

**The Impact of Age, Input and Media on Second  
Language Acquisition of Italian in Malta**



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## **ABSTRACT**

The Italian language and culture have held important roles in Malta in the past and both Italian and Sicilian have influenced heavily the language(s) spoken on the islands. Italian in Malta was especially widespread in the 70s and 80s, which is when Italian television programmes reached their peak popularity amongst the Maltese. However, this trend started changing after 1993, when cable TV was introduced in Malta providing access to television programmes from all over the world. In addition, the media today is mediated via the Internet, and the use English through this medium has taken spaces formerly occupied by foreign languages, including Italian .

This research aims at investigating the role that the media has in the acquisition of Italian as a second language in Malta. The variables 'age', 'formal onset' and 'type of input received' (guided, spontaneous) will be analysed together with frequency of exposure to media in the L2. The interplay of these variables will shed more light on the field of second language acquisition of Italian in Malta. The first hypothesis is that age and formal onset *do* have an effect on L2 Italian proficiency because an early exposure to the second language not only allows learners to have more opportunities to practise the L2, but it can also act as a prime-mover to study the second language formally. The second hypothesis is that spontaneous learners, as opposed to guided ones, will demonstrate higher spoken and comprehension skills in L2 Italian.

Data was collected by distributing a language background questionnaire that was completed by 377 Maltese respondents. Eighty participants were chosen on a sub-sample basis after having filled in the language background questionnaire. The respondents were asked to participate in three tasks: an informal interview held in Italian, an oral picture-description task in Italian and a written translation task from Italian into either Maltese or English.

Results show that while age and formal onset are not statistically significant for high proficiency in the L2, early exposure to the second language leads to better performance in the assigned tasks; participants who had an early exposure to Italian via television obtained high scores both in the picture-story task and in the translation. With regard to the type of input received, there was not a significant difference in performance between the guided and spontaneous learners of Italian L2, as they both followed similar L2 acquisitional processes.

*To my family and to my partner, for the encouragement they showed me throughout this journey  
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## **Table of Contents**

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1. The Maltese Historical Background.....	1
1.2. Italian L2 Input in Malta.....	2
1.3. Studies on Italian Input in Malta.....	3
1.4. Research Hypotheses and Objectives .....	4
1.5. Terminology.....	5
1.6. Overview of the Research.....	5
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	7
2.1. Introduction.....	7
2.2. The Role of Age in Second Language Acquisition.....	8
2.2.1. Research in Support of the Critical Period Hypothesis.....	9
2.2.2. Research Presenting a Critical Stance towards the Critical Period Hypothesis.....	11
2.3. The Role of Input, Exposure and Setting in Second Language Acquisition.....	15
2.3.1. Input and Media.....	20
2.3.2. Italian L2 Input via the Media in Malta.....	23
2.4. Interlanguage.....	26
2.5. Key Findings.....	28
2.6. Relevance to my Research.....	28
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	30
3.1. Research Objectives.....	30
3.2. Data Collection.....	30
3.2.1. The Questionnaire.....	30
3.2.2. Collecting Language Samples.....	31
3.2.3. Task One: The Informal Interview.....	31
3.2.4. Task Two: The Picture-Story.....	32
3.2.5. Task Three: The Translation.....	32
3.3. The Evaluation Criteria.....	33
3.4. Data Analysis.....	39
Chapter 4: Results.....	41

4.1. Introduction.....	41
4.2. The Results of the Questionnaire.....	41
4.3. The Results of the Second Part of the Research.....	46
4.3.1. Evaluation.....	46
4.3.2. General Findings.....	47
4.3.3. The Picture-Story Task.....	50
4.3.4. The Translation Task.....	56
4.4. Age, Input and Formal Onset in relation to Performance.....	61
4.4.1. Age.....	61
4.4.2. Formal Onset.....	62
4.4.3. Guided or Spontaneous Input.....	63
4.4.4. Concluding Remarks .....	64
4.5. Significant Predictors of High Performance in L2 Italian.....	65
4.5.1. Types of Analyses.....	65
4.5.2. Significant Predictors for a High Score in the Picture-Story Task .....	66
4.5.3. Significant Predictors for a High Score in the Translation Task.....	66
4.5.4. Analysing Significant Predictors in relation to Performance.....	68
4.5.5. Concluding Remarks.....	72
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	73
5.1. The Questionnaire.....	73
5.2. The Picture-Story.....	76
5.3. The Translation.....	79
5.4. Exposure to the Media.....	81
5.5. Input, Formal Onset and Age.....	82
5.6. Discussion in light of the Critical Period Hypothesis.....	85
5.7. Concluding Remarks.....	87
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	89
6.1. Concluding Observations.....	89
6.2. Limitations of my research and Suggestions for Future Studies.....	91
Glossary.....	93

References.....	96
Appendix A.....	106
A1. The Language Background Questionnaire (English).....	106
A1(b). The Language Background Questionnaire (Maltese).....	116
A2. Informal Interview Questions.....	126
A3. The Images for the Picture-Story task.....	127
A4. The Translation.....	130
A4(1). The Words.....	130
A4(2). The Phrases.....	130
A4(3). The Simple Sentences.....	131
A4(4). The Compound Sentences.....	132
A4(5). The Complex Sentences.....	133
A4(6). The Idioms.....	134
A5(1). The Evaluation Criteria for the Picture-Story.....	135
A5(2). The Evaluation Criteria for the Translation.....	136
Appendix B.....	137
Figure A: Participants' Sex.....	137
Figure B: Participants' Occupations.....	138
Figure C: Participants' Favourite Italian TV Programmes.....	139
Figure D: Participants' Favourite Italian music/songs/artists.....	140
Figure E: Participants' Preferred Italian Reading Material.....	141
Figure F: Circumstances in which Participants speak Italian at Present.....	142
Figure G(a). Participants' Performance in the Picture-Story based on Age.....	143
Figure G(b). Participants' Performance in the Translation based on Age.....	143
Figure H(a). Participants' Performance in the Picture-Story based on ITA TV habits in Primary.....	144
Figure H(b). Participants' Performance in the Translation based on ITA TV habits in Primary.....	144
Figure I(a). Participants' Performance in the Picture-Story based on ITA TV habits in Secondary..	145
Figure I(b). Participants' Performance in the Translation based on ITA TV habits in Secondary.....	145
Figure J(a). Participants' Performance in the Picture-Story based on Present ITA TV habits.....	146
Figure J(b). Participants' Performance in the Translation based on Present ITA TV habits.....	146
Figure K(a). Performance in the Picture-Story based on Italian Speaking habits at Present.....	147
Figure K(b). Performance in the Translation based on Italian Speaking habits at Present.....	147



Figure L(a). Performance in the Picture-Story based on Accessing ITA Online Resources.....	148
Figure L(b). Performance in the Translation based on Accessing ITA Online Resources.....	148
Appendix C.....	149
Table C(a). Picture-Story Transcripts of Evaluation Range '1' across Age groups.....	149
Table C(b). Picture-Story Transcripts of Evaluation Range '2' across Age groups.....	150
Table C(c). Picture-Story Transcripts of Evaluation Range '3' across Age groups.....	151
Table C(d). Picture-Story Transcripts of Evaluation Range '4' across Age groups.....	152
Table C(e). Picture-Story Transcripts of Evaluation Range '5' across Age groups.....	153
Table C(f). Transcripts of Participants who scored '0-5' in the Translation across Age groups.....	154
Table C(g). Transcripts of Participants who scored '6-7' in the Translation across Age groups.....	155
Table C(h). Transcripts of Participants who scored '8-10' in the Translation across Age groups.....	156

## **List of Tables**

<u>Table 1</u> — Maltese, English and Italian TV habits at present.....	42
<u>Table 2</u> — Participants' Self-assessment for Maltese, English and Italian.....	45
<u>Table 3</u> — High spoken and comprehension skills in Italian according to the four age groups.....	45
<u>Table 4</u> — Frequency of verbs and sentences used across the Evaluation Ranges in the Picture-Story.....	49
<u>Table 5</u> — Number of words, phrases, sentences, and idioms translated correctly across the three scores in the Translation.....	50
<u>Table 6</u> — Performance of selected participants who scored '0-5' in the Translation task.....	57
<u>Table 7</u> — Performance of selected participants who scored '6-7' in the Translation task.....	59
<u>Table 8</u> — Performance of selected participants who scored 8-10' in the Translation task.....	61
<u>Table 9</u> — Performance based on Age.....	62
<u>Table 10</u> — Performance based on Formal Onset.....	63
<u>Table 11</u> — Performance based on Guided or Spontaneous Input.....	63
<u>Table 12</u> — The most significant predictors for high proficiency in the two tasks.....	67
<u>Table 13</u> — High frequency L2 media habits across the various levels of proficiency obtained in the picture-story and in the translation task.....	72

## 1. Introduction

### **1.1. The Maltese historical background**

The history of Malta is rich and diverse and it has certainly had a major influence on the languages spoken on the island throughout the centuries. The Maltese language belongs to the Arabic branch of the Semitic language family the roots of which date back to the span of time between 870 and 1090 a.C, when the Arabs took over Malta introducing their vernacular, which eventually replaced any pre-existing language (Brincat, 2003). After the Arabs, in 1091 a.C the Normans took over Malta until 1194 a.C and during these years the island re-approached the Romance world. In fact, starting from this historical period, the influence of Italian started increasing until it became the standard written medium together with Latin (Cassola, 1998). Another radical linguistic change in Malta happened during the British colonial period (1800-1964), which was when English was introduced to the islands, eventually replacing Italian as the country's official language. During the British colonisation, the Maltese language started to gain more importance too as it gradually developed its own writing system and eventually it became the official language of Malta together with English, a situation which has remained so until the present day.

At present, Maltese is widely used as a spoken variety and, within formal domains, it is not used as a written medium as much as English is. Maltese is the language of daily conversations, television, news, radio, mass etc. It is also used as a *scritto-parlato* variety, as evidenced by its strong presence on social media. Governmental and legal documentation are usually written in both languages, in English and in Maltese. These statements are also confirmed by the National Statistics Office (NSO) that carried out a survey in November-December 2020 on the use of Maltese and English in Malta in different social contexts. The survey, which was devised and commissioned by the *National Council for the Maltese language*, was based on a sample of 1,025 Maltese citizens between the ages of 18 to 80. The number of male and female participants was equally distributed amongst the three age groups (18-24, 25-54, 55-80). The participants to the survey were residents of all regions of Malta, including Gozo, however, a larger number of individuals comes from the Northern Harbour area (134 males and 134 females; with an average of 75.4 males and 76 females coming from the Southern Harbour area, South-east, West, North and Gozo). According to this survey, Maltese is the first language of 97% of the population, which represents a high percentage, given the strong presence and influence of English in Malta. This result is in line with a previous survey carried out by Sciriha and Vassallo in 2001, according to which Maltese was the first language of 98.6% of the population. The survey also shows that Maltese and English are not in conflict or in competition with each other, but they are both used in different situations or contexts.

Results of the survey show that respondents have expressed their preference for Maltese when speaking to their children, partners, parents, colleagues at work and friends, as well as when having telephone calls with government departments or other companies, when listening to the radio, when following the news, sports programmes or dramas on TV, when writing instant messages on social media, when receiving a leaflet at home in both languages, when reading printed or online newspapers and when reading bilingual websites. On the other hand, respondents have expressed preference for English when they listen to music, write formal and informal letters or emails, write cards, read books, use ATMs and read ingredients on a product when it is given in two languages.

## **1.2. Italian L2 Input in Malta**

Malta is bilingual, however, the linguistic situation is not that easy to define, as Italian has had and still has a significant role in Malta. The important role that Italian has had in Malta in recent years and that it continues to have (although presently, to a lesser extent) is mainly due to the media, thanks to which access and exposure to Italian culture and language have been made easy. Up until the beginning of the 1990s, Italian TV programmes, films and telefilms were highly followed by Maltese nationals, since at the time there was only one local state-owned TV channel (Television Malta) and the rest of the channels received via antenna were Italian. Things started to change gradually starting from 1993, which corresponds to the year when cable TV was introduced and through which the Maltese could access channels and programmes from all over the world, not just from Italy. According to IL-KUNSILL NAZZJONALI TAL-ILSIEN MALTI (2021), at the beginning of the 90s the share of Italian TV channels in Malta was higher than 50% but in 2000 it went down to 26,6% and in 2016, it decreased again to 17,6%. These facts coincide with the gradual 'ageing' of TV audience, with a very small number of young Maltese nationals who still follow Italian TV programmes nowadays. The younger generations, in fact, tend to access online news mainly in English and they also tend to interact on social media using either or both Maltese and English (Caruana, 2021:14).

People in Malta though, are not just exposed to Italian through the media: formal instruction plays an important role too. In Maltese schools, both Maltese and English are studied at Primary and Secondary level, but in Secondary school, students have the possibility of choosing one or two other foreign languages to learn. In the past, a number of Maltese Secondary school students would opt for Italian as a 'second' foreign language, starting to study the language at the age of 13, rather than 11; yet others, who would opt not to study Italian at school, would take some private lessons in Italian prior to sitting for their Secondary Education Exam at the age of 16. This situation

has now changed significantly — very few students opt to add an additional foreign language to the one they start studying in Year 7 (previously, Form 1), at 11 years of age. According to the SEC Examinations Statistical Report of 2020, there were 5,225 candidates who registered for the Main Session and 67.5% of them opted to study *one* foreign language, with Italian being the most popular foreign language choice among students (1,139 students chose Italian). In addition to that, it is also reported that since 2004, the number of candidates opting for one foreign language (instead of two) has increased from approximately 50% in 2004 to 70% in 2020 and the number of candidates choosing to study *two* foreign languages (or more) has decreased from approximately 30% in 2004 to 10% in 2020. Finally, it is also important to highlight that according to the MC Examinations Statistical Report of 2020, Italian's popularity has decreased quite significantly since 2008, both for Advanced and Intermediate matriculations, whereas the popularity of Maltese and English is increasing, especially at Advanced level. Exposure to Italian has thus decreased, and as a consequence so has competence in it (Caruana, 2021). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that thanks to the regular and constant input received from television, there was (and possibly, there still is) a general idea amongst youngsters that Italian could be an 'easy' language to learn (Caruana, 2007:277). Therefore, Maltese nationals do have the opportunity to be exposed to Italian through TV channels and other means of communication, especially nowadays with social media, instant messaging apps and the internet; but they also have the opportunity to learn Italian at school where, of course, acquisition will not be spontaneous, but formal and guided. In fact, all Maltese nationals have the possibility of accessing Italian resources both at school and online (or in their personal lives), but it is only when exposure to a foreign language happens as a result of the free choice of a learner that spontaneous acquisition may happen effectively (Caruana, 2021:13).

### **1.3. Studies on Italian Input in Malta**

Malta is an ideal place for investigating the role of foreign language media input given its relationship with the Italian language and culture. In fact, there have been a number of studies which examined this relationship and which will be further discussed in the next chapters (Caruana, 1996, 2003, 2006, 2021; Caruana, Ghia and Pavesi, 2014; to mention a few). The results of these studies show that the more an individual is exposed to a foreign language through the media, especially TV, the higher the level of comprehension and spoken production acquired in the long run. The focus of these studies has mainly been exposure to television, as television offers audiovisual aid through which the learners-viewers can better comprehend input and transform it into intake.

#### 1.4. Research Hypotheses and Objectives

The aim of this research is to analyse the effects that age, formal onset, type of input (guided or spontaneous) and exposure to media in the L2 have on second language acquisition of Italian as an L2 in Malta. 'Age' is an important variable to take into consideration when analysing Italian second language proficiency in Malta because it is hypothesised in this research that the Maltese nationals who were just children in the 1960s (when Italian television programmes started becoming popular in Malta) had an earlier and more frequent exposure to Italian television programmes, compared to the Maltese nationals who are children, teenagers or young adults *now* and who have a more limited or reduced exposure to the media in Italian. Moreover, given that an early exposure to the L2 can act as prime-mover (see 2.3.1) for studying the second language formally, 'formal onset' (intended here as the class in which participants started learning Italian in classroom settings) is also an important variable to analyse in relation to the acquisition of Italian as a second language. Another interesting factor to take into account is the type of input received (guided or spontaneous), particularly in relation to the acquisitional process of L2 Italian. Finally, the amount of exposure to the media in the L2 is also important to analyse in relation to second language acquisition of Italian in Malta, as the types of media that nowadays people have access to, are different from the media that people were exposed to in the past years. For instance, whereas television programmes and radio channels were the preferred types of media in the past (although they are still used in the present days), people today can access information, download books, chat or video-call people via the internet.

The first hypothesis is that older Maltese nationals who have received a copious amount of Italian input from television from an early age will reach better levels of competence in Italian compared to those who received L2 input at a later stage in life. The rationale behind this first hypothesis is that the earlier a person is exposed to a language, the more opportunities that person would have had to improve both receptive and productive language skills throughout the lifetime. The second hypothesis is that Maltese nationals who have acquired Italian as an L2 *mainly* spontaneously (through television, at work etc...) will show higher levels of competence compared to those who acquired Italian *mainly* formally (guided instruction, evening classes etc...) when it comes to L2 spoken proficiency and L2 comprehension. The rationale behind this second hypothesis is that typically, when L2 learning is *mainly* restricted to classroom settings, students do not have the same opportunity of using a second or foreign language as productively and spontaneously as they would have outside the classroom, perhaps within the L2 community itself.

## **1.5. Terminology**

As already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, statistics show that the Maltese language is used (and understood) by 97% of the population, who also understands and uses English depending on the context or situation; for this reason, I will refer to Maltese locals as 'bilinguals'. The definitions of bilingualism that I am adopting can be found in Wei (2000:22), who defines the phenomenon as 'the alternate use of two or more languages by the same individual' and in Grosjean (2008:10), who defines bilinguals as those people who use two or more languages in their everyday lives. However it is important to keep in mind that, as stated in Bhatia and Ritchie (2013), bilinguals are just one type of 'multi-language users' who use only two languages in their daily life. In fact, 'multi-language users' are defined as follows:

'[...] individuals or groups of people who obtain communicative competence in more than one language, with various degrees of proficiency in oral and/or written forms, in order to interact with speakers of one or more languages in a given society. (p.112)'

To refer to the Italian being spoken or used by Maltese nationals, I will use the term 'Second Language' or 'L2' because the term refers to any language learned after learning the L1, irrespective of whether it is the second, third or fourth language being learned. In addition, the term 'L2' refers to both acquisition that takes place in formal, classroom settings, as well as to acquisition that takes place in more 'natural' environments (Gass and Selinker, 2008:7).

As for the type of input received, I will refer to learning Italian mainly in institutional settings or online classrooms as 'guided' acquisition, and I will refer to the acquisition of Italian happened mainly through the media as 'spontaneous' acquisition.

Finally, I will use the term 'formal onset' to refer to the class in which participants started learning Italian as a second language in institutional and formal settings. However, a formal onset of learning the L2 does not exclude the possibility that participants were exposed to Italian earlier in their lives, through television or other forms of L2 media.

## **1.6. Overview of the Research**

In the following chapters I will present a review of previous studies done in the fields of age, input and exposure in relation to Second Language Acquisition and I will also discuss these studies' theoretical backgrounds. Next, I will introduce the current research by discussing the methodology chosen and used to carry out the research. A detailed analysis of the results obtained will follow. After

describing the findings of my research, I will present a general discussion in which I evaluate and interpret the results described in the previous chapter, I will highlight what I believe are the limitations of my research and I will comment on potential further studies.



## 2. Literature Review

### **2.1. Introduction**

In this chapter I will introduce past research which has investigated the topics of age and input in relation to second language acquisition and ultimate L2 attainment. Given that the extensive research has yielded mixed results with regard to understanding the specific role of age and input in second language acquisition, this literature review will be divided into two main sections.

The first section deals with research findings in the area of age, which includes biological age, onset of acquisition and also age of arrival in a specific country where the L2 is spoken as a native language. In this first section, I will present arguments both in favour of the CPH (Critical Period Hypothesis) and against the CPH, in order to have a generic picture of the current findings in literature; this research, however, is in line with the idea that age per se cannot be the only variable which determines high proficiency in a second language and that it must be studied together with other interconnected variables, such as quality and quantity of input, exposure and other social and psychological factors. For this reason, the second section will deal with research findings in the area of L2 input. In this section, I will present studies which are both in line with the idea that formal (or guided) input is more beneficial than informal (or spontaneous) input, and also studies which claim that in order to achieve communicative autonomy in a second language, both spontaneous input and guided instruction are necessary. However, because the aim of this research is to investigate the effects of input originating from the media (e.g. from television, from online resources, from music, podcasts, etc...), another subsection dealing with research findings in this field was included, specifically, research that has been carried out in Malta.

The current research is based on the idea that age *does* have a significant role in second language acquisition, particularly when it comes to early exposure to an L2, because the younger the learner, the more exposure to L2 input s/he will have had during his/her lifetime, therefore, the more opportunities to practise the language, to negotiate for meaning and to receive feedback. However, it is clear from this idea that age needs to be examined concurrently with other variables, in this case, type of input received (guided or spontaneous), quantity and quality of input, and exposure to the second language (not only exposure via the media, but also active exposure, in the sense of speaking the language and actively interacting in it). In fact, this research is also based on the idea that receiving both guided and spontaneous input is beneficial for high L2 proficiency; however, it is also believed that frequent and copious exposure to the input from the media, together with guided instruction, will result in higher L2 spoken proficiency and comprehension.

## 2.2. The Role of Age in Second Language Acquisition

The role of age in Second Language Acquisition has been discussed for decades, including the debate over the existence of a Critical Period slowing down or inhibiting completely the language learning process after a certain age. The Critical Period Hypothesis was originally put forward by Penfield and Roberts in 1959 but it became significantly popular with Corder in 1967 during his talk on 'The Significance of Learners' Errors' (cited in Bialystok and Hakuta, 2003). According to the CPH, there should be an age or a maturational stage at which language-learning either stops, making native-likeness in a second language an impossible goal to achieve, or really slows down the mechanisms of language learning. In other words, the CPH entails that in order to ensure mastery of a language, there must be a high level of preparedness for language learning within the 'critical time' or else, the lack of preparedness to learn a language within the critical period would result in the impossibility of achieving mastery in the L2 at the offset of the Critical Period (Bialystok and Hakuta, 2003).

However, up to this day, there has been very little agreement concerning the establishment of a specific stage or age at which language learning potentially changes or starts slowing down; and if a specific offset age exists, there has still been little agreement with regard to the reasons why a maturational change should take place when learning a second language (Long and Granena, 2012). In the literature, there are many studies which support the existence of a CPH (Abrahamson and Hyltenstam, 2000; DeKeyser, 2010; Flege, 2019) and there are also many studies which challenge this theoretical perspective (Birdsong, 2009; 2014; 2018; Bialystok and Hakuta, 2009; Singleton and Leśniewska, 2021). However, even though the correlation between age and L2 ultimate attainment seems to be strong, other researchers have claimed that age-related differences in ultimate L2 attainment cannot support the CPH on their own and that these differences might actually be due to other variables (Keeley, 2016; Bialystok and Kroll, 2018), such as individual differences (Birdsong, 2018), time spent speaking a language or using it actively on a regular basis (Bialystok, 1997), working memory, attention and cognitive capacities (Bialystok and Hakuta, 2003), motivation and aptitude (Long and Granena 2012) and also amount and quality of input, conditions under which the L2 is encountered and personal orientations (Singleton, 2011). Moreover, there are studies that have investigated the possibility that a critical period might exist for separate domains or aspects of language (Granena and Long, 2013; Hartshorn et al., 2018) or for language-specific features and universal features differently (Johnson, 1988).

### 2.2.1. Research in support of the CPH

In a research by Johnson (1988), there is evidence for the existence of a maturational stage after which the capacity for language learning undergoes a general decline. The aim of Johnson's research was to understand whether maturational constraints only affected language-specific properties or also language universals. Language universals refer to those properties of grammar which are applicable to all languages in the world and which are innate, independent of the external environment (Chomsky, 1965). Language-specific properties are also allowable in all human languages, however, these are not innate and they have to be learned (e.g. English *wh*-question formation, lexical sub-categorisation etc). In this research (Johnson, 1988), three experiments were conducted in order to determine whether the Critical Period affects only language universals or also language-specific features. The first experiment required only participants who were late learners of English and whose L1 was Chinese, a language which differs from English in that the subjacency principle<sup>1</sup> (Chomsky, 1973; White, 1985) does not apply to *wh*-questions in Chinese. The participants had to perform a Grammaticality Judgment Test (GJT). The results of the first experiment showed that in late learners, the subjacency principle was victim of maturational decline. The second experiment still included L1 Chinese speakers, but this time the age of arrival was extended to also incorporate younger participants. For this study, the age of arrival ranged from four years old to 16 years old (post-puberty). In this second experiment, too, subjacency showed to decline as age of arrival increased. The third experiment compared Chinese L1 participants to Spanish L1 participants, in order to understand whether the results yielded so far regarding the subjacency principle were generalisable to all languages. Even in this case, the subjacency principle proved to be subject to maturational constraints even if the subjacency principle was already known and practised every day in the Spanish language by the Spanish L1 participants. It is worth mentioning though, that the Spanish participants scored higher than their Chinese counterparts, suggesting that there might be the possibility that the subjacency principle present in the L1 can help applying the same principle in an L2. All in all, this research suggests that the subjacency principle *does* decline as age of arrival or age of acquisition increase; moreover, both language universals and language-specific properties seem to suffer when it comes to late learners. The findings confirm the existence of a critical period that affects both language-specific structures and structures that are governed by universal principles (Johnson, 1988:134).

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<sup>1</sup> The principle known as subjacency places restrictions on movement operations, which means that subjacency limits the number of 'bounding nodes' that a moved element (in this case, *wh*-words) can cross. These 'bounding nodes' are likely to vary from language to language.

In another study, DeKeyser (2010) investigates the relationship between age of arrival in a country where the L2 is spoken and ultimate attainment in the L2. His participants in the study were Russian L1 natives who moved to Canada or to Israel to improve their languages skills in English and Hebrew, respectively. DeKeyser (2010) hypothesised that, if the CPH holds, then the slope of age of arrival and ultimate attainment would not be linear, but would show a marked flattening between adolescence and adulthood. He divided his participants in three main age groups based on age of arrival: the first group was formed by Russians whose age of arrival in another country was 18 years or less; the second group was formed by Russians who arrived at their destination between the ages of 18 and 40; and the third group was formed by Russians whose age of arrival was over 40. In this study, the hypothesis was confirmed and the slope of age of arrival and ultimate attainment showed a steep decline at around age 12, which coincides with puberty, therefore DeKeyser's results are in line with the Critical Period Hypothesis. In this same study, DeKeyser also explored aptitude and the results showed that aptitude towards an L2 was a strong predictor of ultimate attainment in the second age group, therefore for participants who were between 18 and 40 years old when they arrived in their L2-speaking country. It must be mentioned though, that a limitation to this study was that the sample size was too small to draw more general and universal conclusions.

In a more recent study, Dollmann et al. (2020) found out that foreign accentedness was more pronounced in late learners who arrived in the destination country after the age of ten years old, and even more marked if the age of arrival was after the age of 16 years old. Participants whose age of arrival ranged between four and nine years old were rated (by native speakers) as having a less pronounced foreign accent compared to their counterparts who arrived after the age of ten; and the participants who arrived in the destination country before the age of four, were rated as having a similar accent to second and third generation immigrants, therefore an accent that was considered to be 'near-native' (Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam 2009). However, Dollman et al., (2020) pointed out that in this study, arguments regarding the Critical Period Hypothesis only related to implicit, spontaneous second language acquisition, that requires no conscious reflection about the mechanisms of the new language. To conclude, even though the existence of a critical period or offset in relation to accentedness of speech was found to be at around age ten, the study expands on further possibilities that could compensate successful second language learning for late learners, namely language attitude, general cognitive skills and a language environment with offers abundant and intensive contact with L2 native speakers that can potentially compensate for the disadvantages caused by a late start in L2 acquisition.

Overall, then, there seems to be a general agreement amongst scholars that what is important is not the biological age per se, but the onset age of acquisition, i.e. the age at which L2 acquisition commences. When children are exposed to an L2 and they start acquiring the language at a very young age, their progress might give them more opportunities to receive copious L2 input throughout their life span, therefore they might even have more opportunities to speak and interact in the second language. This view supports the claim 'the younger, the better'.

### **2.2.2. Research presenting a critical stance towards the CPH**

Bialystok (1997) reviewed two small-scale studies from Johnson and Newport (1989) and Johnson (1992) in search for barriers to second language acquisition and she concluded that age of acquisition is not a significant factor compared to exposure and active, regular use of a second language. An additional important factor to keep in mind when researching proficiency in an L2 is the correspondence between language structures in the L1 and in the L2. In fact, according to Bialystok's review, learners of a second language master language similarities first and struggle more when they encounter language differences or linguistic structures in the L2 that are not present in their L1. In other words, difficulties emerge for everyone, irrespective of age, with the only difference that older learners usually extend category boundaries from their L1 to incorporate the L2 and younger learners usually create new categories to represent the L2 differently from the L1. The result of this would simply be that often, older learners wrongly extend L1 rules to express themselves in the L2 (such as syntax and phonology rules), whereas children or younger learners usually create new linguistic knowledge (Piaget, 1958, cited in Bialystok, 1997). The outcome is that children do appear to be better learners, but that does not necessarily mean there is a maturational constraint. It is more appropriate to say that their differences in proficiency are simply due to stylistic differences in learning an L2, therefore general cognitive differences.

In a later study, Bialystok (2011) investigated the relationship between onset age of bilingualism (intended as the age at which both languages start being used on a daily basis) and enhancement of cognitive control, which Bialystok (2011:588) refers to in terms of managing attention to the two available systems, namely that of the L1 and of the L2, and in terms of working memory. The participants in her study were English monolinguals and bilingual adults. The latter were then subdivided into early bilinguals (those who acquired an L2 before ten years old) and late bilinguals (those who acquired an L2 after ten years old). In Bialystok's study, the participants indicated their level of proficiency in both languages, they gave an estimate of the proportion of use of both languages on a daily basis and finally, they also indicated whether they had received guided or natu-

realists education to learn the L2. According to the results of this study, those participants who were late bilinguals and those who were dominant bilinguals ended up performing like monolinguals on executive control tasks (i.e. the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Task, the Cattell Cultural Fair Intelligence Test, the Spatial Span Subtest from the Wechsler Memory Scale and the Flanker task) but they performed more poorly on English proficiency tests. For this reason, the study does not reveal or confirm the existence of a critical period for L2 acquisition, because cognitive control seemed to be solid in all participants. What actually made the difference in proficiency tests were other variables, such as an early age of becoming bilingual and the continuity of a bilingual experience. This study shows that the age at which the L2 starts to be used regularly, actively and in a continuous manner significantly influences L2 proficiency.

Birdsong (2014) examined the relationship between age and language dominance, in which dominance did not necessarily mean proficiency. By this he implied having greater skills in one or more aspects of a language (e.g. a bilingual individual may be strongly dominant in one language in terms of speech rate, but at the same time display poor knowledge of its inflectional morphology). The aim of his study was to challenge the idea that in a later-learned language, a second language learner can never achieve native-likeness. The results of his study showed that as age increased, a decline in inhibitory control in the non-dominant language relative to the dominant language took place and that age did not diminish the item-naming advantage that balanced bilinguals had over dominant bilinguals (bilinguals who have a dominant language). In fact, age effects were not observed for low-frequency words, as both older and younger bilinguals performed poorly. These results are in line with the idea that there is not a fixed age or stage in life at which it becomes impossible to reach native-likeness in a second language. Instead, there seems to be a general decline in cognitive capacities or performance over age.

Keeley (2016) argues that the existence of a critical period for acquiring additional languages is nothing but a rationalisation, as age-related factors simply constitute challenges which are *correlated* with age, but which also vary greatly according to experience, attitudes and individual traits. In fact, L2 acquisition presents advantages and disadvantages at every age. In his review, Keeley mentions other studies which put the notion of a critical period into contention, such as Marinova-Todd and Marshall-Snow (2000), who refute the claim that adults generally achieve lower proficiency than younger learners; however, they do not attribute their results to biological factors such as age, but to contextual factors. Piller (2002), also cited in Keeley (2016) claims that the most successful L2 users attributed their success to meeting a partner, getting a new job or nurturing a high

interest in a specific culture, country or language. Based on this, Keeley (2016) states that the first counterargument to the Critical Period Hypothesis is that children seem to acquire an L2 better than adults not because of their young age or maturational constraints, but because children, especially in a foreign environment, tend to engage in communication or are forced to engage in communication more often than adults. Secondly, research analysing second language proficiency cannot yet attribute findings to brain functions, such as plasticity, as the exact nature of this and its effects still require further investigation. Thirdly, Keeley claims that research often attributes L2 ultimate-attainment failure to the impossibility of success, whereas in reality, research should be taking into consideration variables such as motivation, time, energy, memory or personal expectations. In his review, he also presents neurological evidence about the benefits of a multilingual brain, with plasticity as an intrinsic property of the nervous system that it is retained throughout our life span (Pascual-Leone et al., 2005). In addition to that, as the brain ages, functionality may either decline, maintain itself or even improve, if 'mental training' is provided (Smith et al., 2009). Research has also concluded that the size and shape of different areas of the brain respond to how they are being used (Mechelli et al., 2004). The human brain is capable of new rapid growth when exposed to external stimuli similar to those that toddlers receive when they learn from the environment (Kwok et al., 2011).

In a later study, Birdsong (2018) affirms that the onset of the critical period, its duration and its terminus cannot be fixed but are variable in nature, as they are manipulated by both experience and biological factors, e.g. onset timing can be delayed by sensory deprivation and the timing of closure of the critical period can depend on molecular brakes, such as myelin (2018:3). Also, bilinguals or learners of an L2 should not be compared to monolinguals to test the effects of age on proficiency, as in the case of early bilinguals, adult L2 learners, late bilinguals or even simultaneous bilinguals there are huge individual differences and variability. In fact, in each case, no bilingual's language can ever fully resemble that of a monolingual speaker. For this reason, Birdsong (2018) claims that variability in speech is not a deficiency or a handicap because both native speakers and non-native speakers show variability in their linguistic structure and bilinguals also show differences in terms of dominance, displaying various degrees of language dominance based on the context in which they are or their life stages. In fact, according to Birdsong, language dominance in bilinguals is dynamic throughout the lifespan.

In a critical review of age-related research, Singleton (2011) affirms that unless the association between ultimate L2 attainment and critical period is loosened, little progress can continue to be

made regarding L2 attainment in general, for the reason that there is still much disagreement and controversy regarding the CPH. Singleton (2011) in fact asks whether there is a specific critical period offset (or terminus) beyond which language acquisition becomes harder, or whether age related differences are due to other variables, such as amount and quantity of input, individual differences or conditions under which an L2 is learned or acquired. Singleton (2011) further questions the appropriateness of using native-speakers as a model for L2 ultimate attainment, even though in many studies (also in studies mentioned above) early L2 acquirers tend to be indistinguishable from native-speakers. According to Cook (2002, cited in Singleton, 2011), there is no reason why a learner's L2 ultimate attainment should be the same as that of a monolingual speaker because L2 speakers should be considered in their own right, not in comparison with native speakers<sup>2</sup>. Singleton also refers to Kellerman (1995) when stating that the degree of distance between L1 and L2 plays a crucial factor in L2 ultimate attainment. In a study of McDonald (2000) mentioned in this review, L1 Spanish children exposed to L2 English before five years old could perform like native speakers in a Grammaticality Judgement Task, but L1 Vietnamese children exposed to L2 English before five years old, in the same test, could not. In his review, Singleton (2011) also makes reference to other studies which have taken a critical stance towards the CPH (Birdsong, 1992; Ioup, 1995; Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2000; Flege, 2002). In fact, the uncertainty concerning the validity of the CPH suggests that one cannot base research on the idea that an offset age at which learning abilities decline exists, as there has been no agreement so far in research about a specific critical age. Singleton concludes that in the past research, mismatches could have been caused by an interplay of other variables, amongst which he mentions quantity and quality of input, degrees of exposure and interaction in the L2.

In a more recent review by Singleton and Leśniewska (2021), more neurological evidence against the notion of maturational constraints inhibiting successful L2 acquisition after the end of the critical period is presented. The authors, for instance, claim that the majority of neurological studies *do* support the view that the adult brain retains plasticity throughout the years, with plasticity defined

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<sup>2</sup> This is in line with Grosjean's (2008) '*wholistic*' view of bilingualism, according to which a bilingual is an integrated whole which cannot be composed of two separate parts (in this case, the bilingual cannot be considered as two monolinguals in one). In fact, according to this view, each bilingual has a unique set of linguistic configurations. The coexistence and constant interaction of two languages leads to the creation of a new, yet complete, language system, which the bilingual develops in order to meet his/her daily communicative needs. Bilinguals are, in fact, fully competent speaker-hearers in their own right — they should not and they cannot be compared to monolinguals. The '*wholistic*' view of bilingualism was born in opposition to the '*fractional*' view, according to which a bilingual possesses two separate language systems, each corresponding to or similar to that of a monolingual. The fractional view has enjoyed popularity amongst researchers as language sciences were first born through the study of monolinguals and when studying bilinguals, little modifications have been applied to traditional, monolingual methods of investigation.



as those 'regional changes in the volume and / or density of white and grey matter, as well as changes in connectivity between different areas of the brain' (p.10). Second language acquisition, in fact, has been found to have important effects on the brain, as it results in an increase in grey and white matter in those brain regions that are related to language (DeLuca et al., 2019). In their review, the authors also discuss the fact that despite many years of research, up to this day the Critical Period Hypothesis has neither been falsified nor proven. Also, attributing the end of the critical period to puberty is too generic, as puberty can begin from eight years old to 14 years old, with boys usually reaching puberty later than girls (Roberts, 2013).

Overall, it can be said that successful language learning is possible in adulthood, although it is generally acknowledged that acquisition is more effective when there is an early onset. However, because there is yet no agreement regarding the offset or terminus of the critical period, the research mentioned above does not support the critical period hypothesis, as the critical period cannot be so 'critical' if there is no clear indication as to when it ends.

### **2.3. The Role of Input, Exposure and Setting in SLA**

As for age, the role of input in Second Language Acquisition has seen very little agreement amongst researchers and this is mainly due to the fact that input is difficult to separate from other potentially valid variables, such quality and quantity of input, degrees of exposure to the second language, active use of the L2 or effects of the L1 on L2 production (Singleton, 2011; Keeley, 2016). Before Chomsky, behaviourist theories claimed that the process of language acquisition (even first language acquisition) could be controlled by external stimuli presented to the learners in small doses of input, as it is through constant exposure and practice that languages or behaviours can be learned. It was, in fact, Noam Chomsky (1965) who challenged this behaviourist view in support of a mentalist theory of language acquisition, according to which there are, in the mind of each individual, a set of mental structures or processes which transform input from the outside into forms that will later be stored in the brain for usage. Chomsky's claim then, was that there had to be a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which was responsible for guiding a child's acquisition process. However, the mentalist perspective has been challenged by those researchers who believed that it was interaction and input that contributed more directly and powerfully to second language acquisition (Long, 1981). In 1981, Krashen proposed the '*Input Hypothesis*', according to which learners acquire language naturally as a result of exposure to comprehensible input directed at them. In that same year, Long proposed the '*Interaction Hypothesis*' (Long, 1981) according to which it was through interaction and interactional modifications that acquisition takes place, therefore input

had to be comprehensible but also interactional in order for some acquisition to take place. The idea that input on its own is not sufficient for second language acquisition was also followed up by Swain's '*Output Hypothesis*' (Swain, 1985), according to which meaning *can* be interpreted solely through comprehended input, however it is through production or output that learners are able to move from semantic processing (meaning) to syntactic processing (form), as output gives learners the possibility to practise and solidify already existing knowledge. Finally, a more recent view of input in second language acquisition sees language as a rather complex and adaptive system (Ellis and Larsen-Freeman, 2009). According to this theory, individuals learning a language, be it their L1 or their L2, do not need a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) to assimilate the linguistic patterns present in the language being spoken to them, as it is sufficient to simply observe and attend to frequently occurring form-meaning-use constructions in the language they are exposed to, in order for them to initiate their language learning process (Larsen-Freeman, 2011). Basically, the *emergentist* (or usage-based) view holds that language in each individual emerges out of constant and massive amounts of experience which help the learner create links between form, meaning and active use (of those forms and meanings).

