

## MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF L2 LEARNING

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### Abstract

One of the significant issues in the context of migration is learning the language of the country of arrival as a vehicle for inclusion and integration. This topic has been extensively discussed in several studies, and much data has been collected on adult language erosion due to migration (Wong Fillmore, 1991) or L2 learning difficulties (Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014). It has been observed that the interaction and interdependence between L1 and L2 can be paramount in determining migrants' language choices. In addition, a rapid process of learning and acquisition of the target language could facilitate encounters with different cultures, encouraging integration and inclusion. During this process, two variables come into play that can make a difference in L2 learning: motivation to pass the B1 citizenship exam for reference documentation (according to Italian regulations) and anxiety about not being up to the task of adequately learning the language to foster full autonomy. Based on these premises, the research objectives were: - to measure the level of motivation toward learning Italian and toward Italians; - measure the level of anxiety within Italian L2 classes.

The type of research was purely quantitative, and the data matrix allowed the analysis tool (histogram) to calculate individual and cumulative frequencies for a range of cells and classes of data. The research involved the online administration of a questionnaire through google forms. Participants answered questions within the attitudinal/motivational test battery (Gardner, 1985) with a 7-point response mode on a Likert scale (strongly disagree to agree strongly).

A total of 30 migrants (15 females, 14 males, 1 non-binary) attending two Italian L2 classes in the city of Palermo (Italy) with an age range of 20-50 years participated in the online survey.

The main results show that most participants expressed a positive attitude toward learning Italian and Italians with a high degree of interest in foreign languages; a moderate level of embarrassment or anxiety within the classes emerged.

In conclusion, as teachers, trainers, and pedagogists, it would be appropriate to mitigate and facilitate this learning process by promoting a serene and non-judgmental environment to foster language learning from a perspective of active listening and intercultural empathy. Thus, try to intervene so that the acquisition of the new vocabulary is seen as a tool for autonomy in the migrants' decision-making processes and not as a building block to obtain the documents required by current regulations, and thus a mutual bond that can ensure mastery of the second language combined with personal skills.

**Keywords:** *Attitudes, language L2, linguistic inclusion, migrants, motivation.*

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### 1. Introduction

In a classroom where, despite the different languages or dialects spoken, students have to say in the target language, as soon as their affective filters (Krashen 1988) are broken, the awkwardness disappears, and interlanguage allows effective communication. Unfortunately, this would rarely happen to parents who do not manage the L2 for several reasons: the fear of having their identity questioned and their linguistic rights neglected, belonging to less open communities, etc.

An immediate consideration to make, therefore, is that immigrants should be given the possibility of acquiring linguistic independence, or at least a reasonable level of linguistic autonomy so that they can feel more welcomed and their process of inclusion can be accelerated. If one considers the final objective, the choice between L1 or L2 is free as long as it allows for cultural exchanges and peaceful coexistence.

In an age where communication should be widely allowed, just think of satellites, GPS devices, Siri, etc. Efforts to overcome difficulties with the Italian language, understood as L2 learning are still enormous, especially in a multicultural and multi-ethnic society. If, on the one hand, migratory flows

represent a standard event, on the other, it can be seen how often public institutions and educational systems collapse in the face of a new Gambian student or a Pakistani worker who does not relate correctly to the local language. Even if migrants speak English, French, Arabic or the dialects typical of their regions, in a monolingual country, immigrants often cannot find a job or a suitable school due to their difficulty understanding or speaking the Italian language. Consequently, in our Italian school system, the immigrant student is commonly perceived as a student with special educational needs, with DSA and ADHD. For this reason, an individualized educational plan (IEP) is drafted without considering the main problem, i.e. the target language. As a result, it is possible to predict how intense the struggle to keep up with local comrades or the discomfort of marginalization with its immediate isolating effect will be. What has been said clearly shows how, in a migratory phenomenon, the main objective of inclusion is not possible, indeed, is not achieved, leaving the responsibility to the first reception centres or to voluntary organizations that manage Italian L2 courses for immigrants. Moreover, as required by law, an A2 certification in Italian is required to obtain the 5-year residence permit, which would favour privileged access to state schools, avoiding any burden for both parties, teachers and international students.

