented by Ivan Bacchi. Inside a loft, equipped with the latest education and communication tools, innovations in the pedagogical field will be discussed (such as the introduction of electronic school register, e-learning, learning objects, as well as the production of video content within the classroom) with their related social and anthropological effects: new tools implicate different cognitive impacts. The guests in the studio are Mario Morcellini, sociology professor at Sapienza University of Rome, the tutors from Indire and managers from several Italian schools.

From the data displayed so far, it is clear that, in addition to an ample and interesting space dedicated to educational interests, the only foreign language included in RAI's show schedule is English, thus underlining its evident predominance over the others. In fact, by searching for the other languages, using the appropriate entries, only a few Spanish and German lessons appear, but with no dedicated programs. The only other suggestion resulting from this kind of research on RAI Scuola website is the project "Language, literature and culture in a European dimension – Foreign languages area": thanks to a platform of contents available in four languages (English, French, Spanish, German), the project promotes a true innovation in didactics within a community dimension, ensuring the acquisition of linguistic skills in a multicultural perspective. The program, though being a few years old, is part of the teacher training and provides food for thought.

Furthermore, in the analysis of RAI's offer, most of the programs strike us as being built on a direct and concrete insertion into the reality of language; shows for kids very often feature cartoons where characters face daily challenges of more or less real lives while for grown people the choice lies among sectoral contexts (literary and economic), favouring the acquisition of specialized language. While all this is suitable for encouraging and motivating learning, purely grammar-based courses are scarce.

4. The effectiveness of television in linguistic competence

Generally, the use of satellite TV in the practice of didactics in Italian school teaching has not been very frequent, however, the growing interest in television programs and television series in the original language is clear. This enthusiasm brings out relevant questions including: why not taking advantage of this type of approach with foreign languages and turn it into normal activity, making the most of all the possibilities? After all, children learn a foreign language through listening, combined with TV images, without knowing its morphosyntactic structures from the beginning (Ciari 1984).

This method approaches language learners through the channels offered by satellite TV. This proposal is also fully consistent with what has already been outlined since the "e-europe 2002" Action Plan approved by the European Commission (COM (2001) 0140 of 13.03.2001) and by "e-europe 2005" Action Plan (Official Journal C48 of 28.02.2003) aimed to encourage actions in favour of technological innovation in schools – including online services in order to modernize schools and sensibly improve young people's learning. By using language programs, conventional teaching classes – where sometimes students are not at ease – are transformed into emotionally interesting and engaging experiences. This makes foreign language learning process much closer to that of natural and spontaneous acquisition, as happens to those who learn a foreign language living within the daily environment in which it is spoken, conveying

its proposed meanings without resorting to the use of mother tongue or at least limiting its usage in a natural way (Rampone and Calabrese 2008). Thus, the setting in which the learner is projected is a natural environment which makes acquisition easier (Pichiassi 1999). By stimulating his inclination towards the use of television, which is one of the most widespread free time activities for everyone, adults and children, the student will approach the second language naturally, almost as if teleported right into that reality. In this way, a tool of daily use connected to the pleasure and activity of relaxing, projects the learner into a familiar reality, encourages learning without excessive effort and helps memorization through contextualization of linguistic activity.

Sociolinguistics and pragmatics introduce a vision of language closely associated with communicative functions and their semantics. More generally, the speaker's intention is manifested in the way of using the language and in the way of relating it to the cultural context and the communicative situation (Labov, Hymes). According to Hymes (1972), for whom communication is an attribute of language, grammatical knowledge of a language is not sufficient to adequately characterize it. Communicative competence is therefore an individual's ability to use the second language appropriately according to the different communication situations in which she or he has to interact (Hymes 1972) therefore seeing its use directly in the appropriate communication context can promote correct learning. The innatist model has included and extended, in recent developments, the notion of language to the aspects and knowledge associated with methods of use, removing much of the difficulty of talking through pragmatic approaches. The application of this vision to teaching involves focusing on the communicative event, and specifically on the situation, the participants, the purposes of communication, the content of the message, the choice of the channel through which it is communicated and the register.

