

**LANGUAGE EDUCATION  
(EDUCAZIONE LINGUISTICA) IN ITALY:  
AN EXPERIENCE THAT COULD BENEFIT EUROPE?**

*Guide for the development of language education policies in Europe:  
from linguistic diversity to plurilingual education*

**Reference Study**

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## Preface

This text, part of a series published by the *Language Policy Division*, is clearly significant in its own right because it deals with certain influential factors in the organisation and sociolinguistic foundations of language teaching and in the linguistic ideologies at work in problems related to the languages of Europe. It is, however, part of a larger project since it is one element of a collection of publications focused on the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe: From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education*.

This *Guide* is both a descriptive and programmatic document whose purpose is to demonstrate the complexity of the questions involved in language teaching, often dealt with in a simplistic manner. It aims to describe the processes and conceptual tools needed for the analysis of educational contexts with respect to languages and for the organisation of language learning and teaching according to the principles of the Council of Europe.

There are several versions of this *Guide* for different audiences, but the *Main version* deals with a number of complex questions, albeit in a limited framework. It seemed necessary to illustrate these questions with case studies, syntheses and studies of specific sectors of language teaching, dealing in monographic form with questions only touched upon in the *Guide*. These *Reference Studies* provide a context for the *Guide*, showing its theoretical bases, sources of further information, areas of research and the themes which underlie it.

The *Modern Languages Division*, now the *Language Policy Division*, demonstrates through this collection of publications its new phase of activity, which is also a continuation of previous activities. The *Division* disseminated through the *Threshold Levels* of the 1970s, a language teaching methodology more focused upon communication and mobility within Europe. It then developed on the basis of a shared educational culture, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (published in its final version in 2001). This is a document which is not concerned with the nature of the contents of language teaching but rather with the form of curricula and syllabi for language teaching. The *Framework* proposes explicit referential levels for identifying degrees of language competence, and thus provides the basis for differentiated management of courses so that opportunities for the teaching of more languages in schools and in lifelong learning are created. This recognition of the intrinsic value of plurilingualism has simultaneously led to the development of an instrument which allows each learner to become aware of and to describe their language repertoire, namely the *European Language Portfolio*. Versions of this are increasingly being developed in member States and were at the heart of the European Year of Languages (2001).

Plurilingualism has been identified in numerous *Recommendations* of the Council of Europe as the principle and the aim of language education policies, and must be valued at the individual level as well as being accepted collectively by educational institutions. The *Guide* and the *Reference Studies* provide the link between teaching methods and educational issues on the one hand and policy on

the other, and have the function of making explicit this political principle and of describing concrete measures for implementation.

In this paper Costanzo introduces an approach to language learning and teaching which breaks with many traditions of teaching by arguing that learners can benefit from understanding the nature of language, can learn from comparative analysis of languages, and can then draw upon this knowledge in their learning of particular languages. Furthermore, she suggests that foreign language learning should not be separated from mother tongue learning and teaching, so that what the learner brings to the classroom in terms of linguistic knowledge, implicit and explicit, is not ignored but becomes part of the development of a linguistic repertoire. This approach is called in Italy *educazione linguistica*, and this paper makes the proposals more concrete by describing the ways in which this particular version of the approach has developed, its advantages and problems. Finally, the author explains how this approach is related to the work of the Council of Europe in particular with respect to the *Common European Framework*. It is thus possible to draw upon this approach to languages and language learning to support the development of the plurilingualism of the individual.

This specific aspect of the problems of language education policies in Europe gives a perspective on the general view taken in the *Guide* but nonetheless this text is a part of the fundamental project of the *Language Policy Division*: to create through reflection and exchange of experience and expertise, the consensus necessary for European societies, characterised by their differences and the transcultural currents which create 'globalised nations', not to become lost in the search for the 'perfect' language or languages valued at the expense of others. They should rather recognise the plurality of the languages of Europe and the plurilingualism, actual or potential, of all those who live in this space, as a condition for collective creativity and for development, a component of democratic citizenship through linguistic tolerance, and therefore as a fundamental value of their actions in languages and language teaching.

Jean-Claude Beacco and Michael Byram

## Introduction

Linguistic diversity, paradoxically, is a characteristic shared by European countries, since as well as the various dialects of each language, several European countries have thriving minority languages, some more protected than others. As a result, Europe has forty languages in all<sup>1</sup>, eleven of them with the status of official languages of the European Union.

In a context where multi-lingualism is clearly part of the genetic code of the old continent, to speak of *educazione linguistica* in connection with the work of the Council of Europe inevitably means taking a broad-brush approach, while highlighting key aspects of a vast concept that has left its mark on language teaching in Italy over the last thirty years.