According to Ruggeri (2010), the moment of acceptance is rather delicate for the integration process and the development of relationships. Therefore, it focuses on various aspects, such as education, language and culture. Psycholinguistic research on language acquisition considers many factors present in the individual, such as intelligence, motivation, self-esteem, etc., such as linguistic input in the family (Baker, 2018) and the learning environment, such as L2 teaching (Robinson, 2002). Differences in language acquisition can be found between migrant/non-migrant students or between linguistic minority/majority students in general (Cummins, 2000). The first case is not due to ethnicity, while the second sees immigrant students exposed to the same linguistic input and taught together in the same classroom. As regards the third factor, it has been shown that a large gap between L1 and L2 does not prevent successful L2 acquisition by immigrants (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

As we know, the first element of inclusion and integration for migrants, part of a long and complicated process, is learning a language, in this case, L2 Italian, provided mainly by volunteers and associations who sometimes do not know precisely how to proceed. It is essential to bear in mind that it cannot be assumed that teaching an L2/LS is easy and that most of the time, this task is entrusted to untrained volunteers or retired teachers who do not know how to get started, or behave in class like if they were teaching Italian students. What needs to be done is to teach the language from a different perspective, which allows immigrants to speak Italian as quickly as possible, to give them a "linguistic survival kit" to work with daily. Unfortunately, this is rare, and as lessons can often focus on Italian grammar, in most cases, immigrant students decide to drop out. Since immigrants need to gain confidence in the target language, it should be necessary to involve all newcomers in a complete immersion trying to keep their attention and aim to build relationships based on trust. "Intelligence must be warmed up," argued Simon Weil, who taught illiterate workers for a long time. Human warmth and goodwill are the keys to facilitating the learning process, and a good teacher should think about creating the right atmosphere in the classroom. A classroom in which there is trust and cohesion, a safe environment in which the immigrant student is free to approach the language and to play with it, in which he feels like the protagonist of a great adventure on how to learn and express himself in a new way, free to make mistakes and focused on building new relationships with peers.

From a methodological point of view, the communicative method is considered the most appropriate among L2 Italian teachers, where the primary attention is paid to the spoken language and its structure linked to immediate communication, the main objective of the migrant. The aim is to make him aware of the importance of the target language in the daily routine and of the problem to overcome.

In the learning process, children are facilitated. After all, their way of approaching a language is different from that of adults, above all because they proceed by natural steps, imitating their parents or siblings orally. On the contrary, what is generally expected of migrant adolescents, young adults, or adults is that they acquire the language as quickly as possible, often without regard to their linguistic origin or, worse, their illiteracy.

According to Portes and Rumbaut (2005) there are three different outcomes of the assimilation process. First, young migrants learn the language and culture of the host group to the detriment of their own (upward assimilation). The second (assimilation downwards), identical to the first, involves their inclusion within marginal and deviant groups in the host country, and the educational role fails to improve their condition (Donati, 2009). Finally, the third result is the most advisable, understood as maintaining a solid link with the traditions and the ethnic group of origin (selective assimilation).

## 2. Objectives

It has been observed that the interaction and interdependence between L1 and L2 can be paramount in determining migrants' language choices. In addition, a rapid process of learning and acquisition of the target language could facilitate encounters with different cultures, encouraging integration and inclusion. During this process, two variables come into play that can make a difference in L2 learning: motivation to pass the B1 citizenship exam for reference documentation (according to Italian regulations) and anxiety about not being up to the task of adequately learning the language to foster full autonomy. Based on these premises, the research objectives were: - to measure the level of motivation toward learning Italian and toward Italians; - measure the level of anxiety within Italian L2 classes.

## 3. Methods

The type of research was quantitative, and the data matrix allowed the analysis tool (histogram) to calculate individual and cumulative frequencies for a range of cells and classes of data. In addition, the research involved the online administration of a questionnaire through google forms.

### 3.1. Participants

The present study analysed data from 30 migrants who participated in an online survey. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 50 years. Socio-demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

*Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of participants (N=30).*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>n (%)</b>
<b>Sex</b>	
Female	50
Male	47
Non binary	3
<b>Nationality</b>	
Algeria	7
Bangladesh	13
Ethiopia	3
Gambia	10
Ghana	20
Lybia	7
Morocco	13
Nigeria	23
Sri Lanka	3
<b>Age</b>	
20-25	40
25-30	17
30-35	3
35-40	7
40-45	7
45-50	27
<b>Education</b>	
Primary school	10
Secondary school	43
College	17
University	30
<b>How many languages they speak</b>	
1	30
2	40
3	23
4	0
More than 4 languages	7
<b>What languages they speak</b>	
Arabic	9
English	51
French	13
German	10
Italian	5
Portuguese	3
Spanish	9

### 3.2. Measures and procedures

Participants were recruited through a "snowballing" process, presenting the research project in an educational and community setting while disseminating a link to access an online questionnaire. It was explained to participants that the research involved neither risks nor benefits but only a cognitive purpose of the phenomenon. The study involved the online administration of a questionnaire using the attitudinal/motivational test battery (Gardner, 1985), using the Italian language as the focus in all items. The questionnaire was divided into two macro sections: 1) the role of attitudes and motivation 2) the intensity of motivation. The first section comprised 48 items, as the 6 subscales provided by the broad scale were used, and went to measure: Attitudes toward Italian; Interest in foreign languages; Attitudes toward Italians; Attitudes toward learning Italian; Integrative orientation; Instrumental orientation; Italian lesson anxiety. The response mode included a 7-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The second section included 9 multiple-choice items.