The notions of input and interaction are also to be investigated from the perspective of the settings in which input is offered and in which interaction happens. In fact, it is important to distinguish two main types of settings in which second language acquisition can take place: *naturalistic* and *educational* (Ellis, 1994). In a naturalistic setting, informal or spontaneous acquisition usually takes place and learning results from direct participation and observation. In an educational setting, on the other hand, the learning process takes place formally, with specific focus on the rules and principles of a language. It is important to keep in mind, though, that not all naturalistic settings lead to a spontaneous acquisition of a language and not all educational settings lead to a formal acquisition of a language. Often, the success of language learning can depend on many individual factors, such as the student's willingness to seek opportunities for communication, as well as on social conditions, such as the relationship of power that there might be between teachers and students inside the classroom. It is also worth mentioning that whereas many students get acquainted with a second language in naturalistic settings and others decide to take on a second language in educational settings, a big number of people are exposed to a mix of both settings during their lifetime (Ellis, 1994).

But the question that many researchers have tried to answer is whether it is the educational setting or the naturalistic setting that yields better results in second language ultimate attainment.

Krashen and Seliger (1976) put forward the hypothesis that a majority of guided instruction leads to higher accuracy levels in the L2, whereas a majority of naturalistic exposure does not necessarily lead to higher proficiency. Krashen, therefore, holds that it is the classroom environment which provides the L2 learner with both the conscious knowledge about the TL (target language) and the possibility of using the TL realistically, which is when intake will actually take place. Krashen (1982), though, also points out that the classroom environment is especially beneficial for beginners, who cannot rely on the external environment for input and consequently, intake. This can be limiting in the sense that, compared to the naturalistic settings which offer loads of opportunities for input and communication, the range of topics covered in class may be way too restricted. According to other studies, guided instruction can be beneficial only for what concerns planned production, but not unplanned output (Ellis, 1984). On the other hand, according to Montgomery and Einstein (1985), a combination of both form-oriented and meaning-oriented language teaching is more beneficial than form-oriented teaching alone. This statement is in fact confirmed by the study carried out by Spada (1986), according to which those learners who have access to both types of settings, i.e. learners who are exposed to the L2 both in educational settings and in naturalistic ones, show the greatest gains in proficiency.

Pica (1985) also undertook a study which was aimed at determining whether second language learners who lacked input from the outside environment but were exposed to the L2 in classroom, would acquire grammatical morphology in ways dependent on the linguistic complexity of these items. The results of Pica's study confirmed that classroom instruction is not uniform and it varies according to the linguistic complexity presented to the students, in fact, the production of the indefinite article 'a' was accurate both for spontaneous acquirers and for formal learners; the production of the plural '-s' was accurate amongst classroom learners, but not amongst spontaneous acquirers; finally, the progressive '-ing' was produced accurately by the spontaneous acquirers and not by the guided learners. Pica then concluded that classroom instruction is certainly beneficial at least in facilitating the acquisition of simple linguistic features.

Another finding regarding formal instruction is that it actually accelerates the language learning process, resulting in higher levels of accuracy in the L2 (Ellis, 1989 and 1992). In a study by Gass and Varonis (1994), it was hypothesised that interaction with the possibility of modifications could affect language use positively and the results showed that it was negotiated interaction, *not* modified interaction, that had a significant effect on production in class. This is in line with Long's Interaction Hypothesis, which states that it is the possibility of negotiating and of receiving feedback

that leads to higher proficiency in the L2, not merely the presence of comprehensible input achieved through pre-modified or pre-planned interaction. Another study by Ellis et al. (1994) confirmed this hypothesis, as interactionally-modified input resulted in enhanced comprehension and acquisition of new vocabulary. A study by Mackey (1999) too shows the benefits of actively participating in interaction, as the participants who used the L2 more actively showed significant development in the production of higher level structures, although it must be pointed out that the development of higher structures was a delayed effect. According to Muñoz (2008), foreign language learning is typically limited to two to four 50-minute sessions per week and exposure to the foreign language is generally limited in quantity, quality and source, therefore the foreign language is not developed for communicative purposes and it is not practised outside the classroom. However, this idea should not diminish the importance of explicit focus-on-form instruction, as what students actually learn in these classes can still be relevant for other experiences such as entering academia, which suggests that explicit instruction still plays a crucial role in second language ultimate attainment (DeKeyser, 2007).

More recent research done in the field of input and interaction has concluded that NNSs (non-native speakers) can provide an equally rich amount of L2 input to that of native speakers (Sato, 2015). Related studies also found that NNSs were more willing to change their answers or correct themselves during interaction with other NNSs than with NSs (Sato and Lyster, 2007). In fact, it is possible to say that second language interaction with other NNSs can have more beneficial and positive outcomes than second language conversation with NSs. Sato (2016) discovered, with regard to interaction, that students who approach peer conversation with a more positive and collaborative mindset, actually achieve more and benefit more than those who do not show positivity and readiness to collaborate.

In a recent study, Zhang (2015) investigated university-level L2 learners' implicit and explicit linguistic knowledge. The participants to this study were Chinese L1 university students who had only received form-focused (guided) instruction in China's FL classrooms. The results of her investigation showed that the participants, who had only received guided instruction aimed at preparing the students for the upcoming exams, scored low on implicit language tests, but scored high on measures of explicit knowledge. Because communication-based classes are somewhat limited in China, participants demonstrated having a very developed explicit linguistic knowledge, but a very underdeveloped implicit knowledge of the English language.

Lichtman's (2016) study crosses instruction conditions with age, in an attempt to teach 40 children of ages five to seven years old and 40 adults a mini-language called 'SillySpeak' under either explicit or implicit training conditions. For what concerns grammatical knowledge and accuracy, the results of her study show that all age groups under both training conditions were able to (re)produce the mini language more accurately when asked to pay attention to grammatical structures, although, given the short time in which the study was carried out, adults performed slightly better than children. In terms of grammatical awareness though, children belonging to the implicit instruction group were not able to figure out the grammatical structures of the mini language, whereas adults could do so easily. These results show that children learn additional languages implicitly because they have never been exposed to explicit language instruction in any language, i.e. through explicit grammar instruction. Adults, in fact, who have received explicit instruction throughout their lives, learn better explicitly because of the experience they have with it.

Liu's (2017) study builds upon previous research on the role of interaction in Second Language Acquisition, with the aim of examining how text-based Facebook interaction between NNS-NNS and NS-NNS affects proficiency levels. Text-based interaction is advantageous because through it, learners generate linguistic complexity and accuracy, as text communication allows them to spend time reading others' written messages and understanding their own written output (Lai and Zhao, 2006). In this study, it was found that NS were unlikely to focus on form during negotiation and that the most successful resolved negotiations were, in fact, those between NNS and NNS of respectively high proficiency. The least successful negotiations were those between NNS and NNS both of low proficiency. These findings are in line with a previous study done on interaction by Gass and Varonis (1985). The findings of this study suggest that if learners interacted more or produced more turns during interactions, they would have more opportunities to produce language-related problems and to learn from them (Lai and Zhao, 2006; Yilmaz and Granena, 2010).

In their longitudinal study, Saito and Hanzawa (2018) examine the role of three different types of input (form-based classes, content-based classes and naturalistic exposure) on the L2 oral development of Japanese L1 speakers in foreign language classes over a period of three semesters, keeping in mind that in this particular school, content-based classes are *optional* and not mandatory. The results of Saito and Hanzawa study reveal that the participants' improvement across various linguistic domains was highly correlated with the total number of hours spent using the second language during the semesters and their scores were also significantly correlated with the number of hours spent in content-based classrooms. The authors' final interpretation of the results is that

for successful second language attainment, a balanced focus on form and meaning during L2 instruction is required.

Despite the literature and research carried out in the last decade, until now the global picture regarding guided or informal input is far from clear, as some studies do report positive associations between contact with NS (native speakers) and L2 proficiency (Montgomery and Einstein, 1985), but other studies did not find any relationship between in-class or out-class contact with NSs and L2 attainment (Liu, 2017). In fact, it is now a generally accepted view that exclusively formal instruction will not suffice to make students into fluent language users (Saito and Hanzawa, 2018).

### **2.3.1. Input and the Media**

So far, we have discussed input that originates in formal settings, such as in classrooms or in foreign language classrooms and input that is received through exposure in naturalistic settings, such as having conversations with native speakers. However, in more recent times, thanks to the rapid technological advancements, a growing phenomenon that has been taking place in various areas of Europe is the availability of L2 input coming directly from the media, such as TV, radio, music, online resources, etc.

With regard to input from means of communication, some researchers have expressed doubt as to whether mere exposure to the media can actually result in acquisition. Gass (1997), for example, has claimed that for learners to crack the code of language, assistance in associating meaning and structure is crucial. It is also important to keep in mind when investigating input through traditional media (television, radio, etc.) that this kind of input is totally unidirectional and non-interactive, therefore it does not give the audience an opportunity for negotiating meaning or even for simply interacting. However, despite some pessimistic points of view concerning traditional media input, Brown (1987) had explained that television's help in improving individuals' linguistic, communicative and creative skills cannot be ignored.

The media has also seen rapid advancements in the past two decades, in fact, nowadays, it is possible to receive input from the media in various languages simply by accessing the Internet. Besides, it is not only watching movies or series in another language that counts as second language input today, but also watching musical videos, listening to songs, watching documentaries, following radio stations, reading online articles or blogs and texting people or video-calling them. These days, movies or series are not just dubbed: one has the possibility of selecting the preferred lan-

guage in which to watch the movies/series, but also the preferred language for subtitles. With regard to this, d'Ydewalle and Pavakanun (1996) affirmed that if subjects are already able to pick up foreign language skills after just a few minutes of exposure to the media, then second language acquisition is almost certain to occur with children and adolescents who are exposed to foreign language media on a regular and constant basis. Perego and Pavesi (2007, cited in Caruana, 2021) too, agree with the idea that videos and TV-watching can represent major sources of audio-visual input, as they provide valuable input through to which learners focus on meaning and engage with it in a multimodal environment. According to Webb and Rodgers (2009) in fact, watching TV might be another way to increase learners' word knowledge because in little time, there are many encounters with low frequency words. More recently, Kuppens (2010) claimed that although subtitles unlikely provide a precise and accurate translation of the original script, they are nonetheless beneficial to foreign language proficiency. Rodgers (2013) in fact, found that upon watching ten full episodes of a TV programme, adults learned new words and their gains were comparable to those found in reading studies. Webb (2015) concluded that one of the best assets of TV is that it provides viewers with large amounts of authentic, spoken L2 input. Other studies, on the other hand, such as the one carried out by Van Lommel, d'Ydewalle and Laenen (2006) *do* support the claim that media technologies are useful for both intentional and incidental learning, *but* they point out the importance of remembering that research in this field has mainly examined short-term retention of vocabulary, not long-term and it has not yet investigated the role of media input in relation to grammatical acquisition either, with this being one of the few studies carried out in which grammatical acquisition was indeed not found.

In 2008 Ademi and Bulija investigated exposure to L2 Italian television programmes in Albania. Findings, based on 463 self-report questionnaires and a small sentence-writing task, revealed that TV-watching in Albania *did* lead to L2 spontaneous acquisition and amount of exposure to television was found to be a significant factor in second language proficiency, as participants who were exposed to larger amounts of TV programmes in Italian did indeed perform better than their counterparts.

In a study by Birulés-Muntané and Soto-Faraco (2016) the role of subtitles in L2 comprehension and vocabulary acquisition was examined. It was found that watching a movie with subtitles in the L2 and audio in the L2 did not contribute significantly to the acquisition of new vocabulary, but weak trends towards vocabulary improvement and comprehension were found. In fact, those participants who watched an English language movie with English subtitles showed a 17% vocabulary

increase, whereas those who watched the movie in English without subtitles showed a seven per cent increase in vocabulary. It can be therefore said that watching movies in the L2 and choosing to read subtitles in the second language can facilitate comprehension and improve vocabulary, although at a very small rate. One reason for this could be the fact that the viewer's attention is focused on the quickly presented written text while processing at the same time the audio and visual content of the scene.

In another study by Ashcroft, Garner and Hadingham (2018) the quantity of pupils' English media usage is compared to their English L2 language skills. The participants to this study were students whose average age was 11 years old and who had received a copious amount of L2 input throughout their lives, although they never received any guided instruction in English. The participants were all from the Flemish region of Belgium. The amount of English subtitled TV-watching, the amount of English music listened to and the amount of English video-games played were taken into consideration. The results of this study showed that those participants who made greater use of the media and who watched English-subtitled TV programmes or movies more often were better at translating from English to Dutch than their counterparts. These results are in line with the claim that exposure to the media in a foreign or second language can be beneficial for second language acquisition.

In a study by Peters and Webb (2018) it was found that watching TV is beneficial for vocabulary acquisition, with participants to this study showing a four-word gain after exposure to a movie. However, an important finding in this study was that frequency of occurrence of second language forms, cognateness (including cognate words) and prior L2 knowledge were all significantly correlated with vocabulary increase and acquisition. This is in line with the claim that cognate words are easier for learners to acquire than non-cognates because they are generally phonologically, orthographically, semantically and etymologically related (DeGroot and Kaijzer, 2000). As for prior vocabulary knowledge, it has so far yielded positive results in reading studies (Desmet and Peters, 2018), however, results regarding the role of prior vocabulary knowledge in relation to television viewing are still somewhat inconclusive.

Finally, Pumiège and Peters's study (2019) examines whether formulaic sequences, like single words, can be learned from watching TV programmes or movies and it also examines which item-related factors specifically affect the learning process. The study consisted of two groups: one group watched a movie with subtitles and the other group watched the same movie without subti-



tles. The results showed that (a) learning gains were found for both single words and formulaic sequences, with the highest gains in formulaic sequences and that (b) prior vocabulary knowledge played a significant role in the learning process.

Despite the unidirectional nature of traditional media, which gives the learner-viewer limited opportunities for engaging actively with the L2 through interaction and negotiation, there has been undeniable evidence of its efficacy for spontaneous L2 acquisition. Moreover, a substantial amount of knowledge shows that audio-visual input can act as a prime-mover for L2 acquisition and it can have positive long-term effects, especially if exposure is regular and abundant (Caruana, 2021). Generally, then, it can be said that research in the field of media as a source of L2 input has yielded positive outcomes, although more empirical evidence is needed, especially with regard to long-term effects.

### **2.3.2. Italian L2 Input via the Media in Malta**

In Malta, the Italian culture has historically had a great influence on the languages spoken on the islands, although its influence has somewhat declined recently, as English-language media is vastly widespread, accessible and popular. In Malta, in fact, many programmes such as the news, films, series and also some radio channels are transmitted in English and also in Maltese. Thus, even after the Maltese independence in 1964, the English language has maintained a high status in Malta. On the other hand, the Italian influence, which used to be very present in the 70s and in the 80s thanks to the accessibility of television and radio channels, is now diminishing. This is due to the fact that in the present days the media is no longer transmitted on television or radio only, but it is mediated via the Internet; English is therefore the dominant language, although accessing the Internet is also possible in foreign languages, including Italian.

Research done in Malta on Italian input received from means of communication shows that Maltese individuals who were exposed to a greater quantity of input from the media (especially TV) had higher levels of comprehension compared to those who were less exposed; in fact, while watching TV or movies/series, viewers are stimulated to focus on plot and characterisation, as opposed to language per se, and this process triggers foreign language-processing and incidental learning (Van Patten, 2011). Moreover, it was also discovered that in Malta, linguistic input from TV had a great impact on L2 proficiency because the process of acquisition seemed to be taking place even when the input was not fully comprehended by the learners (Caruana, 2003). These results could be explained by the fact that in the case of television, visual aid together with spoken input

can contribute to transforming the input (not necessarily entirely comprehensible to the learners) into intake that can later be used as output, should the individuals exposed to Italian through TV have the opportunity to practise their gradually acquired second language (Caruana, 2021). It is also important to remember that the Maltese language presents similarities with Italian in that it contains Romance elements which may facilitate comprehension. Finally, in Malta, people are mainly bilingual and knowledge of English together with knowledge of Maltese can represent an asset when it comes to learning an additional language (Caruana, 2003).

Before going into the review of studies done in Malta, it is worth mentioning the changes that Italian media itself has witnessed along the years. Television and radio have played a fundamental role in the process of national unification in Italy and up to this day, they still '*forge*' (Diadori, 2006:7) people's language, although some scholars believe this to happen at a lesser degree in the present days. This is because contemporary Italian TV language generally mirrors informal colloquial Italian (Sobrero-Miglietta, 2006) perhaps as an attempt to create closer contact with the audience (Dardano, 1994). Another variety used in Italian media is the so-called '*parlato-recitato doppiato*', or dubbing English language films and serials into Italian. This variety is generally a simplified form of colloquial Italian and it is not marked diatopically, i.e. in terms of local or regional variants.

This type of input was among those preferred by the Maltese younger population, as research that took place in the 1990s revealed. This preference could represent a problem in acquisition, comprehension and production of L2 Italian because the input received from dubbed movies or series is very different from the Italian input that a migrant would receive when moving to Italy. As previously stated, input received from dubbed movies represents a variety of Italian that is far from the authentic spoken variety of Italian native speakers. On this note, Brincat (1992a; 1992b; 1992c) had pointed out that by watching dubbed films, students were being exposed to an over-simplified form of Italian and for that reason they could achieve high scores in comprehension tasks, but less so in production tasks. Other research has been conducted in Malta with regard to Italian L2 acquisition from exposure to Italian media (Cassar, 1989; Quattromani-Seychell, 1991) and the overall conclusions were that television could be considered as a useful supplement for L2 acquisition, also in addition to the formal process of learning Italian. Exposure to Italian through the media would represent a good means of practising the language or of staying in contact with it (Abdilla, 1993; Mintoff, 1993).

In a study by Caruana (1996) both participants who had received guided instruction and partici-

pants who were spontaneous acquirers responded well to a word identification test and to a phrase/sentence comprehension test, which shows that those students who received guided instruction did not necessarily perform better than those who did not. Furthermore, students who claimed to watch at least one hour of Italian TV on a daily basis, irrespective of their type of instruction, still performed better than their counterparts who were less exposed to Italian input. However, in the oral proficiency test, which consisted of a brief conversation with the researcher before starting the comprehension tasks, students who received guided instruction performed better than those who did not. This outcome could support the stance that television input is less helpful when it comes to L2 production. Also, older learners outperformed younger ones as they had received copious input in Italian L2 from an earlier age.

In a later study by Caruana (2003), results showed that in Malta, at the time of the research, both formal learners and spontaneous acquirers followed Italian TV regularly and the favourite programmes of Maltese people were still dubbed movies, although male participants showed a preference for sports programmes and female participants for musical quizzes. In this study, all participants who had received guided instruction in Italian showed enough competence to be able to express themselves in the L2, as opposed to the untutored learners, 23.5% of whom did not manage to express themselves well in Italian. However, no evidence was found to show that guided instruction led to a more advanced and accurate acquisition of Italian, as subjects who acquired Italian solely via exposure to copious input from TV showed to have a very similar acquisitional process to that of guided learners. Moreover, in this research it was found that those participants who had had more exposure to Italian before the age of 11 not only had a significantly more developed TMA (Tense-Modality-Aspect) system, but they also resorted to code-switching less often than their counterparts. Overall, input in this research had a very positive impact on the acquisition of Italian L2, especially when exposure started before age 11.

In a 2014 study by Caruana, Pavesi and Ghia, 36 Maltese nationals of ages 16 to 17 who had already studied Italian formally for five years and whose level of Italian was B2-C1 (Council of Europe, 1996) were asked to watch five Italian movies during school hours for a period of four months. 19 subjects watched original American or British movies dubbed in Italian and the other 19 subjects watched an original Italian movie. The participants were then asked to perform a translation/definition vocabulary task in which they had to translate or provide a definition for words, phrases or sentences present in the movies they had previously watched (cognates were avoided). The results of this study indicated that the ability to retain Italian vocabulary and refer to pragmat-

ic functions increased immediately (although not significantly) after watching both original and dubbed movies, although it is important to keep in mind that the findings of this study are limited to short-term effects, as the tests were carried out immediately after having watched the movie. This study also shows how the different types of film language (original and translated) were equally beneficial for second language acquisition at advanced competence levels.

Overall, conclusions from recent research done locally show that Maltese speakers of Italian as a second language have a good level of L2 comprehension and spoken production, both in the case of nationals who have received guided Italian instruction and those who have acquired Italian spontaneously through regular and copious exposure to traditional media, such as television programmes or films.

#### 2.4. Interlanguage

Before concluding the chapter, a brief section should be dedicated to the notion of interlanguage. The term was first employed by Selinker (1972) to refer to the existence of a *separate linguistic system* observable in the output of second language learners' attempts to produce utterances in the target language. The existence of an interlanguage can be observed in the utterances produced by most second language learners in the target-language because these are rarely identical to the utterances a native speaker would produce in an attempt to express the same meaning as the learner, irrespective of the level of proficiency reached by the L2 learner. The learners' utterances in the L2, in fact, are different from what a native speaker would produce because learners are constantly recreating and reconstructing new rules underlying the L2 (Lo Duca, 2003)<sup>3</sup>. An interlanguage system then, can be described as a set of transitory systems, a set of stages within the learner's linguistic competence that follow each other in time (Chini, 2005)<sup>4</sup>. Interlanguage is a dynamic and unstable system that allows learners to constantly learn, abandon, simplify and extend rules in an attempt of getting closer to their target language and for this reason, the notion of interlanguage shows that a learner is *actively* participating in the process of second language acquisition. The interlanguage rules can be shaped by several factors, amongst which language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second language acquisition, strategies of second language communication and/or overgeneralisation of the target language linguistic material. Finally, fossilisation is a linguistic phenomenon in which linguistic items and rules of a particular native language (NL) will be re-

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<sup>3</sup> *Ogni apprendimento linguistico, anche il più spontaneo e naturale, si basa dunque sulla ricostruzione, da parte dell'apprendente, delle regole che governano il sistema della lingua.* (Lo Duca, 2003:229)

<sup>4</sup> [...] *un insieme dei sistemi transitori, degli stadi che si succedono nel tempo nella competenza di un apprendente.* (Chini, 2005:27)

tained in a learner's interlanguage (IL), relative to a particular target language (TL), irrespective of age of acquisition, quality and quantity of instruction and exposure to the TL (Selinker, 1972); therefore, fossilisation happens when a learner retains rules and items from his/her native language and applies these rules and items to his/her interlanguage, even though these rules or items might not be realisable in the target language being learned.

In the case of learning Italian as an L2, the process of second language acquisition can be divided in different stages. According to Vedovelli (2000) interlanguage presents three main phases: (a) a 'pre-basic' phase during which the L2 learner mainly communicates through single words and resorts to gestures and/or code-switching; (b) a 'basic' phase during which the L2 learner starts acquiring verb tenses, adverbs and prepositions; and (c) a 'post-basic' phase during which the L2 learner reaches greater communicative autonomy by employing coordination and subordination in his/her speech. This subdivision into phases is also in line with Banfi and Bernini (2003), according to whom verbs are acquired during the 'basic' phase, the stage in which learners abandon the pragmatic mode and start using a syntactic one; in the 'basic' phase, learners start depending less on context as they become more linguistically organised. The Italian verbal system is, in fact, a complex system both because of its inflectional features and because every single form expresses a temporal, modal and aspectual value. As explained by Banfi and Bernini (2003) and by Giacalone-Ramat (2003), the verbal system in second language learners of Italian develops as follows:

Presente / Infinito > (ausiliare) Participio Passato > Imperfetto > Futuro > Condizionale > Congiuntivo

The infinitive and the present tense are the first forms to appear at the initial stages of acquisition and the use of the first and third person singular are particularly frequent (Bernini, 1990:93). Moreover, at the initial stages, L2 learners tend to use the present tense also to refer to past and future events, and only at a later stage, will learners start to include forms of the past, such as *passato prossimo*, used interchangeably by learners for both perfective and imperfective aspects. Later on in their acquisitional process, learners will acquire the difference between *passato prossimo* (perfective aspect) and *imperfetto* (imperfective aspect) and the first verbs that appear in the *imperfetto* are usually 'essere' and 'avere' (Andorno, 2006:98). Once more verb forms are acquired, such as *futuro*, *condizionale* and *congiuntivo*, learners start using the present tense less, but more appropriately. *Gerundio*, *imperativo*, *futuro anteriore* and *trapassato prossimo* usually appear at a later and more advanced stage. With regard to syntax, it has been pointed out by Solarino (2009)

that L2 learners of Italian demonstrate a general tendency of omitting and/or misusing prepositions.

Based on research carried out in Malta, results show that learners, even those at an advanced stage of acquisition, do not frequently employ *futuro*, *passato remoto*, *condizionale* and *congiuntivo* when they use the L2 and they also show a general tendency of using the present tense to refer to future events or actions (Caruana, 2003). In Caruana's research, *passato remoto* was more frequently used by guided learners of Italian L2, as this form appears more frequently in textbooks, rather than in the input provided by the media. *Condizionale* was sporadically used by both guided learners and spontaneous acquirers, and *congiuntivo* was also not frequently used by both groups of learners. One reason why the *congiuntivo* was not employed by the formal learners could have been that they had not yet covered the topic in class; however, it must be pointed out that in daily, spoken Italian, *congiuntivo* is often replaced by the present tense.

## 2.5. Key Findings

In conclusion, the main findings of previous research investigating the effects of age, input and exposure on second language acquisition are summarised as follows:

- 1) Research regarding the Critical Period Hypothesis is still inconclusive;
- 2) Onset of Acquisition is more significant than biological age;
- 3) L1 similarity to the L2 can be an important factor for second language acquisition and proficiency, as it can create favourable conditions which help learners develop their interlanguage;
- 4) Active participation in conversations and interaction — both with non-native speakers and with native speakers — are beneficial for second language acquisition;
- 5) Both formal and informal settings are beneficial for second language acquisition and language learning;
- 6) Based on research done in Malta, people who have received a copious amount of exposure to L2 Italian via traditional media demonstrate high levels of competence both in comprehension and spoken production, sometimes even in the absence of guided instruction in the L2, although guided instruction is also highly beneficial.

## 2.6. Relevance of my Research

The studies mentioned above are all relevant to my research, as I will be investigating the effects that age, formal onset (see 1.5), type of input (guided or spontaneous), and quantity and quality of exposure to the L2 have on second language acquisition of Italian in Malta.

As mentioned above, age per se is not a statistically significant variable for high L2 proficiency and it has to be analysed in the light of the effects of OA (onset of acquisition). For this reason, both the age of the participants and the age at which guided instruction in Italian started will be taken into consideration. Quality and quantity of input are two other variables to be tested in addition to age, in the light of the results regarding input reported in the research. Finally, the participants will also be asked to provide information about their use of Italian, for example in which contexts they use Italian as an L2.

The aim of this research then, is to investigate the interplay of these variables in one study, in order to better understand the role of age, input and exposure in relation to second language ultimate attainment. Another aim of this research is to contribute to studies on second language acquisition carried out in Malta, also in the light of social and linguistic changes which have taken place in the last decades. In addition, this research aims to provide more insight on input deriving from the media, since not many studies have investigated this phenomenon in depth. Another significant aspect in the study of second language acquisition is that of individual differences (such as working memory, aptitude, motivation, cognitive capacities and/or gender, etc.), however detailed investigation of these parameters is beyond the scope of the current investigation.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the methodology used to carry out this research.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Objectives**

The goal of this research is to analyse the effects that age, formal onset (see 1.5), type of input (guided or spontaneous) and exposure to the media in the L2 have on comprehension and spoken production of Italian as a second language in Malta. A language background questionnaire was distributed amongst Maltese nationals who had at least some knowledge of Italian and it was completed by 377 Maltese locals. A subsample of 80 respondents was chosen to take part in the research via participation in three tasks: an informal interview in Italian and a picture-story task narrated in Italian, with the aim of analysing Italian as a second language spoken data, and a written translation task from Italian into either Maltese or English, with the aim of investigating L2 Italian comprehension skills.

#### **3.2. Data Collection**

##### **3.2.1. The Questionnaire**

The first step of this research was to devise a language background questionnaire (see A1 and A1(b) in Appendix A) aimed at collecting information about the participants' age, educational and linguistic background and past and present L2 media habits. The data provided by the participants in the questionnaires included the variables 'age', 'age of acquisition of the L2' (here, formal onset; see 1.5), 'type of input received in the L2' (guided or spontaneous), 'duration of guided instruction in the L2', 'present L2 media habits' and 'past L2 media habits', bearing in mind that all the answers provided were *self-reported*. The survey I devised is based on Caruana's (2003) language background questionnaire, although changes were made with regard to questions related to media habits, as nowadays accessing the media does not only involve watching TV programmes, but also watching series on platforms such as Netflix or Amazon Prime Video (which offer subtitles options), watching videos on YouTube, using social media, instant messaging, video-calling, playing video-games, listening to music and podcasts and reading books and articles online, etc. The questionnaire was created as a Google Form and an informed consent form (see Appendix A) was added at the beginning, to make sure participants read and accepted the terms of data treatment. Participants had to be Maltese nationals over 18 years of age and they also had the option to choose whether to complete the questionnaire in English (see A1) or in Maltese (see A1(b)). It was distributed online, via email and social media, and also through word of mouth and a total of 377 participants completed the questionnaire. Both the Maltese and the English questionnaires contained an optional final question asking the participants to leave their email address if they wished to participate in the second part of the research and a total of 80 people (28% males and 72% fe-



males) have agreed to take part in the second stage. These 80 participants were then assigned to four different age groups (18-30, 31-40, 41-50, 50+). In this research, the questionnaire served the sole purpose of selecting the sub-sample of participants who agreed to participate in the second part of the research; for this reason, results from the questionnaire will not be included in my analyses (see 4.2), which will only take into account the responses provided by the sub-sample. Data was collected between February and April 2022.

### **3.2.2. Collecting Language Samples**

For the second part of the research, the 80 participants who agreed to take part were asked to perform three tasks: (a) an informal interview held in Italian (see A2); (b) an oral picture-story task (see A3); and (c) a written translation task from Italian into either Maltese or English (see A4). The tasks were inspired by Gass and Mackey's data elicitation (2011). All three tasks were carried out by each participant and they were mainly carried out face-to-face, with the exception of those participants who happened to be in quarantine during data collection and who agreed to meet online via Zoom or Skype. Before carrying out the three tasks, participants were once again given an informed consent to sign, in which it was specified that during the informal interview and the picture-story task, their voices would be recorded and stored for data analysis until the submission deadline.

### **3.2.3. Task One: The Informal Interview**

For the first task, the informal interview, participants were asked to provide personal information, such as: their hobbies, their job and studies, which places in Italy they visited or which places they would like to visit, what fascinates them mostly about Italian culture, which Italian dialects or accents they feel more attracted to. The informal interview was held in Italian, therefore participants were asked questions in Italian and they were asked to answer in Italian. The aim of this first task was to allow participants to speak Italian in an informal manner, in order for them to feel more at ease during the following two tasks, the picture-story and the translation; for this reason, the results of the informal interview will not be discussed in this research. Ensuring that the participants felt more at ease during the following two tasks was important to obtain more reliable data in relation to their competence in Italian as a second language. All participants were asked the same questions. Some participants spoke fast and extensively, therefore more questions were added; other participants spoke less and at a slower pace, so not all questions were asked to them due to the time limit. All informal interviews lasted around five minutes.

### 3.2.4. Task Two: The Picture-Story

For the second task, the picture-story, participants were shown a story narrated in a sequence of pictures. As opposed to the first task which was not controlled, this task was semi-controlled, as participants had to provide a narration in Italian based on the visuals provided in the pictures. The aim of this task based on picture sequences was to test the participants' narrative skills, including their use of different verb tenses within sentence structures. The story depicted in sequences could also give them the opportunity to use verb tenses through which the perfective/imperfective aspectual distinction could be investigated. According to Giacalone-Ramat (2003), being able to express this distinction indicates that the participants were at a more advanced stage of Italian L2 acquisition. Three similar picture-stories were used for this task, however each participant was only given one and was required to provide only one narration.

### 3.2.5. Task Three: The Translation

For the translation task, the participants were given single words and sentences in Italian and they were asked to translate them into either Maltese or English. The aim of this task was to check the subjects' comprehension of Italian L2 and their ability to translate words and sentences into a language they are more familiar with. The task consisted of:

(a) 20 single words (see A4(1)):

- *Famiglia, Tazza* (cognates)
- *Tuta, Ciuffo* (false friends)
- *Vita, Ora, Cuore, Fare, Credere, Grande, Nuovo, Mondo* (high frequency words)
- *Spesa, Danno, Mostrare, Aspettare* (medium frequency words)
- *Cibo, Docente, Tentare, Prelevare* (low frequency words)

(b) Four simple sentences and two phrases (see A4(2) and A4(3)):

- *La macchina è parcheggiata* (simple sentence)
- *Ho comprato delle mele* (simple sentence)
- *L'edificio aveva quattro piani* (simple sentence)
- *Vorrei un gelato* (simple sentence)
- *Una cattiva abitudine* (phrase)
- *Cogliere l'attimo* (phrase)

(c) Four compound sentences and four complex sentences (see A4(4) and A4(5)):

- *Sarà una bella giornata, tuttavia sarà impegnativa* (compound sentence)
- *Mio zio faceva sia il cameriere sia l'autista* (compound sentence)
- *Mi metto sia il giubbotto sia i guanti* (compound sentence)

- *Vorremmo viaggiare di più e lavorare di meno* (compound sentence)
- *Riposo adesso perché dopo esco con i miei amici* (complex sentence)
- *Ha fatto troppe assenze, cosicché lo hanno bocciato* (complex sentence)
- *Sebbene conoscesse il rischio, ha fatto di testa sua* (complex sentence)
- *Vorrei saperne di più, qualora mi dovesse servire* (complex sentence)

(d) Two idioms (see A4(6)):

- *In bocca al lupo.*
- *A mali estremi, estremi rimedi.*

A combination of nouns, verbs, and adjectives were included in the words chosen for the translation exercise, which consisted of eight high frequency words, four medium frequency words and four low frequency words, together with two cognates and two false friends. The sentences — particularly compound and complex sentences — were carefully planned: first, 20 compound sentences were created using five different verb forms (*presente, passato prossimo, imperfetto, futuro* and *condizionale*) and four different types of conjunctions, namely: five coordinating conjunctions, five disjunctive conjunctions, five copulative conjunctions and five correlative conjunctions. Secondly, 24 complex sentences were created using six different verb forms (*presente, passato prossimo, imperfetto, futuro, condizionale* and *congiuntivo*) and ten types of subordinates (*causali, temporali, finali, dichiarative, avversative, consecutive, condizionali, modali, concessive* and *interrogative*). Although the complex sentences were 24, only 20 of them were used in the translation task.

The word frequencies were all derived from SketchEngine<sup>5</sup>. A 2020 updated corpus of the Italian language is available on Sketch Engine, which is a corpus manager and text analysis software. Sketch Engine generates absolute frequency lists on a token level using the wordlist tool. For the purposes of my study, "High" frequency was defined as equal to or greater than 1,000,000. Frequency below 500,000 but above five was deemed "Low," and frequency between 1,000,000 and 500,000 was considered "Medium". Four sets of translation tasks were devised and their distribution was alternated across participants and age groups.

### 3.3. The Evaluation Criteria

In order to analyse and evaluate the outcomes of the tasks performed by the participants, two different types of evaluation were devised: one for the picture-story (3.2.4) and another one for the

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<sup>5</sup> <https://app.sketchengine.eu/#wordlist>

translation task (3.2.5). The data obtained from the informal interview (3.2.3) will not be analysed in this research, as the aim of the task was to allow participants to speak informally, so that they would feel more at ease during the following two tasks, namely the picture-story and the translation.

The first type of evaluation, concerning the picture-story, is based on the CILS (Certificazione d'Italiano come Lingua Straniera)<sup>6</sup> assessments and the aspects taken into consideration are:

- (a) communicative efficiency → listening and comprehension skills, communicating clearly, interacting with the interlocutor and maintaining a smooth conversation;
- (b) lexical richness → appropriateness of vocabulary used based on communicative context;
- (c) morphological correctness → appropriateness of forms and structures based on context;

The scale of evaluation ranges from one to five, according to which (see A5(1)):

- Evaluation Range '1': represents poor L2 production skills, which indicates that the speaker is unable to communicate clearly and effectively and has a very limited range of vocabulary. As shown in the examples below, both speakers often use one-word responses to answer the interviewer's questions or elicitations and according to Vedovelli (2000), this behaviour is typical of L2 speakers who are still in the pre-basic phase of language learning. In both extracts there is lack of subject-verb and subject-adjective agreement, and both speakers, whose responses are exemplified below, employ the infinitive to refer to the present, which is typical of L2 learners who are the initial stage of their acquisitional process (Giacalone-Ramat, 2003):

*Example 1:*

**Speaker P271e** (Age group 20-30, Task 2):

P271e: Persone su spiaggia. Bambini giocare.

P271e: Persone nuotare. Cane non- no.

P271e: Si. Bambini contente. Tutti bene, contente.

A further indication that the speakers in question have a limited competence in the L2 is found in their use of English in Example 2 as the speaker also relies on extra-linguistic material, including gestures, in order to convey his/her message:

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<sup>6</sup> Barni, M., Bandini, A., Sprugnoli, L., Lucarelli, S., Scaglioso, A., Strambi, B., Fusi, C. and Arruffoli, A., 2009. *Linee guida CILS - Certificazione di Italiano come Lingua Straniera Università per Stranieri di Siena*. 1st ed. Siena: Guerra Edizioni, pp.17-18.

*Example 2:*

**Speaker P08m** (Age Group: 31-40, Task 2)

P08m: Surprise. Cacciatore.

P08m: They point their finger at the<sup>7</sup> tronca. Indicato il tronco e due occhi.

P08m: They see a gatto. Vedere un gatto.

- Evaluation Range '2': is indicative of limited L2 competence, meaning that the speaker shows difficulties when expressing concepts. Although the speaker still manages to create some meaningful sentences, he/she is still highly dependent on the context and the interlocutor. Vocabulary range is still limited. As Example 3 shows, the speaker can create some simple, meaningful sentences, however she hesitates frequently and seeks confirmation and reassurance from the interviewer. The speaker in Example 4, on the other hand, constructs short meaningful sentences. Although the infinitive form is still employed to express present tense actions there is also evidence of morphological inflection:

*Example 3:*

**Speaker P88e** (Age Group: 20-30, Task 2)

P88e: L'adulti che giocano con il pallone, lost...lost.. perdere?

P88e: Perdono il pallone

P88e: e nel- nel mare c'è un cano? No. Cane.

P88: Il cane va ritrovare il pallone e non- non- ma non è- nuoto? Nuotare.

P88e: Non sa nuotare.

*Example 4:*

**Speaker P64e** (Age Group: 50+, Task 2)

P64e: Ma vedi qualcosa differenti. Vedi occhi grandi e paura.

P64e: Bisogno aiuta. E ragazzo e ragazza urlare per aiuta e vieni un nannu.

P64e: E l'uomo molto vecchio hai un shotgun.