These, then, are the constraints imposed on this study. To begin with, the analysis focuses on the concept of *educazione linguistica*, highlighting its complexity and situating it in the context from which it sprang. A second part deals with how it is put into practice and preferred teaching methods. This is followed by an analysis of curricula in which it has been applied in Italy and some thoughts on teacher training, before I conclude with some thoughts on the "exportability" of the concept in Europe and how it relates to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*.

### 1. The concept

"*Educazione linguistica*' (language education) does not mean education in verbalism or, worse, verbosity - the ability to improvise speeches on any subject."<sup>2</sup> So said De Mauro, one of the illustrious fathers of the concept, only recently, on the one hand drawing attention to the pitfall of verbalistic degeneration that exists if *educazione linguistica* is seen as an education in rhetoric, based on a misunderstood classical tradition, while on the other calling for education in the use of words, seen "not as sounds or formulae, but as the expression of meaning rooted in dialogue, cooperation with others and friction with the things and experiences that one seeks to express"<sup>3</sup>.

This concept is based on a linguistic choice that bears the clear imprint of the historical semantics that made our author say, a few lines later: "Education in language and languages, in this sense of the term, means education in everything that lives through and in language and languages: our history and that of others"<sup>4</sup>. On a more strictly pedagogical level, there is a clear rejection of behaviourist training when we read: "*Educazione linguistica* is none other than the projection on to verbal language of ideas that have been developed in the

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<sup>1</sup> Hagège C, 1994, *Le souffle de la langue*, Paris, Editions Odile Jacob, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> De Mauro T., 2001, "Apprendere nella società complessa", in *Minima scholaria*, Bari, Laterza, pp. 164-166.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

field of mathematical education: not the rote-learning of theorems nor the ability to use arithmetic as one could use a calculator [...] but the ability to produce models and incorporate *lógos* in these models, for *lógos* is language, functionality and praxis"<sup>5</sup>.

The fact that words are considered to have cultural overtones and are seen as *lógos*, as praxis, means that in approaching the concept of *educazione linguistica*, one must eschew simplistic solutions, which range from merely identifying it with the study of actual grammar to the barren interpretation afforded to it by N. Galli de' Paratesi, who, in seeking to define "linguistic awareness" and "*educazione linguistica*", states of the latter: "The term is used in Italy to indicate the profound changes in language teaching imported from the Anglo-Saxon world."<sup>6</sup> There is no doubt that the teaching of foreign languages owes much to Anglo-Saxon thinking, but it is debatable, to say the least, whether one can go so far as to identify the concept of *educazione linguistica* with changes due to those influences, as is easily confirmed if one retraces the various stages of its development.

## 2. The ten precepts of democratic *educazione linguistica*

*Educazione linguistica* stems from a revolt against the old-style "traditional language teaching"<sup>7</sup>. Like the latter, it concerns verbal language acquisition, but it is quite different in its actual conception of language. The former is based on a view of language as a model to be mastered through teaching methods based on Latin, etc., by means of grammatical rules and exercises in applying and understanding them, and by reading aloud, writing essays and copying "good" examples, while the latter disrupts the tranquil lives of teachers of "literature" proper by introducing the novelty of "linguistics", which derives from a tradition of descriptive linguistics in which such terms as "social uses of language", "communicative functions" and "interaction" were increasingly to make themselves heard.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> Galli de' Paratesi N., 1996, "Language and culture awareness in language learning/teaching (L2\* and L1) for the development of learner autonomy (age 11-18)", in *Language Learning for European Citizenship*, texts prepared for the new-style workshop, 13b, "Educazione linguistica" and language awareness: the interplay of L1 and L2 in the development of language awareness", Strasbourg, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> "In the theoretical and cultural debate in Italy, the expression '*educazione linguistica*' was introduced by a Catholic educationist [...] Maria Teresa Gentile with her *Educazione linguistica e crisi di libertà* (1966), which followed on from and elaborated on her equally little known *Immagine e parola nella formazione dell'uomo*. In the context of linguistic studies it initially remained a minority approach: it appears in writings in 1968 but, even in 1969 and 1970, it faced strong competition from expressions such as education in verbalisation (*educazione alla verbalizzazione*), language teaching (*didattica linguistica*) and speech education, (*glottodidattica*)" in De Mauro T., 1983, *Sette lezioni sul linguaggio e altri interventi per l'Educazione Linguistica*, Milano, Franco Angeli, p. 91.