The linguistic needs of the learners take on great relevance as they can motivate them, both in relation to the immediate purpose (learning) and in relation to possible future uses. Desideri (2004) defines the correspondence between skills and teaching, in the sense that each element of communication can be the subject of didactic processes and reflection. The methods and practices based on communicative competence, while differing, are united by the goal of achieving mastery of communication tools; in this perspective, grammatical correctness does not represent the main purpose, but one of the accomplishments of effective learning. As remarked by Pichiassi (1999: 140) in linguistic didactics, attention shifts from teaching to learning: from the product (the second language) to the process, meaning how the language is learned. The needs of the learners become the center of the lesson; the educator turns from teacher to facilitator, promoter and organizer of linguistic activities, while the learner takes on the role of a true manager of the learning process. The teacher's guide lies mainly in providing the appropriate linguistic inputs according to the learner's communication needs; in regard to this, the same teacher / learner relationship represents a very specific communication situation, within a domain, associated with register and gender characteristics (Balboni 2012). Technological innovations allow to contextualize the linguistic-communicative inputs, favoring the activation of the processes of formulation of linguistic hypotheses in the learner (Ballarin 2007), and to highlight the socio-cultural context, favouring the meeting and comparison between cultures and different civilizations in order to educate to critical judgment.

It is within this framework that further methods of learning and didactic work arise, associated with the increase in motivation for the use of second language, where students collaborate using a foreign language, such as for instance cooperative learning. In this way, the foreign language becomes both a means of communication between students and an instrument for reflecting on language. In these practices, grammatical reflection connects to a real context of

use, and is achieved through a process of discovery and systematization of the code to which the both learners and teacher contribute, it is therefore a level of reflection which is different from grammar teaching (Chini and Bosisio 2015).

TV channels also allow the approach towards multiple language models, as well as the use and exercise of the language in different times and methods, without the rigid time restriction imposed by the traditional education system. At the same time, new possibilities are offered to language teachers: introducing linguistic models other than their own, using new tools to make lessons livelier and more compelling through the use of videos and original songs in foreign language. This aspect is again linked, partly, to the concept of CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), which was not focused on the creation of language teaching programs, but on activities and didactic games for textual manipulation and meaning reconstruction starting from multimedia elements; and also to the renewed glottodidactic interest towards videogames programmed for language teaching (Lombardi 2013).

Furthermore, during an emergency such as this one due to the Covid-19, TV can provide continuity to school language teaching as distance lessons do not guarantee the interest of the learner throughout the whole lesson also since all active participation relying on physical presence is lacking. The pupils, who are somewhat scared of oral production, are put at ease by these shows providing them gradually and spontaneously with situations they have already experienced.

A substantially positive element lies in the language television programs being full of that liveliness and immediacy that recorded videos usually lack. The very way of approaching an audio content, recorded years before, is different from following a live television program, rich in spontaneity and immediacy. Furthermore, shows in schedule offer the possibility of adapting not just the level of the program to the learners in the audience, but also the kind of issue addressed at that moment: in fact, through digitalization, knowledge can assume different forms according to the needs of communication. The choice of TV programming thus offers an inexpensive and at the same time effective system to learn a foreign language keeping alive the initial enthusiasm for a long time, whatever the reason that pushed them to learn it. Furthermore, it allows to transform teaching into a pleasant and stimulating approach (Mezzadri 2004). Therefore, since satellite TV is an excellent technological tool available to teachers to do their job better, not exploiting it would be counterproductive. As we know, Tullio De Mauro (1963) was the first to form the hypothesis of language school television for Italians. Years later, his thesis was confirmed: in fact, it proved a valid means for the diffusion of standard spoken language in a spontaneous way, and for the integral adoption of Italian language as a model of culture and verbalization in every circumstance and in all social relationships (Coveri *et al.* 1998).

