



An ICT Based Approach for Italian as L2 in Multicultural Classes

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Abstract

Nowadays current migration streams are changing the scenario of educational system in Italy as well, and the increase of multicultural classes with different learners without any or poor competence in Italian language is an issue teachers and educators have to face. The acquisition of a basic vocabulary and social communicative functions in Italian language is mandatory and not really easy in such a heterogeneous group. Providing a support in the acquisition of the mother tongue of the country of arrival is necessary although it takes time and is not enough to fill the initial gap among learners. In this case, not only a peer-to-peer strategy and classroom asset but also a CLIL approach based on ICT can prove to be a successful methodology. ICT language is universally shared and action based, moreover the support of free online translation software is helpful. In several years of my experience of ICT based methodology in teaching foreign languages this approach has proved to be effective to promote the acquisition of foreign languages. In this way applying it to improve competence in Italian language in foreign learners from abroad attending my classes has reduced the initial language gap more effectively. In this paper some examples of learning units are provided.

Keywords: *ICT in Education, Studies on language Learning*

1. Introduction

Migrations and movements of people from and to other countries is a phenomenon which has been involving our world since centuries, but in a more recent time it has become quite significative with different migration waves, one of the last one considerably interesting Italy. As the society is changing becoming multicultural, so education has to cope with this new input which is getting increasingly strong. The pluralism of cultures, religions, traditions, languages urges the need of an answer to create an intercultural dialogue mostly within the school where all these different inputs converge and integrate. In the context of students with non-Italian citizenship, it is needful to focus attention to newly arrived students or rather students who enter the Italian school system for the first time. In addition to the problems of integration within a class and within a structured system all foreign students have to face, they must deal with the problem of knowledge of the Italian language.

One of the first steps, therefore, is to promote communication filling the linguistic gap with the native peers and creating the proper condition to learn.

2. A multicultural class

A standard multicultural class in the Italian school system can include, in a group composed of Italian native students, a small and variable percentage of foreign students, which can belong to the same culture and nationality of origin or can belong to different ones. It can happen more frequently to have classes in which there are one, two or three students coming from different nationalities. The first issue for the teachers of each discipline is to find the tools to open communication in order to promote dialogue, realizing what can be different in order also of other linguistic styles but also alphabets and learning attitudes. The task is really complex depending also on the culture and language of origin. Italian language owns a complex grammar and functional structure, not so easy and not so immediate depending on the linguistic system the students come from. Some of them can have a slight oral or both oral and written competence in Italian, coming from a family where Italian is spoken or used as second language, although most of them can have no knowledge at all. For these students additional extra hours in the school system as well as the presence of a cultural mediator are planned to make their inclusion easier and to get a basic survival level of competence in Italian language.

Most of the time, however, they attend general class lessons in Italian language.

In my experience teaching in a low secondary school, the students are from 11 to 14 years old, different nationalities and different level of competences in the language of arrival, most of them with no competence at all. Beyond the linguistic support and the differentiated courses of Italian for foreigners, the teachers of the other subjects must intervene on their teaching method in order to communicate dynamically with these students. To achieve the same learning objective, different strategies must be adopted for the foreign language student. In order to actively follow the discussion



of a topic, the foreign student will need to acquire a specific vocabulary. Firstly, entrance class vocabulary is needed and, further on, the acquisition of specific ones related to the different disciplines. As it is, thoroughly, the language the place where they live and they express their life, they can acquire the language by playing, walking on the street, watching television, listening to people who speak. It is therefore a mixed learning situation, which takes place in explicit and intentional situations and moments dedicated to their specific linguistic problem. This awareness must be clear to the teachers who take care of the students to establish continuous transfers between the two-moments. Foreign students have two orders of motivation to learn the Italian language, one is communication and the other is to learn other contents through school. That is the reason why a CLIL approach in building specific vocabulary learning situations, and ICT learning by doing can be very effective. Very often the teacher could guess whether accompanying with a simple gesture the contents improves the communicative and linguistic context, but it is never appropriate as many cultures have other gestures as well.