From a strictly educational point of view, moreover, traditional language teaching neglects learners' existing language, the "linguistic baseline" formed by a dialect or other minority mother tongue, just as it neglects the relationship with other symbolic and expressive skills, such as non-verbal language and arithmetic. The dominant feature is what Calvino was to define as "anti-language"<sup>8</sup>, a bureaucratic literary monolith taught by dint of grammatical analysis and logic, verbal paradigms and rules of syntax, which the most fortunate students, Bourdieu's *héritiers*, succeed in mastering only because it corresponds to the social and cultural behaviour normal in their family environment.

This is the context in which associations of linguists and teachers began their work. From the SLI<sup>9</sup> to GISCEL<sup>10</sup>, CIDI<sup>11</sup> and LEND<sup>12</sup> patient and continuing endeavours, through debate, discussions in specialist journals and conferences, led to the publication of a now historic document, the *Dieci Tesi per l'Educazione Educazione Linguistica Democratica*, (ten precepts of democratic education linguistica) adopted by GISCEL on 26 April 1975.

It is one of those ground-breaking documents, and it is worthwhile reproducing some long extracts (see Appendix 1) to show the novel approach that the *Ten Precepts* still reflects, even today, some thirty years later.

Leaving aside the assumption that verbal language is of major importance for communicative, cognitive and conceptual purposes and that linguistic skills are multiple and complex (Precepts I and III), the assertions of the second precept, which concerns the development of linguistic skills "rooted" in the entire socio-cultural development of the individual, are clearly reminiscent of the ideas of Vygotsky<sup>13</sup>, which are still valid: attributing to language the function of a tool for the development of individual's cognitive capacities, he emphasises that what is acquired is not language as an autonomous system, but the result of interaction between the characteristics of the language system and the way it works, when it is used to acquire knowledge, communicate and act. Likewise, the assertion, in the sort of decalogue constituted by the eighth precept, that a proper *educazione linguistica* should start with the pupils' linguistic and cultural background, not in

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<sup>8</sup> Calvino I., "L'antilingua", in Calvino I., 1980, *Una pietra sopra*, Turin, Einaudi, pp. 122-126.

<sup>9</sup> SLI: Società di Linguistica Italiana, formed in 1967, whose members are linguistics students committed to more innovative scientific approaches. Its statutes point to the need to link theoretical research more closely to practical teaching methods.

<sup>10</sup> GISCEL: Gruppo di Intervento e di Studio nel campo dell'Educazione Linguistica, founded in 1973 within the SLI.

<sup>11</sup> CIDI: Centro di Iniziativa Democratica degli Insegnanti formed in 1972 with specific innovative aims in the field of teaching methods and determinedly progressive in terms of Italian education policy.

<sup>12</sup> LEND: Lingua e Nuova Didattica, formed in 1972 with a clear commitment to reform the teaching of foreign languages in Italian schools.

<sup>13</sup> Vygotskij L.S., *Pensiero e linguaggio*, Bari, Laterza, 1990.

order to tie them to their background, but to enrich their linguistic heritage, can be dated back to the massively dialectic approach of the 1970s in Italy. It is however now especially topical as the precursor of a multi-lingual and multi-cultural approach to education which could be transferred as a matter of course from the Italian regions to Europe generally. The very idea of conceiving language as something that "needs to be nurtured and developed from the start of primary school", explicitly mentioned in Precept VIII (principle 9), is now clearly reflected in everything that the cognitive sciences advocate, while the assertion in Precept IX, to the effect that new forms of teacher training that take account of the importance of the science of language are needed if *educazione linguistica* is to become effective and not just a declaration of intent, clearly anticipate subsequent developments.

### **3. *Educazione linguistica* and teaching methods**

It is immediately clear from a reading of the *Ten Precepts* that the concept of *educazione linguistica* is a complex one, inherently inter-disciplinary and polysystemic, and that it forms a production circuit in the sense meant by Edgar Morin when he states that such a circuit "is formed by changing constructs and interaction: to organise itself, the new science of social anthropology needs the new biology and the new physics, which, to organise themselves, need to incorporate the mental, cultural and social constructs of the scientist"<sup>14</sup>.

As we have seen, *educazione linguistica* involves theoretical arguments (about linguistics, socio-linguistics, pragma-linguistics, semantics, cognitive psychology, and so on) and practical arguments (on subjects varying from teaching methods to classroom practice) which can "complete the circuit", without blocking it, as would happen with a purely applied theory-practice approach. The fact that it takes the form of a production circuit also explains why the concept has, over the years, been enriched by the contributions of, for example, neuroscience, cultural anthropology and research on artificial intelligence.

From the point of view of teaching methods, because of its interdisciplinary nature, *educazione linguistica* finds fertile ground in a range of teaching practices which primarily involve the mother tongue and the foreign language or languages at a time when, thanks to the work of the Council of Europe on the various Threshold Levels, the communicative approach clearly seems to have practical advantages which the *Ten Precepts*, being more of a general declaration, could not provide.