As we know, the early stages of approaching the language, when the memorization of hundreds of words and grammatical concepts is required, are especially difficult. Difficulties become ever greater in front of the listening activities, with all related exercises, aimed to the development of comprehension and production, both oral and written, of acts of communication in the language being studied. In fact, from a psychological standpoint, the learner is engaged in a great effort of concentration in order to mentally enter the context presented in the textbooks.

Still speaking of listening activity, in traditional methods it should be noticed that simultaneously with the acoustic activity the student must also produce exercises such as cloze tests, multiple choices, grids, transcoding, interlocking words, etc. (Maggini and Cassandro 2004). All this creates within the classroom the anxious mood of an exam session. In fact, the listening moment, traditionally experienced in the classroom, is considered more as a testing technique than a teaching method and represents a continuous test (Biotti 1994). As Krashen

(2020) stated in one of his last articles, it is much more useful to insist on the input instead of proposing exercises, this is one of the reasons why he supports the online study, as in this way it is not possible to correct mistakes. Krashen goes on highlighting the importance of input quality, which does not necessarily have to be captivating *per se*, since it is up to the teacher to make it so through didactic action. The motivation is provided by materials and not by the learner, since the drive based on the 'need' runs out rather quickly; it can be linked to numerous factors including for instance:

- duty, school curricula, but it is not very effective;
- pleasure of learning;
- curiosity of having a new communication tool available;
- interest in discovering other worlds.

The usual meaning of motivation for the teacher is probably the interest that something generates in the students; a particular exercise, a particular topic, a particular song, may interest the student in the class, to the teacher's delight. The choice of teaching materials and the information content of the lesson, for example, should correspond to the motivation of the students (Cook 2008).

Krashen (1982) is also famous for the interesting concept of affective filter, highlighting how the emotional component plays a role in learning processes. It is undoubtful that emotionality works as an 'accelerator' or a 'brake' in relation to learning processes, in fact, when pathos sets in and excitement ensues while reading a poem or a novel, information can be collected much faster and more efficiently. The American scholar hypothesizes the existence of an affective filter that would function as a defence that is lowered or raised from time to time. Thus, there would be differences in a child's learning depending on the different teachers. Because of this filter, it is not the child himself who is at the centre of the learning process, but rather the relationship established with the teacher. In this sense, as confirmed by general psychology, learning in the school environment is always a joint work, collaborative work carried out by two persons. If the relationship with a teacher, for instance, gets disturbed by relational factors (feeling too much apprehension, in difficulty, feeling no esteem), the emotional filter imagined by Krashen stops the transfer processes that would otherwise encourage learning. On the contrary, a relationship which is devoid of these elements fosters a much deeper and faster learning. Teachers interact daily with the individual differences of the students, who move along the learning path with different speeds and personal methods, which cannot be easily generalized. These dynamics do not occur when using the television medium as the learner does not feel pressured and does not have a direct relationship with the organizer of the course, and is therefore free to watch the program without the fear of sudden questions. All these aspects may be very helpful for those who approach the new language and its culture in developing linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence (Maggini and Cassandro 2004). It would be useful to employ a tool we all have at home and that can affect our way of thinking: satellite television, which is a formidable opportunity to watch TV programs in the original language.

Considering the particular features of television medium, whose message is mainly conveyed by images, we should always keep in mind the image-word connection and the advantage offered by this connection in helping to decode verbal language, namely as in this case the language gets contextualized, i.e. proposed in concrete situations, and its practical aspects are in plain sight. The problem therefore arises in the passage from the contextualized language of TV sequences to the decoding and organization of the language itself. This process can only be completed effectively if broken down into a series of tiny, logically organized steps (Vidoni 1982).