- Evaluation Range '3': indicates intermediate L2 competence, therefore the speaker is able to communicate in the L2 despite showing some signs of difficulty in formulating sentences and still relying on the context. Messages are delivered clearly, there is evidence of morphological inflec-

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<sup>7</sup> The underlined utterances in the examples provided indicate instances of code switching in the participants' spoken production.

tion which adds cues of temporality to the narration, also by alternating the use of the perfective and the imperfective. Vocabulary is rich and sentence structure is appropriate.

*Example 5:*

**Speaker P180e** (Age Group: 50+, Task 2)

P180e: *C'era l'uccelli*, sta vedendo gli uccelli e

P180e: uno *ha fatto male*, so l'ha preso, l'uccello, è andata a casa,

P180e: l'ha dato da bere, l'ha curato e poi è *andato lasciato volare*.

*Example 6:*

**Speaker P02m** (Age Group: 50+, Task 2)

P02m: mela c'è questa ragazza che è camminare in campagna

P02m: e c'è questi uccelli. Uno di questi uccelli era più vicino dell'altri

P02m: e lei è notato che è vicino perché era feruto.

P02m: E lei ha portato a casa per curarlo.

P02m: Ti fa mangiare e guarito e ti ha lasciato in campagna ancora.

- Evaluation Range '4': represents medium-high second language competence, which means that the speaker shows an almost complete communicative autonomy, with some hesitations and/or mistakes here and there, mainly related to vocabulary. Vocabulary is rich enough for the communicative context. In Examples 7 and 8 below, it is clear that both participants were able to express their ideas in a clear manner, using standard-like sentence structures. The difficulties encountered by both are related to vocabulary and to specific grammatical features such as choice of auxiliary, but none of these hinder communicative efficiency:

*Example 7:*

**Speaker P95e** (Age Group 41-50, Task 2)

P95e: E poi l'uccello è rkuprato e ha dato di mangiare e ha dato l'acqua-

P95e: da bere, e quando lui era abbastanza bene, è andato a casa,

P95e: ha volato per cercare la mamma e papa, forse gli amici.

*Example 8:*

**Speaker P102e** (Age Group 20-30, Task 2)

P102e: [...] che sta camminando e poi questi ragazzi

P102e: stanno chiedere questo uomo per l'aiuto [...].

P102e: Poi l'uomo è arrivato alla fronte dell'albero, questi

P102e: due occhi hanno visto il shotgun, se sta preoccupato.

- Evaluation Range '5': indicates high L2 proficiency, therefore the speaker has rich vocabulary knowledge, enough to ensure smooth communication and expression of more complex thoughts. In the examples below, both speakers employ an array of verb forms, they use complex sentence structures and they demonstrate ability to use specific, content-related vocabulary:

*Example 9:*

**Speaker P112e** (Age Group: 31-40, Task 2)

P112e: Nella seconda c'è un cane nuovamente e sembra che

P112e: la donna abbia lanciato la palla sopra l'uomo.

P112e: Nella terza, si vede il guardia spiaggia che sembra

P112e: che stia urlando e la donna si è alzata dallo sdraio.

*Example 10:*

**Speaker P230e** (Age Group 41-50, Task 2)

P230e: Allora direi che sono fratello e sorella che sono a passeggio

P230e: nel bosco, stanno andando a prendere le bacche [...]

P230e: Controllando, dall'albero esce un gattino, direi un cucciolo di gatto

P230e: che sembra pure abbastanza amichevole. Niente di insolito.

The five evaluation ranges described above find an explanation in theories on language acquisition. According to Klein and Perdue (1997, cited in Bernini 2010), three main stages of acquisition follow each other during second language acquisition, namely: 'pre-basic phase', 'basic phase' and 'post-basic phase', which are characterised respectively by a pragmatic, semantic and syntactic organisation of the utterances in the L2. In addition to that, when it comes to expressing temporality in Italian as an L2, the sequence of acquisition is the same for any L2 learner of Italian (Giacalone-Ramat, 2003):

infinito/presente → participio passato/passato prossimo → imperfetto → futuro →  
condizionale → congiuntivo.

In the 'pre-basic' phase, the speakers' utterances in the L2 mainly contain a Topic, the most informative element of the conversation and at times, also a Focus, any additional information connected to the Topic. At this phase of L2 acquisition, there is a lack of expressions of temporality (Giacalone-Ramat, 2003) and verbs, which are often used as infinitives, have mere lexical value. Moreover, a peculiarity of the pre-basic phase is that speakers might often revert to code-switching, particularly inter-sentential switching, which involves switching entire sentences from one language to another (Giacalone-Ramat, 1995a). During this initial stage of L2 acquisition, speakers' interlanguage is marked by a basic linguistic organisation where there are many lexical units but very few grammatical units or function words (Giacalone-Ramat, 2003). In the case of 'pre-basic' Maltese speakers of Italian L2, this may happen because they use Maltese or English as their matrix language, rather than Italian (Caruana, 2003). Evaluation Ranges '1' in this research corresponds to the 'pre-basic phase' of L2 acquisition.

In the 'basic phase', a distinction between verbs and nouns starts to emerge, although verbal morphology has not developed yet. In this phase, there is still no temporality, however adverbial forms are employed to refer to past or future events or to mark a basic distinction between perfective and imperfective aspects (Giacalone-Ramat, 2003; Bernini, 2010). For this reason, the verb still mainly has a lexical value. The infinitive and/or the present tense are used as verb forms, although some speakers use the past participle (generally without an auxiliary) even though this may lack agreement with the subject. As in the previous phase, inter-sentential code-switching may be frequent. Evaluation Range '2' corresponds to the 'basic phase'.

The 'post-basic' phase includes 'Evaluation Ranges 3, 4 and 5' as these ranges concern the more proficient speakers who provided rich linguistic structures which can be divided into sub-categories on the basis of grammatical complexity and accuracy, communicative efficacy and the use of marked/unmarked structures. This stage marks the moment when speakers start to express the perfective–imperfective distinction. The emergence of auxiliaries leads to the formation of the *passato prossimo* thereby marking an important stage in the acquisition of temporality (Giacalone-Ramat, 2003). During the post-basic phase, speakers acquire verbal morphology and organise their utterances syntactically, generally following the unmarked Subject-Verb-Object construction. L2 utterances are also articulated through the use of coordination and the emergence of subordination (Berruto, 2001). Moreover, during this stage, intra-sentential code-switching may become more frequent than inter-sentential code-switching, meaning that a switch in language happens within the same utterance (Poplack, 2000), sometimes because of lapses concerning single words



or short utterances. Finally, typical of this stage of acquisition are also ‘nonce borrowings’, or single lexical items (typically nouns, verbs, adjectives and/or adverbs) which are syntactically and/or morphologically integrated from the L1 into the L2<sup>8</sup> (Poplack & Sankoff, 1988).

Finally, for the translation task (3.2.5), marks were assigned to each participant as follows: ‘0-3’ (words, where ‘3’ indicates that 18-20 words have been translated correctly), ‘0-2’ (phrases, where ‘2’ indicates that all phrases have been translated correctly), ‘0-3’ (sentences, where ‘3’ indicates that all sentences have been translated correctly) and ‘0-2’ (idioms, where ‘2’ indicates that both idioms have been translated correctly). The highest mark that could be achieved is ‘10’, and for this reason, participants who obtained a score of zero to five were categorised as ‘0-5’; participants who scored between six and seven were categorised as ‘6-7’; and participants who scored between eight and ten were categorised as ‘8-10’. Half-marks were assigned to participants in instances when the translations provided were not completely accurate or equivalent to the Maltese or English forms, but were still considered ‘communicatively or pragmatically acceptable’ (see A5(2)).

### 3.4. Data Analysis

To sum up, the data collected via the language background questionnaire was used to gather information about the participants’ age, educational background, language use at home or with friends, their present TV habits, their past TV habits in Italian, the frequency with which they access media in the L2 and their self-assessment of Italian, Maltese and English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The data collected from the questionnaires was used to run both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

In addition to this, the data collected from the picture-story and the translation tasks was designed to obtain information on the following:

(a) level of competence of Italian as a second language, mainly determined on the basis of the use of verbal and nominal morphology and syntactic complexity, including;

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<sup>8</sup> An example of a lexical item morphologically integrated into the L2 is:

**Speaker P41e** (Age Group: 50+, Task 2)

**P41e:** la ragazza tira il pallone al ragazzo,

**P41e:** ma lui non l’ha *aggrappiato*.

The word ‘aggrappiato’ might have come from the English ‘to grab’ (he didn’t grab it). However, the correct Italian expression would have been ‘preso’ (ma lui non l’ha preso).

- the verbs employed during speech, in order to analyse acquisition of tense, aspect and mode;
- the number of simple, compound and complex sentences used, and the type of subordinate clauses used (explicit or implicit);
- the number of active and passive sentences employed;
- the number of Maltese and English propositions used through which subjects expressed themselves in Italian L2;

(b) the individual scores obtained in each task;

The results of the questionnaire and of the research tasks will be presented in the next chapter.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Introduction**

As mentioned in the previous chapters, this research aims to examine how age, formal onset of Italian, type of input (guided or spontaneous), and exposure to Italian media affect second language proficiency in relation to Italian as an L2 in Malta. In order to obtain such information, a language-background questionnaire was devised and distributed among Maltese locals in Malta between February and April 2022 (see 3.2.1). 377 respondents completed the questionnaire, including the sub-sample of 80 participants who agreed to participate in the second part of the research. As mentioned in 3.2.1, only the responses provided by the sub-sample of participants were taken into account when analysing the results of the questionnaire (see 4.2 below).

### **4.2. The Results of the Questionnaire**

A total of 80 respondents took part in the second part of the research and these were divided equally into four age groups of 20 participants each: (a) 20-30 years old; (b) 31-40 years old; (c) 41-50 years old and (d) over 50 years old. Most of the respondents (72%) were females and the rest (28%) were males (see Figure A in Appendix B). The analysis of the sub-sample's responses to the questionnaire serves the purpose of providing the necessary background of the participants' characteristics, in view of the analysis of their interlanguage presented in sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4.

The respondents were asked about their occupation and the findings reveal that while a sizeable amount of respondents hold jobs in businesses and in educational institutions (25%) or as students (15%), the vast majority of respondents hold different occupations (37.5%), such as those of beauty consultants, cashiers, promoters, call centre agents, etc. Other respondents said that they work in the health sector, others in the IT sector, some work as translators or interpreters and some are either retired or unemployed. 55% of participants aged 20-30 are students. The majority of respondents belonging to the other age groups hold various occupations (see Figure B in Appendix B).

The participants were also asked about the first language(s) they learned or spoke at home. The results of the questionnaire show that for the age groups 31-40, 41-50 and 50+, Maltese was the first language they learned and spoke at home, however both English and Maltese are the languages that most of the participants in the 20-30 age group learned and spoke at home.

The respondents were questioned about the foreign languages that they studied in the past, that

they are studying at present and about languages that they have never studied at all. Interestingly, 81.3% of respondents claimed to have studied Italian in the past, whereas 15% declared to have never studied Italian formally. According to the questionnaire responses, the second most studied language is French, with 62.5% of respondents having studied the language in the past. Spanish was studied by 25% of the participants.

In addition, the participants were asked to indicate the class in which they started learning the foreign languages: Italian was studied starting from Form 1 or Form 2 by 65% of the participants, with only 3.75% having started Italian in Year 5 or Year 6 of Primary School and 8.75% having started studying Italian in Form 3 or in Form 4. A similar trend can be noticed for French: 48.75% of respondents started studying this language in Form 1 or in Form 2, whereas 2.5% of participants declared to have started learning French in Year 5 or Year 6; 10% of respondents claimed that they had started learning French in Form 3 or Form 4.

The participants were then questioned regarding how frequently they watch Italian, Maltese, or English language television programmes. According to the results, English programmes are followed on a daily basis by 58.75% of the participants and 22.5% of them watch English programmes between three and four times a week. Programmes in Italian are followed daily by 45% of the participants and Maltese ones are followed everyday by 31.25% of respondents. The results, displayed in the table below show that English is currently the participants' preferred language for watching television while Maltese is currently their least favourite one ([Table 1](#), below). The 41-50 years old age group and the 50+ age group contain the highest percentage of participants who watch Italian television daily.

**Table 1:** Maltese, English and Italian TV habits at present

TV HABITS	Everyday	3-4 times a week	1-2 times a week	Less than 1 a week	Never
English	58.75%	22.5%	8.75%	7.5%	2.5%
Italian	45%	11.25%	11.25%	22.5%	10%
Maltese	31.25%	7.5%	10%	30%	21.25%

The respondents were then asked questions about their favourite Italian TV programmes, radio programmes, their favourite Italian music and their preferred reading material in Italian. As for participants' favourite Italian TV programmes, 33.75% have selected 'TV Shows' as their favourite programme to watch on Italian channels, such as quiz shows, music shows, talent shows, etc. 25% of

respondents reported 'Cartoons' being their favourite Italian TV programme, specifying that they did not only like originally Italian cartoons, but also Japanese anime dubbed in Italian, such as DragonBall, Naruto, Lady Oscar etc. Two smaller groups reported that their favourite programmes were either movies (11.25%) or documentaries (5%) such as SuperQuark, Kilimanjaro or Geo&Geo. 17.5% of participants answered that they do not or did not have any favourite Italian TV programme. (see Figure C in Appendix B).

When it comes to the participants' favourite Italian radio programmes, 78.75% of them declared not having any favourite Italian radio programme and 13.75% of them reported following the mainstream Italian radio programmes such as RTL, R105, R102.5, Radio Italia, etc.

As for the respondents' favourite Italian music, 30% of them answered that they enjoy listening to 2000s Italian songs and artists such as Måneskin, whereas another 30% of respondents claimed that they do not have any Italian favourite artist or genre. The remaining 40% is split between participants who enjoy Italian 1970s music and those who prefer Italian music from the 1980s or 1990s, such as Laura Pausini, Eros Ramazzotti, Tiziano Ferro, etc. (see Figure D in Appendix B).

Participants were asked about their preferred Italian reading material and 40% of them reported that they enjoy reading online articles in Italian. This is followed by 28.75% of respondents who do not have any reading preference in Italian, and by 22.5% who prefer reading a mix of everything, such as newspapers, books, comics, online articles, journals, blogs, magazines, etc. The majority of the 31-40 and the 41-50 years old age groups showed preference for online articles in Italian (see Figure E in Appendix B).

Additionally, the respondents were asked about the circumstances in which they use Italian to communicate with others. 10% of participants speak Italian with friends or family, another 10% use Italian to communicate via Social Media (e.g. WhatsApp, Messenger, Instagram, etc.) and another 10% reported that they speak Italian in other, different circumstances. 16.25% of the respondents use Italian at work and 50% of them speak Italian in other situations, such as with friends and at work, with teachers, colleagues and relatives, on social media, etc. (see Figure F in Appendix B).

Participants were asked about their preferred subtitling options when watching an Italian programme: 63.75% reported that they do not use subtitles when watching programmes in Italian. Differently, 18.75% of respondents prefer watching a movie or a programme in Italian with Italian

subtitles and 15% of them use English subtitle when watching a movie or programme in Italian. 90% of the age group 41-50 reported not using subtitles when watching movies in Italian.

Finally, to the question 'why did you choose to study Italian?', 20% of participants reported that they chose to study Italian to understand Italian television programmes better, 16.25% declared that they love the Italian language and culture, and 12.5% claimed that they chose to study Italian because they had developed an interest in the language and culture after exposure to Italian television programmes. Moreover, 11.25% reported that they considered Italian an easy language to learn, therefore, they chose to study it at school for convenience. 15% of respondents chose to study Italian at school either because they have Italian relatives, or because of the geographical proximity of Italy and Malta, or for personal reasons. To conclude, 8.75% declared that Italian was a compulsory subject in their schools and 16.25% did not provide an answer to the question.

Participants self-assessed their receptive (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing) in Maltese, English and Italian by rating them in the three languages, on a scale from 1-4. For the receptive skills, 1 represented understating nothing in Italian, 2 indicated understanding little Italian, 3 stood for understanding the majority of what is said in Italian and 4 was used to indicate that the participants understand every word in Italian. For the productive skills, participants chose 1 to indicate that they are unable to produce any spoken Italian, 2 was indicative of being able to produce just a few words or basic sentences in Italian, 3 was selected when respondents deemed themselves quite fluent when speaking Italian and 4 was used to indicate that participants are very fluent when speaking Italian.

With regard to Maltese, 97.5% of respondents reported that they can understand everything or the majority of what is being said in Maltese and another 97.5% reported that they are very or quite fluent in Maltese when speaking. As for English, 81.25% declared that they understand everything or the majority of what is said in English and similarly, 80% reported that they are very fluent or quite fluent in spoken English. Numbers decrease a little when it comes to Italian: 77.5% of participants claimed that they understand everything or the majority of Italian, whereas 62.5% deemed themselves very fluent or quite fluent when speaking Italian. As expected, the number of people who understand Italian well is higher than those who speak Italian well ([Table 2](#), below).

**Table 2:** Participants' Self-assessment for Maltese, English and Italian.

SELF-ASSESSMENT Comprehension	Every word	The majority	Little	Nothing
Maltese	96.25%	1.25%	0	2.5%
English	77.5%	3.75%	1.25%	17.5%
Italian	<b>46.25%</b>	<b>31.25%</b>	12.5%	10%
SELF-ASSESSMENT Production	Very fluent	Quite fluent	Just a few words	Nothing
Maltese	91.25%	6.25%	0	2.5%
English	71.25%	8.75%	1.25%	18.75%
Italian	<b>32.5%</b>	<b>30%</b>	27.5%	10%

The results of the self-assessment were also explored on the basis of the four age groups. With regard to Maltese and English, almost all participants across the four age groups reported being very or quite fluent in both languages, and they also reported being able to comprehend everything or the majority of both languages, with the percentages being slightly higher for Maltese. In relation to Italian, results were slightly different, in fact (see [Table 3](#) below):

- in the age group 20-30, 40% of participants reported being very or quite fluent in Italian and 70% reported being able to understand everything or the majority of it;
- in the age group 31-40, 70% reported being very or quite fluent in Italian and 80% reported being able to understand everything in Italian, or the majority;
- in the age group 41-50, **80%** reported being very or quite fluent in Italian and **90%** claimed to understand everything or the majority of Italian;
- finally, in the 51+ age group, 60% reported being very or quite fluent in Italian and 70% reported being able to comprehend everything or the majority of Italian.

**Table 3:** High spoken and comprehension skills in Italian according to the four age groups.

ITA Comprehension	20-30 Age group	31-40 Age group	41-50 Age group	51+ Age group
Everything or the majority	70%	80%	90%	70%
ITA Production	20-30 Age group	31-40 Age group	41-50 Age group	51+ Age group
Very or Quite fluent	40%	70%	80%	60%

To summarise, the results of the questionnaire show that:

- (a) participants are employed in a variety of jobs;
- (b) English and Maltese together were the first languages learnt by the 20-30 years age group, whereas Maltese was the first language learnt by the other groups;
- (c) Italian and French were the most studied languages in the past, followed by Spanish;
- (d) the majority of participants started studying Italian and/or French in Form 1 or Form 2;
- (e) English TV programmes are the most preferred among participants, followed by Italian TV programmes and then, Maltese ones;
- (f) the participants' favourite Italian programmes are mostly TV shows and cartoons;
- (g) almost all the respondents claimed not having any favourite Italian radio programme;
- (h) Italian music is appreciated by some of the participants;
- (i) online articles are the most preferred reading material in Italian;
- (j) participants speak Italian in a variety of circumstances;
- (k) the majority of respondents do not use any subtitles when watching movies in Italian;
- (l) 77.5% of participants reported that they are able to understand everything or the majority of what is being said or written in Italian;
- (m) 62.5% of participants reported being very or quite fluent in Italian when speaking Italian.

The results of the second part of the research will be discussed in the next section.

### **4.3. The Results of The Second Part of the Research**

#### **4.3.1. Evaluation**

The second part of the research consisted of three tasks, as explained in the previous chapter (see 3.2.2): an informal interview in Italian (3.2.3), an oral picture-description task in Italian (3.2.4) and a written translation task from Italian into either Maltese or English (3.2.5).

As explained in section 3.2.3, for the purpose of my analysis, the results of the informal interview task will not be discussed in this chapter, as the aim of the interview was to allow participants to speak Italian in an informal manner and make them feel at ease during the following two tasks, namely the picture-story task and the translation task.

In addition to that, the results obtained by the respondents in the picture-story task and in the translation task will be discussed in relation to the evaluation criteria described in Chapter 3 (see 3.3): for the picture-story task, participants were assigned an evaluation score ranging from '1' to '5', where '1' represents poor L2 Italian productive skills and '5' represents high L2 Italian productive skills; for the translation task, respondents were assigned the range '0-5' to indicate that they



performed poorly in the translation task, the range '6-7' to indicate that their performance in the translation task was average, and the range '8-10' to indicate that the participants performed well in the translation task<sup>9</sup>.

Finally, in order to describe and discuss the participants' performance in the picture-story (see 4.3.3), a qualitative analysis of a small sub-sample of respondents that were selected from each of the four age groups and from each of the five evaluation ranges was made; as for the translation task, another sub-sample of participants was selected from each of the four age groups and from each of the three ranges ('0-5', '6-7' and '8-10'). Both guided and spontaneous learners were included in the selection. It is important to keep in mind that the selected excerpts are not representative of the full sample; the selection was made for the purpose of presenting linguistic analysis. The complete transcriptions of the picture-story task and the translation task are found in the Appendix.

#### 4.3.2. General Findings

##### • The Picture-Story Task

In the picture-story task, 4/80 participants were assigned evaluation range '1' and 5/80 participants were assigned evaluation range '2'. 14/80 participants were assigned evaluation range '3' and 21/80 participants were assigned evaluation range '4'. Finally, 36/80 responders were assigned evaluation range '5' (see Table 4).

All the participants belonging to evaluation range '1' used the *presente indicativo* between zero and eight times during their narration and they employed verbs in the infinitive form between zero and three times. The *passato prossimo* (with or without auxiliary) was used between zero and six times by the respondents and the *imperfetto* was only used once by one participant. Simple sentences were the most frequently employed, between seven and 20 times during the picture description, and the respondents only used active sentences.

The respondents belonging to evaluation range '2' used the *presente indicativo* up to 37 times during the narration, whereas the infinitive was used between one and eight times. The *passato prossimo* (with or without auxiliary) was used between zero and six times, and the *imperfetto* was never employed. Simple sentences were used between eight and 17 times during the picture-story

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<sup>9</sup> The numbers defining the ranges were chosen arbitrarily to refer to the different categories in which the responses were placed. For more details see Chapter 3, section 3.1.6.

and compound sentences were used between four and nine times. All participants used active sentences to express themselves.

Participants belonging to evaluation range '3' used the *presente indicativo* between ten and 73 times during their description and they used the *infinito* between zero and six times. *Passato prossimo* was used between zero and 14 times, whereas the *imperfetto* was used between zero and eight times. During the narration, respondents employed up to 28 simple sentences, between three and 13 compound sentences and between zero and 15 complex sentences. All respondents employed active sentences.

The participants who belong to evaluation range '4' used the *presente indicativo* between 11 and 73 times, whereas the *infinito* mainly never employed. The *passato prossimo* was used between zero and 21 times, and the *imperfetto* was used between zero and 14 times. Up to 24 simple sentences were used during the picture-description, compound sentences were used between three and 19 times, and complex sentences were used between three and 18 times. Respondents only used active sentences.

Respondents who were assigned evaluation range '5' used the *presente indicativo* between 20 and 78 times, and the *infinito* was only occasionally employed. Participants used *passato prossimo* between three and 34 times, and they used *imperfetto* between zero and 29 times. Simple sentences were used up to 17 times, compound sentences were used up to 13 times, and finally, complex sentences were used between five and 22 times. Even though participants mainly used active sentences to express themselves, three participants also employed passive sentences during the picture-story task. [Table 4](#) below summarises the general findings of the picture-story task (4.3.2)<sup>10</sup>:

**Table 4:** Frequency of verbs and sentences used across the Evaluation Ranges in the Picture-Story.

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<sup>10</sup> 'N/a's in the table indicate that there were no instances of that verb or type of sentence in the participants' speech (e.g. no participants belonging to evaluation ranges '4' and '5' made use of the *infinito* during their speech; no participants belonging to evaluation range '2' made use of *imperfetto* during the narration; none of the participants belonging to evaluation range '1' made use of complex sentences; and finally, participants belonging to evaluation ranges '1', '2', '3' and '4' did not make use of any passive sentence during the picture-story task).

Picture-Description Task	Presente	Infinito	Passato Prossimo	Imperfetto	Simple	Compound	Complex	Active	Passive
Eval Range 1	0-8 times	0-3 times	0-6 times	0-1 time	7-20 sentences	0-6 sentences	N/a	2-10 sentences	N/a
Eval Range 2	0-37 times	1-8 times	0-6 times	N/a	8-17 sentences	4-9 sentences	0-8 sentences	11-27 sentences	N/a
Eval Range 3	10-73 times	0-6 times	0-14 times	0-8 times	1-28 sentences	3-13 sentences	0-15 sentences	9-39 sentences	N/a
Eval Range 4	11-73 times	N/a	0-21 times	0-14 times	1-24 sentences	3-19 sentences	3-18 sentences	14-33 sentences	N/a
Eval Range 5	20-78 times	N/a	3-34 times	0-29 times	1-17 sentences	0-13 sentences	5-22 sentences	16-33 sentences	3 sentences

As the table above shows, the use of the *presente indicativo*, *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto* increase as the evaluation range increases, indicating that the more proficient the L2 speaker, the more frequent the use of verb tenses in his/her speech. Moreover, a similar trend can be observed with regard to compound and complex sentences: the higher the evaluation range, the higher the number of compound or complex sentences employed, which indicates that the higher the evaluation range, the higher the syntactic complexity that participants were able to use during their narration, by employing both coordination and subordination.

#### • The Translation Task

In the translation task, 7/80 participants obtained '0-5'; 11/80 obtained '6-7', and finally, 62/80 participants obtained '8-10'.

The majority of respondents who obtained a score of '0-5' were able to translate between 11 and 17 (out of 20) single words correctly, and all of them were able to translate between one and three (out of six) phrases or simple sentences adequately. The majority were also able to translate between one and three (out of eight) compound or complex sentences. More than half the participants did not manage to translate any of the two idioms.

The respondents who obtained a score of '6-7' were all able to translate between 11 and 17 (out of 20) single words correctly. Moreover, the majority of them were also able to translate between one and five (out of six) phrases or simple sentences, and between four and six (out of eight) compound or complex sentences. A little bit more than half the respondents were able to translate at least one idiom correctly.

The big majority of participants who obtained a score of '8-10' were able to translate between 18 and 20 (out of 20) single words correctly; they were also able to translate the phrases, simple, compound and complex sentences correctly. Finally, the majority were also able to translate both idioms appropriately. [Table 5](#) below summarises the general findings of the translation task (4.3.2).

**Table 5:** Number of words, phrases, sentences, and idioms translated correctly across the three scores in the Translation.

Translation Task	Words (20)	Phrases (6)	Sentences (8)	Idioms (2)
Score '0-5'	11-17	1-3	1-3	0
Score '6-7'	11-17	1-5	4-6	1
Score '8-10'	18-20	6	8	2

### 4.3.3. The Picture-Story Task

#### • Evaluation Range '1'

The oral narrations produced by the participants belonging to Evaluation Range '1' shared many similarities (see Table C(a)). To begin with, the participants<sup>11</sup> selected for the analysis gave one-word responses or simple phrases while narrating the story depicted. Moreover, they used foreign words or phrases to help them during their narration. The samples of the participants belonging to the age groups 20-30 and 31-40 both contain lack of subject-adjective agreement and both use the infinitive form of the verbs to express an action happening either in the present or in the past. Only the 51+ participant used the *presente indicativo* of the verbs 'sapere' (first person singular), 'dire' and 'essere' (third person singular)<sup>12</sup>. Finally, the participant belonging to the 31-40 age group used one verb in the *participio passato* ('indicato') and the 51+ participant used one verb in the *imperfetto* form ('c'era')<sup>13</sup>. The three participants belonging to evaluation range '1' produced an average of 2.45 words per sentence. Below are some examples:

<sup>11</sup> The participants selected for 'Evaluation Range 1' were only three because there were no 41-50 years old respondents who were assigned to this evaluation range.

<sup>12</sup> This is in line with the idea that during the first stages of acquisition, the *presente indicativo* is the first form to be acquired together with the infinitive and the first forms to appear are those of the first and third person singular (Bernini, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> The use of presentative 'c'era' is also interesting from the point of view of interlanguage, in fact, the presentative appears conjugated in the *imperfetto*, which usually appears at a more advanced stage of acquisition; moreover, in most cases, the first conjugated form of the *imperfetto* tense that appears in learners' interlanguage is the third person singular 'era' (Bernini, 1990). The participants' use of 'c'era' at an initial stage may also be due to the fact that these forms are frequently found in the input, e.g. on television, colloquial Italian, etc., and participants memorise them, integrating these forms to their developing interlanguage (Bernini, 1994).

Speaker 271e (20-30, spontaneous)	Speaker 8m (31-40, guided)	41-50	Speaker 70e (51+, guided)
Bambini giocare.	Due figli, amici.	N/a	<u>Scared</u> . Spaventati.
Persone nuotare.	Passigiare.	N/a	Cacciatore, <u>they're waving</u>
Si. Bambini contente.	Sorprise.	N/a	E dice qualcosa è spaventata.
	Indicato il tronco e due occhi.	N/a	Alla fine c'era un gatto.
	<u>They see a gatto</u> .	N/a	

### • Evaluation Range '2'

The oral narrations produced by respondents belonging to Evaluation Range '2' also share many similarities (see Table C(b)). First of all, all samples contain:

- (a) lack of agreement;
- (b) the standard-like use of some verbs in the present simple, such as 'giocare', 'guardare', 'andare', 'aiutare', 'dare', 'essere'<sup>14</sup>;
- (c) syntactic complexity through coordination;

Interestingly, only the participants belonging to the age group 20-30 and 51+ used some infinitive forms and the present simple form 'c'è' in their speech. Moreover, whereas participants in the 20-30 and 31-40 age groups used some words in English to help them express themselves, the 20-30 participant also needed some suggestions related to vocabulary during the task, in fact the word 'sabbia' was suggested by the interviewer during the narration. Finally, the respondents in the 20-30 and 51+ age groups used the *participio passato* 'finito/a' once in their narration.

It is also interesting that the speakers used some types of subordinate clauses even at this stage of acquisition: Speaker 279e uses a *subordinata esplicita oggettiva* ('non sa che c'è la mare), and Speakers 222e and 84e both use a *subordinata implicita finale* ('l'uccello è buono per volare' and 'il padre vai per aiutare')<sup>15</sup>. The selected participants for evaluation range '2' produced an average of 13.4 words per sentence. Some examples are shown below:

<sup>14</sup> All the verbs employed by the selected participants during their narration, with the exception of 'essere', belong to the *prima coniugazione* '-are'.

<sup>15</sup> According to Giacalone-Ramat (1999, cited in Caruana, 2003:114), in the developing process of subordination, *esplicite causali* and *temporali*, and *implicite finali* are the first types of subordinate clauses to be acquired by learners of L2 Italian.

Speaker 279e (20-30, spontaneous)	Speaker 222e (31-40, guided)	41-50	Speaker 84e (51+, guided)
Nella prima, due figli con la	Ma un uccello è <u>injured</u> , non è morto.	N/a	Giocare con la palla
cane giocare con <u>ramel</u> , /sabbia/.	E la bambina li aiuta.	N/a	E c'è anche il cane
La cane andare al pallone	l'uccello è buono per <u>to fly</u> , volare.	N/a	ma il padre vai per aiutare
Non sa che c'è la mare.		N/a	e la storia finita bene allora.

### • Evaluation Range '3'

The picture-descriptions provided by the selected participants belonging to Evaluation Range 3 are similar (see Table C(c)) and in all three narrations the following appear:

- (a) the alternate use of *imperfetto* and *passato prossimo* (although the choice of auxiliary is not always standard-like);
- (b) the standard-like use of the *presente indicativo* of verbs such as 'camminare', 'vedere', 'avere', 'dire', 'essere', 'dare', 'fare'<sup>16</sup>;
- (c) syntactic complexity through coordination and subordination;
- (d) some instances of correct agreement.

The speakers belonging to age groups 20-30 and 51+ made use of 'c'era' or 'c'è'.

The three speakers also used subordinate clauses in their speech: Speaker 13e has used only one *subordinata esplicita dichiarativa* ('I bambini dicono<sup>17</sup> che loro ha visto'); Speaker 82e uses one *subordinata esplicita causale* ('perché è guarito') and two *subordinate implicite finali* ('per curarli' and 'per prendere più forza'); and finally, Speaker 2m uses a *subordinata esplicita causale* ('perché era feruto') and a *subordinata implicita finale* ('per curarlo').

<sup>16</sup> In Evaluation Range '3' verbs belonging to the *prima* (-are), *seconda* (-ere) and *terza* (-ire) *coniugazione* appear in learners' narrations.

<sup>17</sup> Speaker 13e conjugates the verb 'dire' in the third person plural using the standard-like suffix '-ono', however she adds the affricate /tʃ/ (/ditʃono/) instead of the standard-like velar sound /k/ (/dikono/); this is interesting from the point of view of an evolving interlanguage, in fact, inflectional morphology in Italian is very rich and can present difficulties for second language learners, who often overextend verbal forms and miss the standard-like correspondence between subject and verbal inflection (Banfi and Bernini, 2003). The second and third person singular of the verb 'dire', in fact, are pronounced using the affricate /tʃ/, namely /ditʃi/ and /ditʃe/, therefore the speaker might have overextended the pronunciation to the third person plural.

To conclude, an interesting point to highlight in Speaker 82e's transcript is that the participant employs direct and indirect pronouns frequently in her narration ('è andata a trovarlo', 'dove è caduta', 'le fa un po' di terapia', 'per curarli', 'gli da da mangiare', 'lo lancia', 'farlo vivere') and even though the use of such pronouns is not always and necessarily standard-like, it does provide evidence of an evolving interlanguage (see 2.3). The participants selected for evaluation range '3' produced an average of 14.5 words per sentence. Some examples are provided below:

Speaker 13e (20-30, guided)	Speaker 82e (31-40, guided)	41-50	Speaker 2m (51+, guided)
in l'ultima immagine c'è due bambini	Lei andata a trovarlo, dove è caduta	N/a	C'è questa ragazza che è camminare
e sono camminando nel parco.	e poi le fa un po' di terapia per curarli.	N/a	in campagna e c'è questi uccelli.
Dopo c'era un uomo e	...perché è guarito di quello che c'aveva.	N/a	E lei ha portato a casa per curarlo.
i bambini salutavano.		N/a	Ti fa mangiare, è guarito e ti ha lasciato in campagna.
I bambini dicono che loro ha visto un creatura nera.			

#### • Evaluation Range '4'

The narrations provided by the participants belonging to Evaluation Range '4' also share similar structures (see Table C(d)). Firstly, all the selected respondents made use of presentatives 'c'è', 'ci sono' or 'c'era' in their speech and they all encountered some uncertainties related to vocabulary, mainly low frequency words; in fact, words like '*bagnino*' were suggested by the interviewer during the task, in cases when participants seemed unable to proceed with their narrations<sup>18</sup>. All respondents made use of coordination and subordination in their narration and all of them were able to use the *presente indicativo*, *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto* in a native-like manner.

With regard to subordination, Speaker 282e used three explicit subordinate clauses in her narration, of which two were *subordinate esplicite causali* ('perché il cane sta andando nel mare' and 'perché i bambini hanno il cane') and the other was a *subordinata esplicita dichiarativa* ('molto felice che i bambini hanno il cane'); Speaker 281e used one *subordinata implicita finale* ('per difenderli'); Speaker 95e used a *subordinata esplicita dichiarativa* ('penso che lei ha paura') and a *subor-*

<sup>18</sup> The attempt of these high proficiency speakers to use low frequency words is interesting from the point of view of their evolving interlanguage, which allows them to retrieve and use terms that are more appropriate to the context of the narration, in preference to more generic terms. Moreover, the speakers' uncertainty related to low frequency words shows a willingness to use Italian more proficiently.

*dinata implicita finale* ('ha volato per cercare la mamma e papà'); finally, Speaker 41e used two *subordinate implicite finali* ('si è tuffato nell'acqua per prendere il pallone' and 'si è buttato in acqua per salvare il cane').

Moreover, Speaker 95e uses the expression 'infasciato' during her narration. This is an example of a lexical item that was morphologically integrated into the L2 from the Maltese word '*infaxxat*'; in fact, the standard-like Italian equivalent would have been '(ha preso l'uccello e lo ha) *fasciato*' or else, (ha preso l'uccello e l'ha fatto) '*fasciare*'. To conclude, Speaker 282e used the following construction in her narration: 'il cane sta andando nel mare e sta per morire!'. The construction '*stare per + infinito*', which was used by the speaker in a native-like manner and which refers to an action which is about to happen in the near future, provides further evidence of an evolving interlanguage system. The participants selected for evaluation range '4' produced an average of 24.6 words per sentence. Examples are shown below:

Speaker 282e (20-30, guided)	Speaker 281e (31-40, guided)
I bambini stanno facendo i castelli di sabbia.	Ci sono due bambini che fanno una passeggiata e hanno visto
tutti sono felici perché i bambini hanno il cane e <u>their</u> madre è molto felice che i bambini hanno il cane e il /bagnino/ ha dato il pallone alla coppia.	qualcosa di <u>scary</u> , paura nell'albero e hanno visto un uomo che camminava con la pistola [...] questo uomo ha puntato la pistola [...]
Speaker 95e (41-50, guided)	Speaker 41e (51+, guided)
Allora, ci sono gli uccelli e un uccello è ferito e lei, forse in un bosco, sta cercando quell'uccello che ha caduto per terra e lei poi ha preso l'uccello e ha fatto- <u>infasciato</u> *** (see footnote 17). E ha dato da mangiare e ha dato l'acqua da bere.	Allora la ragazza tira il pallone al ragazzo, ma lui non l'ha <u>aggrappato</u> (see 3.3), non l'ha preso. Il cane sta divertendo e sta lì, e poi il cane si è tuffato nell'acqua per prendere il pallone.

#### ● Evaluation Range '5'

What distinguishes the participants belonging to Evaluation Range '4' and '5' is that the spoken productions of the latter are more complex and contain more advanced verb forms, including the *condizionale*, *trapassato prossimo* and *futuro anteriore* (see Table C(e)). The selected respondents



have also employed the *presente indicativo*, *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto* appropriately to the context.

All participants have used coordination and subordination during their narrative; Speaker 49e used three *subordinate esplicite dichiarative* ('direi che è stato', 'credo che il gatto è un po' spaventato' and 'sono felicissimi che è stato solo un gatto'); Speaker 231e used three *subordinate esplicite dichiarative*, both introduced by 'penso/a che', one *subordinata esplicita causale* ('perché stanno per andare in acqua') and one *subordinata implicita finale* ('per salvarlo'); Speaker 156e used a *subordinata esplicita dichiarativa* ('immagino che') followed by a *subordinata condizionale* ('immagino che + se...') and a *subordinata esplicita temporale* ('quando era finalmente guarito'); finally, Speaker 167e used one *subordinata esplicita causale* ('si sono nascosti [...] perché chissà quale animale era'). Both Speaker 49e and Speaker 231e made use of the construction 'stare per + infinito' in a standard-like manner.

