



# Applying the SPEAKING Model to Classes of Immigrants for Residence Permit in Italian Formal School for Adults

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## Abstract

*This paper, by taking into consideration the experience of the author as teacher and researcher, deals with the challenges in an illiterate and uneducated adults class at CPIA (formal school for adults) where immigrants have to learn Italian language as a second language in a short term course in order to obtain a certificate for residence permit in Italy. The typical class at CPIA is strongly heterogeneous in terms of literateness and vehicular language. Most of them are considered vulnerable population. Other critical aspects are the limited amount of hours (200) defined by the Italian Education System (IES) and the difficulty in attending the lessons even if they are provided with e-learning tools, due to long working hours, distance from the school and lack of devices. Finally, teachers are not always adequately prepared. To cope with these difficulties, a lesson plan is proposed by considering some basic theoretical principles: SPEAKING model to try and increase the percentage of success in achieving the level A2 according to CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference).*

**Keywords:** *Language education for adult migrants, Italian L2, Second Language Acquisition, Migration and Language Testing.*

## 1. Introduction

This paper concerns with adult migrants that are provided with language classes in adult formal schools in order to obtain valid certifications involving language testing which is compulsory under the law [1],[2] to obtain permanent residence status.

Two perspectives will be considered: the role of migrant motivation (linked to the language competencies) and the opportunities provided by CPIA school (Local Centers for Adult Education). If it sometimes happens that administrative or juridical sanctions are used to encourage adult migrants to stay in language courses, it is also true that they look for chances of finding a job, helping their family integration process, improving their skills or simply approaching to a learning process for the first time, since they never had the opportunity to do it [3].

This kind of courses present a variety of problems concerning both students and teachers in terms of heterogeneity and intercultural aspects[4][5]. In this paper, in particular, a syllabus of CPIA made up of only 200 hours and performed by teachers with few or no experience in the field of Second Language Acquisition is considered and analysed through a survey carried out in 2019 at the Cpia Lecce.

An example of lesson plan will be discussed in order to cope with these difficulties by considering the specific language and literacy programmes that have been set up [6].

## 2. The Typical class at CPIA

The CPIA centres aim at certifying the literacy of Italian citizens and the Italian language teaching to foreign citizens as well as to organize courses for the achievement of middle school success and general education courses by assuring the acquisition of competencies (Presidential Decree 263/12, and supported by Laws 92/2012 and Law 107/2016). Unlike of a standard high school, the CPIA system is characterized by classes composed by teenagers up 16 years old and adults and proposes a variety of curricula. In the present investigation only Italian language courses, denoted as AALI in Italian language (Alfabetizzazione e Apprendimento della Lingua Italiana), are considered.

The typical classroom of such courses is quite heterogeneous, being composed of unaccompanied minors of low schooling level, students from international communities (often refugees or asylum seekers), people in a state of uncertainty fleeing from tragic events, regular worker migrants integrated into the surrounding areas and willing to improve the Italian language, illiterate and semi-literate adults, people with learning difficulties, students with serious differences between pre A1 level in writing and an intermediate level in speaking, international university students beginning the courses from A1 in order to carry on their studies till B2 level. Many of them come from Bangladesh, India, China, Brazil, Russia, Ukraine, though the vast majority come from Western African countries such as Gambia, Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Guinea-Bissou and Sierra Leone.



In this context the lesson plan process can be the right key to answer to the majority of requests from students and to assure the validation of the course. The first step is, therefore, the analysis of their motivations.

## 2.1 Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations

Some students (cultured, residents) want to build their learning path, i.e. the tasks which they are called to carry out every day, particularly in the context of the class. Others, forced by the migration status, do not commit themselves if they do not have at least some hope of succeeding. As Schumann [7] wrote in 1998, the perception of the quality of learning experiences is a fundamental variable of motivation. So we can say that language habits, the attitudes towards language and at least towards language learning of the receiving society is determined by very different factors which cannot be brought into a simple relation [6],[8]. However, we can identify five dimensions on which individuals evaluate the stimuli they receive from the environment:

1. the novelty (the degree of originality / familiarity);
2. pleasantness (attractiveness);
3. the meaning of purpose or need (the extent to which the stimulus is instrumental in satisfying needs or achieving goals);
4. the potential for self-efficacy (the extent to which the individual expects to be able to cope with the event);
5. the image of the self and the social image" (the extent to which the event is compatible with the social norms and the self-concept of the individual).

In order to design a typical lesson plan for this context, some of these dimensions will be considered in the paper after listing the "Ten competencies" to be reached after the 200 hours syllabus at CPIA [9]. These competencies are classified in Table 1 according to the five linguistic skills.

Table1. Ten competencies to plan an Italian Second Language Course for level A2 CEFR [9].

Listening	Reading	Oral and written interaction	Oral production	Written production
1.Understanding instructions given as long as you speak slowly and clearly.	3.Understanding very short and simple texts, gathering familiar names, familiar words and expressions and eventually re-reading.	4.Ask and answer simple questions about yourself, daily actions and places where you live.	7.Describe yourself, the daily actions and the places where you live.	9.Write your personal data, numbers and dates.
2.Understanding a speech pronounced very slowly and articulated with great precision, which contains long pauses to allow users to assimilate the meaning.		5.Using numbers, quantities, prices, times in a communicative exchange.	8.Expressing simple expressions, mainly isolated, on people and places.	10.Writing simple isolated phrases and sentences.
		6.Complete a simple form with your personal data.		

