

The role of community context in Italian as Second Language learning in Perugia



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When teaching a foreign language, it is imperative to impart

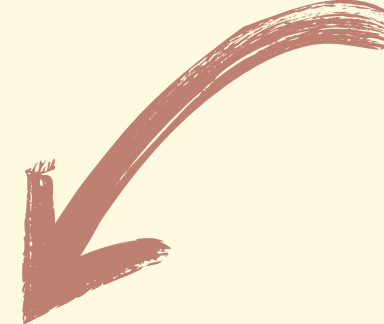
LANGUAGE

&

CULTURE




Culture embodies the people who speak a language and furthermore encapsulates its past, present, and future.



The community, therefore, serves as a fundamental resource from which students can draw to acquire a new language or reinforce their existing knowledge [1].

1. Communicative competence

COMMUNICATION = an essential element
for human interaction [2]



When applied to foreign languages, **communication** becomes **necessary** for the circulation and exchange of various languages and associated cultures. Consequently, communication occurs within communicative events [3], which are characterized by a specific social situation within a particular social context [4].

3 dimensions:

- sociocultural;
- way of life;
- way of thinking.

2. Intercultural competence

In order to talk about the intercultural competence it is important to consider concepts like **acculturation** and the consequent **cultural shock**.



It is the process by which an individual gradually acquires a culture different from their native one over time.

At the level of the learner, this process is affected by both external and intrinsic factors.

External factors:

- social distance between the two cultures;
- the new "diversity" [5] of the new culture;
- how the hosting society receives the individual.

Intrinsic factors:

- the personality of the individual;
- the attachment to their home country's culture.



The initial phase during which the student **perceives** the cultural **differences between their native culture and the culture of arrival** sharply. Feelings of indecision, sadness due to separation, and estrangement are indicative of this phenomenon.



cross-cultural difficulties:

EXTRALINGUISTIC
ELEMENTS

CULTURAL
DIFFERENCES

STEREOTYPES

Sometimes it is possible that, when knowledge of the culture and society associated with the language is acquired indirectly, students become **fluent fools**: individuals who speak a foreign language proficiently but do not grasp its social and philosophical dimension [6].

3. How to gauge sociocultural competence?

Several tools are available to assess the intercultural sensitivity and competence of individuals involved in encounters between diverse cultures.

Among the most common tools are:

- **"Cross-cultural World-Mindedness Scale" (CCWMS);**
- **"Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory" (ISI);**
- **"Sociocultural Adaptation Scale" (SCAS) [7].**

These assessment scales take into account an individual's attitudes and abilities to adapt and change within a cultural context different from their own.