To conclude, Speaker 49m used the verb 'fare' to report direct speech, which is typical of spoken, colloquial Italian and Speaker 167e employs a *subordinata implicita oggettiva* ('gli occhi brillare') which is used in a native-like manner and indicates a high level of spoken proficiency in Italian. The participants selected for evaluation range '5' produced an average of 23.4 words per sentence. Examples are displayed below:

<p><b>Speaker 49m</b> (20-30, guided)</p>	<p><b>Speaker 231e</b> (31-40, spontaneous)</p>
<p>Ma poi intanto, nel frattempo c'era un cacciatore e hanno chiesto aiuto e questo cacciatore è venuto con loro; direi che è stato un po' sbalordito dalla loro descrizione. [...] è uscito rilassato da quel buco e il cacciatore fa: 'eh, ma è un gatto!'</p>	<p>Il pallone penso che sta andando in acqua e il cane lo sta guardando. Il cane è sfinito e i bambini stanno salutando il bagnino, correndo.</p>
<p><b>Speaker 156e</b> (41-50, guided)</p>	<p><b>Speaker 167e</b> (51+, guided)</p>
<p>Un bel giorno c'era Clara che ha visto degli uccelli nel cielo, volando in formazione. Immagino che se non ha mai cambiato vestito, saranno passate delle settimane...</p>	<p>C'erano due bambini che andavano a passeggio in una boscaglia. Poi, nel buco di un albero, hanno visto gli occhi brillare di qualcuno, di qualcosa, di qualche animale, allora loro avevano paura.</p>

## Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the analysis of the selected subsample of participants for the picture-story task reveals that:

- (a) The performance of the selected participants is in line with the three systematic stages of acquisition that learners typically go through, namely the 'pre-basic' phase, the 'basic' phase and the 'post-basic phase' (3.3);
- (b) Except from those belonging to Evaluation Range '1', respondents have generally not made use of inter-sentential code-switching in their narration; in the majority of cases, participants used a word or two in English or in Maltese during the task;
- (c) Participants across all age groups and evaluation ranges showed a preference for using the *passato prossimo* more frequently than the *imperfetto*;
- (d) Subordination was present in the participants' narrations belonging to Evaluation Range '2' up to '5' and the number of subordinate clauses employed gradually increased as the evaluation range increased; the most frequently used subordinate clauses were: *esplicite dichiarative*, *esplicite causali* and *implicite finali*.
- (e) With regard to expressing subordination, oftentimes participants showed a preference for 'che' when introducing a *subordinata esplicita*, which is also more frequently found in spoken Italian (Giacalone-Ramat, 2003; Berruto, 2012);

### 4.3.4. The Translation Task

#### • Score '0-5' (see Table C(f))

The participants who scored '0-5' in the translation task belonged to the 20-30, 31-40 and 51+ age groups, as nobody belonging to the age group 41-50 obtained a '0-5' score.

With regard to the single words, participants across the three age groups were more familiar with high frequency words and with cognates, whereas the hardest words to translate were the false friends ('*salute*', '*marito*', '*mansione*' and '*magazzino*'). Respondents seemed to have a hard time with medium frequency words as well ('*lettura*', '*ingresso*', '*legare*', '*dimenticare*', '*pensiero*', '*giro*', '*vendere*' and '*mangiare*'), however Speaker 64e (spontaneous acquirer) belonging to the age group 51+ translated all the low frequency words correctly.

The participants in this group were unable to translate the phrases correctly; the simple sentences were all translated correctly by Speaker 64e, but the other participants could only translate half of them. In the case of Speaker 64e, it is interesting to mention that the subject translated the *imper-*

*fetto* ‘cucinava’ into the past simple ‘cooked’, therefore showing uncertainty in the perfective / imperfective aspectual distinction<sup>19</sup> (see 3.3); moreover, the *condizionale* ‘farei’ was translated into present simple ‘I do’<sup>20</sup>.

All the respondents found difficulties when translating compound and complex sentences, although Speaker 1e (guided learner, 20-30) managed to translate three out of four compound sentences correctly. In the sentences that the participants correctly comprehended and translated there was uncertainty related to the choice of verb forms; for example, both Speaker 1e and Speaker 8m translated the *futuro semplice* ‘adotterò’ into the past simple ‘I adopted’<sup>21</sup>. In addition to that, Speaker 64e translated the first person of *presente indicativo* ‘studio’ into the English imperative form ‘study’ and translated the *imperfetto* ‘facevamo’ into simple past ‘we did’<sup>22</sup>. Moreover, Speaker 1e also translated two words incorrectly: ‘*bagnoschiurma*’, which she translated as ‘towels’ and ‘*cercherei*’, which she translated as ‘I checked’<sup>23</sup>. Amongst the complex sentences, Speakers 1e and 64e translated correctly the following subordinates: (a) *Implicita temporale*; (b) *Implicita finale*; and (c) *Esplicita modale*. To conclude, none of the participants was able to translate any idiom correctly<sup>24</sup>. The results are described in [Table 6](#) below.

**Table 6:** Performance of selected participants who scored ‘0-5’ in the Translation task.

Translation Score ‘0-5’	20-30 Speaker 1e	31-40 Speaker 8m	51+ Speaker 64e (S)
<b>Words (20)</b>	1/2 cognates 1/2 false friends 4/8 high freq. 1/4 med freq. 0/4 low freq.	2/2 cognates 0/2 false friends 2/8 high freq. 0/4 med freq. 0/4 low freq.	1/2 cognates 0/2 false friends 7/8 high freq. 1/4 med freq. 3/4 low freq.
<b>Phrases (2)</b>	0/2	0/2	0/2
<b>Simple Sentences (4)</b>	2/4	2/4	4/4

<sup>19</sup> ‘0-5’, Speaker 64e, 51+, Phrases (b) in the Appendix

<sup>20</sup> ‘0-5’, Speaker 64e, 51+, Phrases (d) in the Appendix

<sup>21</sup> ‘0-5’, Speaker 1e, 20-30, Sentences (c) in the Appendix;  
‘0-5’, Speaker 8m, 31-40, Sentences (a) in the Appendix;

<sup>22</sup> ‘0-5’, Speaker 64e, 51+, Sentences (a, c) in the Appendix;

<sup>23</sup> ‘0-5’, Speaker 1e, 20-30, Sentences (b, d) in the Appendix;

<sup>24</sup> It is important to point out that, in instances where some verb tenses, such as *imperfetto* or *passato prossimo*, were not translated into the equivalent verb tenses in English or in Maltese, but were still considered communicatively acceptable, the pragmatic use of the verbs was taken into consideration and half a mark was assigned (as opposed to zero): acceptability, in fact, was the main criteria when evaluating the translations.

Compound Sentences (4)	3/4	1/4	1/4
Complex Sentences (5)	1/4	0/4	2/4
Idioms (2)	0/2	0/2	0/2

• **Score ‘6-7’** (see Table C(g))

The participants who scored ‘6-7’ in the translation task were all able to translate the high frequency words, the medium frequency and the cognates with ease. The challenging words to translate were the false friends (*‘quartiere’, ‘minuta’, ‘cancellino’, ‘cognata’, ‘mansione’, ‘magazzino’*).

The participants aged 31 and over did very well with the low frequency words, but the respondents in the 20-30 year-old age bracket did not translate any of the low frequency words correctly (*‘elenco’, ‘brano’, ‘tacere’, ‘cadere’, ‘affitto’, ‘vicenda’, ‘spingere’, ‘indossare’, ‘spiaggia’, ‘muro’, ‘uccidere’, ‘prestare’*).

With regard to the phrases and simple sentences, all participants were able to translate the simple sentences well, however some speakers had difficulties with the phrases; only Speaker 273e (guided, 31-40) was able to translate all phrases and all simple sentences correctly. It is interesting to mention that all participants made some minor mistakes related to vocabulary or choice of verb forms, in fact, Speaker 100e (guided, 20-30) translated *‘concorso’* as ‘prize’, the *futuro semplice* *‘passeremo’* as the past simple ‘we had’ and, the *condizionale* *‘vorrebbe’* into the past simple ‘wanted’<sup>25</sup>. Speaker 273e (guided, 31-40) translated *‘citofono’* as ‘phone’ (instead of ‘intercom’)<sup>26</sup>. Speaker 31e (spontaneous, 41-50) translated the *presente indicativo* *‘vuoi’* into the infinitive form ‘to want’<sup>27</sup> and finally, Speaker 109e (guided, 51+) has translated the word *‘film’* into ‘episode’ and the *condizionale* *‘farei’* into the future simple ‘I will do’<sup>28</sup>.

Moving on to the compound and complex sentences, all participants were able to translate a significant number of sentences correctly, although the choice of verb forms was not always accurate<sup>29</sup>. Speaker 100e translated *‘siccome’* into ‘if’ (instead of ‘since’) and she translated the *con-*

<sup>25</sup> ‘6-7’, Speaker 100e, 20-30, Phrases (b), (c), (d).

<sup>26</sup> ‘6-7’, Speaker 273e, 31-40, Phrases (c).

<sup>27</sup> ‘6-7’, Speaker 31e, 41-50, Phrases (a).

<sup>28</sup> ‘6-7’, Speaker 109e, 51+, Phrases (d), (e).

<sup>29</sup> Once again, it is important to keep in mind that, in instances where some verb tenses, such as *condizionale presente*, *imperfetto* or *passato prossimo* were not translated into the equivalent verb tenses in English or in Maltese, but were still considered communicatively acceptable, the pragmatic use of the verbs was taken into consideration and half a mark was assigned (as opposed to zero): acceptability, in fact, was the main criteria when evaluating the translations.

*dizionale* ‘mi piacerebbe’ into the past simple ‘wanted’<sup>30</sup>. Speaker 273e translated the *presente indicativo* ‘voglio’ into ‘I would like to’ (instead of ‘I want’)<sup>31</sup>. Speaker 31e translated the *passato prossimo* ‘mi ha chiesto’ into a past simple ‘asked’ with no explicit subject; she also translated the *imperfetto* ‘guardava’ and ‘faceva’ into the present continuous ‘is watching’ and ‘is doing’; and finally, she has translated the *futuro semplice* ‘faremo’ and ‘terremo’ into the present simple ‘we do’ and ‘we keep’<sup>32</sup>. Similarly, Speaker 109e has omitted the subject when translating the *presente indicativo* ‘(io) studio’ and has used the wrong subject when translating ‘mi ha chiesto’ into ‘I asked’; the speaker also translated the *imperfetto* verbs ‘facevamo’, ‘spiegava’, ‘guardava’ and ‘faceva’ into the past simple, and she translated the *futuro semplice* verbs ‘faremo’ and ‘terremo’ into the present simple ‘we do’, ‘it keeps’, just like Speaker 31e<sup>33</sup>.

To conclude, amongst all the complex sentences that the participants had to translate, the following types of subordinates were correctly translated: (a) *Esplicita causale*; (b) *Esplicita temporale*; (c) *Esplicita consecutiva*; (d) *Esplicita modale*; (e) *Implicita finale*; and (f) *Implicita interrogativa*; Only Speaker 100e translated both idioms correctly; the other participants only managed to translate one idiom correctly. Results are shown in [Table 7](#), below.

**Table 7:** Performance of selected participants who scored ‘6-7’ in the Translation task.

Translation Score ‘6-7’	20-30 Speaker 100e	31-40 Speaker 273e	41-50 Speaker 31e (S)	51+ Speaker 109e
<b>Words</b>	1/2 cognates 0/2 false friends 8/8 high freq. 3/4 med freq. 0/4 low freq.	2/2 cognates 1/2 false friends 7/8 high freq. 3/4 med freq. 3/4 low freq.	2/2 cognates 1/2 false friends 8/8 high freq. 2/4 med freq. 4/4 low freq.	1/2 cognates 0/2 false friends 8/8 high freq. 2/4 med freq. 4/4 low freq.
<b>Phrases</b>	1/2	2/2	0/2	1/2
<b>Simple Sentences</b>	3/4	4/4	4/4	4/4
<b>Compound Sentences</b>	3/4	4/4	3/4	3/4
<b>Complex Sentences</b>	2/4	3/4	3/4	3/4
<b>Idioms</b>	2/2	1/2	1/2	1/2

<sup>30</sup> ‘6-7’, Speaker 100e, 20-30, Sentences (a), (e).

<sup>31</sup> ‘6-7’, Speaker 273e, 31-40, Sentences (c).

<sup>32</sup> ‘6-7’, Speaker 31e, 41-50, Sentences (b), (e), (f).

<sup>33</sup> ‘6-7’, Speaker 109e, 51+, Sentences (a), (b), (d), (e) and (f).

• **Score '8-10'** (see Table C(h))

The participants who obtained '8-10' in the translation task were able to translate almost all the single words correctly, with the exception of two false friends ('*mansione*' and '*minuta*') and one medium frequency word ('*ingresso*') which were not translated accurately; however, Speaker 87e has translated '*ingresso*' as 'tidħol' (instead of 'dħul'), which is still close to the correct translation. With regard to the phrases and simple sentences, all participants have translated everything correctly, with minor mistakes related to the choice of verb forms: Speaker 193e translated the *imperfetto* '*cucinava*' into the past simple 'cooked'<sup>34</sup>; Speaker 57e translated the *condizionale* '*vorrebbe*' with the present simple<sup>35</sup>; and Speaker 87e translated the *condizionale* '*vorremmo*' into the present simple 'I want' (instead of 'we would like') and he translated '*ha corso*' as 'mxiet' (instead of 'griet')<sup>36</sup>.

The participants also translated all the compound and complex sentences correctly, with minor mistakes related once again to the choice of verb forms: Speaker 193e translated the *imperfetto* '*facevamo*' and '*guardava*' into the past simple 'we did' and 'she watched'<sup>37</sup>; Speaker 57e translated the *futuro semplice* '*staremo*' into the present simple 'we stay'<sup>38</sup>; and Speaker 87e has translated all the *imperfetto*, *passato remoto*, *congiuntivo imperfetto*, *condizionale* and *futuro semplice* verbs ('*disegnavamo*', '*coloravamo*', '*amasse*', '*diede*', '*chiedevamo*', '*potevamo*', '*adotterò*' and '*cercherei*')<sup>39</sup> into the Maltese present simple forms<sup>40</sup>.

The subordinate clauses that were correctly translated were: (a) *Esplicite condizionali*; (b) *Esplicite causali*; (c) *Esplicite consecutive*; (d) *Esplicite concessive*; (e) *Esplicite temporali*; (f) *Esplicite avversative*; (g) *Esplicite interrogative*; and (h) *Implicite finali*; (i) *Implicite interrogative*; (j) *Implicite dichiarative*; (k) *Implicite temporali*. All idioms were translated correctly by all participants. Results are shown in [Table 8](#), below.

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<sup>34</sup> '8-10', Speaker 193e, 20-30, Phrases (d).

<sup>35</sup> '8-10', Speaker 57e, 41-50, Phrases (f).

<sup>36</sup> '8-10', Speaker 87e, 51+, Phrases (d), (f).

<sup>37</sup> '8-10', Speaker 193e, 20-30, Sentences (e) and (g)

<sup>38</sup> '8-10', Speaker 57e, 41-50, Sentences (a)

<sup>39</sup> '8-10', Speaker 87e, 51+, Sentences (c), (e), (f), (g), (h)

<sup>40</sup> Also here, in instances where some verb tenses were not translated into the equivalent verb tenses in English or in Maltese, but were still considered communicatively acceptable, the pragmatic use of the verbs was taken into consideration and half a mark was assigned (as opposed to zero): acceptability, in fact, was the main criteria when evaluating the translations.

**Table 8:** Performance of selected participants who scored 8-10' in the Translation task.

Translation Score '8-10'	20-30 Speaker 193e (S)	31-40 Speaker 117e	41-50 Speaker 57e	51+ Speaker 87e
<b>Words</b>	2/2 cognates 1/2 false friends 8/8 high freq. 4/4 med freq. 4/4 low freq.	2/2 cognates 2/2 false friends 8/8 high freq. 4/4 med freq. 4/4 low freq.	2/2 cognates 1/2 false friends 8/8 high freq. 4/4 med freq. 4/4 low freq.	2/2 cognates 2/2 false friends 8/8 high freq. 3/4 med freq. 4/4 low freq.
<b>Phrases</b>	2/2	2/2	2/2	2/2
<b>Simple Sentences</b>	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4
<b>Compound Sentences</b>	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4
<b>Complex Sentences</b>	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4
<b>Idioms</b>	2/2	2/2	2/2	2/2

### Concluding Remarks

To conclude, the qualitative analysis of the selected subsample of participants for the translation task reveals that:

- (a) The single words that respondents across the three levels ('0-5', '6-7' and '8-10') found harder to translate were the false friends, such as '*mansione*', '*magazzino*', '*minuta*' and also '*salute*', '*marito*', '*quartiere*', '*cancellino*' and '*cognata*';
- (b) When translating phrases and sentences, the selected participants showed uncertainties that were mainly related to the choice of verb forms; in fact, across the three levels, the respondents encountered more difficulties when translating the *condizionale presente* and the *futuro semplice*, which many of them translated into either past or present simple;

### 4.4. Age, Input and Formal Onset in relation to Performance

#### 4.4.1. Age

Both in the picture-story task (3.2.4) and in the translation task (3.2.5), the age group which performed significantly better was the 41-50 age group, followed by the 31-40 and the 51+ age group; the 20-30 age group was the group that performed worse.

In the picture-story, 17/20 participants belonging to the 41-50 age group, 9/20 participants belonging to the 31-40 age group, and 5/20 participants belonging to 51+ and 20-30 age groups were assigned evaluation range '5' (see 3.3); in addition, the 41-50 age group was the only group in which zero participants were assigned evaluation ranges '1' and '2'.

In the translation task, 20/20 respondents belonging to the 41-50 age group, 16/20 belonging to the 31-40 age group, 15/20 respondents belonging to the 51+ age group and 11/20 participants belonging to the 20-30 age group obtained a score of '8-10' in the translation task. Results are shown in [Table 9](#) below (See also Figures G(a) and G(b) in Appendix B).

**Table 9:** Performance based on Age.

<b>Picture-Story</b>	<b>20-30</b>	<b>31-40</b>	<b>41-50</b>	<b>51</b>
Evaluation Range 5	5	9	17	5
Evaluation Range 4	7	5	2	7
Evaluation Range 3	3	4	1	6
Evaluation Range 2	3	1	N/a	1
Evaluation Range 1	2	1	N/a	1
<b>Translation</b>	<b>20-30</b>	<b>31-40</b>	<b>41-50</b>	<b>51</b>
Score '8-10'	11	16	20	15
Score '6-7'	6	3	N/a	2
Score '0-5'	3	1	N/a	3

#### 4.4.2. Formal Onset

With regard to formal onset, 62/80 participants reported to have started learning Italian formally in Form 1 or Form 2; in addition, 7/80 participants reported to have started in Form 3 or Form 4; only 3/80 participants reported to have started learning Italian in Year 5 or Year 6; finally, 8/80 participants reported having started to learn Italian in other contexts<sup>41</sup>.

In the picture-story (3.2.4), 38.7% of participants who started in Form 1-2, 71.4% of respondents who started in Form 3-4, 33% of respondents who started in Year 5-6, and 75% of participants who started in other contexts were assigned evaluation range '5'. On the other hand, only 13% of respondents who started in Form 1-2 and 12.5% of participants who started learning Italian in other contexts were assigned evaluation ranges '1' and '2'.

In the translation task (3.2.5), 72.6% of participants who started learning Italian in Form1-2, all respondents who started in Form 3-4, all the respondents who started in Year 5-6, and 87.5% of par-

<sup>41</sup>In the questionnaire that participants were asked to complete, they were given the option to select 'other' when asked about the class in which they started learning Italian (or other languages) formally. The participants did not have the option to explain what they referred to as 'other' (e.g. at university level, at post-graduate level, etc.), as it was not an open question.



Participants who started learning Italian in other contexts, obtained a score of '8-10'. The results are summarised in [Table 10](#), below.

**Table 10:** Performance based on Formal Onset.

<b>Picture-Story</b>	<b>Year 5-6</b> 3 participants	<b>Form 1-2</b> 62 participants	<b>Form 3-4</b> 7 participants	<b>Other</b> 8 participants
Evaluation Range 5	1	24	5	6
Evaluation Range 4	2	17	1	1
Evaluation Range 3	N/a	13	1	N/a
Evaluation Range 2	N/a	5	N/a	N/a
Evaluation Range 1	N/a	3	N/a	1
<b>Translation</b>	<b>Year 5-6</b> 3 participants	<b>Form 1-2</b> 62 participants	<b>Form 3-4</b> 7 participants	<b>Other</b> 8 participants
Score '8-10'	3	45	7	7
Score '6-7'	N/a	11	N/a	N/a
Score '0-5'	N/a	6	N/a	1

#### 4.4.3. Guided or Spontaneous Input

With regard to the type of input participants received, 66/80 participants reported having received guided instruction in Italian, whereas 14/80 respondents reported having received spontaneous/informal input in Italian.

In the picture-story (3.2.4), 44% of the guided learners and 50% of the spontaneous ones were assigned evaluation range '5'. Only 9% of the guided learners and 21% of the spontaneous ones were assigned evaluation ranges '1' and '2'.

In the translation task (3.2.5), 78.8% of the guided learners and 71.4% of the spontaneous ones obtained a score of '8-10'. Results are shown in [Table 11](#) below.

**Table 11:** Performance based on Guided or Spontaneous Input.

<b>Picture-Story</b>	<b>Guided</b> 66 participants	<b>Spontaneous</b> 14 participants
Evaluation Range 5	29	7
Evaluation Range 4	19	2
Evaluation Range 3	12	2
Evaluation Range 2	4	1

Evaluation Range 1	2	2
Translation	Guided 66 participants	Spontaneous 14 participants
Score '8-10'	52	10
Score '6-7'	9	2
Score '0-5'	5	2

#### 4.4.4. Concluding Remarks

To conclude, the results described in this section show that the 41-50 age group is the group that obtained the highest results both in the picture-story and in the translation task; whereas these results need to be analysed further (e.g. in relation to frequency of exposure to Italian media), it is interesting, as described in section 4.2, that the 41-50 age group contains the highest number of participants who currently watch Italian TV on a daily basis, the highest number of respondents who do not use subtitles when watching Italian movies or television programmes, and it is also the age group that contains the highest proportion of respondents who self-assessed themselves as being very or quite fluent when speaking Italian and able to understand everything or the majority of Italian.

With regard to formal onset, it seems that the majority of participants across all classes (Year 5-6, Form 1-4, other) performed very well in the picture-story and in the translation task. As mentioned before, these results need to be further analysed in relation to exposure to Italian media, however, in this case, it is also of interest to point out that in the picture-story task, the one participant in Year 5-6, 41.7% of respondents who started in Form 1-2, 60% of those who started in Form 3-4 and 50% of those who learned Italian in other context and obtained evaluation range '5', all belonged to the 41-50 age group. The results are similar for the translation task, in fact, 67% of respondents who started in Year 5-6, 27% of those who started in Form 1-2, and 43% of participants who started in Form 3-4 and in other contexts, and who obtained a score of '8-10', were also part of the 41-50 age group.

Moreover, in relation to the type of input received in Italian, there were no big differences in performance between the guided and spontaneous learners, as the majority of respondents belonging to each group performed very well both in the picture-story and in the translation task. Moreover, amongst the guided learners, 52% of participants who obtained evaluation range '5' in the picture-story and 33% of participants who obtained a score of '8-10' in the translation task, belonged to the age group 41-50; with regard to spontaneous learners, 43% of respondents who obtained

evaluation range '5' in the picture-story task and 50% of those who obtained a score of '8-10' in the translation task, belonged to the 31-40 age group.

In conclusion, based on the results described so far, age, formal onset and type of input do not seem to be highly significant factors that can account for high proficiency in the L2, in fact, even though the age group 41-50 outperformed the other age groups, and the participants who started in Form 3-4 obtained slightly higher scores compared to the other groups, the overall differences in L2 performance are minimal. For this reason, in the next section, performance will be analysed and discussed in relation to the participants' past and present media habits in Italian.

## **4.5. Significant Predictors of High Performance in Italian L2**

### **4.5.1. Types of Analyses**

As mentioned in section 4.3.1, the results of the informal interview (3.2.3) are beyond the scope of the current investigation, as the aim of the informal interview was to allow participants to speak Italian informally, in order for them to feel at ease during the picture-story task (3.2.4) and during the translation task (3.2.5).

Before discussing the factors which are most highly correlated with high proficiency in Italian L2, I hereby explain briefly the analyses I chose for the purpose of my research, all run using R Studio 1.4.1106.

To understand which factors were significant to account for a high score in the picture-description task and in the translation task, models containing potentially significant predictor variables were created through linear regression analysis.<sup>42</sup> In addition, Pearson correlations were derived after obtaining a final model through linear regression. The Pearson correlation measures the strength of the linear relationship between two variables, with the highest values ranging from '-1' (indicating a highly negative correlation) to '1' (indicating a highly positive correlation). '0' indicates a

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<sup>42</sup> The aim of linear regression is (a) to determine the significance of a set of predictor variables in relation to a dependent variable; and (b) to predict the effect that the predictor variables might have on a dependent variable. For this reason, once a set of potentially significant predictor variables are selected for analysis, the linear regression will return a finalised model of predictors containing only the most significant variables.

The results of the finalised models return a series of values: the *t-value* of each predictor variable contained in the model must be higher than 1.96 and that the *p-value* must be lower than 0.05 for our predictor variables to be significant. A *standard error value* which is close to zero is preferred. Finally, the *adjusted R-squared value* shows how well the model explains our observed data. Generally, a high adjusted R-squared value indicates that a high percentage of variance in the data is explained by the model.

complete lack of correlation. When interpreting Pearson values, it is important to keep in mind that correlations do not imply causation, but they may allow for reflections on the relationship between variables.

#### **4.5.2. Significant Predictors for a High Score in the Picture-Story Task**

The finalised model that was created for the picture-story task (3.2.4) included the following variables as the most significant predictors of a high score:

- (a) Frequency of watching Italian television in Primary School;
- (b) Frequency of watching Italian television at present;
- (c) Frequency of speaking Italian at present;
- (d) Frequency of accessing social media in Italian at present;
- (e) Duration of Italian studies;

The variables that had a *p-value* lower than 0.05 were: frequency of watching Italian TV at present ( $p=0.00336$ ), frequency of watching Italian TV in primary school ( $p=0.00000534$ ) and frequency of speaking Italian at present ( $p=0.00271$ ). On the contrary, frequency of accessing social media and duration of Italian studies had a *p-value* which was slightly higher than 0.05, making these two variables marginally insignificant. The *adjusted r-squared value* for this model was 0.49, meaning that almost 50% of variance in the data is explained by our model.

A correlation matrix graph was created to visualise the correlations existing between the score of the picture description task and the predictors included in the model. The strongest correlated variable was frequency of watching Italian TV at present ( $r=0.48$ ), followed by the frequency with which participants speak Italian ( $r=0.41$ ) and the frequency with which participants access or use social media in Italian ( $r=0.41$ ). Italian TV habits in primary school ( $r=0.36$ ) and length of Italian studies ( $r=0.35$ ) were the least strongly correlated variables.

#### **4.5.3. Significant Predictors for a High Score in the Translation Task**

The second finalised model which was obtained for the translation task (3.2.5) contained the following predictors of high levels of comprehension in L2 Italian:

- (a) Frequency of watching Italian television in Primary School;
- (b) Frequency of watching Italian television in Secondary School;
- (c) Frequency of accessing online resources in Italian at present;
- (d) Frequency of speaking Italian at present;

Frequency of accessing Italian online resources was the predictor variable with the lowest p-value ( $p=0.003$ ), followed by Italian TV habits in Secondary school ( $p=0.01$ ) and Italian TV habits in Primary school ( $p=0.02$ ). Frequency of speaking Italian at present had a *p-value* of 0.08, making this predictor variable only marginally significant for L2 high comprehension skills. The adjusted R-squared value was 0.37, which means that 37% of variance can be explained by our model.

A correlation matrix graph was created to visualise the strength of the correlations existing between the predictor variables selected by our model and a high score in the translation task. The most strongly and positively correlated variables are Italian TV habits in Secondary School ( $r=0.49$ ), Italian TV habits in primary school ( $r=0.41$ ) and frequency of accessing online resources in Italian ( $r=0.36$ ). Frequency of speaking Italian at present, although positively correlated with a high score in the translation task, was the least strongly correlated, with  $r=0.23$ . [Table 12](#) below shows the p-values of the predictor variables in each model<sup>43</sup>.

**Table 12:** The most significant predictors for high proficiency in the two tasks.

P-value $p < 0.05$	MODEL 2 Picture-Story	MODEL 3 Translation
Primary School Italian TV habits	0.000005 +	0.02 ++
Secondary School Italian TV habits		0.01 ++
Present Italian TV habits	0.003 ++	
Speaking Italian at present	0.003 ++	0.09 +
Accessing Italian Online Resources at present		0.003 ++
Social Media	0.05 ++	
Length of Study	0.08 +	
Age		
Formal Onset		

In summary, frequency of exposure to Italian television programmes in Primary school is a significant predictor that could potentially account for high proficiency both in the picture-story and in the translation task, which suggests that the earlier one is exposed to a second language (in this case, Italian), the better the general performance in the L2.

<sup>43</sup> ‘++’ indicates the most highly correlated variables; ‘+’ indicates the least highly correlated variables;

The frequency of exposure to Italian television programmes in Secondary school and the frequency of accessing online resources in Italian at present are both significant factors that can account for a high score in the translation task; these results are interesting because watching television, reading online articles or listening to podcasts are types of unidirectional input that nonetheless can have positive repercussions on L2 comprehension skills (Caruana 2021).

On the other hand, the frequency of watching Italian television programmes at present is a significant predictor of high proficiency in the picture-story task; this result is also interesting because it indicates that a copious and above all, regular exposure to the L2 is beneficial not only for comprehension in the L2, but also for spoken production in the L2.

Finally, speaking Italian regularly at present is a significant predictor that accounts for a high score in the picture-story task, but it is not a significant predictor for a high score in the translation task; this result is interesting because regular and abundant L2 spoken practice allows speakers to negotiate meaning during interaction in the L2, which then allows second language learners to receive feedback and as a consequence, improve their L2 spoken proficiency (Yilmaz and Granena, 2010; Sato, 2016; see 2.3).

#### **4.5.4. Analysing the Significant Predictors in Relation to Performance**

The five most significant predictors of high proficiency in the picture-story task and in the translation task were:

- (a) Frequency of watching Italian television in Primary School;
- (b) Frequency of watching Italian television in Secondary School;
- (c) Frequency of watching Italian television at present;
- (d) Frequency of speaking Italian at present;
- (e) Frequency of accessing online resources in Italian at present;

In this section, I will analyse each significant predictor in relation to performance in the picture-story task and in relation to performance in the translation task.

##### **• Exposure to Italian television in Primary School**

In the picture-story task (3.2.4), 83% of participants who were assigned evaluation range '5' used to watch Italian television programmes for a minimum of three hours a week, up to more than five

hours a week in Primary school<sup>44</sup>; and amongst these respondents, 47% belonged to the age group 41-50.

In the translation task (3.2.5), 71% of respondents who used to watch Italian television programmes for a minimum of three hours a week, up to more than five hours a week obtained a score of '8-10'<sup>45</sup>; amongst these participants, 34% belonged to the 41-50 age group, and 29.5% belonged to the 31-40 age group.

These results are in line with the findings in 4.5, confirming that a high amount of exposure to Italian television programmes in Primary School, in this case a minimum of three hours a week, is highly significant for both L2 spoken production and L2 comprehension (see Figures H(a) and H(b) in Appendix B).

#### • Exposure to Italian television in Secondary School

In the picture-story task, 86% of participants who were assigned evaluation range '5' used to watch Italian television programmes for a minimum of three hours a week, up to more than five hours a week in Secondary School<sup>46</sup>; and amongst these participants, 42% belonged to the age group 41-50.

In the translation task, 78% of respondents who obtained a score of '8-10' used to watch Italian television programmes for a minimum of three hours a week, up to more than five hours a week<sup>47</sup>; amongst these respondents, 26% belonged to the age group 41-50, and 21% belonged to the age group 31-40.

These results confirm that even in Secondary school, an exposure to Italian television programmes

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<sup>44</sup> The participants who were assigned evaluation range '5' and were frequently exposed to Italian TV in Primary school were 30 respondents. Of these 30 respondents, 23 were guided learners and seven were spontaneous learners.

<sup>45</sup> The participants who scored '8-10' in the translation task and were exposed to Italian TV frequently in Primary school were 44 respondents. Of these 44 respondents, 35 were guided learners and nine were spontaneous learners.

<sup>46</sup> The participants who were assigned evaluation range '5' and were frequently exposed to Italian television in Secondary school were 31 respondents, Of these 31 respondents, 25 were guided learners and six were spontaneous learners.

<sup>47</sup> The participants who scored '8-10' in the translation task and were frequently exposed to Italian TV in Secondary school were 47 respondents. Of these 47 respondents, 39 were guided learners and eight were spontaneous learners.

of a minimum of three hours a week is a significant predictor of high L2 proficiency (see Figures I(a) and I(b) in Appendix B).

- **Exposure to Italian television at Present**

In the picture-story task, 47% of participants who were assigned evaluation range '5'<sup>48</sup> and 43% of respondents who were assigned evaluation range '4' currently watch Italian television programmes for a minimum of three hours a week, up to more than five hours a week. Of the 47% of respondents who obtained evaluation range '5', 41% belonged to the age group 41-50.

In the translation task, 43% of respondents who scored '8-10' also currently watch Italian television programmes for a minimum of three hours a week, up to more than five hours a week<sup>49</sup>; amongst these participants, 33% belonged to the 31-40 age group and 29% belonged to the 41-50 age group.

According to these results, a regular and frequent exposure to Italian television at present does lead to higher spoken proficiency and higher comprehension skills in the L2 (see Figures J(a) and J(b) in Appendix B).

- **Frequency of Speaking Italian at Present**

In the picture-story task, 36% of participants who were assigned evaluation range '5' currently speak Italian between three and seven times a week<sup>50</sup>; amongst these participants, 54% belong to the age group 41-50. Interestingly, 55% of participants who also were assigned evaluation range '5' in the picture-story task, currently speak Italian less than once a week or never.

In the translation task, 29% of the respondents who scored '8-10' currently speak Italian between

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<sup>48</sup> The participants who were assigned evaluation range '5' and currently watch Italian television frequently were 17 respondents. Of these 17 respondents, 15 were guided learners and two were spontaneous learners.

<sup>49</sup> The participants who scored '8-10' in the translation task and currently watch Italian TV programmes frequently were 27 respondents. Of these 27 respondents, 24 were guided learners and three were spontaneous learners.

<sup>50</sup> The participants who were assigned evaluation range '5' and currently speak Italian between three and seven times a week were 13 respondents. Of these 13 participants, 11 were guided learners and two were spontaneous learners.



three and seven times a week<sup>51</sup>; amongst these respondents, 50% belong to the age group 41-50. In this case, it also of interest that 58% of the participants who scored '8-10' in the translation task, currently speak Italian less than once a week or never.

The results show that speaking Italian frequently and regularly at present is a significant factor for high proficiency in the L2; however, the high percentage of participants who currently do not speak Italian regularly but still performed well in the picture-story and in the translation task, indicates that only speaking Italian at present (without taking into consideration other significant factors) is not sufficient for high L2 proficiency (see Figures K(a) and K(b) in Appendix B).

#### • Frequency of Accessing Italian Online Resources at Present

In the picture-story, 50% of the respondents who were assigned evaluation range '5', currently access online resources in Italian between three and seven times a week<sup>52</sup>; of these participants, 41% belong to the 41-50 age group. Interestingly, amongst the participants who were assigned evaluation range '5', 39% rarely or never access online resources in Italian, at present.

In the translation task, 37% of respondents who scored '8-10', access online resources in Italian between three and seven times a week, at present<sup>53</sup>; of these participants, 39% belong to the 41-50 age group. Also in this case, 48% of participants who obtained a score of '8-10', rarely or never access online resources in Italian, at present.

According to the results, accessing online resources in Italian (such as online articles) on a regular and frequent basis, is a significant predictor of high proficiency in the L2; however, the significant proportion of participants who rarely or never access online resources in Italian, but still performed very well, indicates that accessing online resources in Italian alone cannot account for high proficiency in the L2, unless taken into consideration with other significant predictors, too (see Figures L(a) and L(b) in Appendix B). [Table 13](#) summarises the results discussed in section 4.5.4.

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<sup>51</sup> The participants who scored '8-10' in the translation task and who currently speak Italian between three and seven times a week, were 18 respondents. Of these 18 respondents, 16 were guided learners and two were spontaneous learners.

<sup>52</sup> The respondents who were assigned evaluation range '5' and who currently access online resources in Italian between three and seven times a week, were 18 respondents. Of these 18 respondents, 15 were guided learners and three were spontaneous learners.

<sup>53</sup> The participants who obtained a score of '8-10' in the translation task and who currently access Italian online resources between three and seven times a week, were 23 respondents. Of these 23 respondents, 20 were guided learners and three were spontaneous learners.

**Table 13:** High frequency L2 media habits across the various levels of proficiency obtained in the picture-story and in the translation task.

<b>Picture-Story</b>	<b>Primary Ita TV</b> 3hrs - more than 5 hrs	<b>Secondary Ita TV</b> 3hrs - more than 5 hrs	<b>Present Ita TV</b> 3hrs - more than 5hrs	<b>Present Speaking Ita</b> 3-7 times a week	<b>Ita Online Resources</b> 3-7 times a week
<b>Ev. Range '1'</b>	1/4 (25%)	1/4 (25%)	N/a	1/4 (25%)	N/a
<b>Ev. Range '2'</b>	2/5 (40%)	1/5 (20%)	N/a	N/a	N/a
<b>Ev. Range '3'</b>	8/14 (57%)	8/14 (57%)	5/14 (36%)	2/14 (14%)	1/14 (7%)
<b>Ev. Range '4'</b>	12/21 (57%)	12/21 (57%)	9/21 (43%)	6/21 (28%)	6/21 (28%)
<b>Ev. Range '5'</b>	30/36 (83%)	31/36 (86%)	17/36 (47%)	13/36 (36%)	18/36 (50%)
<b>Translation</b>	<b>Primary Ita TV</b> 3hrs - more than 5 hrs	<b>Secondary Ita TV</b> 3hrs - more than 5 hrs	<b>Present Ita TV</b> 3hrs - more than 5hrs	<b>Present Speaking Ita</b> 3-7 times a week	<b>Ita Online Resources</b> 3-7 times a week
<b>Score '0-5'</b>	3/7 (43%)	3/7 (43%)	N/a	1/7 (14%)	N/a
<b>Score '6-7'</b>	6/11 (54%)	3/11 (27%)	4/11 (36%)	3/11 (27%)	2/11 (18%)
<b>Score '8-10'</b>	44/62 (71%)	47/62 (76%)	27/62 (43%)	18/62 (29%)	23/62 (37%)

#### 4.5.5. Concluding Remarks

According to the results described in section 4.5, exposure to the media in Italian is an important factor that contributes to high spoken proficiency and high comprehension skills in the L2. Despite the high significance of the factors analysed in this section, the frequency of exposure to Italian television programmes in Primary school and in Secondary school were the two factors that most significantly contributed to a high performance in the L2; these findings are in line with the idea that the earlier one is exposed to a second language, the more opportunities to practise the L2 in life, therefore, the higher the competence in the L2 if exposure and practice are kept constant and frequent (see section 2.3), in fact, even though all age groups performed well, the age group 41-50 outperformed the other age groups. Nonetheless, exposure to Italian television at present, accessing online resources in Italian and speaking Italian on a regular basis, at present, still contribute significantly to high spoken performance in the L2 and high comprehension skills in the L2.

In the next chapter, I will present a discussion of the results described in these sections and I will discuss their implications on the Maltese sociolinguistic context.

## 5. Discussion

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the aim of this research was to investigate the effect that age, formal onset, type of input received and exposure to the media in the L2 have on second language acquisition of L2 Italian. The hypotheses are two: the first, is that older participants who regularly received copious L2 input would outperform those who received less copious input; the second, is that the participants who acquired Italian mainly in spontaneous settings would have a higher level of spoken proficiency and comprehension in Italian, compared to the participants who acquired Italian mainly formally (see 1.4).