As a result of via this approach, which puts awareness of the functioning of the language at the centre of learning, the idea of the need for integrated teaching of

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<sup>14</sup> Morin E., 1980, *La méthode. La nature de la nature*, I, Paris, Seuil, coll. Points Essais, p. 287.

the mother tongue and the foreign language, as advocated by Roulet<sup>15</sup> for second languages, is making headway. This idea stems from the observation that, in a school situation, the learner is disadvantaged from a communicative point of view, because "if the ability to communicate is characterised by mastery of acts of language in speech"<sup>16</sup>, it will never be possible to reproduce in the classroom the context of natural language learning, and an entirely instrumental approach to communication is therefore doomed to fail. At the same time, however, programmed deductive learning cannot be proposed, since "even the experts still do not know the rules governing the sequencing and interpretation of acts of language in speech"<sup>17</sup>.

The solution, according to Roulet, is to compensate for the communicative disadvantages of the school situation, by taking advantage of its merits, which are as follows:

- The possibility of exploring the system and functioning of language with the help of the teacher, as learning facilitator and no longer as the depository of encyclopaedic knowledge to be passed on;
- The possibility of using, for this activity involving observation and reflection on the foreign language, the heuristic tools used for similar work with the mother tongue.

Clearly, the observation and analysis of language suggested by Roulet are one means of translating principles 8 and 9 of Precept VIII into practice. These, in turn, are reminiscent of the constructivist type of learning theory explicitly referred to by Courtillon when, with respect to grammar, she said, "The approach based on the discovery and gradual adjustment of rules is founded on a constructivist type of theory [...] It is to be preferred because, what is of concern here is the **learner's grammar**, the goal is the appropriation by the learner of rules which work for him or her. He or she must construct these rules step by step..."<sup>18</sup>.

The idea of mental activity as a means of structuring the learning process, regardless of the different schools of thought, has become one of the cornerstones of cognitive psychology, making it absolutely clear that, in the learning process, it is not the product of the mental activity that is to be filed away but the mental activity itself, which, in turn, involves perceptions and

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<sup>15</sup> Roulet E., 1980, *Langue maternelle et langues secondes. Vers une pédagogie intégrée*, Paris, Hatier-CREDIF, coll. LAL and Roulet E., 1995, « Peut-on intégrer l'enseignement-apprentissage décalé de plusieurs langues? », *Études de Linguistique Appliquée*, April-June, n°98, p. 113-118.

<sup>16</sup> Roulet E., 1980, p. 82.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 83.

<sup>18</sup> Courtillon J., La grammaire sémantique et l'approche communicative, in ...Et la grammaire, *Le Français dans le Monde-Recherches et Applications*, Feb/March 1989, p. 118.

mental processes. This allows certain **learning processes**<sup>19</sup> to be reconsidered, for example the interference between mother tongue and foreign language or the use of **routines**<sup>20</sup>, which apparently require a behaviourist explanation and whose role must be seen in the broader context of **strategies**<sup>21</sup>, which, in turn, depend on the mental activity of the learner and use different processes.

This is yet another element that, this time from a psycho-linguistic point of view, was to enrich the notion of *educazione linguistica* by giving weight to the idea of integrated education, recommended by Roulet, and introducing the idea of the need for metacognitive activities, the latter being important in the acquisition of procedural skills, wrongly sacrificed for a long time in favour of declarative skills.

Given that foreign language teaching theory has long held that when a language is learned, it is "linguistic situations" that are learned and it is here that the mental activity is exercised, and given that the ability to communicate, which is a complex skill<sup>22</sup>, requires the application of several skills in the learning situation<sup>23</sup>, we cannot help but conclude that, if the goal of *educazione linguistica* is to develop a full set of linguistic skills (Precept III), it is language teaching based on a communicative/cognitive approach which will provide many of the practical tools which, in Italy, are expressly advocated by the authorities or used independently by teachers in the classroom.

#### 4. *Educazione linguistica* in Italian schools

The official introduction of *educazione linguistica* in Italian schools came with the 1979 curricula in response to Law No. 348 of 1977<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> **Process** here means the entire set of mental activities which result in the performance of a given task, in Gaonac'h D., dir., 1990, *Acquisition et utilisation d'une langue étrangère*, le Français dans le Monde – Recherches et Applications, February/March, Paris, EDICEF, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> **Routine** here means the use of ready-made formulae learned and reproduced as units, in Gaonac'h D., 1987, *Théories d'apprentissage et acquisition d'une langue étrangère*, Paris, Hâtier/CREDIF, coll. LAL, p. 149.