3. Strategies based on ICT

On the basic assumption that ICT is a universal language, that computers and smartphones are universally used, known in their use and functions and thanks to the translation applications a common language can be found immediately in order to promote sociality and dialogue through peers speaking different languages and through teachers and foreign students,

The strategy used to build learning units is based on digital tools and devices, on Visual and Oral approaches and, only in a second time, on the introduction of written words and letters, more than ever as many cultures own a different alphabet and this is a big issue to face (in Italy for example Chinese communities).

The topic has to be set within the students' world: me (name, age, travel, history ...), the classroom, school objects and actions, family, home, on the street, time (days, months, date), weather, food, the meeting with the other, the other, school life and the urban context where they live, the first approaches to "civic" needs. Only when these topics are rather consolidated the specific vocabulary of each discipline can be implemented.

For each theme the first step is *Listening and Comprehending, Acquiring* as more words related to the topics listed above as possible.

Some hints in their mother tongue can be useful but, as the teacher cannot have knowledge of all the native languages the students own, the use of Images is really primary as it is Universal.

A combination of Sound and Image through different apps which can work both on computers and on smartphones allows an easier and faster acquisition of vocabulary, words, verbs, and consequently a proper combination of verbs and nouns, adjectives, building up a competence in foreign language.

Example 1

Learning Unit *Me and my environment My Class* (Io e il Mio ambiente La mia classe)

Target Group Foreign Students, age 11-12, with no competence in Italian Language

Aims Acquisition of the Vocabulary related to the Classroom Objects and their use

Methodologies Oral and Visual approach deduction through exercises

Tools Interactive Board Smartphones Tablets Laptops Wi-Fi Connection Apps

Activities Presentation on screen Oral introduction of the lexicon focusing on pronounce

Choice of the same words to practice with different tools

Step 1 Image recognition

Step 2 Use of ICT

Step 3 Matching sound related to the word identifying the object Kahoot (online quiz)[fig.1]

Step 4 Practice repeating the pattern exercises Learning Apps match the pairs][fig.2],

Step 5 Matching Sounds and Letters (spelling and words) hangman [fig.3]