### **5.1. The Questionnaire**

Based on the results of the questionnaire described in the previous chapter (see 4.2), Maltese is the first language of the respondents who were part of the age groups 31-40, 41-50 and 51+. For the age group 20-30, both Maltese and English were the first languages that the participants learned to speak at home; this may be due to the fact that participants belonging to the 20-30 age group (born between 1992 and 2002), had greater exposure to television and media in English and in Maltese, but less so in Italian, since cable TV was introduced in Malta in 1993. These findings are in line with previous research carried out in Malta (see 1.1) according to which Maltese is the first language of 97% of the population.

The majority of the participants who took part in the second part of the research started studying Italian formally in Form 1 or Form 2, and the second most chosen foreign language to learn was French. These results are slightly different from the results presented in previous literature (Caruana 2003), as participants had reported that they had started to learn French earlier than Italian, at school. These differences are to be interpreted in the light of the fact that in Caruana's (2003) study, the participants were between 14 and 15 years old when the research was carried out, whereas in this research, the participants' ages range from 20 years old to over 51 years old; Caruana's (2003) study was carried out at a time when the young participants of his study had a greater exposure to this language<sup>54</sup>. At present, Italian might be a challenging foreign language to learn, especially since the younger participants of my study have had less exposure to Italian media and more exposure to English through the Internet and social media (see 1.1 and 1.2). In fact, as reported by the participants in this research, English television programmes are accessed on a daily basis, followed by television programmes in Italian and the least frequently followed are Maltese

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<sup>54</sup> Italian television programmes reached the peak of popularity in Malta in the 1970s and in the 1980s. In 1993 cable TV was introduced in Malta; therefore the Maltese started to have access not only to Italian television programmes, but also to television programmes from all over the world.

television programmes. It is important to keep in mind that the responses provided by the eighty participants to this research do not reflect the television viewing trends of the Maltese population; as a matter of fact, according to the National Statistics Office (2021), a large proportion of Maltese nationals follow the news, current affairs, sports programmes and television dramas mainly in Maltese. Nevertheless, this comparison has its limitations as the results presented by the NSO (2021) were obtained by taking into account only the Maltese nationals who declared using either Maltese only or English only in various contexts, such as watching television. The findings of the NSO (2021) show that Maltese nationals who have a highly positive perception towards the Maltese language listen to the radio, watch the news on TV, follow sports programmes and television dramas and/or use instant messaging via social media largely in Maltese, even though English is preferred to listen to music, write formal letters or emails, write cards and/or read books.

According to the results obtained in this research, then, it appears that the Maltese nationals who use English, Maltese and also Italian in their daily lives have different television or media preferences compared to the general population, as they seem to integrate media exposure in a second (or third) language regularly in their lives. However, even though Italian television programmes are still somewhat popular amongst Maltese nationals, they are not the main source of access to information and entertainment, as Caruana (2009:182) had already stated some years ago:

‘[...] where once [television] was the uncontested means of entertainment in many households, it now has to “compete” with other computer-based attractions, most notably the use of Internet and of online chatting and blogging’.

The introduction of the Internet, though, has given people the opportunity of accessing online resources or audiovisual material in any language desired, in fact, 40% of the participants who took part in the second part of this research reported that they enjoy accessing and reading online articles or online material in Italian. Some participants reported that they appreciate Italian music and that they read a variety of materials in Italian (see 4.2), and the majority of the respondents reported that they do not follow Italian radio channels frequently and that they do not have a preferred Italian radio channel at present. These findings indicate that of all the means of communication that participants could avail themselves of in the present days, the preferred means remains the television, together with the internet platforms that offer a variety of movies and series (such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, etc.) which can be watched in a variety of languages and for which subtitles are also available. In this respect, the majority of the participants who took part in this re-

search reported that they do not use subtitles when watching programmes in Italian. Some stated that that they use subtitles in Italian when watching a movie or a series in Italian. These results indicate that overall, the presence of Italian on the island still plays an important role, although to a lesser extent compared to two decades ago, and that overall, the level of comprehension of this language is still generally high amongst the Maltese nationals.

With regard to television habits, English television programmes, movies or series are the most popular among the respondents across all age groups, followed by Italian television programmes or movies which, at present, are most frequently watched on a daily basis by the two older age groups, namely 41-50 and 51+. The reason why the two older age groups (41-50 and 51+) still follow Italian television programmes more frequently with respect to the other two age groups (31-40 and 20-30) is probably due to the fact that they grew up in an era when television programmes in Malta were mainly received in Italian (between the 1960s and the early 1990s)<sup>55</sup>.

Finally, the self-assessment scores in relation to Italian comprehension and spoken production indicate that even though exposure to Italian television and media has decreased in the last decades, comprehension of Italian is still high amongst participants across the four age groups; however, self-report spoken proficiency data indicates that this is not high in the 20-30 age group. One reason why the youngest participants (age group 20-30) reported that their Italian spoken proficiency is not high is likely linked to the fact that these participants have had less exposure to Italian throughout their lives, compared to their counterparts, especially because these participants were born in the same period of time when cable TV was introduced in Malta (1993) and when people could watch programmes from all over the world; in fact, as discussed earlier, the participants in the age group 20-30 reported growing up speaking both English and Maltese as first languages in their households, as opposed to their counterparts who grew up speaking Maltese. The results are in line with the idea that the Italian language and culture have held very important roles in Malta, therefore the general perception of the Maltese population towards Italian is largely positive (see 4.1; and Brincat, 2011). In this research, the most common reasons for studying Italian amongst participants across age groups were that (a) the participants learned Italian from television and decided to continue studying it formally at school, since it was easier for them compared to other

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<sup>55</sup> It is important to bear in mind that the 51+ age group was formed by people whose ages ranged from 51 to 74 years old, therefore participants who were born in 1947 or 1948 (i.e. participants who are now 74 years old) had to wait at least until 1957 to start their exposure to Italian television programmes, which is the year when the Times of Malta announced the first successful TV transmission from Sicily. This might also explain the fact that in Primary School, only 50% of the age group 51+ used to watch Italian television for a minimum of three hours a week, up to more than five hours a week.

foreign languages (the participants who gave this reason for studying Italian, mainly belonged to the age groups 31-40, 41-50 and 51+); (b) the participants learned Italian mainly from television or in order to understand better what they watched on television; and (c) the participants love Italian language and culture (see 4.2). Having a high interest towards a language, a country or a culture can also lead to ultimate attainment in a second language. In fact, as explained by Piller (mentioned in Keeley, 2016), the most successful L2 users attributed their success to meeting a partner, finding a new job or simply nurturing a high interest in a specific country or culture. This idea is also found in Caruana (2003:6), according to whom high exposure to audio-visual material in a second language is often prompted by a high interest in a wider cultural scenario.

## 5.2. The Picture-Story

According to the results described in the previous chapter (see 4.3.2), 57/80 participants obtained an evaluation range of '4' or '5' in the picture-story and these findings reflect the self-assessment scores discussed in 4.2; in fact, 62.5% of participants reported being able to speak Italian very or quite fluently, while in the picture-story task 71.25% performed highly.

As explained by Giacalone-Ramat (2000:124), in language acquisition, learners start the acquisition process by using the limited lexical resources they have at their disposal as much as they can, and gradually, they learn how to express functional categories, morphological distinctions and syntactic rules to their expression. Moreover, as delineated by Chini (2016:347), during their first attempts at communicating in the L2, second language learners are firstly driven by pragmatic purposes, in fact, they try to utilise the restricted vocabulary that they possess in order to reach their communicative purposes; and for this reason, sometimes learners resort to their first language.

The attempts of trying to communicate in the L2 despite not being highly proficient in it are evident in the extracts analysed in the previous chapter (see 4.3.3), particularly the extracts of participants belonging to Evaluation Range '1': the participants mainly communicate with one-word or two-words sentences, in fact, the average number of words produced by these participants was 2.45 words per sentence. The verbs, which are almost all in the infinitive form, acquire a lexical, pragmatic value which has the sole purpose of delivering meaning; the *presente indicativo* was only used by the 51+ participant, who conjugated the verb '*dire*' and '*essere*' in the third person singular in a standard-like manner ('*dice*' and '*è*'). Interestingly, two forms of the past appear in the narrations of the participants belonging to Evaluation Range '1', namely '*indicato*' and the presentative '*c'era*'; these two forms are interesting because the use of *passato prossimo* (with or without

auxiliary) and the use of *imperfetto* are generally acquired at a more advanced stage in the acquisitional process of Italian as an L2. In fact, these two forms might have appeared so early in the participants' interlanguage because they may have been present in the input to which these participants were exposed (such as on television or in colloquial Italian), therefore they may have been memorised and integrated into their developing interlanguage (see 4.3.3; Bernini, 1994).

The participants belonging to Evaluation Range '2' also employed verbs in the infinitive form to express themselves, however, their extracts contain more verbs conjugated in the *presente indicativo* (mainly, in the singular and often, verbs belonging to the *prima coniugazione* ending in '-are'), such as 'aiuta (aiutare)', 'vai (andare)' and 'è (essere)'. The attempt to conjugate some verbs in the *presente indicativo*, besides using verbs in the infinitive, indicate that the participants no longer use verbs as mere lexical items, but they are trying to express actions — typically expressed via more complex verb forms — by using the limited competence they have of the second language, showing that their interlanguage is in a phase of evolution. In addition to that, it might also be the case that participants make use of the present tense as a form of 'refuge' to avoid making mistakes related to temporality (Caruana 2003:104). Also in the case of participants belonging to Evaluation Range '2', there are sporadic instances of the *passato prossimo* without the auxiliary, such as '*finito*' or '*finita*'. What distinguishes this category from the previous one, however, is syntactic complexity through coordination and subordination. In fact, the coordinating conjunctions '*e*' and '*ma*' are used frequently and both a *subordinata esplicita oggettiva* and a *subordinata implicita finale* appear in the narrations of participants. The introduction of syntactic complexity at early stages of L2 acquisition are also described in Berruto (2001), who explains that after the introduction of coordination through prepositions '*e*' and '*ma*', the first types of subordination that appear in learners' language are causal, temporal and indeed, purpose clauses. Moreover, the average sentence length of participants belonging to this category was of 13.4 words per sentence, indicating a higher syntactic complexity compared to the respondents belonging to Evaluation Range '1'.

Participants belonging to Evaluation Range '3' showed higher syntactic complexity in their narrations. Apart from conjugating more verbs in the *presente indicativo* in a standard-like manner (across the three conjugations, '-are', '-ere' and '-ire') and making use of subordination, they also use the *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto*, the two verb tenses that mark the passage to a more advanced stage in the acquisition of Italian L2 (Giacalone-Ramat, 2003; Banfi e Bernini, 2003). The *passato prossimo* was employed more frequently than the *imperfetto*, even though the auxiliary was often omitted. According to Crippa (2014) students who have a less developed interlanguage

system tend to show a preference for the *passato prossimo*, compared to the *imperfetto* when learning Italian as a second language; although this is confirmed in my research, it must also be kept in mind that new grammatical form that appears in interlanguage will not be immediately and systematically employed to all verbs, as it is integrated gradually into the learner's L2 system (Gicalone-Ramat, 2003:111). In fact, participants often encountered difficulties with agreement and also with the choice of the auxiliary *essere* or *avere*; moreover, the form of the *passato prossimo* that was most often employed by the participants was the third person singular ('ha visto', 'è caduta', 'è guarito', 'ha portato', 'ha lasciato'), which, as explained by Bernini (1990:93), prevails over the plural forms in second language acquisition. Additionally, the most frequently used subordinates were explicit causals and implicit purpose clauses, which are in line with the sequence of acquisition of subordination introduced by Berruto (2001). The average length of sentences for this category was of 14.5 words, indicating a slightly higher level of syntactic complexity compared to the participants in Evaluation Range '2'.

In Evaluation Range '4', participants made use of the *presente indicativo*, *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto* in a native-like manner, displaying uncertainties that were mainly related to the use of low frequency vocabulary. As discussed in 4.3.3, the attempt of these participants to use low frequency words provides evidence of an evolving interlanguage system, which allowed participants to retrieve terms that were more appropriate than others for the picture-story. As for subordination, the participants employed implicit purpose clauses and explicit causal and declarative clauses, the latter introduced by 'penso che + *presente indicativo*' or 'sono felice che + *presente indicativo*'. The use of the *presente indicativo*, in clauses for which standard Italian would require the subjunctive (*congiuntivo presente*) to express a declarative subordinate clause, may once again be attributed to the frequent presence of this construction in the input received from the colloquial variety of Italian, also spoken on television programmes or movies<sup>56</sup>. This tendency is interesting because it shows how exposure to the media leads to the acquisition of forms which are considered as 'neo-standard' in Italian (Sabatini, 1985; Berruto, 1987; 2012; 2017), including the use of the *presente indicativo* instead of the *congiuntivo*<sup>57</sup>. Additionally, participants belonging to this category em-

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<sup>56</sup> As Sabatini (1985) had explained, 'Italiano medio' (p.178) largely takes place in face-to face communication or on means of communication, such as television programmes. Moreover, according to Berruto (1987 and 2012), 'neo-standard' (or 'Italiano medio') is not itself a new language variety, but it represents a modern and de-aristocratised version of 'standard Italian'.

According to Berruto (2012) the 'neo-standard' variety of Italian is characterised by a simplified linguistic system which is restricted to the following verb tenses: *presente indicativo*, *passato prossimo*, *imperfetto* and *trapassato prossimo*. Additionally, with regard to mode, the general tendency in 'neo-standard' is to replace the *congiuntivo* with the *indicativo*, particularly in the case of subordinates introduced by opinion verbs.



ployed an average of 24.6 words per sentence, indicating a significantly higher syntactic complexity in the L2 compared to the respondents belonging to Evaluation Range '3'.

Participants belonging to Evaluation Range '5' showed more syntactic complexity in their narration: a part from using the *presente indicativo*, *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto* in a native-like manner, they also employed more complex verb tenses such as *condizionale*, *trapassato prossimo* and *futuro anteriore* during their speech. Moreover, together with the explicit causal, temporal and declarative subordinates, the participants belonging to this category also employed explicit conditional subordinates in a standard-like manner. Surprisingly, the average word length for participants in this category was of 23.4 words per sentence, a slightly lower average compared to respondents in Evaluation Range '4'; this does not necessarily mean that participants belonging to this category have less developed syntactic complexity compared to their counterparts. It may, in fact, be the case that whereas in Evaluation Range '4', participants frequently repeated the subject or the object in the same sentence, the participants in Evaluation Range '5' were able to avoid repetition of the subject or object by using direct and indirect pronouns instead, in a more native-like manner, therefore reducing the number of words employed in one sentence.

To conclude, the performance of the participants assigned to the five evaluation ranges is in line with the three systematic stages of acquisition that learners of L2 Italian typically go through, as described in Bernini (2010; see 3.3). It also respects the sequence of acquisition of temporality in L2 Italian, as described by Giacalone-Ramat (1992; Banfi and Bernini, 2003; see 3.3).

### 5.3. The Translation

The vast majority of the respondents (62/80) who performed the translation task obtained a score of '8-10' and this result reflects precisely the self-assessment scores that participants reported in the questionnaire: 77.5% of respondents claimed to understand Italian very or quite well and in fact, 77.5% of the participants obtained a high score in the translation task, confirming that even though exposure to Italian on the island has decreased in the past decades, their level of comprehension is still high.

The participants who scored '0-5' in the translation task were mainly familiar with cognates and high frequency words, however, the 51+ participant was able to translate three (out of four) low frequency words correctly, namely '*spiaggia*', '*muro*' and '*uccidere*'; the low frequency words that the other participants were not able to translate were '*onda*', '*volto*', '*nascondere*' and

'denunciare'. Even though these words were categorised as low frequency words (see 3.3 and 4.3.4), the fact that one participant was able to translate them, whereas the others were not, could be linked to the fact that the 51+ participant has had more opportunities in life to be exposed to Italian via television, compared to her counterparts, even if the 51+ participant is a spontaneous acquirer of Italian L2 and the other two claimed to have received guided instruction in Italian; moreover, the 51+ participant claimed that her sibling is married to an Italian, which might increase her opportunities to be exposed to the language throughout her life. In fact, even if none of the participants who scored '0-5' could translate the phrases correctly, the 51+ speaker was also able to translate all the simple sentences correctly, showing only some uncertainties related to the choice of verb forms (perfective-imperfective aspect). All the participants in this category showed some difficulties when translating compound and complex sentences, however, whereas the 20-30 participant mostly translated compound sentences correctly, the 51+ participants translated a higher number of complex sentences correctly, still showing uncertainties related to the verb forms; this might be a further indication that the 51+ participant demonstrated higher comprehension skills in L2 Italian because she had more opportunities of being exposed to the Italian language throughout her life, compared to the 20-30 and 31-40 participants.

The participants who scored '6-7' in the translation task were able to translate a larger number of words correctly, however, all showed some difficulties when translating the false friends, namely '*minuta*', '*quartiere*', '*cancellino*', '*mansione*' and '*magazzino*'. With regard to the phrases and simple sentences, participants showed some difficulties with the phrases '*scattare una foto*', '*farsi beccare*' and '*prendere appunti*'; however they did not show particular difficulties with the comprehension of simple, compound and complex sentences, which in almost all cases were translated correctly, displaying only some uncertainties related to the verb forms (namely, the *futuro semplice* '*passeremo*', '*faremo*', '*terremo*' and the *condizionale presente* '*vorrebbe*', '*farei*' and '*piacerebbe*'). This is in line with findings in the literature (Giacalone-Ramat, 2003; Caruana, 2003) according to which, even at more advanced stages of acquisition, learners of L2 Italian do not frequently employ complex verb forms such as *futuro*, *passato remoto*, *condizionale* and *congiuntivo*, and for this reason, they may face some challenges when trying to provide an accurate translation to such verbs. In addition to that, these complex verb forms do not appear frequently in the input received from television (Caruana, 2003:107), since it generally mirrors a spoken and colloquial variety of Italian where the *modo indicativo* is preferred over the *congiuntivo*. The idioms were not all fully comprehended by the participants, in fact, they seem to have had difficulties translating: '*A buon intenditor poche parole*' and '*Chi pecora si fa, il lupo se la mangia*'; these difficulties may be related

to the fact that these two idioms are not popular or frequently used in English or in Maltese, therefore participants struggled to find a meaning to them; on the other hand, idioms like '*Gatta frettolosa fa gattini ciechi*', '*Chi dorme non piglia pesci*' and '*Chi va con lo zoppo, impara a zoppiare*' did not come across as problematic for the respondents, perhaps because the equivalent idioms are frequently heard and/or used in Maltese.

Finally, the participants who scored '8-10' encountered little, if any, difficulties in the translation task. '*Mansione*', '*minuta*' and '*ingresso*' were the three false friends that participants had difficulties translating. However, with regard to phrases, simple sentences, compound and complex sentences, respondents were able to comprehend everything; in fact, only the 20-30 participant and the 51+ participant, despite comprehending the meaning of the sentences, showed some uncertainties related to the choice of verb forms, both in relation to the perfective/imperfective aspect and in relation to the *passato remoto*, *futuro semplice* and *condizionale presente*, which, as explained in the previous paragraph, are complex verb forms that do not appear frequently even in learners who have a highly developed interlanguage system and they also do not appear frequently in Italian television programmes. As for the idioms, participants were able to comprehend and therefore translate both idioms.

#### **5.4. Exposure to the Media**

As discussed in the previous chapter (see 4.5), watching television programmes in Italian regularly and frequently during and Primary Secondary school years and at present are highly significant factors which lead to high proficiency in Italian L2; in fact, participants who used to watch Italian television regularly during their Primary school and Secondary school years and those who currently watch Italian television just as frequently, obtained high scores both in the picture-story task and in the translation task. These results are in line with the literature, in fact, as mentioned in Caruana (2021), Feng and Webb (2020) and Rodgers and Webb (2019), television can be a useful supplement for second language acquisition, even when it accompanies the formal process of learning the L2. The findings are also in line with research carried out in Malta (Caruana, 1996; Caruana, 2003), and as mentioned in Caruana (2021:1023), even though comprehension of Italian can be facilitated by shared features between the L1 (or previously known languages) and the L2, the quantity of audio-visual input that participants were and are exposed to *is* a determining factor for high L2 proficiency, therefore, the more copious the input, the higher the opportunities for second language acquisition.

The other two determining factors for high proficiency in Italian were speaking Italian and accessing online resources in Italian on a regular and frequent basis; in fact, the participants who currently speak Italian and access resources in Italian more frequently and regularly, performed well in both the picture-story and the translation task. These findings are in line with the notion that a regular, copious and *active* exposure to the second language is beneficial for high proficiency in the L2 (Lai and Zhao, 2006; Yilmaz and Granena, 2010). As explained by Sato (2016), learners who approach L2 conversation with a positive and collaborative mindset, will achieve better and benefit more from it than those learners who do not show readiness to collaborate and participate in L2 conversation. Moreover, although the nature of input received via online resources in Italian (amongst which online articles, as indicated by the participants to this research) may be unidirectional, findings confirm that this can potentially be beneficial to L2 comprehension, as it allows the learners to be exposed to the language although they do not engage productively with it.

### **5.5. Input, Formal Onset and Age**

The majority of the participants who took part in this research reported that they have received guided instruction in Italian; however in the picture-story task and in the translation task, both guided and spontaneous learners performed highly, although a slightly larger proportion of spontaneous learners performed better in the picture-story task, and a slightly larger proportion of guided learners performed better in the translation task. Given the high number of participants who claimed having received formal instruction in Italian and the small number of respondents who declared having learned Italian spontaneously (see 4.4.3) the two groups were not comparable. Another limitation of the guided and spontaneous learners subdivision is that there is not a clearcut, explicit separation between the participants who were only exposed to Italian in formal settings and the participants who were only exposed to Italian in naturalistic settings; in this research, however, the fourteen participants who were categorised as spontaneous learners had reported in the questionnaire that they did *not* learn Italian at school, they did *not* learn Italian through online classes or courses, they did *not* attend evening classes to learn Italian and that they did *not* learn Italian in private settings (e.g. with private tutors or private classes).

The minor differences in the scores obtained in the two tasks (see 3.2.4 and 3.2.5) may be due to the fact that the spontaneous acquirers who learned Italian via television have mainly been exposed to a colloquial or informal variety of Italian, which is typical of contemporary Italian television language (Sobrero-Miglietta, 2006). In addition to this, a large number of spontaneous acquirers claimed that they enjoy watching dubbed cartoons or movies in Italian, in a language variety

called 'parlato-recitato doppiato' (see 2.3.2)<sup>58</sup> which is generally a simplified, standard-like form of Italian. This exposure is based more on meaning than on form (see 2.3) and can lead to heightened communicative skills. On the other hand, guided learners who received formal instruction in Italian as a second language (in some cases, after prior exposure to Italian via television) also had the opportunity to study the language explicitly, with greater focus on grammar and rules (see 2.3); this may be one of the reasons for which they obtained higher scores in the translation task because although systematic L1-TL translation is avoided in principle, there is some evidence that this occurs quite frequently<sup>59</sup>. The guided learners may also have had more encounters with low frequency words during their formal study of Italian and they might have acquired complex verb tenses and/or grammatical constructions that do not necessarily appear frequently on television, hence the higher performance in the translation task. Nevertheless, Van Lommel, d'Ydewalle and Laenen (2006), claim that even though exposure to the media in the second language is useful for incidental L2 learning, the benefits have mainly been found in relation to vocabulary, and not in relation to the acquisition of grammar, which still requires further investigation. Overall, as originally outlined in Caruana (2003), despite these minimal differences, both guided and spontaneous learners follow a similar L2 acquisitional process in relation to L2 Italian. To sum up, even though a slightly larger proportion of spontaneous acquirers performed better in the picture-story task and a slightly larger proportion of guided learners performed better in the translation task, the differences registered are only indicative of a trend found among participants and in the absence of statistically significant outcomes and of poor comparability between the two groups, it is not possible to make further generalisations. Moreover, since both spontaneous and guided learners in this research performed according to a similar L2 acquisitional patterns, the type of input received (guided or spontaneous) was not deemed to be a highly significant predictor of L2 ultimate attainment in this research.

With regard to formal onset (see 1.5), the majority of participants who took part in the second stage of the research reported that they had started learning Italian formally in Form 1 or Form 2 (ages 11-12). The vast majority of them obtained high scores both in the picture-story and in the translation task. The participants who reported that they had started learning Italian formally in

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<sup>58</sup> According to the literature, in fact, one of the best assets of television is that it provides the audience with large amounts of spoken and authentic input (Webb, 2015).

<sup>59</sup> As explained by Caruana and Pace (2019:204), despite the benefits of adopting a communicative approach to encourage L2 communication in formal settings, it is not an easy task for L2 instructors to bring the real and natural context in which an L2 is used by natives to the classroom; this explains why, in some contexts, L2 instructors tend to prioritise the development of L2 grammatical competence over L2 communicative competence.

Year 5 or Year 6, in Form 3 or Form 4, or in other contexts (at University, privately, online, etc.) also obtained high scores in the picture-story and translation task. For this reason, even though formal onset is not statistically significant for high proficiency in Italian, it must be discussed in terms of the quantity (or copiousness) of input that the participants were exposed to throughout their lives; in fact, a high proportion of participants, irrespectively of the start date in which they started learning the L2, used to watch Italian television programmes between three hours and up to more than five hours a week, both during Primary school and during Secondary school. This means that even though for a large number of participants in this research, formal onset started in Form 1 or Form 2 (Secondary school), exposure to Italian television started way earlier (in Primary school); therefore the respondents who obtained a high score both in the picture-story and in the translation task had an earlier onset of exposure to Italian television programmes, which was then followed by a more formal, instruction-based exposure to the language in Secondary school. These findings imply that while a large number of participants *did* have an early, spontaneous exposure to Italian via television, the majority of them pursued formal instruction in Italian at a later stage. For this reason, it is safe to say that whereas formal onset per se was not statistically significant for high performance in Italian, early exposure to the language *is* highly correlated with high proficiency in the L2, provided that the exposure is regular and abundant throughout.

As well as for formal onset, the significance of the variable 'age' also needs to be discussed in relation to the participants' Italian media habits in the past and in the present. Both in the picture-story and in the translation task, the age group that performed significantly better than the others was the 41-50 age group, followed by the 31-40 and the 51+ age group; the 20-30 age group obtained the lowest scores compared to the other groups<sup>60</sup>. The 41-50 age group is formed by participants who not only had copious and regular exposure to Italian television in the past, but who also keep their exposure to Italian regular and frequent at present, not only by watching television programmes in Italian, but also by accessing and reading online material in Italian and by speaking Italian regularly. These findings confirm the notion 'the younger, the better' (Lenneberg, 1967; DeKeyser, 2010; Flege, 2019; Dollmann, 2020), at least, in relation to the 41-50 age group. Another point in favour of this age group is that participants were born approximately between 1971 and 1980, which also correspond to the years during which Italian television programmes had reached their peak popularity in Malta, before the introduction of cable TV in 1993, which marked a grad-

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<sup>60</sup> The reason why the youngest age group performed worse might be related to the fact that these participants not only declared growing up speaking both English and Maltese as L1s in their homes, but they might also have had less exposure to Italian media because they were born after 1992, when cable TV was introduced in Malta (see 5.1). Moreover, greater exposure to the media in English might have increased the youngest participants' interest in the English language and culture, as opposed to Italian.

ual, yet steady decline of the popularity of Italian TV in Malta. The opportunity of being abundantly exposed to Italian input from television programmes during the 70s and 80s had a significant impact also on Italian as a subject taught in schools to the extent that teachers observed that students were already fluent in Italian before starting to learn it at school (Caruana, Pavesi, Ghia, 2014). It can therefore be said that, as opposed to other younger counterparts, participants in the 41-50 age group grew up in era when the Italian language and culture had a strong influence on the Maltese islands and when they could benefit from a large quantity of exposure to Italian television programmes starting as early as in Primary school.

What is interesting about these results is also that the older age group (51+) did not outperform the other age groups in this research; the reasons may be, as previously explained, that Italian television programmes in Malta were most popular between the 70s and the 80s, therefore, not all participants born between 1947 and 1970 had access to television programmes in Italian from infancy, although the 51+ age group contains the highest number of participants who presently watch Italian television frequently and regularly. This further confirms that, even though present exposure to Italian TV can lead to a high performance in the L2, early onset of exposure is a highly determining factor for high proficiency in the L2. On the other hand, the 20-30 age group, as hypothesised, obtained lower scores compared to the other age groups. Participants born between 1992 and 2002 received less copious amount of Italian input throughout their lives and also had less opportunities to speak in Italian, irrespective of how early their exposure to Italian media or Italian guided instruction started. In addition to the previously-documented decreased access to TV, the introduction of the Internet and its widespread use in English have led to a decline in exposure to television programmes, especially amongst the younger generations (Caruana, 2009).

These results are all in line with previous literature carried out in the field of second language acquisition and, especially, in the field of second language acquisition of Italian in Malta. For example, Caruana, Pavesi and Ghia (2014) confirm the importance of audiovisual input in order to attain levels of high proficiency in the L2 and, according to the studies referred to in Caruana (2021), older learners of Italian outperformed younger ones as they had received more copious and regular input in the L2 from a young age.

## **5.6. Discussion in light of the Critical Period Hypothesis**

The finding 'the earlier the better' must also be discussed in terms of its relevance to the Critical Period Hypothesis, in which it is argued that there exists a stage in life during which the language

learning process may start slowing down to the extent that 'late' L2 learners will find it problematic to achieve high levels of competence. Extensive research has been conducted in relation to the CPH, and it is supported particularly with regard to L2 pronunciation and/or acquisition of L2 parameters (Granena and Long, 2013; Hartshorn et al., 2018; Flege, 2019; Dollmann, 2020). Other research takes a critical stance towards it, especially as to how it was posited originally by Lenneberg in 1967 (see 2.2), the main reason being that a well-defined offset of the critical period for second language acquisition has proven hard to establish (Singleton and Leśniewska, 2021).

According to my research, early onset of exposure to the second language proved to be highly significant for high proficiency in the L2, provided that the input was copious and frequent. In addition to this, early exposure to the L2 leads to higher proficiency levels in the L2 in the case of the 41-50 age group, but less so for the 51+ age group, as sociolinguistic factors also came into play (see 5.5). In this research, as even though a large number of participants reported to have started learning Italian formally in Secondary school (in Form 1 or Form 2, at 11-13 years old), a significant amount of respondents were already exposed to the Italian language via television in Primary school; for this reason, even though the idea 'the younger, the better' is confirmed, it is not the only factor to account for high proficiency levels in the L2, as what appears to also significantly contribute to ultimate L2 attainment are the quantity and the quality of input received, and other factors such as the opportunities of actively engaging with the language, attitudes towards the second language, memory, motivation, etc (see DeKeyser, 2010; Brincat, 2011; Keeley, 2016)<sup>61</sup>.

These conclusions are in line with Birdsong (2009:5) who stated that "an early onset of acquisition is preferred for speakers to reap benefits of linguistic communication over a longer stretch of their lifetime", confirming that early starters may reach higher levels of proficiency in the L2 because they would have more opportunities of practising the language and actively engaging with it (see 2.3). Moreover, Flege (2019) claimed that a major "suspect" as to why older learners are not as successful as younger learners is the amount and quality of the input received. In fact, even though an early L2 onset of acquisition is preferable, it must be accompanied by regular, frequent and copious L2 input for second language learning to be successful (Bialystok, 2011). In addition to that, as explained by Bialystok and Hakuta (2009), social factors contribute to the effort made by young children when learning an additional language. These factors include a nurturing environment,

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<sup>61</sup> This is in agreement with Brincat (2011) according to whom a positive perception towards the L2 contributes to higher levels of proficiency in the L2, and also in agreement with DeKeyser (2010), who states that a positive attitude towards the L2 is a strong predictor of L2 high proficiency. Also, Keeley (2016) states that age-related factors are only *correlated* with age, and what makes the difference in L2 ultimate attainment are experience, attitudes and individual traits.



simplified input, educational opportunities, cooperative peers and other supporting aspects. In fact, participants who were exposed to L2 Italian via television in their early childhood were presented both with simplified input of dubbed cartoons, movies or TV shows and also had the opportunity to develop an interest towards the Italian language and culture in general. This increased their motivation to further their studies in Italian L2 in formal settings (see 1.2; and Caruana, 2021).

To sum up, the results of this research concur that early onset of acquisition is conducive to a high level of proficiency in the L2. However, age of acquisition is not a sufficiently significant variable that can account for L2 ultimate attainment. In fact, the results of this research support the view that an early onset of acquisition becomes an important factor for second language acquisition when it is accompanied by regular, frequent and copious input in the L2.

### **5.7. Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, the results obtained in this research indicate that even though the type of input received (guided or spontaneous), formal onset and age were not *statistically* significant variables for high proficiency in the second language, the idea ‘the younger the better’ holds to a certain extent. Participants who had a more copious and frequent exposure to L2 Italian media starting from Primary School performed highly both in the picture-story (3.2.4) and in the translation task (3.2.5). For this reason, whereas formal onset and age, respectively, were not statistically significant for high proficiency in the L2, early onset is beneficial when exposure to the second language (via the media, by speaking the L2 with native or non-native speakers, etc.) is frequent, regular and copious. This is particularly the case in a country like Malta where the population is mainly bilingual and where both the Italian language and the Italian culture have held important roles for decades.

For this reason, the hypothesis that the participants who received a copious and regular amount of L2 input throughout their life will outperform the participants who did not receive or who were not exposed to regular and copious input in Italian during their lives, is confirmed.

Secondly, the hypothesis that the participants who acquired Italian mainly spontaneously will have a higher level of spoken proficiency and comprehension in Italian, compared to the participants who acquired Italian mainly formally, is not corroborated in this research. In fact, even though a slightly higher proportion of spontaneous acquirers performed better in the picture-story task and a slightly higher proportion of guided learners performed better in the translation task, the differ-

ences are statistically small. Therefore, it is safe to say that with regard to type of input received, both guided and spontaneous learners of L2 Italian performed well and both followed similar L2 acquisitional processes.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this concluding chapter I will briefly summarise the results obtained in this research and discuss their implications in the Maltese context. In addition, I will be discussing the limitations of my research and suggestions for future studies.

### **6.1. Concluding Observations**

“Television gave the epistemological biases of the telegraph and the photograph their most potent expression, raising the interplay of image and instancy to an exquisite and dangerous perfection. And it brought them into the home. We are by now well into a second generation of children for whom television has been their first and most accessible teacher and, for many, their most reliable companion and friend”.

— Neil Postman (1985)

Means of communication have been rapidly evolving in the last decades and they have brought about important innovations, such as the introduction of the Internet, the development of social media platforms and the possibility of accessing online platforms which offer movies, series or television shows in streaming and on-demand. Such technological advancements have also had an impact on the sociolinguistic situation in Malta: after the appearance of the first Italian television programme transmitted on the island in 1957, the presence of the Italian language and culture in Malta gradually regained popularity amongst the Maltese. The positive effects of Italian television on the linguistic competence of this L2 is still evident in some of the participants who took part in this research. This study shows that there is a correlation between the spoken and comprehension skills of some participants, and TV exposure, particularly at a young age. The benefits of television were particularly visible in the case of 41-50 years old participants who were among those who enjoyed the peak of Italian television popularity in Malta in the 1970s and in the 1980s. This confirms that early and abundant exposure to television programmes in the L2 *is* beneficial for second language acquisition and that it can also motivate viewers to start studying the language formally. Even though television and/or streaming platforms seem to be the participants' preferred modes of exposing themselves to the L2, the 41-50 years old participants were also exposed to Italian in Malta by speaking the language regularly and by frequently accessing and reading online articles in the L2.

Nowadays however, the influence of the Italian language and culture has diminished radically in

Malta, particularly since the introduction of cable television and, later, of the Internet, through which the Maltese can access resources in a variety of languages and, especially, in English. The presence of English in the media, in fact, has become ubiquitous and given its status as a global language, English is slowly “suffocating” the presence of other foreign languages in Malta, including Italian (Caruana and Pace, 2015). The effects of this gradual decrease of interest in the Italian language and culture were also found in this research, particularly in relation to the results obtained by the participants aged 20-30 who performed less positively than their older counterparts both in the oral task and in the comprehension task. The low scores obtained by the younger participants were linked to the fact that they did not spend the same amount of hours watching Italian television programmes as their counterparts did in Primary and Secondary school; in addition to this, being the youngest age group, they might also have had less opportunities to be exposed to the Italian language compared to the three older age groups. This finding, however, also needs to be interpreted in the light of the fact that this age group grew up speaking both English and Maltese in their households (see 4.2), while the participants in the other age group have a linguistic repertoire that is more Maltese dominant. These findings further confirm that in order to reach high levels of proficiency in the second language, early onset of exposure to the L2 *is* crucial and it is even more effective if it is copious and regular.

The results of this research also confirm that a gradual decrease of interest towards the Italian language and culture is indeed taking place amongst the younger generations, who prefer communicating and accessing the media either in English or in Maltese. This gradual drop of interest and competence in Italian could represent a threat to the multilingual and multicultural identity that the Maltese population has built throughout the centuries (Caruana and Pace, 2015). The influence of Italian on the island is no longer as strong as it used to be in the recent past and for this reason, in the absence of an opportunity to speak Italian in daily life, the classroom becomes one of the most important environments in which young Maltese students of Italian can have the possibility to be exposed both to the language and to the culture. The quasi-total L2 immersion that older participants have had the opportunity to experience by following Italian television programmes regularly in the past, is nowadays somewhat impossible to reproduce for teachers of Italian in Malta (Caruana, 2013), even though they may use the Italian media in their classrooms in order to allow students to both develop an interest towards the language and also to use Italian actively.

## 6.2. Limitations of my research and Suggestions for Future Studies

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the goal of this research was to investigate the effects that age, formal onset, type of input received (guided or spontaneous) and exposure to L2 media have on second language acquisition of Italian in Malta. One limitation of this research was that there was not an explicit distinction between participants who acquired Italian spontaneously via television only and participants who learned Italian in classroom settings only, in fact, the large majority of participants to this research (66 out of 80) declared that they had received some type of guided instruction, though after years of exposure to Italian television programmes in Primary and/or Secondary school. For this reason, it could be argued that the majority of my participants have indeed received both types of input throughout their lives, both spontaneous via television during childhood, and formal in Secondary school. Even though in this research, both guided and spontaneous learners obtained high scores in the picture-story and in the translation task, and both groups performed according to similar L2 acquisitional processes, it would be interesting to investigate this phenomenon in more depth, by analysing the spoken production and comprehension levels of participants who received both types of input throughout their lives (guided and spontaneous), of participants who learned Italian only in classroom settings and of participants who acquired Italian merely from television or media input. In addition to this, it would be important to have a larger number of participants belonging to each of the three groups mentioned, and also larger samples of L2 data, in order to run more statistic and linguistic analyses, and in order to investigate the age factor further. The results could shed more light on second language acquisitional processes, even though findings from previous research which have examined the L2 performance of guided and spontaneous learners (Giacalone-Ramat, 2003; Caruana, 2003) indicate that both groups perform similarly with regard to L2 acquisitional processes.

Another limitation of this research is that individual factors (such as motivation, memory, attitude towards the language, cognitive abilities, etc.) were not taken into consideration given the large amount of data that needed to be analysed. As stated by many linguists and researchers, individual factors can play a very important role in the process of second or foreign language acquisition (DeKeyser, 2010; Long and Granena 2012; Birdsong, 2018) and for this reason, future research investigating the effects of age, input and media, could also take into account individual aspects, such as attitudes towards Italian in Malta and/or the participants' motivation to know Italian as a second or third language; this would allow the researcher to better understand how Maltese speakers of L2 Italian of different ages feel towards Italian, and the results could help second lan-

guage instructors to better understand their students' needs in the classroom.