<sup>21</sup> The word **strategy** deserves an article of its own. We will confine ourselves here to pointing out the difference between **communication strategies**, defined as supervised programmes which individuals adopt to resolve what they perceive as a problem in order to reach a particular communication goal and **learning strategies**, defined as supervised actions designed to attain a precise goal in Bogaards P., 1988, *Aptitude et affectivité dans l'apprentissage des langues étrangères*, Paris, Hatier-CREDIF, coll. LAL, p. 92 and p. 98.

<sup>22</sup> Moirand S., 1982, *Enseigner à communiquer en langue étrangère*, Paris, Hachette, coll. F, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Beacco J-C., 1980, « Compétence de communication: des objectifs d'enseignement aux pratiques de classe », *Le Français dans le Monde*, May-June, n° 153, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> Mentioning these dates, far from being pernickety, serves to emphasise, should it not be clear, that we are talking about the period immediately following the publication of the *Ten Precepts* and the first *Threshold Levels* of the Council of Europe (Threshold Level, 1975; Niveau Seuil, 1976).

These were curricula for State lower secondary schools, the last stage of compulsory education. In the section on "disciplines as education" and learning methods, they introduced *educazione linguistica* as follows:

"The teaching of Italian is part of the broader picture of *educazione linguistica*, which concerns, albeit in differing degrees, all subjects and activities and which is designed, in particular, to allow pupils, as a fundamental right, to master the use of language in all its functions [...]

Foreign languages should contribute, in harmony with other disciplines, and especially the Italian language, to the mastery of pupils' capacity to express themselves and communicate, not least by expanding their cultural, social and human horizons. This is possible because a knowledge of foreign languages allows contact with historical and socio-cultural situations other than those found in Italy"<sup>25</sup>.

How could one fail to notice that the philosophy of the *Ten Precepts* permeates the entire text of these paragraphs? And as further evidence of the fact that these secondary school curricula derive directly from the *Precepts*, here are some quotations from the methodological guidelines. In the case of Italian, we find, for instance, that "language learning must be linked to basic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and to the various functions and uses of language (informing, persuading, telling, expressing feelings and states of mind, asking questions, participating in discussions, etc.) and take account of the social variants of the language, which are linked to geographical factors, individual situations and local environments. The particular linguistic circumstances of Italian society, with its various dialects and idioms, and the effects of mass migration, mean that schools cannot ignore these variants [...]. Typological variants, such as colloquial and familiar language, and more formal and cultured language, must not be neglected, the aim being that the pupil should be able to grasp their expressive features and use a register appropriate to a particular situation"<sup>26</sup>.

The communicative approach of this methodology is very clear, as is the reference to cognitivism, when we read, "Reflection on language should not take the form of formal study [...] but be part of the process of developing linguistic expression and one of the means of promoting that process. This will lead pupils from concrete linguistic experiences to conscious use of linguistic material [...] so that they eventually arrive at generalisations about the building blocks of Italian, both the purely grammatical aspects [...] and the communicative functions of the language"<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> MPI-Direzione Generale Istruzione Secondaria di 1° grado, 1994, *Scuola media Statale: programmi ed orari di insegnamento, criteri orientativi per le prove d'esame di licenza e relative modalità di svolgimento*, Istituto Poligrafico e zecca dello Stato, Rome, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 32.

At the same time, in the case of foreign languages, it reads, "...exercises will be used to allow the use of the language in communication situations, e.g.:

- to convey and understand information;
- to describe places, objects and people;
- to read and understand short, accessible narrative texts and extracts from newspapers and magazines catering for the general public;
- to understand and write letters [...]

The language will initially be approached through its practical use in context and not through grammatical models [...]. This will also provide opportunities to supply the necessary cultural references, given that language is a reflection of the socio-cultural environment ..."<sup>28</sup>.

Communication/reflection is an almost obsessive refrain which pervades all areas, including the socio-cultural context.

These were ambitious curricula, for the time, and paved the way for primary school curricula. A few years later, we read in this connection:

"*Educazione linguistica* is being resituated in the context of the various forms of language, in the sense of opportunities for symbolisation, expression and communication [...]

*Educazione linguistica* should not neglect the communicative and expressive contributions of other forms of language[...]

*Educazione linguistica*, in an era of intensive communication and with the prospect of growing integration of the European Community, cannot do without a clearly defined approach to knowledge of a foreign language..."<sup>29</sup>

And the circle is completed with the GISCEL proposals for new secondary school curricula, which are now on the drawing board. In speaking of "the specificity of *educazione linguistica*", they state that the latter "... is not absolute or general, but targeted at specific objectives:

- ensuring the ability to read and write so that the pupil can function within and outside school;
- guiding the approach to literary texts;
- guiding reflection on the language;

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<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 44.