Furthermore, didactic tools helping the understanding of linguistic properties through visual means, are essential for this purpose. In this way, using a trivial example, in order to understand anaphoric grammatical mechanisms, one can visualize the operation on a magnetic panel by replacing certain parts of the sentences with the appropriate substitutive pronouns. The process underlying the use of pronouns, or rather substitutives, is thus easily explained, without the need for abstract metalinguistic explanations and technical-grammatical terminologies. The topic of teaching support is central to didactic TV programs, as otherwise they would just be the mere copy of a traditional classroom lesson. This is why in choosing the lesson plan it is not desirable to recreate the teacher-pupil relationship with the presence on video of students asking questions, making mistakes, etc., with ensuing passivity and, perhaps, consolidation of mistakes in the audience. It is preferable for visual aids to act as a mediator for the decoding and assimilation of linguistic materials presented. The choice of linguistic contents to be dealt with is crucial, thus, following the structuralist approach, it is always necessary to apply the rule of complexity degree, so the linguistic structures are introduced following a scale suggested by their intrinsic complexity. However, the complexity degree shouldn't be abstractly applied by taking only into account the language to be learned, since as we know, the effort of learning a language also depends on the similarity between the mother tongue and the foreign language system. The learning of a second language anyway implies the presence of linguistic attitudes already acquired, with possible interferences in the different levels of linguistic structure. The forecast of mistakes and their removal through appropriate exercises are considered of central importance in audio-oral method. In this framework, the error is seen as a bad imitation or memorization on which to intervene. Contrastive analysis is therefore a necessary didactic instrument, according to which teaching materials are prepared, differentiated by the type of interference determined by the learner's native language. On the contrary, no room was dedicated to metalanguage, that is to the linguistic comment related to the mentioned products, nor to the explicit explanation of its rules. Grammatical explanations are true inductive reflections on language based on the text and according to specific needs.

In fact, a foreign language course must be made for an audience that is consistent in regard to the mother tongue; so that an Italian course, made for Spanish speakers, would not be suited to English speakers etc. In fact, in introducing linguistic structures, one should keep in mind the elements that may interfere with the mother tongue. In the early dialogues, positive interference structures should be favoured, to encourage the decoding of messages, while later on dissimilar structures should be introduced, thus insisting on negative interference. It is also important to organize linguistic contents around aggregation cores, and for this reason each lesson of the course should revolve around one or more linguistic functions (approval, refusal, request for information, permission, etc.). One should start from a basic level, dealing with the most customary communicative use of the language, and linguistic functions that also concern psychological attitudes and emotional states should be introduced only in the following phase. From dialogues and scenes, opportunities arise for the introduction of linguistic functions, which in turn introduce the use of the various grammatical structures. For instance, situations of desire or possibility allow the introduction of the subjunctive, while purpose can introduce the use of conditional. Thus, the verbal conjugation is introduced in close connection with its use.

In addition to the linguistic functions, during the course we must also consider those ample background categories which are defined by Slagter in *Un nivel umbral* (1979) as *nociones generales* (concepts of time, space, place etc.). To develop these general notions within television courses, one can rely on the possibility of expressing them through different grammatical elements which share the same meaning. For example, concerning the concept of time, adverbs, locutions, com-

plements, propositions, verbal markers are introduced before worrying about their positioning within grammatical categories. This new linguistic approach, focused on the core mental categories and typical of the so-called *notional syllabuses* method (notional programs), overcomes the traditional and rather formalistic approach that would recommend to teach morphology first, then the syntax of complements, then that of propositions, and which would therefore dictate a sequence of linguistic elements restricted by the grammatical categories over the semantic ones.