Given that exposure to the media in the L2 is an important factor in second language acquisition (Ashcroft, Garner and Hadingham, 2018; Caruana, 2021), future studies could investigate the use that participants make of Italian media in Malta in more depth: future research could ask not only about the participants' frequency of exposure to Italian television or series, but the respondents could also be asked whether they have any Italian friends living on the island or abroad, what part of Italy these friends come from, whether these friends make use of any Italian dialect during their interaction with Maltese respondents, how often communication via the media happens between the participants and their Italian friends, how often face-to-face communication happens between the respondents and their Italian friends and/or what type of online articles or resources the participants access in Italian. These questions can help the researcher better understand how and in what contexts Italian L2 media is used in Malta and whether it has any effect on the participants second language skills (such as use of vocabulary, pronunciation, sentence structure, etc.).

Further studies that analyse the effects of age, media and types of input on SLA could also take into consideration different types of research tasks, compared to the ones that were used for this research; for instance, future studies could use research tasks that specifically aim at eliciting certain grammatical forms from the participants (such as the use of prepositions, the use of more complex verb tenses like the future simple, the future perfect or the third conditional and/or the use of auxiliaries). Moreover, future studies could investigate the short-term or long-term acquisition of vocabulary and L2 structures of participants after watching movie excerpts both from international movies dubbed in Italian and from originally Italian movies (with and/or without subtitles). Longitudinal studies are particularly relevant in this area, as research carried out so far has mainly focused on short-term acquisition of vocabulary (Caruana, Ghia and Pavesi, 2014; Peters and Webb, 2018; Pumiège and Peters, 2019), therefore analysing the acquisition of new L2 vocabulary or L2 structures in the long-term after exposure to L2 media could bring about improvements in the way that second or foreign languages are taught in Maltese schools.

## Glossary

Infinito

- *Infinitive*

Presente (indicativo)

- *Present Simple*

Participio Passato

- *Past Participle*

Passato Prossimo

- *Present Perfect (perfective)*

Trapassato Prossimo

- *Pluperfect*

Imperfetto

- *Past Continuous (imperfective)*

Passato remoto

- *Past Simple (perfective)*

Futuro anteriore

- *Future Perfect*

Futuro

- *Future Simple*

Condizionale Presente

- *Present Conditional*

Congiuntivo

- *Subjunctive*

Gerundio

- *Gerund*

Imperativo

- *Imperative*

Subordinata Esplicita Oggettiva

- *Subordinate Finite Object Complement Clause*

Subordinata Esplicita Dichiarativa

- *Subordinate Finite Declarative Clause*

Subordinata Esplicita Causale

- *Subordinate Finite Causal Clause*

Subordinata Esplicita Temporale

- *Subordinate Finite Temporal Clause*

Subordinata Esplicita Modale

- *Subordinate Finite Modal Clause*

Subordinata Esplicita Interrogativa

- *Subordinate Finite Interrogative Clause*

Subordinata Esplicita Consecutiva

- *Subordinate Finite Consecutive Clause*

Subordinata Esplicita Concessiva

- *Subordinate Finite Concessive Clause*

Subordinata Esplicita Avversativa

- *Subordinate Finite Adversative Clause*



Subordinata Implicita Finale

- *Subordinate Non-finite Purpose Clause*

Subordinata Implicita Dichiarativa

- *Subordinate Non-finite Declarative Clause*

Subordinata Implicita Oggettiva

- *Subordinate Non-finite Object Complement Clause*

Subordinata Implicita Temporale

- *Subordinate Non-finite Temporal Clause*

Subordinata Implicita Interrogativa

- *Subordinate Non-finite Interrogative Clause*

Subordinata Condizionale

- *Subordinate Conditional Clause*

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **A1. The Language Background Questionnaire (English)**

#### **Informed Consent:**

My name is Clara Cordova and I am a student at the University of Malta, reading for a Masters of Arts in Linguistics. I am presently conducting research as part of my thesis titled 'The Impact of Media Input, Age and Exposure on Italian L2 Proficiency in Malta'; this is being supervised by Professor Sandro Caruana ([sandro.caruana@um.edu.mt](mailto:sandro.caruana@um.edu.mt)). The aim of my study is to examine the influence that Italian media (such as TV or music) together with age and exposure, have on the L2 proficiency of Maltese speakers of Italian. My study aims at investigating comprehension and spoken production.

#### **YOUR PARTICIPATION:**

- 1) Any data collected from this research will be used only for the purpose of this study;
- 2) Participation to this study is entirely voluntary - you are free to accept or refuse to participate without giving any reason;
- 3) You can choose to withdraw from this study at any point without giving any reason. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from you will be destroyed immediately;
- 4) Your participation does not entail any risks;
- 5) This questionnaire takes approximately 5-7 minutes to complete;

#### **THE DATA:**

- 1) The data collected will be anonymised;
- 2) Only my supervisor and I will have access to your anonymised data;
- 3) All data collected will be destroyed upon finalisation and submission of this project (by February 2023);

#### **YOUR CONSENT:**

- 1) I have read and understood the information about the nature of the study, my involvement and data collection;
- 2) I declare that I am 18 years or older;
- 3) If I have additional questions, I can contact Clara Cordova ([clara.cordova.16@um.edu.mt](mailto:clara.cordova.16@um.edu.mt)) or Professor Sandro Caruana ([sandro.caruana@um.edu.mt](mailto:sandro.caruana@um.edu.mt)).
- 4) I agree to participate in this research study.

Do you agree to participate?

- Yes
- No

**Section A:**

This is Section A of the questionnaire to be filled in by Maltese locals, who were born in Malta and who have attended / attend school or work in Malta.

1. Date of Birth:

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Sex:

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

3. What is your current occupation?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your parents' higher level of education?

	Less than Secondary	Secondary School	Sixth Form	Undergraduate Certificate	Undergraduate Degree	Postgraduate Degrees
Mother						
Father						

5. What is your mother's current occupation?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What is your father's current occupation?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Which was/were the first language/s that you learnt to speak?

- Maltese
- English
- English and Maltese
- English and other
- Maltese and other
- English, Maltese and other

- Other

8. What languages do you use most often at home to speak to your parents?

- Maltese
- English
- English and Maltese
- English and other
- Maltese and other
- English, Maltese and other
- Other

9. What languages do you use most often to speak to your siblings or other close relatives?

- Maltese
- English
- English and Maltese
- English and other
- Maltese and other
- English, Maltese and other
- Other

10. Besides Maltese and English, did you every study / are studying any of the following languages?

(At school, private lessons, online classes, evening classes...)

	Studied in the Past	Never Studied	Studying at Present
Italian			
French			
Spanish			
German			
Arabic			
Chinese			
Japanese			
Other			

11. In which class were you when you *started* studying the above languages?

	Year5	Year6	Form1	Form2	Form3	Form4	Never	Other
Italian								
French								
Spanish								
German								
Arabic								
Chinese								
Japanese								
Other								

12. If someone speaks to you in one of these languages, how well do you *understand* them?

	I understand every word	I understand the majority	I understand little	I do not understand anything
Italian				
French				
Spanish				
German				
Arabic				
Chinese				
Japanese				
Other				

13. How well do you think you *speak* the following languages?

	Very fluently	Quite fluently	I can say a few words	Not well at all
Italian				
French				
Spanish				
German				
Arabic				
Chinese				
Japanese				
Other				

14. Presently, how often do you follow TV programmes, watch series or movies (e.g. Netflix, YouTube, PrimeVideo, etc.) in the following languages?

	Everyday	3-4 times a week	Once a week	Rarely or less than once a week	Never
Maltese					
English					
Italian					

15. Presently, how much time do you spend watching Italian TV programmes weekly? (Including series or movies on Netflix, YouTube, etc.).

- Less than one hour
- Between 1 and 3 hours
- Between 3 and 5 hours
- More than 5 hours
- Never

16. How much time *did you use to spend* watching Italian TV weekly, when you were in Primary School?

- Less than one hour
- Between 1 and 3 hours
- Between 3 and 5 hours
- More than 5 hours
- Never

17. How much time *did you use to spend* watching Italian TV weekly, when you were in Secondary School?

- Less than one hour
- Between 1 and 3 hours
- Between 3 and 5 hours
- More than 5 hours
- Never

18. What was/is your favourite Italian TV programme? (You may also not have / have had one)

---



19. Presently, which is the Italian TV channel that you follow most frequently? (You may also not follow any Italian TV channel at present)

---

20. Presently, how often do you access Italian resources through the Internet? (e.g. Podcasts,, Articles, TedTalks, Blogs, Official websites, etc.).

- Everyday
- 3-4 times a week
- Once or twice a week
- Less than once week
- Never

21. What subtitling option do you prefer when watching Italian programmes, series, videos, etc.?

- No subtitles
- Italian audio and Italian subtitles
- English (or other language) audio and Italian subtitles
- Italian audio and English (or other language) subtitles

22. Presently, what do you prefer reading in Italian?

- Magazines
- Comics
- Books
- Newspapers
- Blogs
- Online Articles
- Other
- Nothing

23. Presently, how often do you listen to Italian music on a weekly basis? (e.g. Spotify, YouTube...)

- Everyday
- 3-4 times a week
- Once a week
- Less than once a week
- Never

24. Presently, who is your favourite Italian singer / group? (You may also not have one)

---

25. Presently, how often do you listen to Italian radio channels weekly? (This also applies to radio channels accessed via the Internet or online sources, such as YouTube or Spotify).

- Everyday
- 3-4 times a week
- Once a week
- Less than once a week
- Never

26. Presently, which programmes do you listen to on Italian radio channels?

---

27. Do you or did you have the opportunity to speak Italian, not including the use of Italian in classrooms or during lessons?

- Yes
- No

28. If you did speak Italian in the past (excluding the times you spoke in classrooms), for how long did you speak Italian *regularly*?

- For a couple of days / weeks
- For about 1 month
- For a few months
- For about 1 year
- For more than 1 year

29. If you speak Italian presently (excluding the times you speak in classrooms), how often do you use the language?

- Everyday
- 3-4 times a week
- Once or twice a week
- Less than once week
- Never

30. In what circumstances do you or did you speak Italian?

- With friends
- With family members
- With professors or teachers
- At work
- As a tourist guide
- Working in hotels or restaurants
- On WhatsApp
- On Facebook Messenger
- On Instagram
- APPs to connect with international peers (e.g. Speak, Preply, etc.)
- Other

31. How often do you use Italian to text, video-call people and send voice clips? (e.g. on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, etc.)

- Everyday
- 3-4 times a week
- Once or twice a week
- Less than once week
- Never

**Section B:**

This is Section B of the questionnaire and it is to be filled in ONLY by those who have studied or are studying Italian (either at school, in private classes, in evening classes, etc...)

32. For how long have you studied or have been studying Italian?

- Less than a year
- For 1-2 years
- For 2-3 years
- For 3-4 years
- For 4-5 years
- For more than 5 years

33. Where did or do you study Italian?

- At school
- Privately
- Private lessons
- Evening classes
- Online courses (learning apps, etc.)
- Other

34. If you study or studied Italian privately or during evening classes, for how long have you been attending or have attended such classes?

- Less than a year
- For 1-2 years
- For 2-3 years
- For 3-4 years
- For 4-5 years
- For more than 5 years

35. Could you explain why you have chosen to study Italian?

---

**Section C:**

This section is to be completed by all participants who are Maltese locals and who attended schools in Malta.

36. Could you indicate your proficiency level in MALTESE on a scale from 0 - 5? [0 = zero proficiency; 1 = low or basic proficiency; 2 = elementary proficiency; 3 = intermediate proficiency; 4 = upper-intermediate proficiency; 5 = high proficiency and can communicate like a native].

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Listening						
Speaking						
Reading						
Writing						

37. Could you indicate your proficiency level in ENGLISH on a scale from 0 - 5? [0 = zero proficiency; 1 = low or basic proficiency; 2 = elementary proficiency; 3 = intermediate proficiency; 4 = upper-intermediate proficiency; 5 = high proficiency and can communicate like a native].

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Listening						
Speaking						
Reading						
Writing						

38. Could you indicate your proficiency level in ITALIAN on a scale from 0 - 5? [0 = zero proficiency; 1 = low or basic proficiency; 2 = elementary proficiency; 3 = intermediate proficiency; 4 = upper-intermediate proficiency; 5 = high proficiency and can communicate like a native].

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Listening						
Speaking						
Reading						
Writing						

39. Thank you for participating and filling in the questionnaire. If you wish to participate in the second part of the research, please provide your email address below. This information will only be used for the purpose of my research, in which all data provided will be anonymised.

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## **A1(b). The Language Background Questionnaire (Maltese)**

### **Kunsens Infurmat:**

Jiena Jisimni Clara Cordova u jien studenta fl-Università ta' Malta. Qed nistudja għal Masters of Arts fil-Lingwistika. Bħalissa qed nagħmel riċerka li se tkun parti mit-teżi tiegħi 'The Impact of Media Input, Age and Exposure on Italian L2 Proficiency in Malta'; Din ir-riċerka hija sorveljata mill-Professor Sandro Caruana ([sandro.caruana@um.edu.mt](mailto:sandro.caruana@um.edu.mt)). L-għan ta' din ir-riċerka huwa li neżamina l-impatt li l-midja Taljana (bħat-televiżjoni, il-mużika, eċċ.), flimkien mal-fattur tal-età u l-użu tal-lingwa, għandhom fuq il-kompetenza tal-Maltin fit-Taljan L2. Din ir-riċerka hija interessata li teżamina l-komprensjoni tat-Taljan u l-produzzjoni mitkellma.

### **IL-PARTEĊIPAZZJONI TIEGĦEK:**

- 1) L-informazzjoni kollha miġbura għal din ir-riċerka se tintuża biss għall-iskop ta' din l-għotja;
- 2) Il-partecipazzjoni f'din ir-riċerka hija volontarja - inti liberu/a li taċċetta jew turrifjuta mingħajr ma tagħti ebda raġuni;
- 3) Tista' tagħzel li tirtira fi kwalunkwe mument. Jekk tagħzel li tirtira, kwalunkwe informazzjoni li ttiprovdi se titħassar immedjatament;
- 4) Il-partecipazzjoni tiegħek ma timplika l-ebda riskju;
- 5) Dan il-kwestjonarju jieħu 5-7 minuti biex jitlesta;

### **ID-DEJTA**

- 1) Id-dejta miġbura se tkun anonimizzata;
- 2) Is-superviżur tiegħi u jiena biss nistaw naċċessjaw d-dejta anonimizzata tiegħek;
- 3) Id-dejta kollha miġbura se tinqered mal-finalizzazzjoni u s-sottomissjoni ta' dan il-proġett (sa Frar 2023);

### **IL-KUNSENS TIEGĦEK:**

- 1) Qrajt u fhimt l-informazzjoni dwar in-natura tal-istudju, l-involviment tiegħi u l-użu tad-dejta;
- 2) Nikkonferma li għandi 18-il sena jew aktar;
- 3) Jekk ikolli bżonn nistaqsi xi mistoqsijiet oħra, nista' nikkuntattja lil Clara Cordova ([clara.cordova.16@um.edu.mt](mailto:clara.cordova.16@um.edu.mt)) jew lill-Professor Sandro Caruana ([sandro.caruana@um.edu.mt](mailto:sandro.caruana@um.edu.mt));
- 4) Naqbel li nippartecipa f'din ir-riċerka.

Inti taqbel li tippartecipa f'din ir-riċerka?

- Iva
- Le

### Sezzjon A:

Din is-sezzjon għanda timtela minn min hu Malti, mwieled u mrobbi Malta, u li mar skola jew jaħdem Malta.

1. Data tat-twelid:

---

2. Sess:

- Raġel
- Mara
- Nippreferi ma ngħidx

3. X'inhu ix-xogħol tiegħek bħalissa?

---

4. X'inhu l-għola livell ta' edukazzjoni ta' ommok u missierek?

	Inqas minn-Sekondarja	SEC = Skola Sekondarja	Sixth Form	Ċertifikat Undergraduate	Undergraduate Degree	Postgraduate Degrees
Omm						
Missier						

5. X'inhu ix-xogħol ta' ommok bħalissa?

---

6. X'inhu ix-xogħol ta' missierek bħalissa?

---

7. Liema kienet / kienu l-ewwel lingwa/i li tagħllimt titkellem?

- Malti
- Inġliż
- Malti u Inġliż flimkien
- Inġliż u lingwa oħra
- Malti u lingwa oħra
- Inġliż, Malti u lingwa oħra

- o Lingwi oħra

8. B'liema lingwa titkellem l-iktar ta' spiss id-dar mal-ġenituri tiegħek?

- o Malti
- o Inġliż
- o Malti u Inġliż flimkien
- o Inġliż u lingwa oħra
- o Malti u lingwa oħra
- o Inġliż, Malti u lingwa oħra
- o Lingwi oħra

9. Liema lingwi tuża l-iktar ta' spiss biex titkellem ma' ħutek jew membri oħra tal-familja?

- o Malti
- o Inġliż
- o Malti u Inġliż flimkien
- o Inġliż u lingwa oħra
- o Malti u lingwa oħra
- o Inġliż, Malti u lingwa oħra
- o Lingwi oħra

10. Minbarra il-Malti u l-Inġliż, qatt studjajt / qed tistudja waħda minn dawn il-lingwi? (l-iskola, lezzjonijiet privati, online...)

	Studjajt fil-passat	Qatt ma' studjajt	Qed nistudja fil-preżent
Taljan			
Franciż			
Spanjol			
Ġermaniż			
Għarbi			
Ċiniż			
Ġappuniż			
Lingwa oħra			



11. F'liema klassi kont meta BDEJT tistudja il-lingwi tal-mistoqsija preċedenti?

	Year5	Year6	Form1	Form2	Form3	Form4	Qatt ma studjajt	Fi klassi oħra
Taljan								
Franciż								
Spanjol								
Ġermaniż								
Għarbi								
Ċiniż								
Ġappuniż								
Lingwa oħra								

12. Jekk xi ħadd ikellmek b'waħda minn dawn il-lingwi, kemm taħseb li *tifhimhom*?

	Nifhem kull kelma	Nifhem kwazi dak kollu li jintqal	Nifhem ftit minn li jintqal	Ma' nifhem xejn
Taljan				
Franciż				
Spanjol				
Ġermaniż				
Għarbi				
Ċiniż				
Ġappuniż				
Lingwa oħra				

13. Kemm *titkellem* tajjeb dawn il-lingwi?

	Tajjeb hafna	Tajjeb	Ngħid xi haga l-hemm u l-hawn	Ma' nitkellimx tajjeb
Taljan				
Franciż				
Spanjol				
Ġermaniż				
Għarbi				
Ċiniż				
Ġappuniż				
Lingwa oħra				

14. Fil-preżent, kemm-il darba ssegwi programmi tat-televizjoni, series jew films b'dawn il-lingwi?  
(per eżempju anke fuq Netflix, Prime Video etc....)

	Kuljum	3 - 4 darbiet fil-gimgha	Darba f-gimgha	Inqas minn darba f-gimgha	Qatt
Malti					
Ingliz					
Taljan					

15. Fil-preżent, kemm tuża' mill-ħin tiegħek biex tara programmi bit-Taljan kull ġimgha? (inkluzi Netflix, YouTube, PrimeVideo....)

- Inqas minn siegħa
- Bejn 1 - 3 sigħat
- Bejn 3 - 5 sigħat
- Izjed minn 5 sigħat
- Qatt

16. Kemm kont tqatta' ħin tara' programmi bit-Taljan kull ġimgha meta kont l-iskola Primarja?

- Inqas minn siegħa
- Bejn 1 - 3 sigħat
- Bejn 3 - 5 sigħat
- Izjed minn 5 sigħat
- Qatt

17. Kemm kont tqatta' ħin tara' programmi bit-Taljan kull ġimgha meta kont l-iskola Sekondarja?

- Inqas minn siegħa
- Bejn 1 - 3 sigħat
- Bejn 3 - 5 sigħat
- Izjed minn 5 sigħat
- Qatt

18. Liema huwa / kien il-programm Taljan favorit tiegħek? (Tista' twieġeb li m'għandekx jew ma kellekx wieħed favorit).

---

19. Fil-prezent, liema stazzjon Taljan issegwi l-aktar ta' spiss? (Tista' twiegeb li ma ssegwi l-ebda programm fil-prezent)

---

20. Fil-prezent, kemm-il darba fil-ġimgħa tagħmel użu ta' riżorsi online bit-Taljan (ez. podcasts,, artikli, Ted Talks, websites uffiċjali, kotba....)

- o Kuljum
- o Bejn 3 - 4 darbiet fil-ġimgħa
- o Darba jew darbtejn fil-ġimgħa
- o Inqas minn darba f-ġimgħa
- o Qatt

21. X' għażla ta' \*subtitling\* tippreferi tuża' meta tara xi programmi, series, films, dokumentarji etc... bit- Taljan?

- o Bla subtitles
- o Nisma' bit-Taljan u naqra bit-Taljan
- o Nisma' bit-Taljan u naqra bl-Ingliż (jew lingwa oħra)
- o Nisma' bl-Ingliż (jew lingwa oħra)u naqra bit-Taljan

22. Fil-prezent, x' tippreferi taqra bit-Taljan?

- o Magazines
- o Comics
- o Kotba
- o Gazzetti
- o Blogs
- o Artikli minn fuq l-internet
- o Affarijiet oħra
- o Xejn

23. Fil-prezent, kemm-il darba TISMA' il-muzika bit-Taljan matul il-ġimgħa? (ez. Spotify, YouTube...)

- o Kuljum
- o Bejn 3 - 4 darbiet fil-ġimgħa
- o Darba jew darbtejn fil-ġimgħa
- o Inqas minn darba f-ġimgħa
- o Qatt

24. Fil-preżent, min hu il-kantant / grupp favorit tiegħek Taljan? (tista' twieġeb li m'għandekx wieħed).

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25. Fil-preżent, kemm-il darba fil-ġimgħa tisma' programmi tar-radju bit-Taljan? (dawn jinkludu stazzjonijiet aċċessibbli online, bħal Spotify jew YouTube)

- Kuljum
- Bejn 3 - 4 darbiet fil-ġimgħa
- Darba jew darbtejn fil-ġimgħa
- Inqas minn darba f-ġimgħa
- Qatt

26. Fil-preżent, liema programmi tħobb tisma' fuq ir-radju bit-Taljan? (anke daww li jinkludu Spotify u tista' twieġeb li m'għandekx wieħed li ssegwi).

---

27. Għandek jew qatt kellek l-opportunita' li *titkellem* bit-Taljan? (l-użu ta' taljan fil-klassijiet ta' l-i skola MHUX validu).

- Iva
- Le

28. Jekk kellek il-possibilita' titkellem bit-Taljan fil-passat, (bla ma tgħodd id-drabi li tkellimt fil-klassi), għal kemm żmien tkellimt bit-Taljan regolarment?

- Għal xi granet jew ġimgħat (imma inqas minn xahar)
- Għal xahar
- Għal iktar minn xahar wieħed
- Għal xi sena
- Għal iżjed minn sena

29. Jekk titkellem bit-Taljan fil-preżent (bla ma tgħodd id-drabi li titkellem fil-klassi), kemm-il darba titkellem bit-Taljan matul il-ġimgħa?

- Kuljum
- Bejn 3 - 4 darbiet fil-ġimgħa
- Darba jew darbtejn fil-ġimgħa
- Inqas minn darba f-ġimgħa
- Qatt

30. F'liema ċirkustanzi titkellem / tkellimt bit-Taljan?

- Ma' ħbieb
- Ma' membri tal-familja
- Ma' professuri jew għalliema
- Bħala gwida turistika
- Ix-xogħol
- Fuq WhatsApp
- Fuq Facebook Messenger
- Fuq Instagram
- Fuq applikazzjonijiet (apps) maħluqin apposta biex tikkomunika ma' nies barranin (bħal Speaky jew Preply...)
- F'ċirkustanzi differenti

31. Kemm-il darba fil-ġimgħa tuża' t-Taljan biex tibgħat messaggi, tagħmel video-call jew tibgħat voice clips (e.g fuq WhatsApp, Instagram etc....)

- Kuljum
- Bejn 3 - 4 darbiet fil-ġimgħa
- Darba jew darbtejn fil-ġimgħa
- Inqas minn darba f-ġimgħa
- Qatt

**Sezzjon B:**

Din hija Sezzjon B tal-kwestjonarju u għandha timtela BISS minn għand min studja jew għadu jistudja t-Taljan.

32. Kemm domt tistudja / Kemm ilek tistudja t-Taljan?

- Inqas minn sena
- Għal sena jew sentejn
- Għal 2 -3 snin
- Għal 3 - 4 snin
- Għal 5 snin
- Għal iżjed minn 5 snin

33. Fejn titgħallem / tagħllimt t-Taljan?

- L-iskola
- Fil-privat
- Lezzjonijiet privati
- Lezzjonijiet ta' filgħaxija
- Korsijiet Online (applikazzjonijiet bħal Duolingo jew korsijiet oħra)
- X'imkien ieħor

34. Jekk tistudja / studjajt t-Taljan fil-privat jew waqt xi kors filgħaxija, għal kemm żmien segwejt / ilek issegwi il-lezzjonijiet?

- Għal sena
- Għal sena jew sentejn
- Għal 2 - 3 snin
- Għal 3 - 4 snin
- Għal 4 - 5 snin
- Għal iżjed minn 5 snin

35. Tista' tispjega fi ftit kliem għala għażilt li tistudja it-Taljan?

---

**Sezzjon C:**

Din is-sezzjoni għandha tiġi mimlija mill-partecipanti kollha Maltin li marru skola Malta jew li jaħdmu Malta.

36. Tista' tindika il-livell ta' kompetenza li għandek fil-MALTI minn 0 sa 5? [0 = m'għandix kompetenzi; 1= għandi kompetenza baxxa; 2= għandi kompetenza elementari; 3 = għandi kompetenza medja; 4=għandi kompetenza għola mill-medja; 5= għandi kompetenza għolja u nista' nikkomunika sew]

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Smigh						
Tahdit						
Qari						
Kitba						

37. Tista' tindika il-livell ta' kompetenza li għandek fl-INGLIZ minn 0 sa 5? [0 = m'għandix kompetenzi; 1= għandi kompetenza baxxa; 2= għandi kompetenza elementari; 3 = għandi kompetenza medja; 4=għandi kompetenza għola mill-medja; 5= għandi kompetenza għolja u nista' nikkomunika sew]

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Smigh						
Tahdit						
Qari						
Kitba						

38. Tista' tindika il-livell ta' kompetenza li għandek fit-TALJAN minn 0 sa 5? [0 = m'għandix kompetenzi; 1= għandi kompetenza baxxa; 2= għandi kompetenza elementari; 3 = għandi kompetenza medja; 4=għandi kompetenza għola mill-medja; 5= għandi kompetenza għolja u nista' nikkomunika sew]

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Smigh						
Tahdit						
Qari						
Kitba						

39. Grazzi talli ipparteċipajt u talli imlejt il-kwestjonarju. Jekk tixtieq tipparteċipa fit-tieni parti ta' din ir-ricerka, jekk jogħġbok ikteb l-email address tiegħek hawn. Din l-informazzjoni se tintuza' BISS għal din ir-ricerka u kull tip ta' informazzjoni li ttiprovdi ħa tkun anonima.

---

## **A2. Informal Interview Questions**

- Parlami del tuo passatempo e di ciò che ti piace fare nel tempo libero.
- Che cosa studi, hai studiato o pensi di studiare in futuro?  
Come mai hai scelto questo indirizzo?  
Che carriera pensi di costruirti più avanti?
- Che lavoro fai?  
Ti piace il tuo lavoro?
- Cosa pensi dell'Italia e della sua cultura?  
Ci sei mai stato/a?  
Cosa ti ha colpito di più?  
Ci sono dei posti nuovi che vorresti scoprire o posti in cui vorresti tornare? Quali e perché?  
Se un giorno ti si presentasse l'opportunità di trasferirti, vivresti in Italia?
- Cosa ti attrae della lingua italiana? Cosa ne pensi?  
Sei a conoscenza di qualche dialetto italiano in particolare? Come ti sembra rispetto all'italiano a cui siamo abituati in TV? Riesci a capirlo o parlarlo?



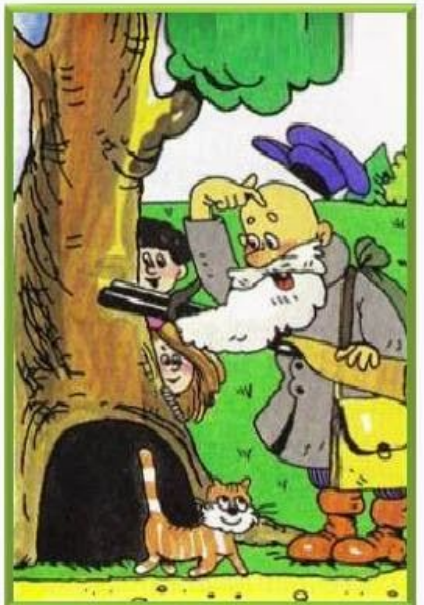
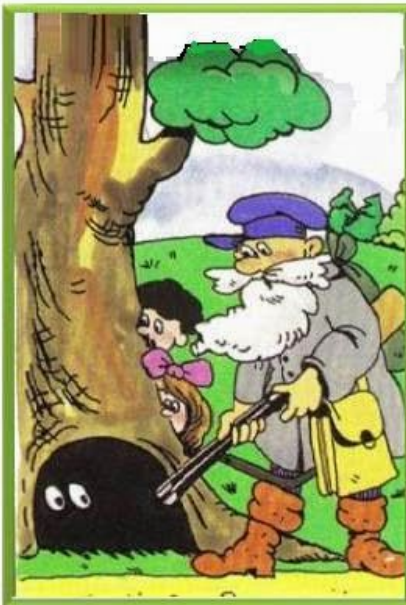
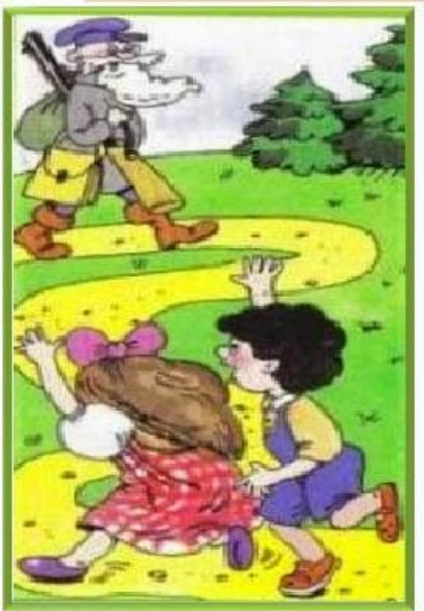
**A3. The Images for the Picture-Story**



Source:

<https://www.pinterest.com.mx/>

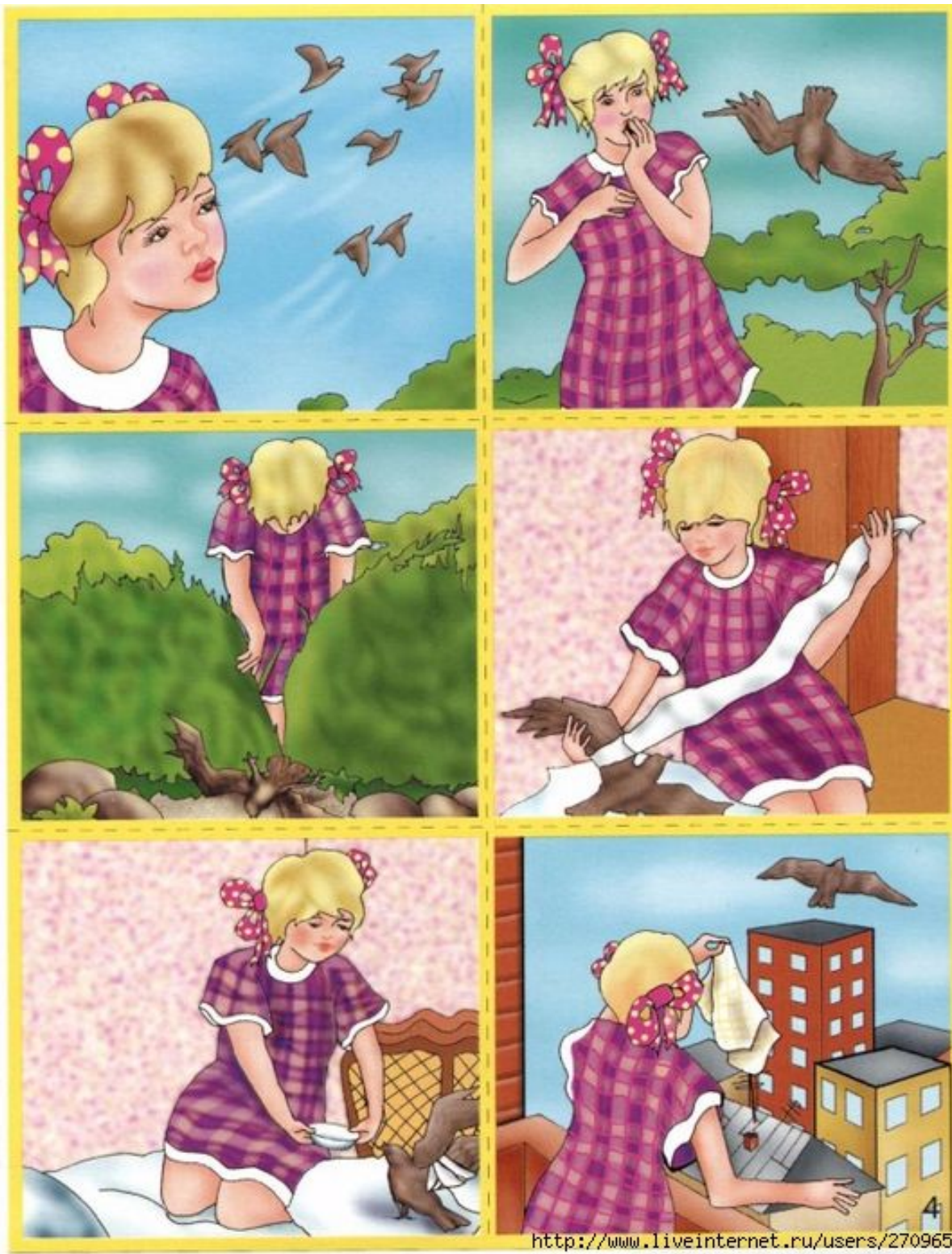
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Source:

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Source:

<https://www.pinterest.com.mx/>

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## A4. The Translation

### A4(1). The Words

	SET I	SET II	SET III	SET IV	SET V
<b>COGNATES</b>	Famiglia (n) Tazza (n)	Iniziativa (n) Quadro (n)	Bagaglio (n) Visione (n)	Messaggio (n) Scaffale (n)	Cervo (n) Tempo (n)
<b>FALSE FRIENDS</b>	Tuta (n) Ciuffo (n)	Quartiere (n) Minuta (n)	Cancellino (n) Cognata (n)	Mansione (n) Magazzino (n)	Salute (n) Marito (n)
<b>HIGH Frequency</b> <b>&gt; 1,000,000</b>	Ora (n) Vita (n) Cuore (n) Fare (v) Crederne (v) Grande (adj) Nuovo (adj) Mondo (n)	Casa (n) Gioco (n) Sole (n) Dire (v) Andare (v) Bello (adj) Piccolo (adj) Scegliere (v)	Rete (n) Via (n) Conoscenza (n) Trovare (v) Mettere (v) Primo (adj) Buono (adj) Mese (n)	Acqua (n) Amore (n) Luce (n) Portare (v) Prendere (v) Ultimo (adj) Prossimo (adj) Cercare (v)	Luogo (n) Strada (n) Chiesa (n) Chiedere (v) Diventare (v) Migliore (adj) Forte (adj) Parola (n)
<b>MEDIUM Frequency</b> <b>&lt; 1,000,000</b> <b>&gt; 500,000</b>	Spesa (n) Danno (n) Mostrare (v) Aspettare (v)	Porta (n) Sogno (n) Ritrovare (v) Vincere (v)	Gara (n) Gente (n) Crescere (v) Incontrare (v)	Pensiero (n) Giro (n) Vendere (v) Mangiare (v)	Lettura (n) Ingresso (n) Legare (v) Dimenticare (v)
<b>LOW Frequency</b> <b>&lt; 500,000</b> <b>&gt; 5</b>	Cibo (n) Docente (n) Tentare (v) Prelevare (v)	Elenco (n) Brano (n) Tacere (v) Cadere (v)	Affitto (n) Vicenda (n) Spingere (v) Indossare (v)	Spiaggia (n) Muro (n) Uccidere (v) Prestare (v)	Onda (n) Volto (n) Nascondere (v) Denunciare (v)

### A4(2). The Phrases

Sets	Phrases
SET I	Una cattiva abitudine. Cogliere l'attimo.
SET II	Scattare una foto. Respirare faticosamente.
SET III	Mettersi in gioco. Fidarsi ciecamente.
SET IV	Farsi beccare. Prendere appunti.
SET V	Assolutamente vietato. Perdutamente innamorato.