<sup>29</sup> *Programmi didattici per la scuola primaria (Primary Schools Teaching Curricula)*, Presidential Decree No 104 of 12 February 1985, Regular supplement to the Official Gazette (Gazzetta Ufficiale) No. 76 of 29 March 1985.

- integrating *educazione linguistica* into other disciplines (foreign languages, classical languages, etc.).

Pupils must always be fully involved in the identification and pursuit of these objectives. The choice between the many specific "options" must depend on pupils' needs and especially their functional literacy needs, as well as the levels of linguistic competency actually achieved by pupils in present-day Italian society<sup>30</sup>.

Quite clearly, the basic philosophy, the communicative/cognitive methodological approach, remains, but the proposal is certainly more pragmatic, less ambitious, less "generous" it could be said (and certainly the socio-linguistic element is less evident), a sign, given the time that has elapsed, that something has not worked as it should have.

## 5. The limitations of the Italian experiment

In quoting extensive extracts from the *Ten Precepts* and equally long excerpts from the curricula that have embodied the concept of *educazione linguistica* as the cornerstone of the entire educational process, beginning in primary school, and continuing with revision and further elaboration at later stages, I want to make it clear that this sector has enjoyed a high level of theoretical development, accompanied over the years by a remarkable commitment to updating professional skills, with the support of teachers' associations and the high quality of publications on the subject.

Against such a background, it is necessary to ask what has not worked, given that we have failed so far to establish a clear effective practice shared by all teachers, to the extent that we are in the danger of going backwards.

The barriers encountered in the Italian experiment and which have in fact drastically undermined it, can essentially be traced to two factors:

- the organisational model on which Italian schools are based;
- the basic training and attitudes of teachers.

With regard to the first factor, it is worth referring to the comments by Ambel to the effect that "all too often, the precepts of teaching methods based on communication, interaction, the application of assumptions and procedures, the priority on "knowing how" and cognitive acts rather than on knowledge, and flexible situations and contexts came up against a structurally rigid model in which information is passed on in one direction only"<sup>31</sup>. With this type of organisational model, one major constraint is the management of the school

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<sup>30</sup> Guerriero A. R., *Documento GISCEL sul curriculum di educazione linguistica*, Rome, 19 April 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Ambel M, 1998, "Educazione linguistica e dintorni", in Sasso A., Toselli S., *Il sapere della scuola. Proposte e contributi*, Quaderni CIDI no. 1, Bologna, Zanichelli, p. 23.

timetable, which is rigidly divided into subjects. This has not changed for at least half a century; there are the same number of hours' tuition a week, based on a traditional core around which subjects of secondary importance orbit like satellites. As far as *educazione linguistica* is concerned, this is responsible for the damage done by what is known as "traditional language teaching". Only recently has the law on schools' autonomy in Italy at last made for the flexibility needed if a complex objective such as that of *educazione linguistica* is to be underpinned by organisational models more suited to specific situations. There is provision, among other things, for working as much as possible across subject boundaries. This, in our case, allows *educazione linguistica* to be placed in the inter-disciplinary setting which it needs. Nevertheless, this belated development runs the risk of not producing the desired effects if nothing is done about the other sore point: teacher training.

A simple comparison of university courses for teachers of Italian and foreign languages in universities in different geographical locations and with different traditions (University of Calabria, Naples Oriental Institute, Universities of Bari and Pisa) in the 1970s, 80s and 90s shows that, for thirty years, there was little to distinguish between them, with plenty of "history of literature", "history of literary criticism", "philology" and "history of language", and little emphasis on the science of language and nothing or almost nothing on knowledge more immediately relevant to teaching, apart from the general "psychology of child development" or "general educational theory", which were not compulsory, moreover<sup>32</sup>. Added to this, in so far as languages are concerned, the students become teachers of only one language, be it Italian mother tongue or a foreign language. The incoherence this creates in *educazione linguistica* in Italian schools can easily be imagined.

Given the situation, attempts have been made to compensate for the lack of initial training with in-service refresher courses, but an innovation such as *educazione linguistica* cannot be managed by means of refresher courses. "It appears that schools have hardly been touched by twenty years of research, discussions and new developments. What has changed is the way they see themselves and what they are supposed to do, rather than what they do in practice"<sup>33</sup>. This highlights the fact that the impact of reform on actual teaching methods is less than anticipated and in some cases has actually had the opposite effect, of exacerbating the difference between those teachers who saw the refresher training as part of their in-service training, and put it into practice in the classroom and those who attended refresher courses unwillingly and merely made cosmetic changes without altering their teaching methods. The reason for this is that superimposed on the compartmentalised initial training described

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<sup>32</sup> More hope has been placed in the new specialist post-graduate teacher training colleges for secondary school teachers, launched in 1999, but the initial results have been disappointing because the vast majority of teachers continue to specialise in one subject, and there is little concern to provide future teachers with the skills necessary to their profession.