Still, concerning the sequence in which linguistic elements are organized, there are some observations to be done. The first is that, once a structure has been introduced, it must not be considered as permanently acquired, but must be later reiterated both to fix it in the mind and to link it with others by logical means. In other words, the program must not be linear, that is, made up of self-contained didactic units lined up one next to the other, but should rather have a spiral pattern featuring cross references, expansions and insights; it is a typical aspect of communicative methods. In this way, a feedback process is achieved which is, as it's well known, essential to learning. We may also observe that a television program teaching foreign language shouldn't be limited to the detection of expressions proposed by the staged situations, but should reach stages of analogue construction of new messages and extension of knowledge to new linguistic structures. All this can happen through a series of transformations of sentences taken from the dialogues of TV scenes, according to the criteria of opposition, expansion, replacement etc. typical of structural exercises, not through the insisting reiteration of grammatical mechanisms, but rather by recontextualization through visual support or through micro-dialogues among teleinstructors. Furthermore, concerning the teaching of the lexicon, we suggest to try and gradually expand the number of terms by organizing them into semantic fields (Balboni 2008a). For instance, when attempting to characterize a character's attitudes, one may obtain a small set of psychological states: nervous / angry / happy / satisfied which will then be further expanded by matching the opposing terms: calm / peaceful / discontented / dissatisfied etc. and successively, through the processes of lexicon organization which were for instance illustrated by Coseriu (1971), it becomes possible to obtain *getting nervous* from *nervous*, *calming down* from *calm*, etc.

Leaving the more strictly linguistic field, I would now like to emphasize the need to connect linguistic materials with civilization or, namely, with the culture that lies behind the language to be learned, and by culture we mean the whole complex of knowledge, techniques and lifestyles of a people. Maintaining this cultural and social depth is essential to every course, also through the choice of subjects and the setting of the scenes, as well as through slides and videos especially related to aspects of physical and anthropological geography at an elementary level, while in the intermediate stage, elements from the world of entertainment can be introduced (classical theatre, musical comedies, operas, operettas, songs, popular festivals) offering a panoramic overview of local audience taste. All this material is to be used not only for the power of suggestion of images, for their spectacular nature, but above all based on its didactic use. Furthermore, in order to present images useful for introducing the people, and aware of the fact that knowledge of others' culture is also achieved through processes of comparison with one's own, opportunities should be offered for a comparison between Italian language culture and the culture related to the language that is being learnt.

As the situational method suggests, language happens in a context of communication and the interpretation of the enunciations and the speech can only be achieved by referring to that context (Borello and Luise 2009-2010), therefore the learning process and the selection of materials will take into account not only the morphological or syntactic features of target language or the language of origin, but also the aspects of the situation where the linguistic

interaction takes place. It is important not to separate the language to be learned from the one to be used so that the learner is called to be an active part of the learning path, favouring the achievement of ever greater autonomy. Grammar plays a crucial role in the learning process, although the mechanisms of communication are increasingly important. In the same way, cultural rules become relevant, so that the cultural error is considered as serious as the linguistic one and also in this case exercises of identification and comparison with the first language are useful (Chini and Bosisio 2015). The notion of culture is always open to change, Freddi (1970) considers language as the compound of a culture, therefore the link between the two is essential. Therefore, alongside the communicative competence, the cultural and intercultural competence necessary for understanding and using behavioural models of linguistic communities cannot miss. Intercultural competence has now become essential knowledge since it allows for the communication with a foreign interlocutor using language consistent with her or his world (Baldi and Savoia 2017-2018). Even for modern language didactics, language teaching cannot be separated from culture teaching since language is a culture's expression and vehicle. The teaching of the second language gives voice to new cultural contents; many didactic models connect guided teaching with the cultural elements that are features of the second language (Balboni 2006). The Common European Framework (2001) also expands the notion of communicative competence to cultural competences and adds to it the identification of cultural values that give meaning to what makes a linguistic act appropriate in a certain situation.