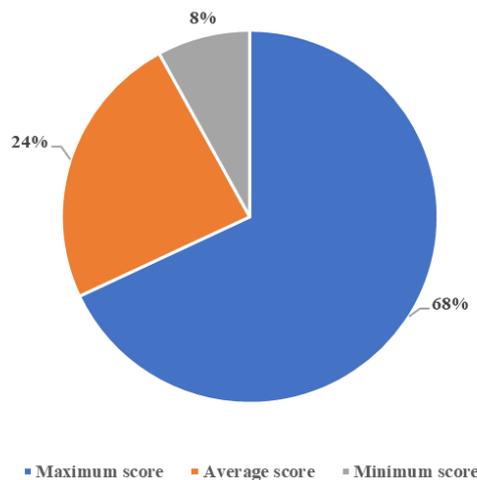
### 3.2. Results

The main results in the first category show that most of the participants expressed a positive attitude toward learning Italian (learning Italian is great or I really enjoy learning Italian - 47% strongly agree; I love learning Italian, 53% strongly agree) recognizing that Italian is an essential part of the school curriculum (40%). Confirming our hypothesis to the statement, I hate Italian 77% of participants expressed a total degree of disagreement. Participants said a high sense of integration toward the Italian language, for example (studying Italian can be essential for me to because it will allow me to be more comfortable with Italian 60% or studying Italian can be important for me because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people 70%), this could show how important it is for migrants to learn and know the Italian language not only as a vehicle to meet their own needs and demands but also to dispel clichés (migrants do not want to learn Italian) and the creation of small ghettos within which migrant communities do not open up to the culture of the country of arrival.

Feelings of anxiety and embarrassment emerged in the circumscribed moments within the classroom during Italian language learning. For example, some participants expressed a high level of anxiety when they have to voluntarily answer questions asked by the teacher (27%) or when they talk about themselves in the classroom (33%), or feel that some of their classmates speak Italian better than they do (40%).

Regarding the second category (intensity of motivation), the result was obtained by adding up all the answers of each participant to measure the degree of motivation. Precisely, the items referred to specific attitudes that the sample investigated activates in acquiring and learning the language and using other communication channels (TV, radio) to know the Italian language better. The results revealed high motivation towards learning the Italian language (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of choice based on the score of all questions (motivation intensity scale).



### 4. Discussion

Our results confirmed all our hypotheses. The acquisition and learning processes represent two paths that are not always easy to manage for all migrants who are about to learn a foreign language. In any case, several factors drive our target audience, individual characteristics, family factors, and social factors; a common element often accompanies these: the experience of the migratory journey that

involves a clash, and thus a full awareness, between expectations and the real one, encounters in the host country, in other words, what is called cultural shock (Oberg, 1960).

The motivations of migrants are related more generally to the whole linguistic, social and political sphere that arises from the use of L2 in a concrete and satisfying way to the multiple possibilities of investment for a new life, and, finally, motivation may be directed at the desire to integrate into Italian society. The characteristics of migrants' reasons for learning Italian L2 could point not only to single needs (documents, hospital, etc.) but to cultural motivations, to motivations that form an articulated motivational, helpful structure to understand better the way of teaching Italian L2, to deepen more and more the connections between the causes present and the importance of understanding how they are related to the teaching of Italian L2. The incentives identified through the survey go beyond the immediate and unambiguous need to work, touching on the need to communicate and study within diverse emotional conditions for learning Italian L2. Learning Italian as a second language is not purely instrumental but is related to the pleasure of learning or the desire to be independent. Circumstantial factors, such as difficulty obtaining a document, can negatively affect motivation, weakening it.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, as teachers, trainers, and pedagogues, it would be appropriate to mitigate and facilitate this learning process by promoting a serene and non-judgmental environment to encourage language learning in a perspective of active listening and intercultural empathy. Therefore, try to intervene so that the acquisition of the new language is seen as an instrument of autonomy in the decision-making processes of migrants and not just as a step to obtain the documents required by current legislation, and therefore a mutual bond that can guarantee mastery of the second language combined with personal skills. Thus, the figure of the teacher who can feed, with his competence and sensitivity, the interest in language learning remains central.

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