<sup>33</sup> Colombo A., 1996, "Un passo avanti e due indietro", in *Insegnare*, n. 6, pp. 28-29.



above, are teachers' mental attitudes, often derived from personal experience of learning which has not been challenged, especially if it is psychologically gratifying, and is thus the source of teaching axioms in the true sense of the term, which no amount of retraining is likely to influence. This explains why, for example, although language teaching has long had linguistic reference models of a descriptive kind, linguistic reflection as proposed in the syllabuses themselves has been translated, in reality, into classroom practices based on a prescriptive approach.

Does that mean that everything is bleak? No, because Italy's experience, good and bad, has interesting possibilities at European level.

## **6. *Educazione linguistica* and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages**

The complexity of the concept of *educazione linguistica* and the fact that it takes the form of the "production circuit" described above has meant that certain core benefits remain, such as:

- an awareness that linguistic skills cut across different disciplines and as a result, a cross-disciplinary teaching approach;
- an awareness of the need to teach the functional uses of language, with emphasis on linguistic know-how combined with the imperative of reflection on language;
- the progressive approach, whereby the acquisition of language skills goes hand-in-hand with personal development generally, the essential goal being awareness and control of the learning process.

To this we can now add awareness of the piecemeal nature of skills, which must be broached from the angle of plurilingual competence skills, already evident in the *Ten Precepts* (VIII, 9) in the case of Italy and, more recently, in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, which states: "Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw."<sup>34</sup>

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* revives an ambitious objective of *educazione linguistica* in all its complexity and has the advantage of offering, for all its limitations, the descriptors needed to identify partial skills to be developed in the various languages. Italy's experience can

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<sup>34</sup> Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, Cambridge University Press, p. 168.

serve as a pointer to the strengths to be emphasised and ways in which the process can continue.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that Europe has espoused the idea of a multilingual education policy that stresses (as is stressed in the introduction to certain documents of the Language Policy Division) the need to manage multilingualism in such a way as to accept the languages of migrant populations (and ensure in particular that their linguistic heritage does not disappear), make Europeans aware of the cultural value of the languages spoken on their continent and promote education which respects differences<sup>35</sup>. This brings us back to the idea of democratic *educazione linguistica* as advocated in the *Ten Precepts*, which, like plurilingualism, is set in the context of respect for people's linguistic rights vis-à-vis the State, respect for freedom of expression, respect for the rights of linguistic minorities in the context of the nation and respect for the less spoken and less widely taught national languages, as essential components of human rights. In fact, both plurilingualism, defined in this way - certainly not in an "economic" sense, but in a manner in keeping with what Hagège calls "constantly keeping an open mind to multiplicity" ("*l'ouverture permanente à la multiplicité*"<sup>36</sup>) - and the democratic *educazione linguistica* of the *Ten Precepts* are hugely important in political terms and, to conclude, ideologically different from the other approaches.

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<sup>35</sup> Beacco J.-C., 2001, "Les idéologies linguistiques et le plurilinguisme", *Le Français dans le Monde* n. 314, March-April, Paris, CLE International, p. 25.

<sup>36</sup> Hagège C., op. cit., p. 9.

## **Appendix**

### ***The Ten Precepts of democratic educazione linguistica***

#### ***I. The central importance of verbal language***

*Verbal language is of fundamental importance in personal life and in the community because, by mastering it, whether passively (ability to understand) or actively, we can understand others and make ourselves understood (communicative uses), organise and analyse experiences (heuristic and cognitive uses) and take steps to transform these experiences (emotive, persuasive uses, etc.). Without undermining the importance of verbal language, we can put it in context by stressing that in general, and in human beings specifically, it is one form of the ability to communicate, variously known as basic symbolic capacity and semiological (or semiotic) capacity [...]*

#### ***II. Verbal language is rooted in biological, emotional, intellectual and community life***

*Given the many links with personal and community life, it is obvious that the development of linguistic abilities is rooted in the development of the whole human being, from infancy to adulthood, and hence in opportunities for psychomotor development and socialisation, stable affective relationships, the emergence and maturation of intellectual interests and participation in cultural and community life [...]*

#### ***III. The plurality and complexity of linguistic skills***

*As already indicated (Precept 1), verbal language is the product of multiple skills. Some, it can be said, are obvious, such as the ability to form appropriate words and phrases orally or in writing, the ability to converse, ask questions and answer clearly, the ability to read aloud, to recite from memory, etc. Others are less evident, such as the ability to attribute meaning to words and phrases heard and read, the ability to put different situations into words and analyse them internally by means of words, the ability to expand existing language skills by using or assimilating words and phrases which are subjectively or objectively new.*