The language-culture or language-society relationship also implies the choice of which linguistic register to teach: colloquial, literary or technical-scientific. This is mainly conditioned by the course audience; as we have seen, in fact, RAI offers different types of TV programs based on the target audience. However, often times the aim is to address a mixed group of people both in terms of age and cultural level, therefore, it is advisable to utilize a mixed register ranging from colloquial to literary, trying to avoid linguistic expressions. This non-strict distinctness of the language register is typical of ready-made foreign language TV courses in general, which are necessarily made for a universal audience and as such cannot take into account all the cultural and psychological features of various kinds of learners. Despite the general nature, even these ready-made courses can be effective in the presence of certain conditions, especially if they feature an open structure. A course with an open structure is characterized by the offer of linguistic and cultural materials in such a way that they can encourage further observations and exercises. The slides or videos are selected for the specific purpose of developing a discussion that can continue beyond the audiovisuals; while the exercises proposed by teleinstructors, which are based as mentioned before on analogue processes and recontextualizations, have been designed to trigger strings of other possible exercises in any school department, and as such also in faculties.

Language learning TV courses can have several functions and advantages, even if originally aimed at a general audience, they can be integrated into school and academic teaching and become part of the program. As for teachers, it is their task to guide the teaching of the foreign language, making good use of the television course, to prepare materials for a useful comparison between the cultures of language 1 and language 2, to pick exercises for verifying the degree of acquisition of the various notions through tests, etc. Especially, he should focus on the feedback process, which is otherwise likely to be greatly reduced in a television course.

Essentially, we see this tool being used through a kind of exercises that can be done during the sequences seen on TV, with the purpose of transitioning from unidirectional to interactive communication: the initial approach must be unidirectional. For the beginner learner, in fact, audiovisual contact should be used without any commitment nor assimilation required from the student (De Mauro 2007). Later on, it may be requested to identify words similar to those

of the mother tongue, or coming from the cultural background as well as from other languages possibly learned (limited bilateral communication).

At a later time, complete bilateral communication will be introduced, a stage in which the teacher, at first, asks students to write the words that they gradually recognize as they are watching the program: this exercise helps the learner to 'enter' the pace of that culture with very little effort (Pichiassi 1999). Types of written exercises in this last learning phase can vary and range from the formation of groups of words related to a specific topic and the identification of the different communicative acts up to a wide array of written or oral activities, positively stimulated by what has been seen and heard, to be performed individually or in group work. It is even possible to perform engaging recreational activities and simulation of the input received, which is no longer represented only by the teacher.

In this context, it's the teacher's task to be informed on the daily programming offered (through teletext pages and through the internet) and make the best use of it, taking into account the possibilities offered by purely educational channels addressed to students (e.g. RAI Education 1, RAI Education 2). The broadcasts of these channels can be very useful, also as they are repeated several times throughout the day and week. Therefore, the task of the teacher is demanding: operating in a systematic way will be possible only through competence in various fields, from the essentially linguistic one, to the sociolinguistic, psychological, etc. His active role in front of ready-made TV courses requires a more complex preparation than that of the foreign language teacher who follows the translation grammar method. On the basis of the above, it is clear that a ready-made TV course, guided by a teacher in the audiovisual stage, can be adapted to the needs of various groups of learners. Specifically, in Universities, depending on the skill level of students it will be possible to develop both the exercises (in this case also introducing grammatical terminology) and the cultural reflections related to students' interests as well as to the distinctness of the preparation that is required to them (as in the case of Business Language).

Furthermore, it would be productive to identify further forms of university use of the television medium, as it offers the teacher the chance of creating a course on her or his own, starting from television materials not yet arranged for teaching purposes. In this case, the teacher, having established the objectives of the course based on the cultural prerequisites as well as the needs of the students, prepares a set of teaching units. The latter, in their internal structure and in the arrangement, must follow selection criteria of linguistic material similar to those explained above; they should also be linked through television contents with the foreign language's culture, and should contain feedbacks as well as chances to verify the notions acquired. It is easy to grasp the efficiency potential of such foreign language teaching method, featuring a program tailored for students. This type of methodology which uses the television medium essentially as a didactic support, instead of taking the teachers' place, actually entrusts them with a greater and more complex task, especially considering the power of the medium that they are, so to speak, in charge of steering; their role is therefore enhanced, as responsibility and need for preparation are evidently multiplied. An example of an ideal combination is described in the methods of blended learning, whose main feature is the mixed training course between attendance and distance teaching activities (Murphy *et al.* 2001; Thorne 2003) as well as in the flipped classrooms which see technologies as vectors of a teaching that takes place in an outside school context (Bergmann and Sams 2012) while the time spent in the classroom is dedicated to practice.