## 2.2 Italian L2 teachers: skills and competencies

The skills and competencies of the teachers of CPIA are analysed on the basis of the author's experience as coordinator of the L2 department. In this role, the author performed an analysis of the percentage of success of immigrants in achieving the required certification in the last school years (2017/18 and 2018/19). It was found that only 46% of the 845 students enrolled in 2017 and 61% enrolled in 2018 AALI courses achieved the final certification.

According to the author, the limited didactic skills of the teachers are one of the causes of this limited degree of success. Therefore, a short training course (ten hours) of Italian Second Language Teaching was held by the author and addressed to all teachers of CPIA involved in multicultural classes and AALI courses. The limited knowledge of second language acquisition theory resulted, qualitatively, from the discussion with the participants and quantitatively from a survey administered to the 33 teachers involved in the short course.

The results of the survey revealed that most of the CPIA teachers have taught in AALI classes in the past but only 24% of them had attended specific courses from centres for Italian Language certification or masters in Italian as second language. Note that only recently (2016), the Italian



Ministry for Education has allowed each CPIA to enrol two qualified teachers that passed open competitive exams in Italian for international students.

### **3. The lesson plan: a possible proposal**

Before planning a model of lesson plan, some factors can be considered. Firstly, the language acquisition outside the classroom depends on different language contacts. Standard Italian language is rarely practised because of the interaction with dialect speakers and it is essential for surviving.

Secondly, the CLIL (Content Language Integrated Learning) principles cannot be applied to migrants language courses due to the heterogeneity of languages.

The third element concerns with the question of testing for residence or citizenship. On the one hand, testing stimulates assimilation but on the other hand it can discourage illiterate students or students with motivated difficulties in attending courses. A typical lesson plan should weigh possibilities of facing the factors mentioned above. The adaption of the SPEAKING model comply with these necessities.

#### **3.1 Applying the SPEAKING model**

In order to face the different needs of adult students, differentiated teaching techniques (mostly based on cooperative learning approaches) were proposed in literature but with pros and cons because illiterates could show “distress”, “discouragement”, “confusion” [10]. In this work a concise lesson path is proposed according to Hymes’ SPEAKING model [11]. The acronym stands for setting and scene, participants, ends, acts sequence, keys, instrumentalities, norms and genres. It focuses on analysing the speech events, but in this investigation the acronym is considered to manage the classes in presence and on distance without focusing only on specific techniques or methods but by considering the basic theories on second language acquisition.

#### **3.2 Embedding the SPEAKING model with Input Hypothesis and Interlanguage steps**

Let’s start with the “S”, setting and the “P” participants at CPIA: a classroom where a group of heterogeneous adult immigrants meet and where didactic equipment are limited (only in lucky cases it is possible to have a traditional black board). As already pointed out, the addressee are students with different backgrounds and motivation and teachers can have little expertise in adult teaching and Italian language for foreigners. In this case, according to Dörnyei, [12], it is necessary to create basic motivational conditions by assuring a class atmosphere that involves pleasure and support, taking care of the cohesion of the class as a group. If the teacher takes out an adequate cohesion of the group, he/she can ensure the relevance of his/her teaching materials even if the classroom has lack of devices because the focus is the increasing of successful students’ expectations. The warm up phase plays an important role in motivation. It is possible to use different materials: realia, pictures or short video clips to promote learning strategies for less motivated students. At the end of the warm up phase every student should have the perception to be ready to learn more. Thus, the different learning styles present in the group should be known from the teacher. For example, analytic-style students prefer strategies such as contrastive analysis, rule-learning, and dissecting words and phrases, while global students use strategies to find meaning (guessing, scanning, predicting) and to converse without knowing all the words (paraphrasing, gesturing). Stephen Krashen’s affective filter hypothesis [13] concerns with the connection between attitude and motivation. He argues that learners with high motivation, self-confidence and a low level of anxiety regarding the target language have better conditions to learn a second language. On the other hand, if the motivation and self-confidence are low and the learner is more anxious, it will aggravate the process as the affective filter is raised and creates an obstacle to learning.

The “E” ends stands for goal and outcome. A successful communication at level A2 must be guaranteed to students both in oral and written form. To manage this effort it is important that teachers have a clear idea about the process involved in the formation of Interlanguage. In particular the “language transfer” process is few considered at CPIA setting by ignoring that in the process of language acquisition the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (sometimes incorrectly) acquired is a key issue for future steps [14].