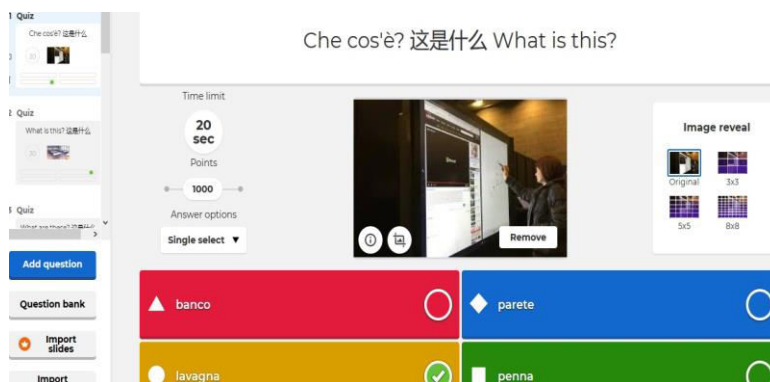


Figure 1: Kahoot Multilingual Quiz

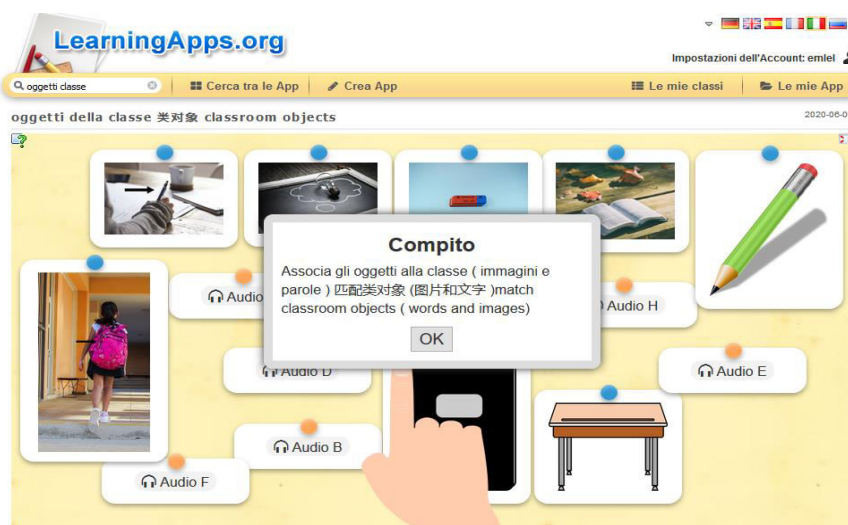


Figure 2: Learningapps matching Quiz

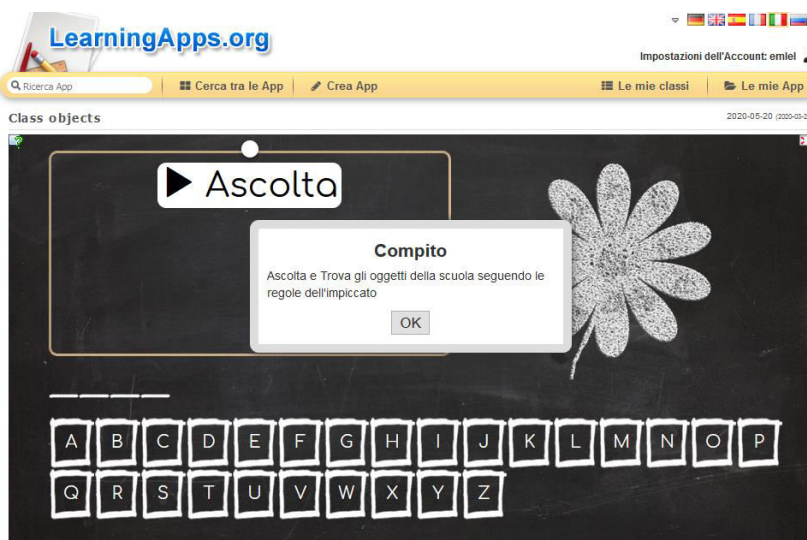


Figure 3: Hangman audio filling with alphabet letters

Example 2

Learning Unit *The weather* (Il tempo atmosferico)

Target Group Foreign Students ,age 11-12, with no competence in Italian Language

Aims Acquisition of the Vocabulary related to the Classroom Objects and their use

Tools Interactive Board Smartphones Tablets Laptops Wi-Fi Connection Apps

Methodologies Oral and Visual approach deduction through exercises



- Step 1 Image recognition
- Step 2 Use of ICT
- Step 3 Matching sound related to the word identifying the object
- Step 4 Practice repeating the pattern exercises [fig.4]
- Step 5 Matching Sounds and Letters (spelling and words)



Figure 4: Learningapps matching pairs audio and image

Matching or Multiple choices exercises based on oral and visual inputs give an easier and faster tool of acquisition of skills as it is based on two shared languages, ICT and Images. Next step is the association of the Sound to the alphabet and in this case also the use of digital tools such as Hangman [Fig.4] or other similar.

To test the level of competence another app can be created linking words and sounds as in Fig. 5.



Figure 5: Learningapps matching sounds and written words

All these activities can be also proposed to the whole class of Native Italian speakers and foreign as well as a moment for inclusive games ,to promote also the peer-to-peer reviews and the motivation in learning practising within the class group.

3.1 ICT remote learning after COVID 19 lockdown

After lockdown the perception of digital tools and devices has totally changed. Their main asset that is to ease distance communication and relation , applied to didactics revealed to be an instrument really useful to practice for all students and in particular for the ones with communicational issues. The use of online virtual classes, of messages platform in different languages with a prompt translation tool guaranteed communication even with foreign students although the lack of an Italian speaking



community around for some time can have ,in some cases, reduced the motivation in learning. Digital tools can overcome language barriers although in some cases has not revealed to be the utmost inclusive instrument with disadvantaged families as they depend on a Wi-Fi connection which is not generally affordable and most of these families include the immigrant and foreign students as well .

Conclusion

ICT can prove to be a successful methodology in learning foreign languages. It can be applied to any foreign language and used at every level as ICT language is universally shared and action based, A proper use of Digital tools provides a strong increase in communication and interaction and eases to fill the linguistic gaps foreign students can feel as they arrive in a new context ,lacking the basic instrument of communication.

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