4. Case of study: the role of community context in Italian L2 students in Perugia





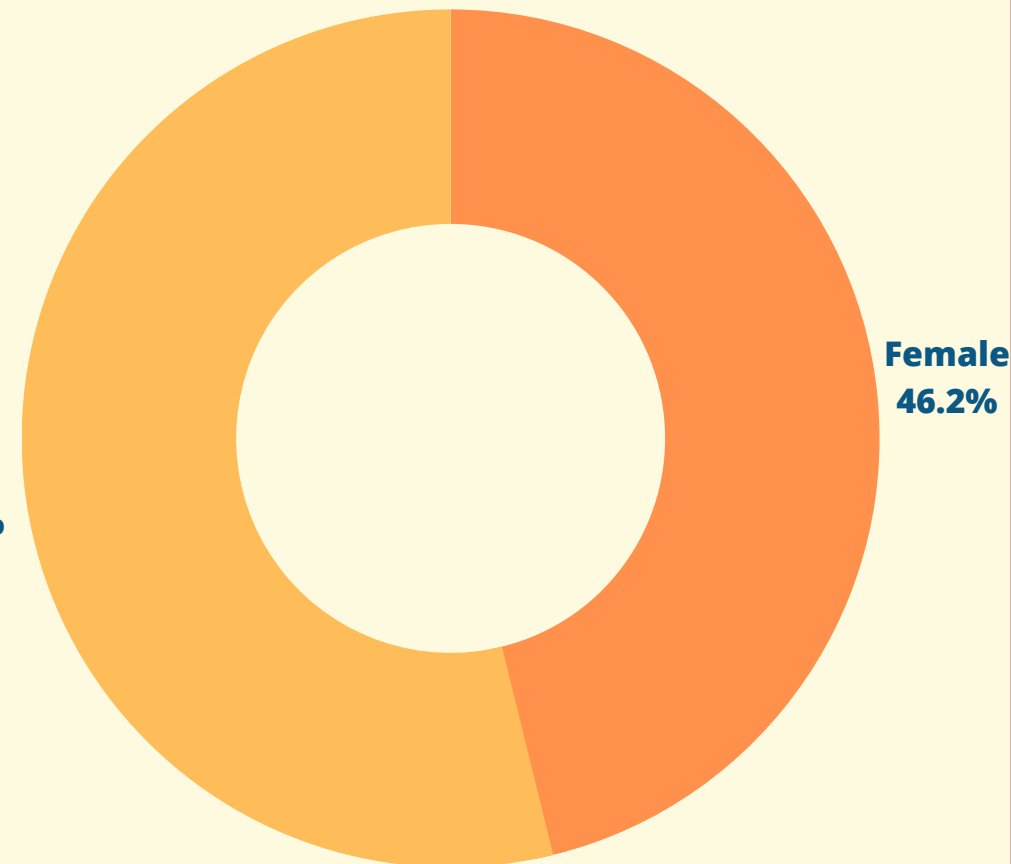
Methodology:

Participants were given a paper questionnaire about sociocultural competence that they could complete either synchronously or asynchronously.



Participants:

Sex



Age group

18-30 ys: 4
31-50 ys: 3
51-70 ys: 13
> 70: 6

Native language

English (7)
German (7)
Dutch (4)
Arabic (4)
Spanish (2)
Norwegian (1)
Lithuanian (1)

Proficiency in Italian

A1 8%
A2 27%
B1 30.5%
B2 30.5%
C1 4%

Results

- Factors such as the participants' **Italian language proficiency and their native language** are important, even decisive, in determining the values chosen to indicate their sociocultural competencies during their time in Italy.
- Participants belonging to the "**B**" level of the CEFR [8] exhibited greater competency in various sociocultural behaviours during their life in Italy.



Results

Among the fifteen items to be evaluated, some were more interesting than others, primarily based on the responses provided by the students.

The items considered relate to the ability to correctly interpret gestures and facial expressions (5) and changes in pace (10), manners (13), and social behavior (14) depending on the situational context in which the communicative act occurs. These items have been cross-referenced with Italian proficiency and first language of participants.



Item 5: Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's gestures and facial expressions.

Item 14: Changing my behavior to suit social norms, rules, and attitudes.

Item 13: Expressing my ideas to other students in a culturally appropriate manner.

Item 10: Varying the rate of my speaking in a culturally appropriate manner.