### **A4(3). The Simple Sentences**

	SIMPLE SENTENCES
Presente	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. La macchina è parcheggiata. (Set I)</li><li>2. Il citofono non funziona. (Set III)</li><li>3. Vuoi guardare un film? (Set IV)</li><li>4. Marco parla troppo. (Set V)</li></ol>
Passato Prossimo	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Ho comprato delle mele. (Set I)</li><li>2. Tommaso ha vinto il concorso. (Set II)</li><li>3. I miei cugini hanno preparato la cena. (Set III)</li><li>4. Paola ha corso dieci chilometri. (Set V)</li></ol>
Imperfetto	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. L'edificio aveva quattro piani. (Set I)</li><li>2. Entrambi volevano comprare una casa. (Set II)</li><li>3. Elisa non guidava la moto. (Set III)</li><li>4. La nonna cucinava le lasagne. (Set IV)</li></ol>
Futuro	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Passeremo un'estate meravigliosa. (Set II)</li><li>2. La mia squadra vincerà il campionato. (Set III)</li><li>3. Il nuovo film uscirà presto. (Set IV)</li><li>4. Guiderò io la macchina. (Set V)</li></ol>
Condizionale	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Vorrei un gelato. (Set I)</li><li>2. Luca vorrebbe una nuova bicicletta. (Set II)</li><li>3. Io farei la stessa cosa. (Set IV)</li><li>4. Vorremmo provare quel vestito. (Set V)</li></ol>

## A4(4). The Compound Sentences

	COMPOUND SENTENCES
Presente	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mi piace tanto il mare quanto la montagna. (Set II)</li> <li>2. Sono molto stanca, ma voglio aiutarti. (Set III)</li> <li>3. Bevo un po' di caffè altrimenti mi addormento. (Set IV)</li> <li>4. Mi metto sia il giubbotto sia i guanti. (Set I)</li> </ol>
Passato Prossimo	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sono stato a Miami ma non sono stato a Los Angeles. (Set II)</li> <li>2. Abbiamo camminato tanto e abbiamo bevuto tanta acqua. (Set III)</li> <li>3. Hai mangiato tu gli avanzi oppure è stato tuo fratello? (Set IV)</li> <li>4. Ho comprato sia il bagnoschiuma sia il dentifricio. (Set V)</li> </ol>
Imperfetto	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mio zio faceva sia il cameriere sia l'autista. (Set I)</li> <li>2. Sonia lavorava e studiava. (Set III)</li> <li>3. Camilla guardava i cartoni, ma Pietro faceva altro. (Set IV)</li> <li>4. Disegnavamo i fiori oppure li coloravamo. (Set V)</li> </ol>
Futuro	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sarà una bella giornata, tuttavia sarà impegnativa. (Set I)</li> <li>2. Pioverà o farà bel tempo? (Set II)</li> <li>3. Faremo volontariato e ci terremo occupati. (Set IV)</li> <li>4. Adotterò un cane o un gatto. (Set V)</li> </ol>
Condizionale	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vorremmo viaggiare di più e lavorare di meno. (Set I)</li> <li>2. Mi piacerebbe guidare sia le auto sia le moto. (Set II)</li> <li>3. Sceglieresti un albergo oppure un agriturismo? (Set III)</li> <li>4. Cercherei nel cassetto e anche nell'armadio. (Set V)</li> </ol>
<b><u>Congiunzioni</u></b> <b><u>Coordinanti:</u></b>	Copulative (5) Disgiuntive (5) Avversative (5) Correlative (5)

## A4(5). The Complex Sentences

	COMPLEX SENTENCES
Presente	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Riposo adesso perché dopo esco con i miei amici. (ESP_causale - Set I)</li> <li>2. Puoi tenermi i bambini mentre sono a lavoro? (ESP_temporale - Set II)</li> <li>3. Studio per passare gli esami. (IMP_finale - Set IV)</li> <li>4. Dice che oggi cucina lui. (ESP_dichiarativa).</li> </ol>
Passato Prossimo	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ha fatto troppe assenze, cosicché lo hanno bocciato. (ESP_consecutiva - Set I)</li> <li>2. Ho letto così tanto che mi gira la testa (ESP_consecutiva - Set III)</li> <li>3. Mi ha chiesto come arrivare a casa tua. (IMP_interrogativa - Set IV)</li> <li>4. Hai già deciso quando partire? (IMP_temporale - Set V)</li> </ol>
Imperfetto	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Spiegava come fare per montare una scrivania. (IMP_dichiarativa - Set II)</li> <li>2. Camminavo piano per non svegliarti. (IMP_finale - Set III)</li> <li>3. Ci chiedevamo come potevamo fare più soldi. (ESP_interrogativa - Set V)</li> <li>4. Facevamo gli esercizi come ci spiegava l'istruttore. (ESP_modale - Set IV)</li> </ol>
Futuro	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Siccome poverà, staremo a casa. (ESP_causale - Set II)</li> <li>2. Appena tornerà, gli daremo la bella notizia. (ESP_temporale)</li> <li>3. Domanderemo perché agire domani e non ora! (IMP_interrogativa - Set III)</li> <li>4. Capiremo insieme come uscire da qui. (IMP_modale)</li> </ol>
Condizionale	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vorrei saperne di più qualora mi dovesse servire. (ESP_condizionale - Set I)</li> <li>2. Io mi occuperei della sala mentre tu potresti occuparti degli ospiti (ESP_avversativa)</li> <li>3. Mi faresti un favore se smettessi di fare rumore. (ESP_condizionale - Set III)</li> <li>4. Troveresti un lavoro, qualora venissi bocciato? (ESP_condizionale - Set V)</li> </ol>
Congiuntivo	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sebbene conoscesse il rischio, ha fatto di testa sua. (ESP_concessiva - Set I)</li> <li>2. Laddove dovesse nevicare, noi non usciremo. (ESP_avversativa - Set II)</li> <li>3. Malgrado amasse molto il suo cane, lo diede in adozione. (ESP_concessiva-Set V)</li> <li>4. Benché sia tardi, non riesco a dormire. (ESP_concessiva - Set IV)</li> </ol>
<b>Subordinate:</b>	<p>Implicite (7) , Esplicite (17)</p> <p>Causali (2) , Temporali (2) , Finali (2)</p> <p>Dichiarative (2) , Avversative (2) , Consecutive (2)</p> <p>Condizionali (3) , Modali (3) , Concessive (3) , Interrogative (3)</p>

#### A4(6). The Idioms

Sets	Idioms
SET I	In bocca al lupo. A mali estremi, estremi rimedi.
SET II	Gatta frettolosa fa i gattini ciechi. Chi dorme non piglia pesci.
SET III	Tutto fumo e niente arrosto. A buon intenditor poche parole.
SET IV	Chi va con lo zoppo impara a zoppicare. Chi pecora si fa, il lupo se la mangia.
SET V	Lupo di cattiva coscienza, come opera pensa. Chi prima arriva meglio alloggia.



## **A5(1). The Evaluation Criteria for the Picture-Story Task**

**Evaluation Range '1'** → ***Competenza insufficiente***. La persona non è in grado né di esprimersi né di comunicare. Presenta difficoltà anche a livello di comprensione.

**Evaluation Range '2'** → ***Competenza appena sufficiente***. La persona stenta a comunicare ed incontra molte difficoltà nel produrre frasi comprensibili e chiare, dunque nell'esprimersi. La comprensione è molto limitata, la persona fa affidamento al contesto e dipende dall'esaminatore per produrre frasi e/o parole.

**Evaluation Range '3'** → ***Competenza sufficiente e intermedia***. La persona riesce a comunicare, anche se con delle difficoltà sia a livello di comprensione che di produzione. La persona non dimostra autonomia comunicativa perché nonostante riesca a portare avanti una conversazione, dipende ancora dal contesto e/o dall'aiuto dell'esaminatore per poter parlare ed esprimere concetti un po' più complessi. Pronuncia si presenta chiara e abbastanza comprensibile, anche se molto influenzata dalla L1, ma c'è ancora del lavoro da fare per quanto riguarda l'intonazione (e.g. intonazione ancora troppo piatta o non adatta al contesto).

**Evaluation Range '4'** → ***Competenza medio-alta***. La persona riesce ad esprimersi in maniera scorrevole con qualche esitazione qua e là, soprattutto a livello lessicale. La persona dimostra una quasi totale autonomia nel comunicare ed il livello di comprensione non presenta problemi particolari. Pronuncia è chiara e comprensibile, poco influenzata dalla L1 ed intonazione è adatta nella maggior parte dei casi.

**Evaluation Range '5'** → ***Competenza alta***. La persona si esprime in maniera del tutto scorrevole e presenta un bagaglio lessicale molto ricco, o per lo meno, abbastanza ampio da non creare difficoltà nell'espressione. La persona dimostra una totale autonomia comunicativa e il livello di comprensione è anch'esso molto alto. Pronuncia è molto chiara ed intonazione è idonea in ogni contesto.

## A5(2). The Evaluation Criteria for the Translation

<b>Words:</b>	0	0,5	1	1,5	2	2,5	3
<b>Phrases:</b>	0	0,5	1	1,5	2		
<b>Sentences:</b>	0	0,5	1	1,5	2	2,5	3
<b>Idioms:</b>	0		1		2		
<b>Total:</b>	_____ / 10						

Words —> 0 (zero words have been translated whatsoever)  
0,5 (one to three words have been translated correctly)  
1 (four to seven words have been translated correctly)  
1,5 (eight to ten words have been translated correctly)  
2 (eleven to thirteen words have been translated correctly)  
2,5 (fourteen to seventeen words have been translated correctly)  
3 (eighteen to twenty words have been translated correctly)

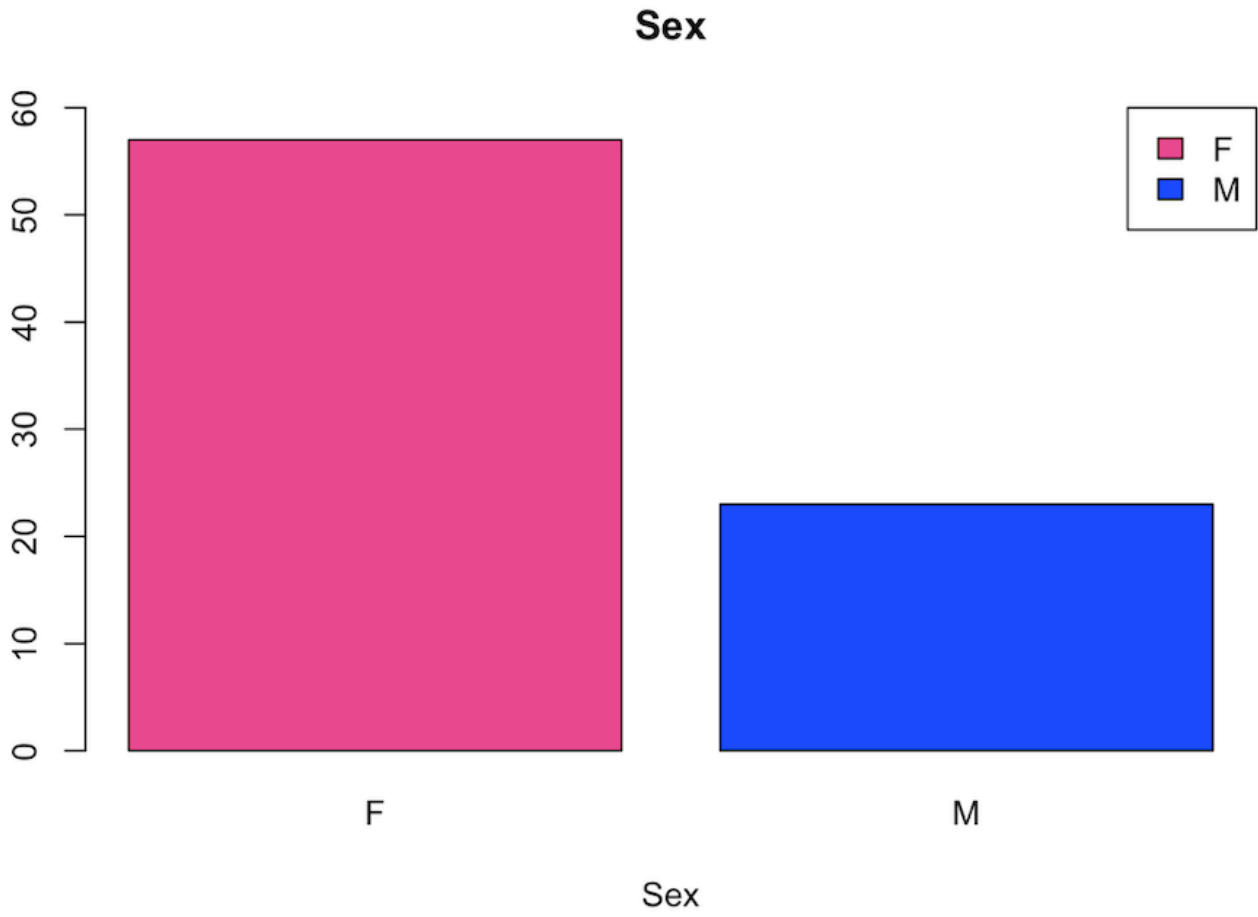
Phrases —> 0 (zero phrases have been translated correctly)  
0,5 (one to two phrases have been translated correctly)  
1 (three phrases have been translated correctly)  
1,5 (four to five phrases have been translated correctly)  
2 (six phrases have been translated correctly)

Sentences —> 0 (zero sentences have been translated)  
0,5 (one to two sentences have been translated correctly)  
1 (three sentences have been translated correctly)  
1,5 (four sentences have been translated correctly)  
2 (five to six sentences have been translated correctly)  
2,5 (seven sentences have been translated correctly)  
3 (eight sentences have been translated correctly)

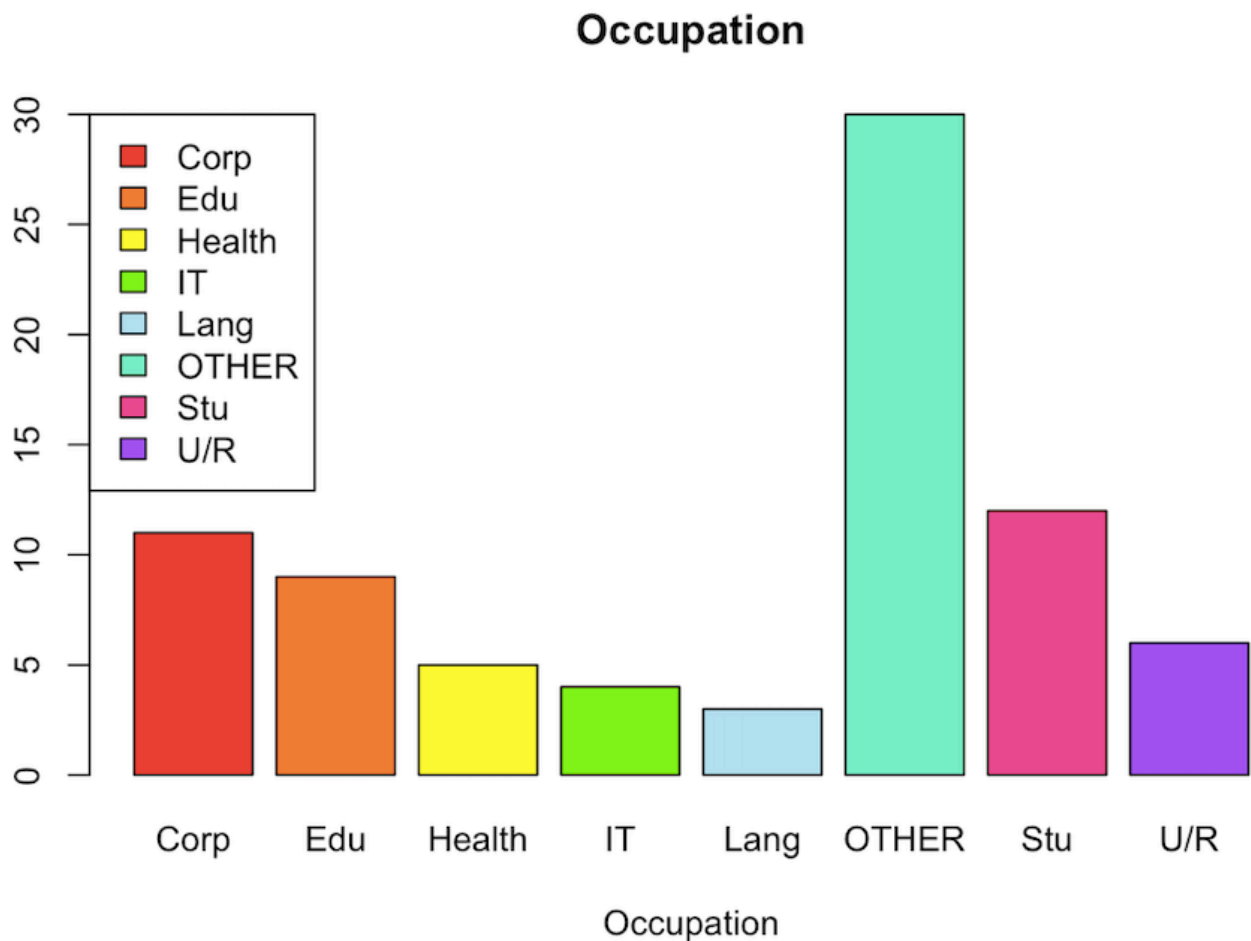
Idioms —> 0 (zero idioms have been translated)  
1 (one idiom has been translated correctly)  
2 (two idioms have been translated correctly)

## APPENDIX B: The Results

Figure A — Participants' Sex



**Figure B — The Participants' Occupations**



**Corp:** Corporation (managers, executives, etc.)

**Edu:** Education (teachers, LSAs, private tutors, etc.)

**Health:** Health sector (dentists, nurses, etc.)

**IT:** Information Technology (software developers, IT support, etc.)

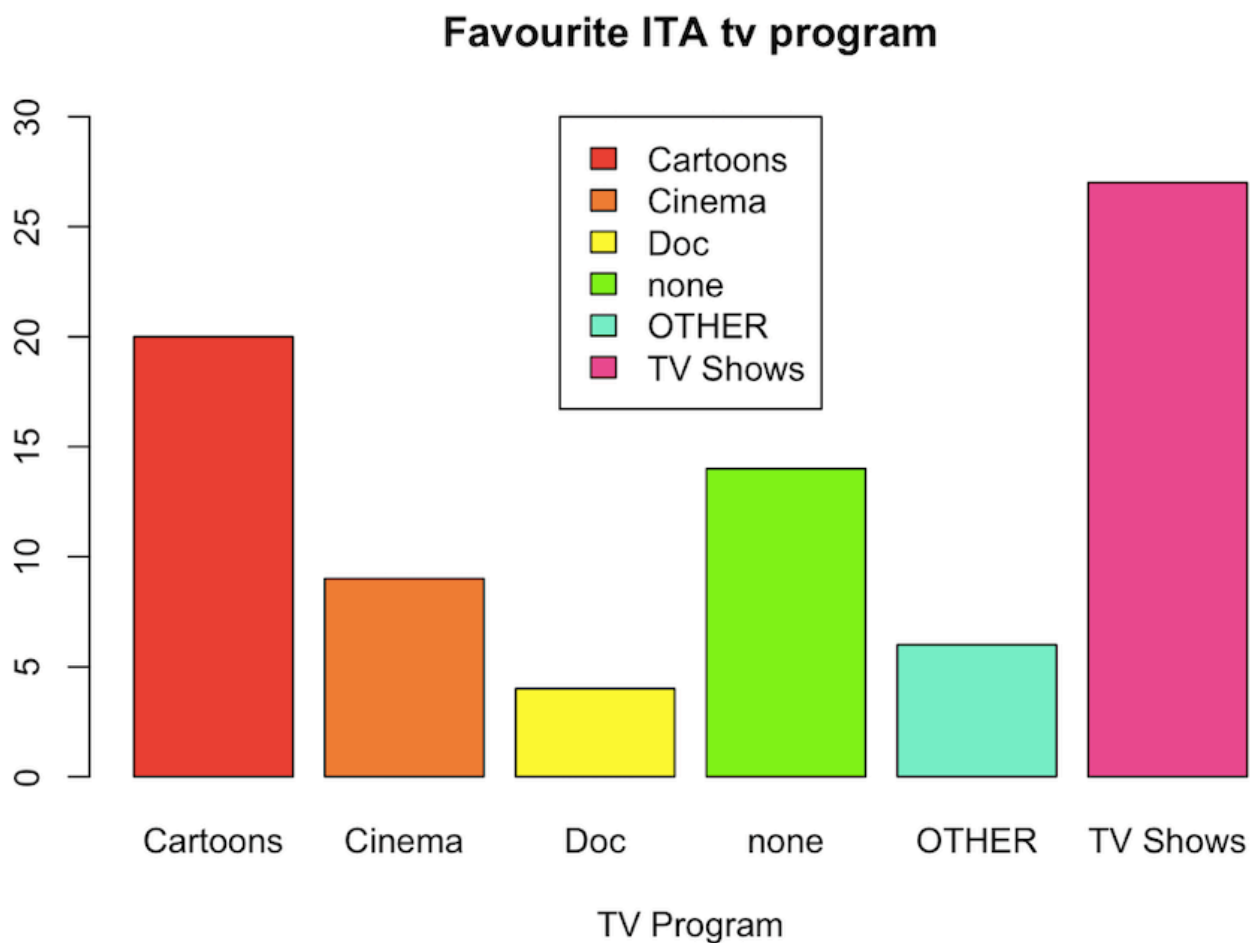
**Lang:** Interpreters or Translators

**OTHER:** various occupations (cashiers, promoters, beauty advisors, etc.)

**Stu:** Students

**U/R:** Unemployed or Retired

**Figure C — Participants' favourite Italian TV programmes**



**Cartoons:** Naruto, Dragonball, Lady Oscar, etc.

**Cinema:** movies or series

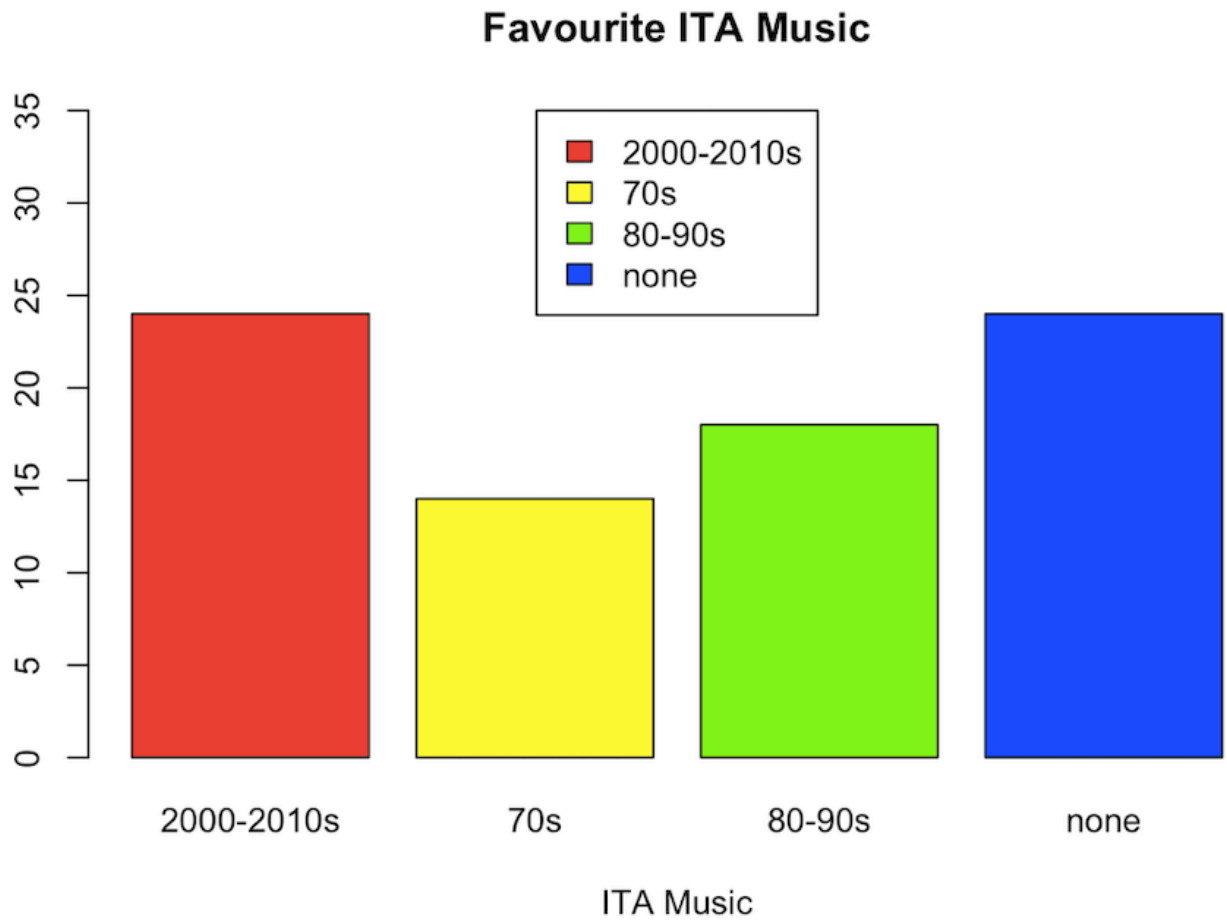
**Doc:** documentaries (Kilimanjaro, Geo&Geo, etc.)

**None:** no favourite programmes

**OTHER:** other preferences

**TV Shows:** Chi Vuol Essere Milionario, Non è la Rai, Amici, etc.

**Figure D — Participants' favourite Italian music/songs/artists**



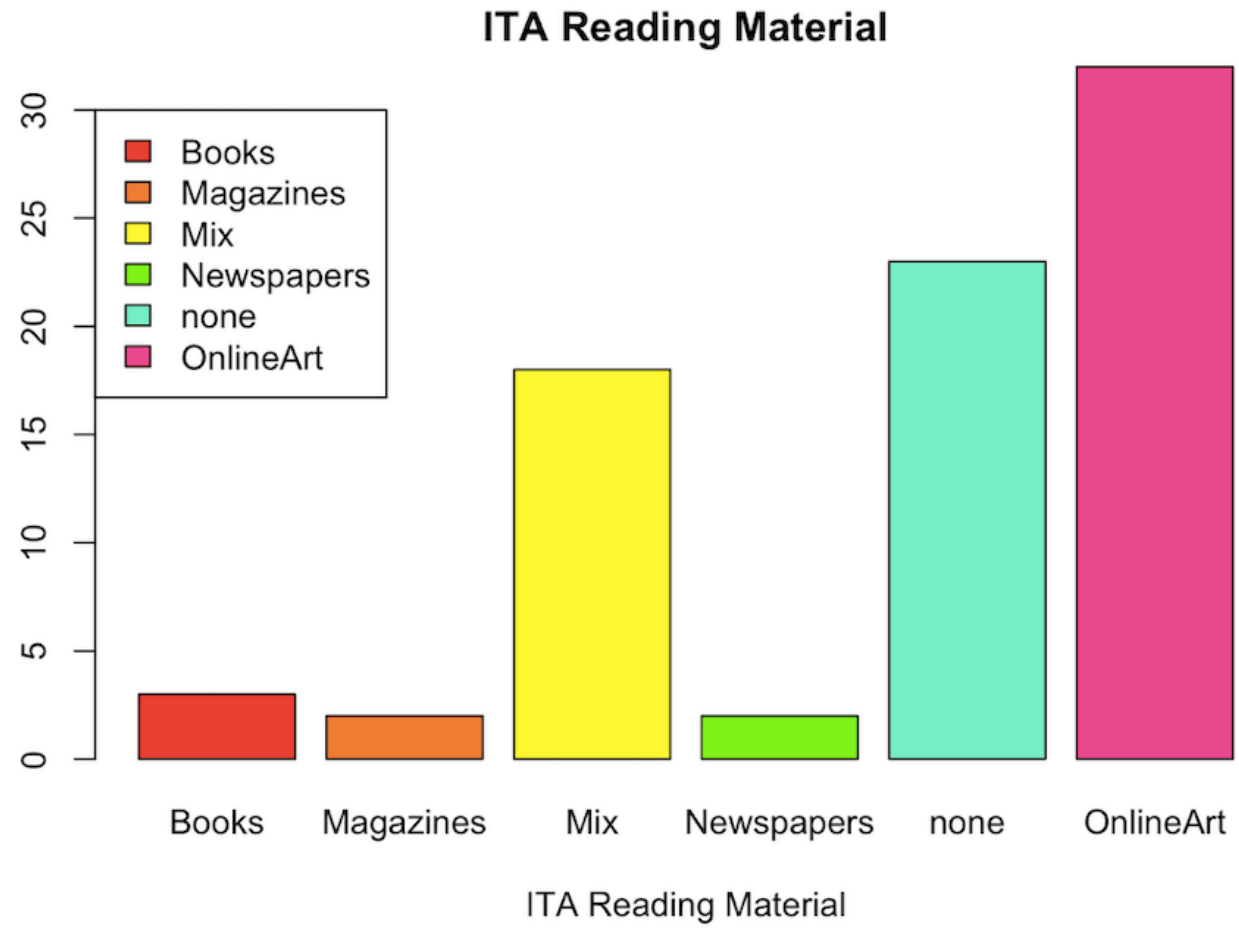
**2000-2010s:** Måneskin, Emma, etc.

**70s:** Claudio Baglioni, Riccardo Cocciante, etc.

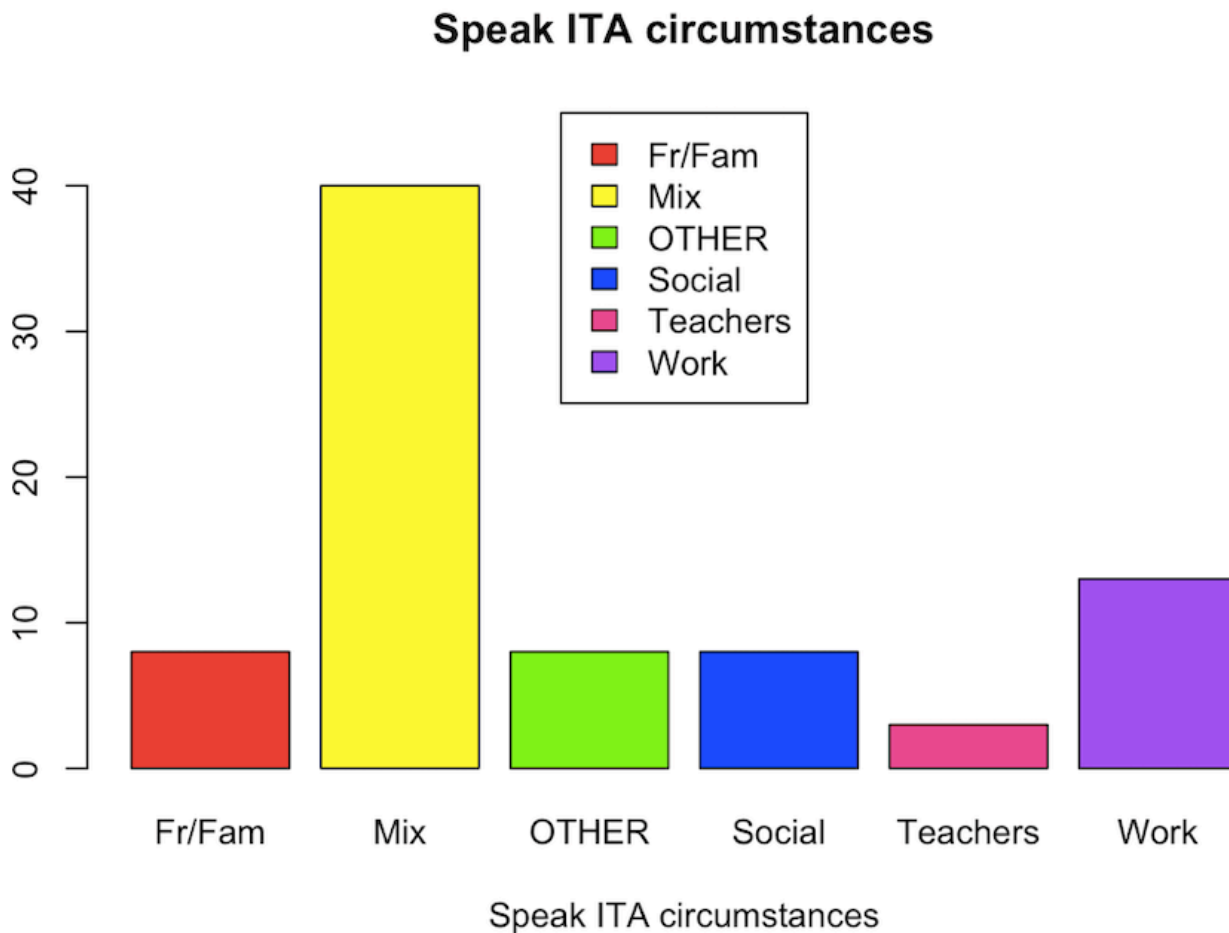
**80-90s:** Laura Pausini, Eros Ramazzotti, Tiziano Ferro, etc.

**None:** no preference for Italian music

**Figure E — Participants' preferred Italian reading material**



**Figure F — Circumstances in which participants speak Italian at present**



**Fr/Family:** with friends and family

**Mix:** in approximately all situations mentioned here

**OTHER:** in different circumstances than the ones mentioned here

**Social:** on social media

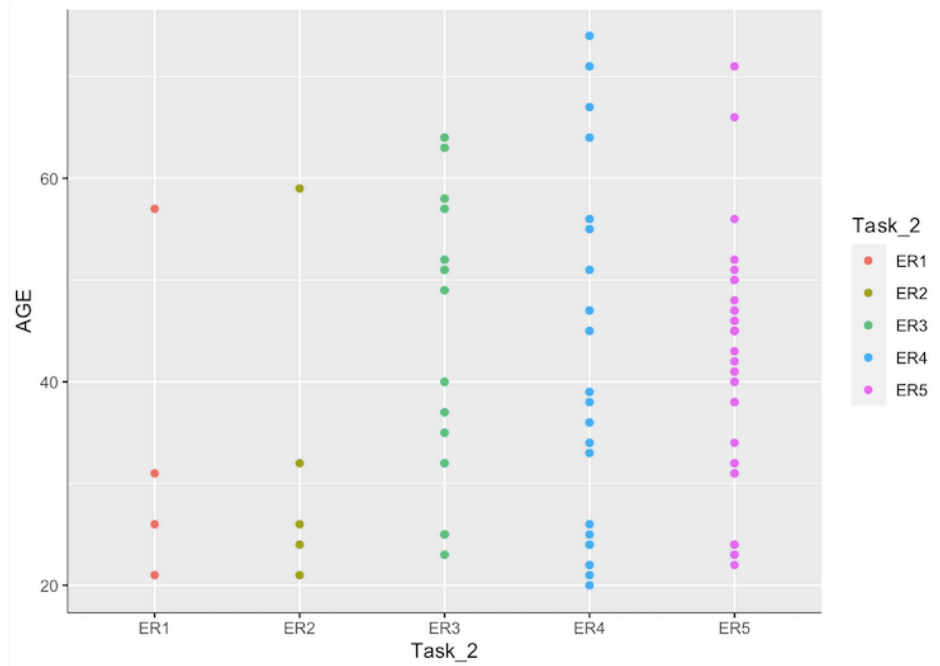
**Teachers:** with teachers at school

**Work:** at work with colleagues or clients

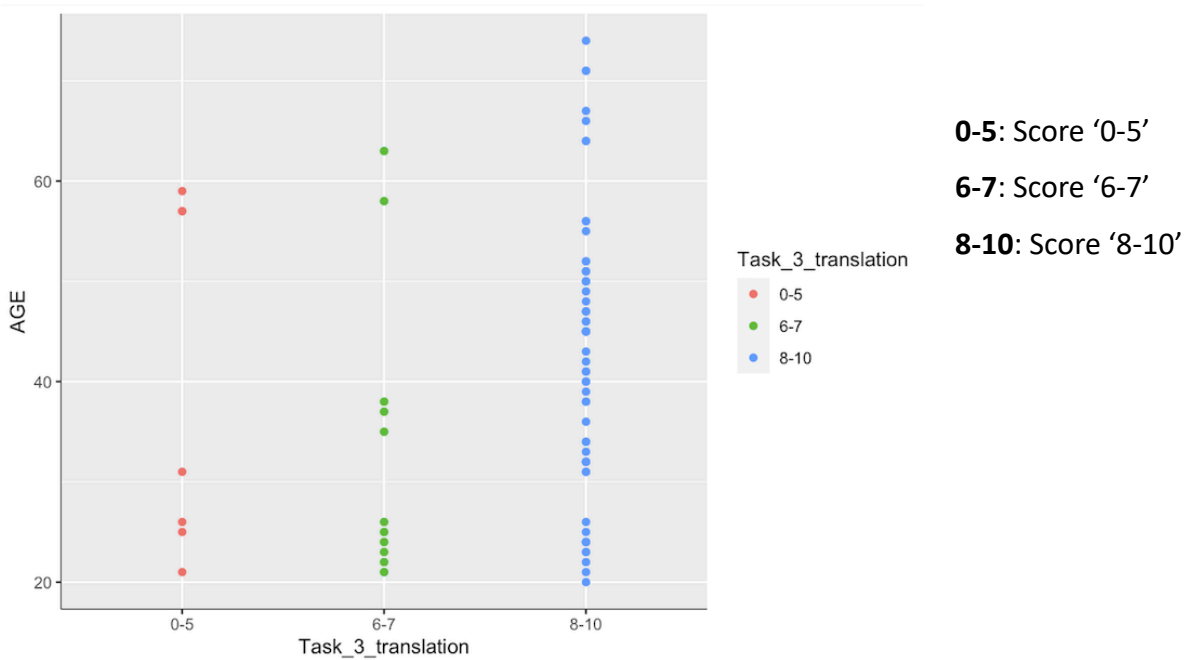


**Figure G(a) — Participants' Performance in the Picture-Story based on Age**

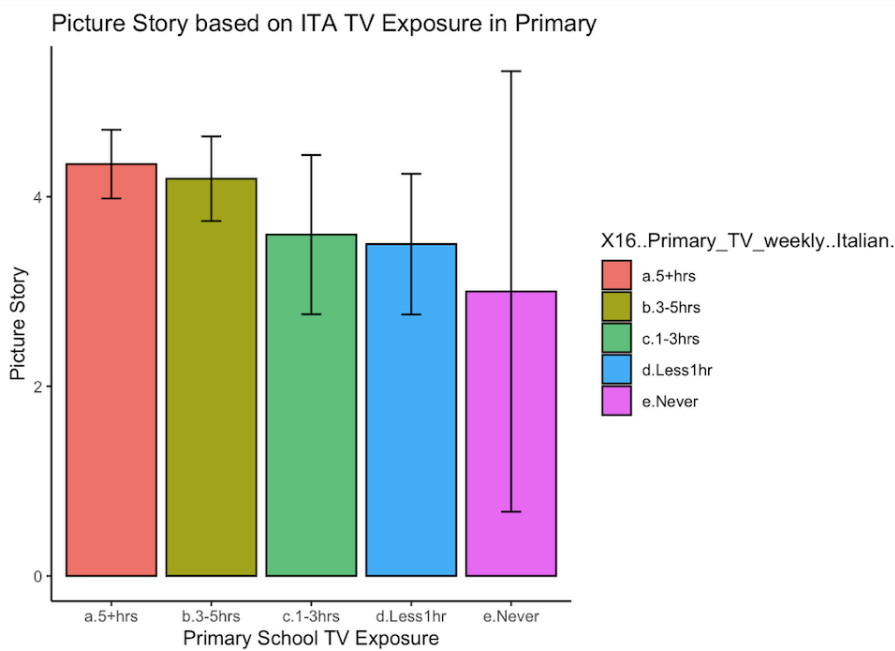
- ER1:** Evaluation Range 1
- ER2:** Evaluation Range 2
- ER3:** Evaluation Range 3
- ER4:** Evaluation Range 4
- ER5:** Evaluation Range 5



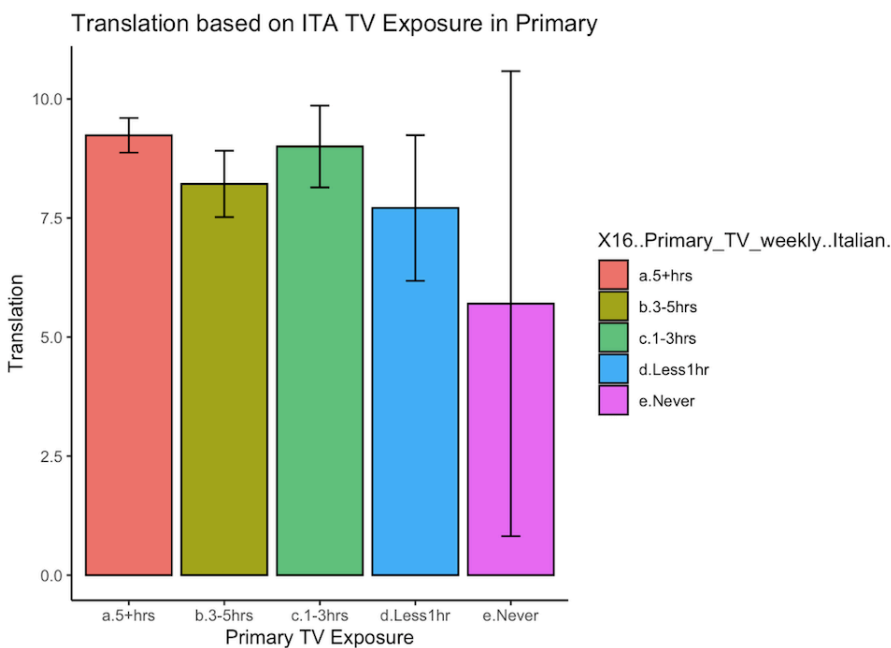
**Figure G(b) — Participants' Performance in the Translation based on Age**



**Figure H(a) — Participants' Performance in the Picture-Story based on ITA TV habits in Primary**



**Figure H(b) — Participants' Performance in the Translation based on ITA TV habits in Primary**



**5+hrs:** participants used to watch Italian TV for more than 5 hours a week in Primary school.

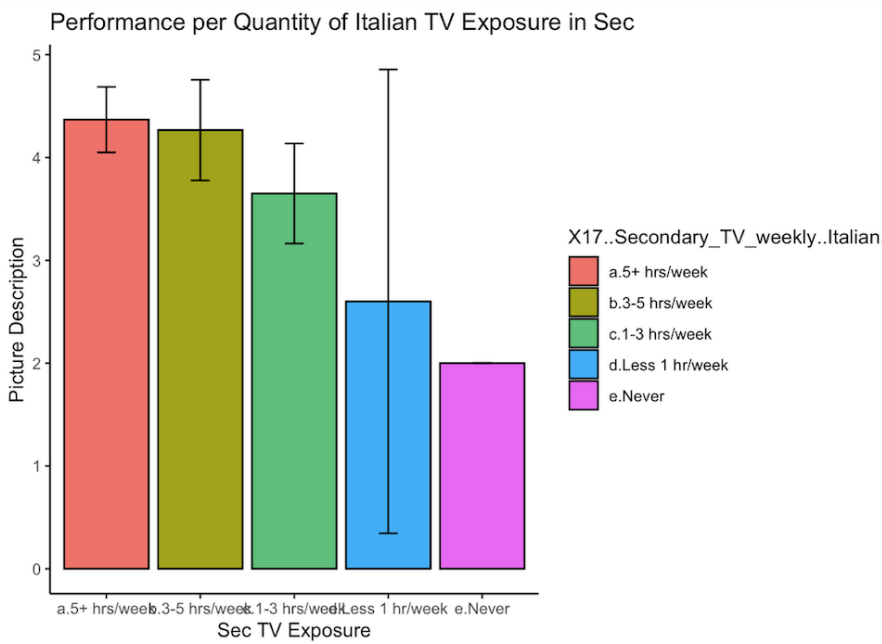
**3-5hrs:** participants used to watch Italian TV between 3 and 5 hours a week in Primary school.