#### ***IV. Linguistic rights in the Constitution***

*[...] Effective language teaching is democratic (the two do not necessarily coincide) if, and only if, teachers accept and put into practice the linguistic precepts set out in such texts as the Italian Constitution, Article 3 of which recognises the equality of all citizens "regardless of language", and promotes this equality, ensuring that the goal of the Republic is to remove obstacles in its path. And "Republic", in lawyers' parlance, means the whole complex of central and peripheral legislative, executive and administrative organs of the State and public institutions. These include schools, which under the Constitution are required to identify and pursue the tasks of a truly democratic educazione linguistica [...]*

### **VIII. Principles of democratic educazione linguistica**

*[...] At this point we wish to sum up the various features of a democratic educazione linguistica in logical order by formulating ten principles on which to base educazione linguistica in the new democratic schools, that are emerging.*

*1. The development of verbal ability must be encouraged in close conjunction with proper socialisation, psycho-motor development and the development and manifestation of the various expressive and symbolic capacities.*

*2. The development and exercise of linguistic skills must never be advocated and pursued as ends in themselves, but as a means of becoming more actively involved in the community and in intellectual life. The specific development of verbal skills must always be promoted during study, research, discussion, participation and personal and group creativity.*

*3. In seeking to develop language skills, it is necessary to identify pupils' personal, family, cultural and linguistic background and environment, not in order to tie them to their background, making them prisoners of it, but, on the contrary, to enrich their linguistic heritage by adding to it and expanding it, a process which, to be effective, must be consciously progressive.*

*4. The discovery of the diversity of individual linguistic backgrounds among pupils in the same group can serve as a starting point for repeated and increasingly profound experiences and explorations of the spatial, temporal, geographical, social and historical variety of the linguistic heritage of the members of the same society. Learning to understand and appreciate that variety is the first step to learning to live within it without being a slave to it or trampling it underfoot.*

*5. Passive as well as active skills should be developed, by testing the level of pupil's comprehension by written tests or recordings and assessing and stimulating the ability to understand an increasingly wide vocabulary and an every-increasing variety of types of phrases.*

*6. Both active and passive skills must be developed both orally and in writing, by fostering a feel for the different forms required in writing as compared with speech, and by creating situations in which it is useful to convert oral expressions into written expressions for the same audience and vice versa.*

*7. In the case of both active and passive oral and written skills, it is necessary to foster the ability to switch from more evidently local, colloquial, direct, informal registers to more considered, carefully thought out and formal registers that are used more widely.*

*8. In keeping with the previous principle, there is a need to familiarise pupils with the institutional usages of the common language (legal language, literary and poetic language, etc.) and teach them to use the language in these ways.*

*9. Among the many linguistic skills, particular attention should be paid to nurturing and developing, from the start of primary school, the ability, inherent in verbal language, to define oneself, state one's views and analyse oneself. One can start in the first years of primary school, by progressively enriching*

vocabulary specifically designed for talking about linguistic matters, leading on, after primary school, to the study of the linguistic setting, the mechanisms of language and dialects, the functioning of verbal language and the historical development of languages, always with special reference to the languages that are most widely known in Italy and taught in Italian schools.

10. In any event, a sense of the functionality of every possible linguistic form, whether familiar or not, should be developed. The old-style language teaching was imitative, prescriptive and exclusive. It said, "You must always say this and nothing else. Anything else is wrong". The new *educazione linguistica* (which is harder) says, "You can say this or that; and even what sounds wrong can be said and is said; and this is what happens when you say this or that." The old-style language teaching was dictatorial. But the new method is by no means synonymous with anarchy: [...] the guiding criterion is how effectively a spoken or written text and its component parts communicate a message to people for whom the text is intended [...]

#### **IX. Towards a new curriculum for teachers**

[...] There is no doubt that applying the principles of democratic *educazione linguistica* requires a qualitative and quantitative leap in terms of knowledge of language and education. In a future ideal world where teacher training takes the form of a university and post-graduate course suited to the needs of a democratic society, training should cover theoretical, sociological, psychological and historical skills in language and languages training in educational processes and teaching methods. The ultimate objective here is to endow teachers with a critical and creative awareness of the demands of school life and the means of dealing with them.

#### **X. Conclusion**

The qualitative and quantitative leap in scientific linguistic knowledge required of teachers is inconceivable without the establishment of appropriate language and educational training and information centres to rectify the mistakes in the underlying approach and practical details of the post-graduate training organised by the Ministry of Education and to make up for the shortcomings, arbitrariness and bias of university arrangements for teaching the linguistic sciences.

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