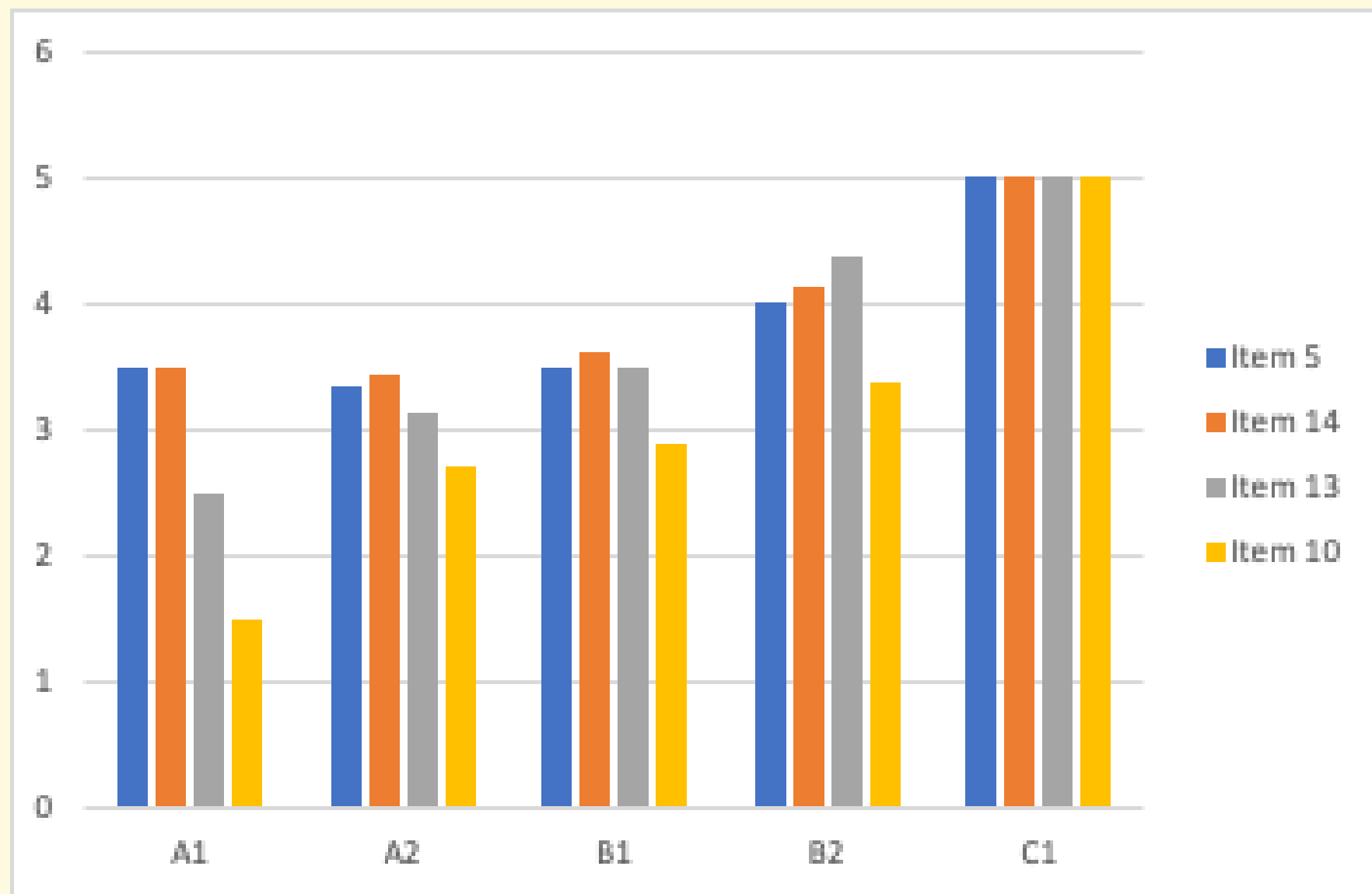


fig.1 items crossed-referenced with Italian proficiency of participants.