The “A” act sequences involves all the participants at the new input that is proposed and discussed. The adult learners brings with themselves a wealth of linguistic and cultural experience that allows them to have an active role in the presentation phase of a new part of the lesson. Moreover, at CPIA context, the learner lives immersed in L2 itself, so the teacher has no control over the input, nor how much the learner has learned spontaneously (sometimes with errors). A fundamental psychological



characteristic of the adult is its metalinguistic need, which is far superior to that of the child or adolescent. Superior abstracting and systematizing ability of the adult mind and desire for "fixed" rules to refer to. Teaching materials are often designed for adolescents, hence the need to integrate on the basis of the needs of their group. In this phase the input hypothesis  $i+1$  is crucial to produce results. According to "Natural order",  $i + 1$  «proximal development zone»  $i$  is the part of the linguistic or communicative task that we are already able to perform based on the acquired competence,  $+1$  is the area of potential development. The first of the conditions for the input to be acquired is placing it on the step of the natural order immediately following the input acquired up to that moment. For  $i + 1$  to be acquired it is necessary that the affective filter is not inserted, otherwise what is understood is placed in the short-term memory.

The "K" refers to the clues that establish the "tone, manner, or spirit" of the speech act. According to Rogers, [15], the adult is reluctant to continually question the architecture of his knowledge, therefore the teaching process can be successful only if the student himself/herself decides to change his/her knowledge. Adult learners do not make acts of faith but feel "equal" to the teacher except for the teacher of foreign mother tongue. This is a strong point at the CPIA context because the learner tries to imitate the teacher's voice and gestures. In this case, different keys should be used in different situations. Intonation can provide additional linguistic input and social behaviour in formal and informal context. For example a conversation at the doctor differs from a conversation among friends at the cinema.

The "I" denotes Instrumentalities. In the worst case scenario that the school does not have adequate devices and equipment to allow differentiation of learning, given the heterogeneity of the levels of language knowledge present in the classroom of adults, it is necessary to resort to techniques and teaching strategies that can be the emergency tools for the teacher. A short example is briefly illustrated in Table 2 derived by the author according to Balboni, 2012 [16].

Table 2. The development of receptive and productive abilities

Receptive abilities		Productive abilities	
<i>Techniques</i>	<i>Educational impact</i>	<i>Techniques</i>	<i>Educational impact</i>
Cloze	It does not insert the affective filter. The mistake can be discussed and the mental path that led to the error can be reconstructed. It is also used in testing.	Dramatization (oral ability)	To recite by reading or by heart a prearranged text. It is useful for phonological and paralinguistic aspects.
Linguistic puzzle	Students are asked to put together a sentence, a text, etc. There is no affective filter. The Gestalt theory globalization-analysis-synthesis is applied. The mistake is immediately evident and discussed.	Chain dialogue (oral ability)	A student starts the dialogue and the partner responds and restart. In the playful aspect, at every wrong answer the team member is eliminated.
Multiple choice	It does not require written production and allows students to reconstruct the path that led to the mistake.	Text transformation (written ability)	An adult learner prefers to exercise by himself with dictation in cloze structure, writing notes, translation by using his/her own devices.
Transcodification	Switching from one code to another. It does not require written production. He has a clear pragmatic indication (he understood / he did not understand).		

The "N" refers to Norms, that is, social rules governing the event and the participants' actions and reactions. Since all the UDAs (Unità di Apprendimento -teaching by learning units) are linked to skills as indicated in Table 1 and as required from the Ministry of Education for adult system [17], it is necessary to include in this aspect of the rules, the definition of communicative competence in the sense of "knowing how to do with the language" which includes the social, pragmatic dimension and cultural. To this end, it is useful to emphasize the use of paralinguistic and extra-linguistic elements to foster the acquisition of linguistic-communicative competence. The more properly paralinguistic traits,





such as the type of voice, the tone of voice used, the rhythm and intonation of the teacher are not to be overlooked because the teacher is the reference point for those adults immigrants that live in their community and are in contact with the Italian language only when they are at school. Nevertheless extra-linguistic traits are important too. The perlocutionary acts of socio-communicative actions illustrated in the Common European Framework Reference for Languages (CEFR) and in the syllabus for A2 level addressed to immigrants [10] (for example: introduce yourself, talk about yourself, greet and respond to greetings, etc.), should be encouraged by supporting the social actions that occur between and among learners that take advantage from their different origins.

The “G” Genre, The kind of speech act or event. At this point it could be useful to focus on the speech acts that occur in a heterogeneous and difficult class. If teachers are interested in learning more about his/her students communicate indoor and outdoor, a particular attention should be addressed on this aspect. It happens that during a class the high percentage of talking belongs to teacher who, involuntarily, does not allow students to have time to organize his/her speech and talk both with classmates and with teacher [18].

#### 4. Conclusions

This article proposes a lesson plan based on the SPEAKING model in a heterogeneous class of Italian L2 composed of adult migrants to be used in the 200 hours syllabus defined by the Italian Ministry of Education to cope with several difficulties that usually emerge during the classes. The didactic model was developed with continue references to the basic theory and takes into account the adult learner difficulties (and their different motivation in learning Italian language) and the results of a survey conducted during a training course by the author and addressed to the teachers of the CPIA. The lesson plan proposed by the author can be a useful tool of reference for all the teachers who approach the Italian L2 teaching and also to all those who have faced the emergency of teaching without having received adequate preparation in the field of Second Language Acquisition.

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