It is also worth mentioning the role of students in relation to a TV course, to highlight how an active attitude is best suited to them both in the moments dedicated to exercises, tests,

forms, and in the organization of the courses itself, when cultural contents can be agreed with the students themselves. Naturally, at this point the argument also involves the field of the relationship to be established between teacher and students, a relationship which is known to be crucial in defining the teaching method to rely on.

What has been illustrated on the teaching of foreign languages through television, is more than possible in a university setting too. For example, the University of Milan features a University Television Center with these same purposes. The Center provides teaching support, as well as the following services:

- it is available to teachers who intend to create audiovisuals for educational purposes, offering specialized facilities and technical assistance;
- organizes courses for professional training on audiovisual teaching for both teachers and students as well as for glottodidactic training of students enrolled in the foreign languages degree course and willing to specialize in technologies relevant to foreign language teaching;
- experiments on new didactic technologies, especially concerning the use of personal computer in the teaching of a foreign language.

The Center has formed strong partnerships with other universities, regardless of them having their own television centres or not, and promotes its own visions also through national conferences analysing the role of university audiovisual centres in didactics and life-long learning. It is to be hoped that means and initiatives of university television centres will be developed, and new courses will be offered for increasingly advanced and effective teaching.

5. Conclusions

There are different perspectives and angles to look at the television phenomenon in relation to school. It can be certainly used as an inexpensive, timely, complete and powerful teaching tool, supported and subsidized by the EU. Moreover, TV is considered a versatile communication system that is increasingly integrated with other mass media and is radically and profoundly changing the very essence of communication. It cannot replace teachers in any way but offers further operational opportunities to their didactic intention and represents a chance to venture beyond traditional didactic methods of language. Given its versatility, audiovisual material allows for selective comprehension (images only, speech only, images and soundtrack, certain words and narrative setting, images, speech and implicit cultural concepts, etc.) thus proving to be a successful instrument in classes where students' linguistic and cognitive skills are of different levels.

The channels offered by the satellite dish can open to the learners a perpetual window on the outside world with a simple press of a button on the remote control; casting them into a multidimensional reality otherwise difficult to experience within the classroom; bringing them in contact with various communication contexts; offering a large number of inputs, both linguistic and cultural, able to boost their motivation, their active participation in didactic practice and their knowledge. They bring out those potentials, those interests, those inclinations that will help to increase the vision of oneself in the future, providing the learner with tools for the enrichment of a knowledge that will be useful also and above all outside of the institutional framework, in a life-long learning perspective (Quercioli 2004).

An attempt was made to give some coordinates for experimenting on the effectiveness of television services for the conservation and consolidation of linguistic competence of foreign

languages. The examination of the language to be used and the specific features of the internet meta-medium lead to consider its relevance for two different targets of second language learners:
  • the informal learners (Conner 2009) and those who want to maintain and refine the knowledge of a language already known at least at a survival-level according to the typical features of immersive learning and the conveying use of the second language according to what Diadori (2007) wrote on the viewing of films and programs in the original language, giving it a much greater scope than the few hours per week of an average language course;
  • students following a guided learning path, who can benefit from these original materials while having, in addition, the teacher's support and thus receiving feedback on their understanding, as shown for instance by Cotroneo and Oddone (2011).

It is, however, important that the school system and the extra-curricular opportunities of language learning are not kept separate. Indeed, the quality of a good language education system is also determined by its network relationships with the outside world and by its capability of motivating students, by giving them the opportunity to experience language contact and learning outside the school environment.

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