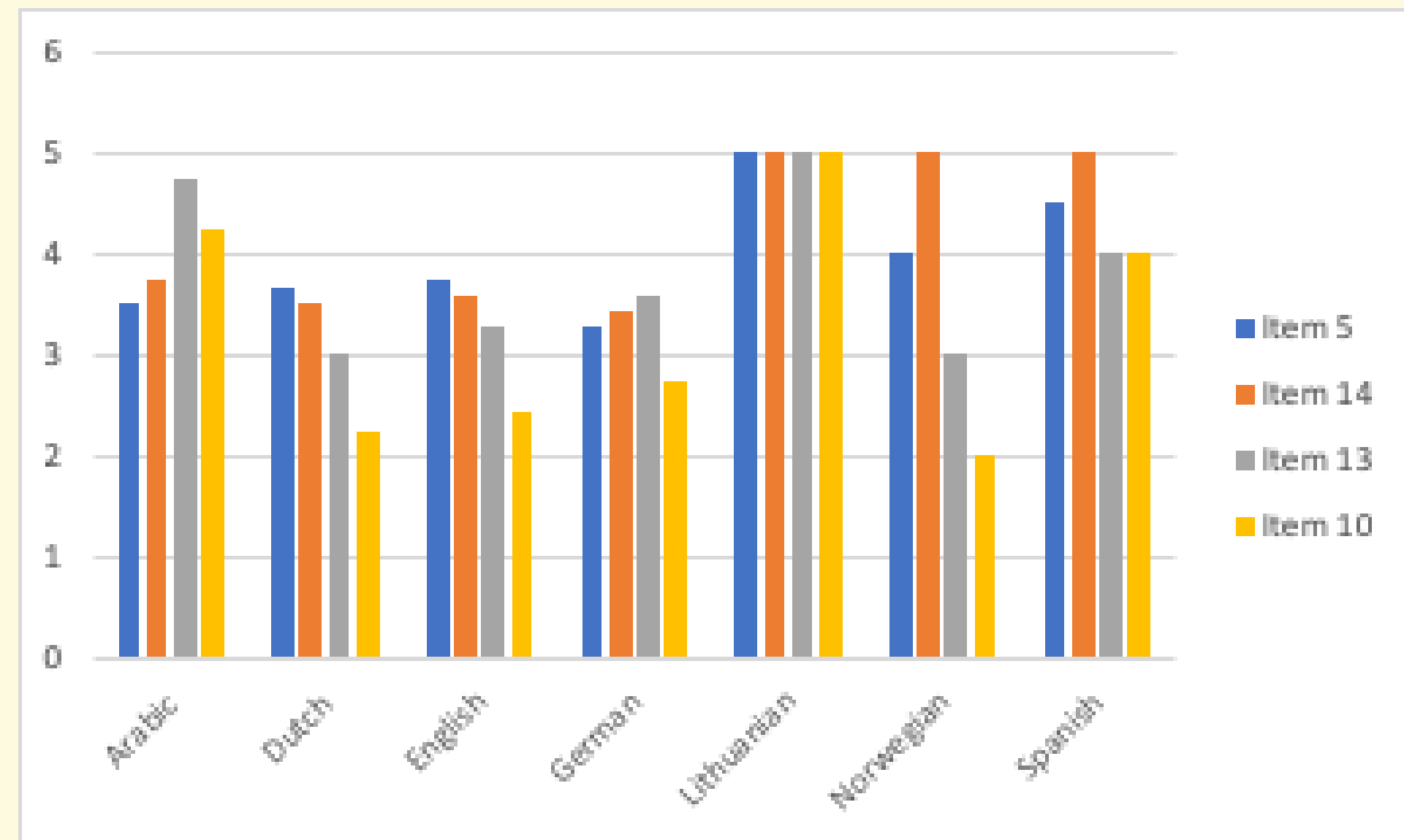


fig.2 items crossed-referenced with first language of participants.

Results

- Results demonstrate that the **proximity of the native language to Italian is an important factor**. For example, in the case of Spanish, this similarity led to the choice of high values, despite the participant's lower Italian proficiency level (A2).
- Participants' choices **are influenced** not only **by** their linguistic abilities but also by **personal factors**: intrinsic elements like personality and extrinsic factors like customs and practices are some examples.
- The **duration of the stay** in Italy is another influential factor: from the analysis of the collected data, it becomes clear that **the longer the period spent in Perugia, the greater the competencies of the participants**.



Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be affirmed that the **community plays a significant role in education**. In the context of teaching Italian as a second language, it is important for the development of sociocultural competencies in students. This paper presented a preliminary study based on a limited sample of students. It is hoped that in the future, this line of research can be further pursued to support the thesis.

References

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Thanks for your attention.

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