**1-3hrs:** participants used to watch Italian TV between 1 and 3 hours a week in Primary school.

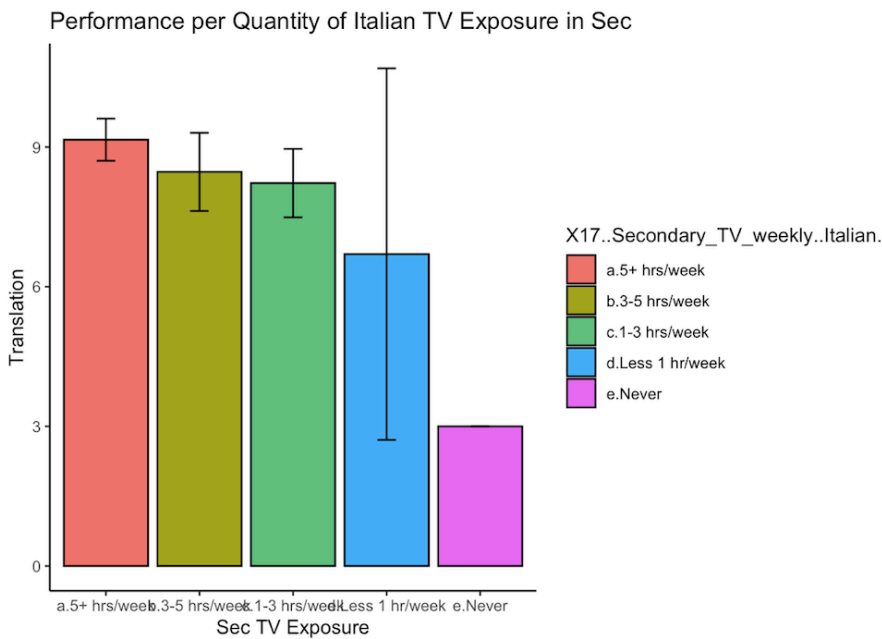
**Less1hr:** participants used to watch Italian TV for less than one hour a week in Primary school.

**Never:** participant never used to watch Italian TV programmes in Primary school.

**Figure I(a) — Participants' Performance in the Picture-Story based on Italian TV habits in Secondary**



**Figure I(b) — Participants' Performance in the Translation based on Italian TV habits in Secondary**



**5+hrs:** participants used to watch Italian TV for more than 5 hours a week in Secondary school.

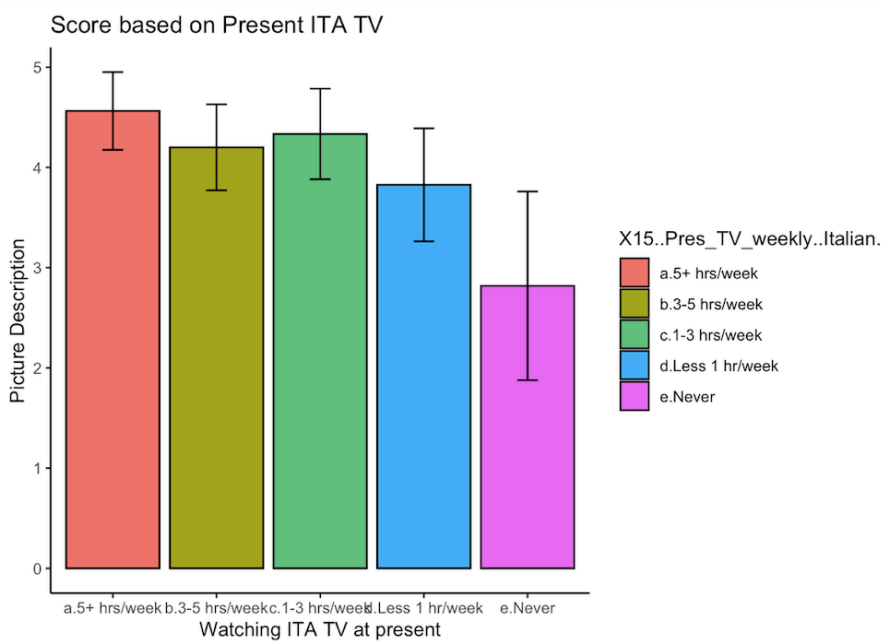
**3-5hrs:** participants used to watch Italian TV between 3 and 5 hours a week in Secondary school.

**1-3hrs:** participants used to watch Italian TV between 1 and 3 hours a week in Secondary school.

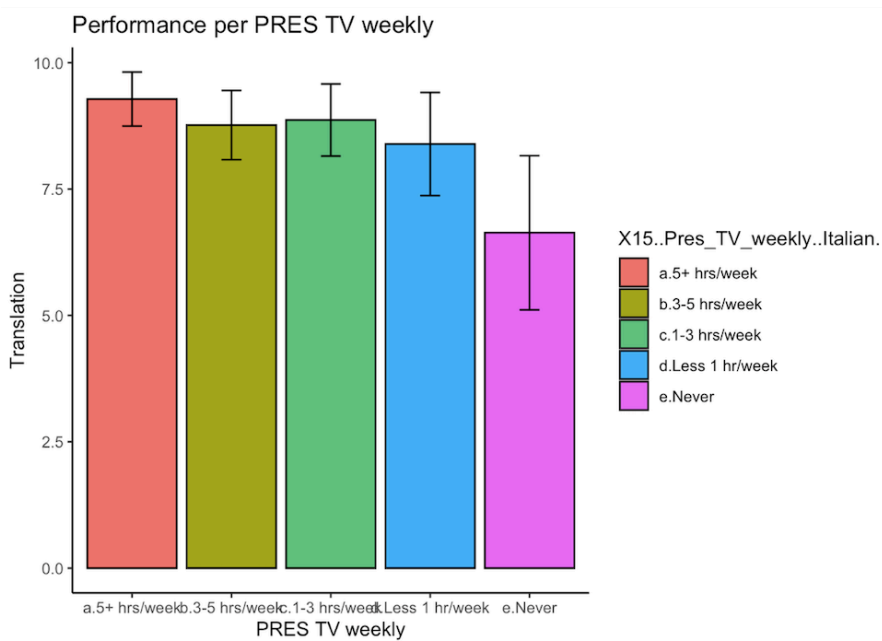
**Less1hr:** participants used to watch Italian TV for less than one hour a week in Secondary school.

**Never:** participant never used to watch Italian TV programmes in Secondary school.

**Figure J(a) — Participants' Performance in the Picture-Story based on Present Italian TV habits**



**Figure J(b) — Participants' Performance in the Translation based on Present Italian TV habits**



**5+hrs:** participants watch Italian TV for more than 5 hours a week at present.

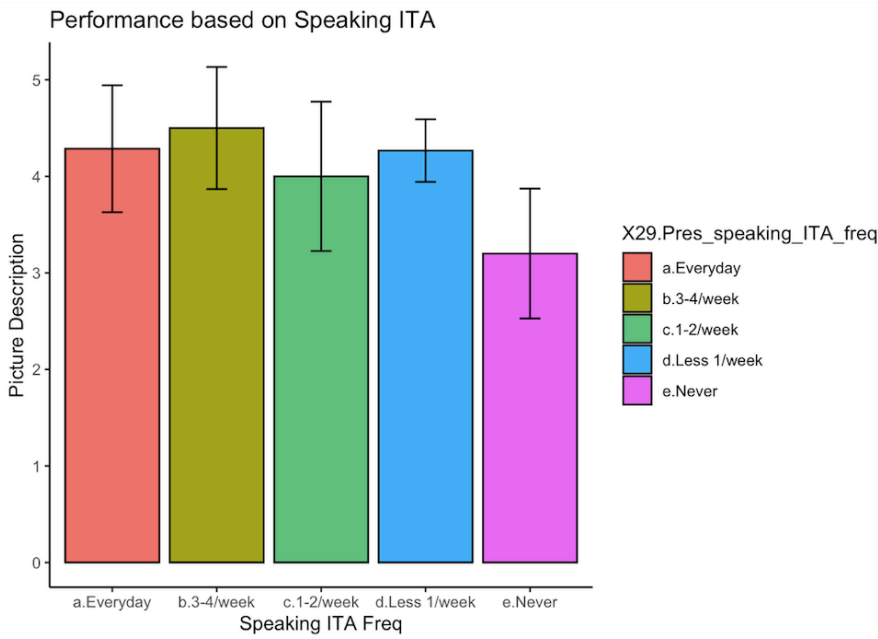
**3-5hrs:** participants watch Italian TV between 3 and 5 hours a week at present.

**1-3hrs:** participants watch Italian TV between 1 and 3 hours a week at present.

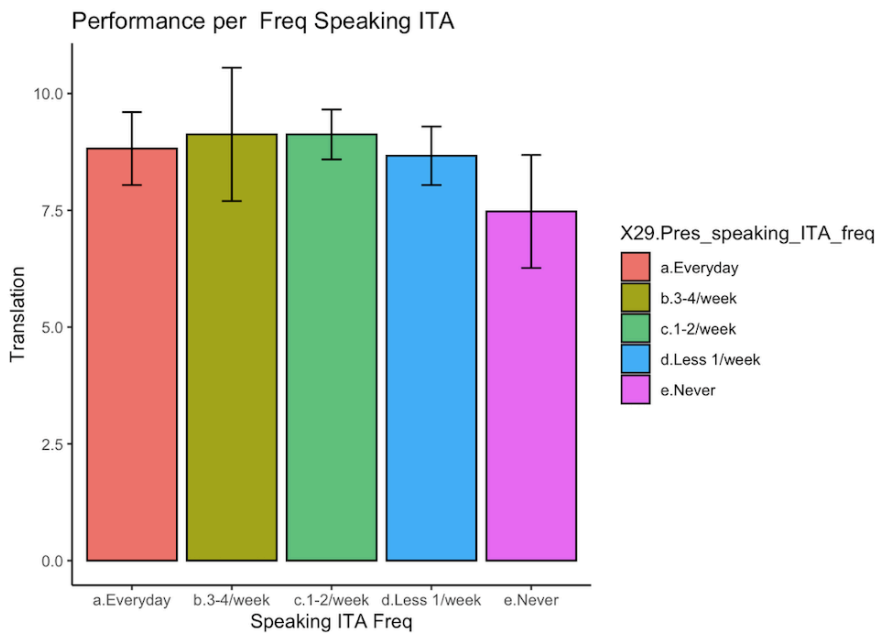
**Less1hr:** participants watch Italian TV for less than one hour a week at present.

**Never:** participant never watch Italian TV programmes at present.

**Figure K(a) — Performance in the Picture-Story based on Italian Speaking Habits at present**



**Figure K(b) — Performance in the Translation based on Italian Speaking Habits at present**



**Everyday:** participants currently speak Italian on a daily basis

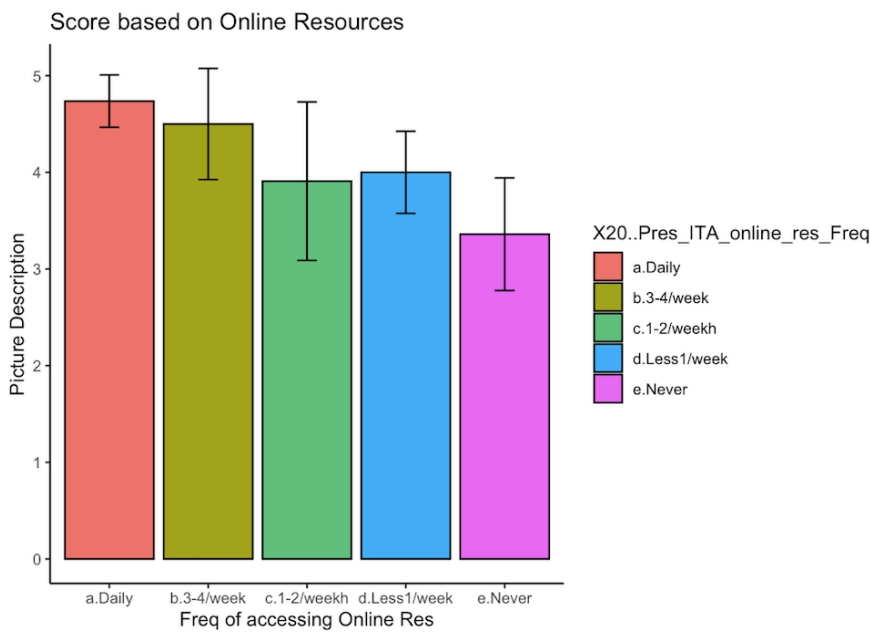
**3-4/week:** participants currently speak Italian between 3 and 4 times a week

**1-2/week:** participants currently speak Italian between once or twice a week

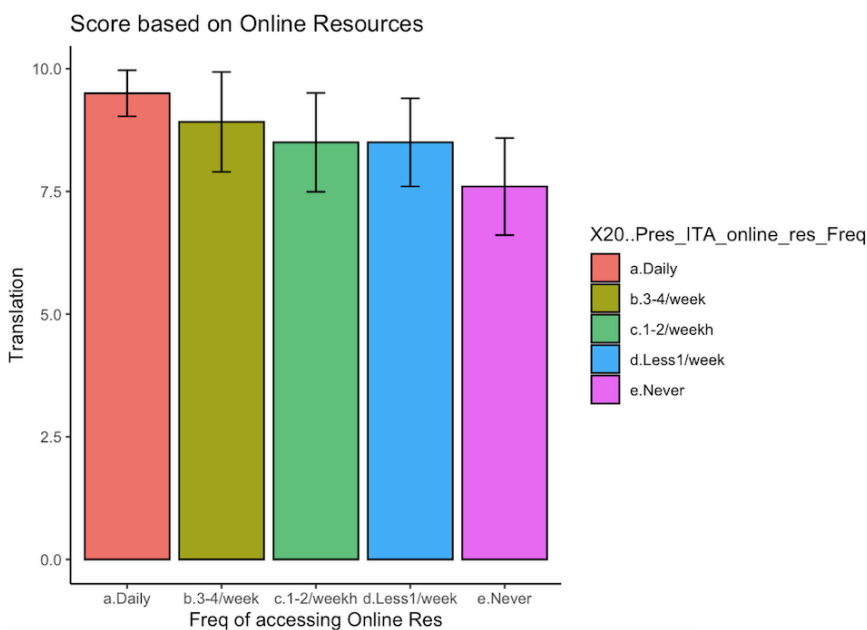
**Less1/week:** participants currently speak Italian less than once a week

**Never:** participants currently never speak Italian

**Figure L(a) — Performance in the Picture-Story based on Accessing ITA Online Resources at present**



**Figure L(b) — Performance in the Translation based on Accessing ITA Online Resources at present**



**Daily:** participants currently speak Italian on a daily basis

**3-4/week:** participants currently speak Italian between 3 and 4 times a week

**1-2/week:** participants currently speak Italian between once or twice a week

**Less1/week:** participants currently speak Italian less than once a week

**Never:** participants currently never speak Italian

## **APPENDIX C:**

### **The Transcripts of the Picture-Story and Translation Task**

Appendix C contains the full transcripts of the picture-story narrations provided by the sub-sample of participants selected for the linguistic analyses run in section 4.3.3.

It also contains the translation tasks performed by the sub-sample of participants selected for the linguistic analyses run in section 4.3.4.

#### **Table C(a):**

#### **Picture-Story Transcript of Participants belonging to Evaluation Range '1' across Age Groups.**

EVALUATION RANGE 1 Picture-Story			
20-30 (speaker 271e) (S)	31-40 (speaker 8m)	41-50	51+ (speaker 70e)
Persone su spiaggia.	Due figli, amici.	n/a	Bambino e bambina.
Bambini giocare.	Fratello and fratella. Fratello and sorella.	n/a	Questa non lo so...eh, il gatto!
E perro. Cane.	Passigiare.	n/a	Occhi!
Persone nuotare. Cane no.	Due occhi.	n/a	Scared. Spaventati, ok.
Si. Bambini contente.	Sorprise.	n/a	Cacciatore, they're waving.
Tutti bene, contente.	Cacciatore.	n/a	E dice qualcosa è disspaventata
	They point their finger at the tronca.	n/a	Alla fine c'era un gatto.
	Indicato il tronco e due occhi.	n/a	
	They see a gatto.	n/a	
	Vedere un gatto.	n/a	

**Table C(b):**

**Picture-Story Transcript of Participants belonging to Evaluation Range '2' across Age Groups.**

EVALUATION RANGE 2 Picture-Story			
20-30 Speaker 279e (S)	31-40 Speaker 222e	41-50	51+ Speaker 84e
Nella prima un due figli con la cane, giocare con ramel, sabbia.	Una bambina veda gli uccelli, ma un uccello è injured, non è morto.	n/a	Una famiglia che vanno una giornata al mare con i bambini.
Un altra due gente giocano con il pallone e una persona prende il sole.	E la bambina li aiuta e darlo-dargli un po' di cibo e acqua.	n/a	Giocare con la palla e c'è anche il cane.
Un altro ritratto, queste due persone che gioche con pallone, son finito alla mare. E la cane guarda là.	E dopo, l'uccello è buono per to fly, volare.	n/a	Ma il cane è in difficoltà qui, ma il padre vai per aiutare e- ma la storia finita bene allora.
In terza immagine, la cane andare al pallone. Non sa che c'è la mare perché l'altro ragazzo, bagnino, sta parlare con la figlia, con bambini.		n/a	
Nella quattro immagine, la bagnino va salvare la cane e la cinque immagine, la bambina salvare la cane. E la sei immagine, normale. La bagnino lo da il pallone alle due ragazze		n/a	



**Table C(c):**

**Picture-Story Transcript of Participants belonging to Evaluation Range '3' across Age Groups.**

EVALUATION RANGE 3 Picture-Story			
20-30 Speaker 13e	31-40 Speaker 82e	41-50	51+ Speaker 2m
Allora in l'ultima immagine c'è due bambini e sono camminando nel parco.	E' una ragazza che vedi l'uccelli e poi uno di loro caduto.	n/a	C'è questa ragazza che è camminare in campagna e c'è questi uccelli.
Dopo, loro vedono una cosa, un creatura nera sull'albero o sotto l'albero.	Lei andata a trovarlo, dove è caduta, e poi le fa un po' di terapia o qualcosa per far- curarli,	n/a	Uno di questi uccelli era più vicino dell'altri e lei è notato che è vicino perchè era... feruto.
Dopo c'era un uomo e i bambini salutavano il uomo e l'uomo ce l'ha una cosa per morire il-	gli da da mangiare, anche per forse prendere più forza	n/a	E lei ha portato a casa per curarlo.
E dopo i bambini dicono il uomo che loro ha visto un creatura nera e l'uomo avvicina il creatura nera.	e poi lo lancia di più- ancora- fuori perchè è guarito di quello che c'aveva.	n/a	Ti fa mangiare è guarito e ti ha lasciato in campagna ancora.
E nell'ultima immagine, i bambini e il uomo vedono un gatto orango; è lui il creatura che sotto l'albero.	E riuscita a farlo vivere di nuovo.	n/a	

**Table C(d):****Picture-Story Transcript of Participants belonging to Evaluation Range '4' across Age Groups.**

EVALUATION RANGE 4 Picture-Story			
20-30 Speaker 282e	31-40 Speaker 281e	41-50 Speaker 95e	51+ Speaker 41e
C'è una famiglia sulla spiaggia e i bambini stanno facendo i caselli nella sabbia.	Ci sono due bambini che fanno una passeggiata e hanno visto qualcosa scary, paura nell'albero	Allora vedo una bimba che sta vedendo uccelli.	Allora, c'è una famiglia alla spiaggia. I bambini fanno i castelli della sabbia.
Un uomo e una donna stanno giocando con un pallone e un'altra è sotto l'ombrellone e nella seconda immagine, la donna ha buttato il pallone e il cane sta-chasing sta girando al pallone, dopo il pallone.	e hanno visto un uomo che camminava con la pistola e hanno andato a chiamare questo uomo per difenderli.	Penso che lei ha paura, oppure che gli uccelli stanno-	La mamma è sul deckchair, non divano sedia a sdraio sotto l'ombrellone e c'è un'altra famiglia o una figlia, o che ne so, una coppia che giocano con il pallone
Nella terza immagine c'è il lifeguard, il bagnino e sta he's calling- sta chiamando i bambini perchè il cane sta andando nel mare e sta per morire!	E questo uomo è andato a guardare e ha puntato la pistola ma poi un gatto è uscito e allora rideva.	Allora ci sono gli uccelli e un uccello è ferito e lei in giardino, forse in un bosco e sta cercando quell'uccello che ha caduto per terra e infatti, lei poi ha preso l'uccello e ha fatto-infasciato.	Allora la ragazza tira il pallone al ragazzo, ma lui non l'ha aggrappato, non l'ha preso.
Nella quarta immagine, il bagnino sta salvando il cane e il suo occhiali stanno in aria, e il suo cappello e i suoi sandali stanno in aria e lui sta salvando il cane.		E poi l'uccello è rkuprato e ha dato di mangiare, un po' di mangiare, e ha dato l'acqua, da bere	Il cane sta divertendo e sta lì, e poi il cane si è tuffato nell'acqua per prendere il pallone.
E nella cinque quinta immagine, il bagnino ha salvato il pallone e il cane, ha dato il pallone ai bambini e il cane sta prendendo il suo respiro.		e quando lui era abbastanza bene, è andato a casa, ha volato per cercare la mamma e papa, forse gli amici.	il cane non sa nuotare e poi il ragazzo si è buttato in acqua per salvare il cane e il pallone e tutti sono felici.
E nell'ultima immagine tutti sono felici perchè i bambini hanno il cane e their madre è molto felice che i bambini hanno il cane e il bagnino ha dato il pallone ai due- alla coppia.			

**Table C(e):****Picture-Story Transcript of Participants belonging to Evaluation Range '5' across Age Groups.**

EVALUATION RANGE 5 Picture-Story			
20-30 Speaker 49e	31-40 Speaker 231e (S)	41-50 Speaker 156e	51+ Speaker 167e
Ci sono due ragazzi in campagna, stanno per mangiare qualcosa e hanno passato accanto a un albero e hanno visto un buco in cui c'erano due occhi e loro erano spaventati.	Si, sono in spiaggia, ci sono due bambini che giocano con la sabbia, facciamo i castelli di sabbia, c'è un cane, c'è una donna che penso che è la madre di una delle bambine che sta salutandoci e ci sono un ragazzo e una ragazza che giocano a pallone.	Allora un bel giorno c'era Clara che ha visto degli uccelli nel cielo, volando in formazione, bhè formazione non tanto.	Allora c'erano due bambini che sono- andavano a passeggio in un bosco probabilmente, in una bosaglia.
Ma poi intanto, nel frattempo c'era un cacciatore e hanno chiesto aiuto e questo cacciatore è venuto con loro; direi che è stato un po' sbalordito da dalla loro descrizione.	Il pallone penso che sta andando in acqua e il cane lo sta guardando, penso.	E poi ha visto uno di questi uccelli che è caduto giù ed è andata, l'ha cercato tra i cespugli etc, e l'ha trovato.	Poi in questo- nel buco di un albero, hanno visto gli occhi brillare di qualcuno, di qualcosa, di qualche animale che- allora loro avevano paura.
Lui con la canna di fuoco, ha puntato la canna di fuoco dentro il buco.	C'è il bagnino che sta urlando con il bambini perchè i bambini pensa che stanno per andare in acqua, ma il cane è già in acqua per il pallone.	Poverino, aveva un'ala rotta.	Così sono andati a cercare aiuto e hanno trovato questo vecchio cacciatore.
Credo che il gatto è un po' spaventato con quegli occhi e poi è uscito, rilassato da quel buco e il cacciatore fa: 'eh! ma quello è un gatto!'.	Il bagnino andato in acqua per il cane, per salvarlo, c'è il pallone, gli occhiali sono volati via con il cappello e le scarpe.	Quindi l'ha portato a casa, quest'uccello, e l'ha curato, gli ha infasciato l'ala e poi ha continuato a curarlo,	Gli hanno detto c'è un animale feroce, insomma, e allora il cacciatore è venuto con il fucile ed è uscito un gattino
E anche i ragazzi sono felicissimi che è stato solo un gatto, non un mostro.	C'è il bagnino ha preso il cane e il pallone, il cane è sfinito e i bambini stanno salutandolo il bagnino, correndo.	immagino che se non ha mai cambiato vestito, saranno passate delle settimane, dei mesi, l'ha dato da mangiare, da bere etc..	e loro, i bambini, si sono nascosti dietro l'albero perchè chissà quale animale era
	Il cane era del ragazzo e il pallone era di quelli due che stavano giocando e la mamma è contenta.	E poi quando era finalmente guarito, questo uccello è volato via e Clara lo saluta col fazzolettino.	e invece è stato un gatto con grande sorpresa del cacciatore.

**Table C(f):**

**Transcript of Participants who scored '0-5' in the Transition Task.**

'0-5' Score	20-30 Speaker 1e (1)	31-40 Speaker 8m (1)	51+ Speaker 64e (2) (S)
<b>Words</b>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> Tempo, Marito, Strada, Chiesa, Forte, Parola, Dimenticare.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> Cervo, Salute, Luogo, Chiedere, Diventare, Migliore, Lettura, Ingresso, Legare, Onda, Volto, Nascondere, Denunciare.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> Cervo, Tempo, Strada, Forte,</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> Salute, Marito, Luogo, Chiesa, Chiedere, Diventare, Migliore, Parola, Lettura, Ingresso, Legare, Dimenticare, Onda, Volto, Nascondere, Denunciare.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> Messaggio, Acqua, Amore, Luce, Portare, Prendere, Prossimo, Cercare, Mangiare, Spiaggia, Muro, Uccidere</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> Scaffale, Mansione, Magazzino, Ultimo, Pensiero, Giro, Vendere, Prestare</p>
<b>Phrases</b>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Marco parla troppo; (b) Paola ha corso 10 chilometri;</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Assolutamente vietato; (b) Perdutoamente innamorato; (c) Guiderò io la macchina; (d) Vorremmo provare quel vestito;</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Marco parla troppo; (b) Guiderò io la macchina.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Assolutamente vietato; (b) Perdutoamente innamorato; (c) Paola ha corso 10 chilometri; (d) Vorremmo provare quel vestito;</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Vuoi guardare un film? (b) La nonna <a href="#">cucinava</a> le lasagne. (c) Il nuovo film uscirà presto; (d) I <a href="#">do</a> the same thing</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Farsi beccare; (b) Prendere appunti;</p>
<b>Sentences</b>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Hai già deciso quando partire? (b) Ho comprato sia il <a href="#">bagnoschiu-</a> <a href="#">ma</a> sia il dentifricio; (c) <a href="#">Adotterò</a> un cane o un gatto; (d) Io <a href="#">cercherei</a> sia nel cassetto sia nell'armadio.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Troveresti un lavoro, qualora venissi bocciato? (b) Disegnavamo i fiori oppure li coloravamo; (c) Malgrado amasse molto il suo cane, lo diede in adozione; (d) Ci chiedevamo come fare più soldi;</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) <a href="#">Adotterò</a> un cane o un gatto</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Troveresti un lavoro, qualora venissi bocciato? (b) Hai già deciso quando partire? (c) Disegnavamo i fiori oppure li coloravamo; (d) Ho comprato sia il bagnoschiu- ma sia il dentifricio; (e) Malgrado amasse molto il suo cane, lo diede in adozione; (f) Ci chiedevamo come fare più soldi; (g) Io <a href="#">cercherei</a> nel cassetto e anche nell'armadio.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) <a href="#">Studio</a> per passare gli esami; (b) Bevo un po' di caffè altrimenti mi addormento; (c) <a href="#">Facevamo</a> gli esercizi come ci spiegava l'istruttore.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Mi ha chiesto come arrivare a casa tua; (b) Hai mangiato tu gli avanzi o è stato tuo fratello?; (c) Benché sia tardi, non riesco a dormire; (d) Camilla guardava i cartoni, ma Pietro faceva altro. (e) Faremo volontariato e ci terremo occupati.</p>
<b>Idioms</b>	<p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Lupo di cattiva coscienza, come opera pensa; (b) Chi prima arriva, meglio alloggia.</p>	<p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Lupo di cattiva coscienza, come opera pensa; (b) Chi prima arriva, meglio alloggia.</p>	<p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Chi va con lo zoppo, impara a zoppiare; (b) Chi pecora si fa, il lupo se la mangia.</p>

**Table C(g):**

**Transcript of Participants who scored '6-7' in the Transition Task.**

'6-7' Score	20-30 Speaker 100e	31-40 Speaker 273e	41-50 Speaker 31e (S)	51+ Speaker 109e
<b>Words</b>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> Iniziativa, Casa, Gioco, Sole, Dire, Andare, Bello, Piccolo, Scegliere, Porta, Sogno, Vincere.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> Quadro, Quartiere, Minuta, Ritrovare, Elenco, Brano, Tacere, Cadere.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> Bagaglio, Visione, Cognata, Via, Conoscenza, Trovare, Mettere, Primo, Buono, Mese, Gente, Crescere, Incontrare, Affitto, Spingere, Indossare.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> Cancellino, Rete, Gara, Vicenda</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> Messaggio, Scaffale, Magazzino, Acqua, Amore, Luce, Portare, Prendere, Ultimo, Prossimo, Cercare, Vendere, Mangiare, Spiaggia, Muro, Uccidere, Prestare.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> Mansione, Pensiero, Giro,</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> Messaggio, Acqua, Amore, Luce, Portare, Prendere, Ultimo, Prossimo, Cercare, Vendere, Mangiare, Spiaggia, Muro, Uccidere, Prestare.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> Scaffale, Mansione, Magazzino, Pensiero, Giro.</p>
<b>Phrases</b>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Respirare faticosamente; (b) Tommaso ha vinto il concorso (c) <b>Passeremo</b> un'estate meravigliosa; (d) Luca <b>vorrebbe</b> una nuova bici.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Scattare una foto; (b) Entrambi volevano comprare una casa</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Mettersi in gioco; (b) Fidarsi ciecamente; (c) Il <b>citofono</b> non funziona. (d) I miei cugini hanno preparato la <b>cena</b>. (e) Elisa non guidava la moto; (f) La mia squadra vincerà il campionato.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) <b>Vuoi</b> guardare un film? (b) La nonna cucinava le lasagne. (c) Il nuovo film uscirà presto. (e) Io farei la stessa cosa.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Farsi beccare; (b) Prendere appunti;</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Prendere appunti; (b) Vuoi guardare un film? (c) La nonna cucinava le lasagne. (d) Il nuovo <b>film</b> uscirà presto. (e) Io <b>farei</b> la stessa cosa.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Farsi beccare;</p>
<b>Sentences</b>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) <b>Siccome</b> pioverà, staremo a casa. (b) Sono stato a Miami ma non sono stato a Los Angeles. (c) Puoi tenermi i bambini mentre sono a lavoro? (d) Pioverà o farà bel tempo? (e) Mi <b>piacerebbe</b> guidare sia le macchine sia la moto.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Spiegava come fare per montare una scrivania; (b) Mi piace tanto il mare quanto la montagna. (c) Laddove dovesse nevicare, noi non usciremo.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Ho letto così tanto che mi gira la testa; (b) Sonia lavorava e studiava. (c) Sono molto stanca, ma <b>voglio</b> aiutarti. (d) Camminavo piano per non svegliarti (e) Domanderemo perché agire domani e non ora! (f) Sceglieresti un albergo o un agriturismo? (g) Abbiamo camminato tanto e abbiamo bevuto tanta acqua.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Mi faresti un favore se smettessi di fare rumore.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Studio per passare gli esami. (b) <b>Mi ha chiesto</b> come arrivare a casa tua; (c) Bevo un po' di caffè altrimenti mi addormento; (d) Hai mangiato tu gli avanzi o è stato tuo fratello? (e) Camilla <b>guardava</b> i cartoni ma Pietro <b>faceva</b> altro. (f) <b>Faremo</b> volontariato e ci <b>terremo</b> occupati.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Benché sia tardi, non riesco a dormire. (b) Facevamo gli esercizi come ci spiegava l'istruttore;</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Studio per passare gli esami. (b) <b>Mi ha chiesto</b> come arrivare a casa tua; (c) Bevo un po' di caffè altrimenti mi addormento; (d) <b>Facevamo</b> gli esercizi come ci <b>spiegava</b> l'istruttore; (e) Camilla <b>guardava</b> i cartoni ma Pietro <b>faceva</b> altro. (f) <b>Faremo</b> volontariato e ci <b>terremo</b> occupati.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Hai mangiato tu gli avanzi o è stato tuo fratello? (b) Benché sia tardi, non riesco a dormire.</p>
<b>Idioms</b>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Gatta frettolosa fa gattini ciechi; (b) Chi dorme non pigli pesci.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Tutto fumo niente arrosti.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) A buon intenditore poche parole.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Chi va con lo zoppo, impara a zoppiare.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Chi pecora si fa, il lupo se la mangia.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Chi va con lo zoppo, impara a zoppiare.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> (a) Chi pecora si fa, il lupo se la mangia.</p>

**Table C(h):**

**Transcript of Participants who scored '8-10' in the Transition Task.**

'8-10' Score	20-30 Speaker 193e (S)	31-40 Speaker 117e	41-50 Speaker 57e	51+ Speaker 87e
<b>Words</b>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> Messaggio, Scaffale, Magazzino, Acqua, Amore, Luce, Portare, Prendere, Ultimo, Prossimo, Cercare, Pensiero, Giro, Vendere, Mangiare, Spiaggia, Muro, Uccidere, Prestare.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> Mansione</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> Famiglia, Tazza, Tuta, Ciuffo, Ora, Vita, Cuore, Fare, Credere, Grande, Nuovo, Mondo, Spesa, Danno, Mostrare, Aspettare, Cibo, Docente, Tentare, Prelevare.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> Iniziativa, Quadro, Quartiere, Casa, Gioco, Sole, Dire, Andare, Bello, Piccolo, Scegliere, Porta, Sogno, Ritrovare, Vincere, Elenco, Brano, Tacere, Cadere.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> Minuta</p>	<p>Cervo, Tempo, Salute, Marito, Luogo, Strada, Chiesa, Chiedere, Diventare, Migliore, Forte, Parola, Lettura, Legare, Dimenticare, Onda, Volto, Nascondere, Denunciare.</p> <p><b>Wrong / No Translation:</b> Ingresso</p>
<b>Phrases</b>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Farsi beccare; (b) Prendere appunti; (c) Vuoi guardare un film?; (d) La nonna <a href="#">cucinava</a> le lasagne; (e) Il nuovo film uscirà presto; (f) Io farei la stessa cosa.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Una cattiva abitudine; (b) Cogliere l'attimo; (c) La macchina è parcheggiata; (d) Ho comprato delle mele; (e) L'edificio aveva quattro piani; (f) Vorrei un gelato.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Scattare un foto; (b) Respirare faticosamente; (c) Entrambi volevano comprare una casa; (d) Tommaso ha vinto il concorso; (e) Passeremo un'estate meravigliosa; (f) Luca <a href="#">vorrebbe</a> una nuova bicicletta.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Assolutamente vietato; (b) Perdutoamente innamorato (c) Marco parla troppo; (d) Paola <a href="#">ha corso</a> 10km; (e) Guiderò io la macchina; (f) <a href="#">Vorremmo</a> provare quel vestito.</p>
<b>Sentences</b>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Studio per passare gli esami; (b) Mi ha chiesto come arrivare a casa tua; (c) Bevo un po' di caffè altrimenti mi addormento; (d) Hai mangiato tu gli avanzi o è stato tuo fratello? (e) <a href="#">Facevamo</a> gli esercizi come ci spiegava l'istruttore; (f) Benché sia tardi, non riesco a dormire; (g) Camilla <a href="#">guardava</a> i cartoni, ma Pietro faceva altro; (h) Faremo volontariato e ci terremo occupati.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Riposo adesso perché dopo esco con i miei amici; (b) Ha fatto troppe assenze, cosicché lo hanno bocciato; (c) Sarà una bella giornata, tuttavia sarà impegnativa; (d) Mio zio faceva sia il cameriere sia l'autista; (e) Sebbene conoscesse il rischio, ha fatto di testa sua; (f) Vorrei saperne di più, qualora mi dovesse servire; (g) Mi metto sia il giubbotto sia i guanti; (h) Vorremmo viaggiare di più e lavorare di meno.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Siccome poverà, <a href="#">staremo</a> a casa.; (b) Spiegava come fare per montare una scrivania; (c) Mi piace tanto il mare quanto la montagna; (d) Sono stato a Miami ma non a Los Angeles; (e) Puoi tenermi i bambini mentre sono a lavoro?; (f) Laddove dovesse nevicare, noi non usciremo; (g) Poverà o farà bel tempo? (h) Mi piacerebbe guidare sia le auto sia le moto.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Troveresti un lavoro, qualora venissi bocciato? (b) Hai già deciso quando partire? (c) <a href="#">Disegnavamo</a> i fiori oppure li <a href="#">coloravamo</a>; (d) Ho comprato sia il bagno sia il dentifricio; (e) Malgrado <a href="#">amasse</a> molto il suo cane, lo <a href="#">diede</a> in adozione; (f) <a href="#">Ci chiedevamo</a> come <a href="#">potevamo</a> fare più soldi; (g) <a href="#">Adotterò</a> un cane o un gatto. (h) Io <a href="#">cercherei</a> nel cassetto o nell'armadio.</p>
<b>Idioms</b>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Chi va con lo zoppo, impara a zoppiare; (b) Chi pecora si fa, il lupo se la mangia.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) In bocca al lupo; (b) A mali estremi, estremi rimedi.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Gatta frettolosa fa i gattini ciechi; (b) Chi dorme non piglia pesci.</p>	<p><b>Correct Translation:</b> (a) Lupo di cattiva coscienza, come opera pensa; (b) Chi prima arriva, meglio alloggia.</p>