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Vol. 7 No. 2 June 2017

Print and online editions

Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching is published both in print (ISSN 2083-5205) and online (eISSN 2084-1965), with the print edition being the original version.

Indexing and abstracting

Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching is currently indexed and/or abstracted in the following databases:

- Scopus
- Web of Science Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)
- European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH PLUS)
- Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)
- Index Copernicus
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Special issue:
Multilingual practices and
their pedagogical implications in a globalised world

Guest editors:
Théophile Munyangeyo
François Pichette

Contents

Notes on Contributors

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Bespoke Language Teaching (BLT): A proposal for a theoretical framework. The case of EFL/ELF for Italians

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Abstract

This paper deals with the problems of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) and as a lingua franca (ELF) in the Italian educational system and, in particular, with introducing language variation in the English class. After briefly illustrating how English teaching has changed in the last few decades, an outline is drawn of what happens in the Italian school system today from child care to university as far as English teaching is concerned. The second part of the contribution focuses on the increasing variability of English as a world language, both within and outside the native speakers' domain. The second part also deals with the issues that the complex nature of variation in English has raised when teaching it, and underlines how such issues have recently, although only partially, been acknowledged by the Italian Ministry of Education. The final section, illustrates a proposal for implementing the teaching of English variation in Italian schools, based on the concepts of utility and usability which have given birth to a student-tailored approach called Bespoke Language Teaching.

Keywords: English teaching in Italy; English as a world language; sociolinguistics

I have come to believe that a great teacher is a great artist and that there are as few as there are any other great artists. Teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit.
John Steinbeck, *America and Americans and Selected Nonfiction* (2003), p. 142 (first contained in *Like captured fireflies* (1955)

The best language textbook is the one written in the learner's mind at the end of a course.
Balboni & Santipolo 2003, p. 101

1. Introduction

The long-established role of English as an international language and as a lingua franca used in all kinds of social and geographical contexts and situations around the world and with the most heterogeneous purposes and its consequent increased internal variation, both within and outside the native speakers' domains, has progressively raised the question of what variety should be taken as a model when teaching it to speakers of other languages, regardless of the context in which they happen to find themselves (cf. Howatt, 1984; Jenkins, 2006, 2009; Kirkpatrick, 2007; McKay, 2002; Santipolo, 2009). As a result of all this, more and more teachers of English have realised that facing and coping with a constantly fast-changing world and its needs and pressing demands which have radically shifted over the last few decades can no longer be disregarded. We could say that the role of the English teacher of the mid-20th century was totally different from the role of the English teacher today (cf. McCarthy 2016, chapter 5). Even though we focused only on what used to happen in an English class during the 1970s in most European countries and if we compared it with what happens (or should happen) today, we would be considerably surprised in many respects. Changes, in particular have affected at least four fundamental aspects:
1) objectives;
2) methodology;
3) consideration of the student's role in the learning process;
4) teaching tools.

With regard to the objectives, a Copernican revolution occurred when language teaching adopted and adapted the principles of sociolinguistics, thus opening the way to a new conception of what it means "to know" a language. In this way the role of grammar in the use of language took on a secondary role. This lay the foundations for the *Communicative Approach* which introduced new teaching

methods and methodologies to the English classroom, further strengthened by studies on neuro- and psycholinguistics (cf. Balboni, 2009; Howatt, 1984; Howatt & Smith, 2014). A student-centred approach was also the consequence of such a contribution which led to the development of a new awareness of and a novel attitude towards what to expect from learners and their active participation in the class (cf. Santipolo, 2015). Last but undoubtedly not least, the development and adoption of modern technologies (from computers to Smart Boards and all sorts of other electronic and interactive devices and software which have given birth to a methodology of its own, the so-called BYOD "Bring your own device"), in the English class have demanded that both teachers and learners acquire competences that were simply not even imaginable less than 15 years ago. After all, little do we know what might lie ahead of us in the years to come.

Surprisingly, despite all of these significant and substantial innovations in teaching approaches, methodology and technology, much less specific attention, and only recently, has been devoted, at least in Italy, to the object of what is being taught, that is, the constant evolution of the English language. As pointed out by Seidlehofer (2011, p. 189):

> Although lip service is paid to the idea that learners should be encouraged to put the language to communicative use, they are generally only allowed to do so on the teacher's terms and not their own, and as a means to an end, namely the eventual conformity with NS [native speakers] norms that counts as competence.

Therefore, albeit not everywhere, in many cases, the language taken as a teaching model has mainly been somewhat "crystalized," with few openings and exceptions towards variation and variability. These, when present, have concentrated on the two most popular so-called International reference varieties, namely British and American English, mainly as a result of the huge amount of teaching materials available in these two "dialects." Nonetheless, even when these two have been taken into account, it's often been more of lip service than a serious and systematic comparative illustration of the main differences and features existing between them, limiting analysis to some vocabulary and more rarely to basic grammatical structures. The principle drawback of such a narrow-minded choice and practice has, fallen on the learners' actual and usable competencies which have often revealed themselves inadequate or, not sufficient for the necessities of the real world (cf. Santipolo 2012, pp. 13-32). Of course, what I have described so far cannot be considered exhaustive of what happens in all countries and neither is it applicable to all possible contexts in which English is taught worldwide. It is only meant to provide a broad (and perhaps even blurred) picture of the state of the art. What I know for sure, however, is that it definitely depicts what has happened in a considerable number of Italian schools.

2. Foreign language teaching in the Italian educational system today: an outline

Before focusing on English, I would like to explain in a nutshell the status of foreign language teaching in general in Italian schools. The Italian educational system is organised in different age cycles, whereby the study of a foreign language becomes compulsory only at the age of six, although it is recommended even in earlier years. With very few exceptions (which mainly regard "bilingual" regions such as Valle d'Aosta – along the border with France – and Alto Adige, or Südtirol – along the border with Austria, where French and German are respectively the foreign languages taught), English is by and large the predominant foreign language taught. Here is an outline of what happens in the different cycles in relation to foreign language teaching in general:

- *Nido* (literally "nest," Child care: from 0 to 3 years): English is not taught, but there is a reasonable and increasing number of sporadic experimental projects whose success depends mainly on the presence and preparation of (semi-qualified) teachers in the school staff.
- *Scuola dell'infanzia* (Nursery school/Kindergarten: from 3 to 6 years): English is currently taught in some nursery schools, although it is not compulsory. Its teaching depends on the availability of (semi-)qualified teachers in the school staff.
- *Scuola primaria* (Primary school: from 6 to 11 years): English is compulsory (on average from 2 to 4 hours a week); Chinese is currently being introduced in some areas.
- *Scuola secondaria di primo grado traditionally known as "Scuola media"* ("Middle" school: from 11 to 14 years): English is compulsory (3 to 5 hours a week). A second language (French, Spanish or German) is also taught (2 hours a week).
- *Scuola secondaria di secondo grado, traditionally known as "Scuola superiore"*: (Secondary/high school: from 14 to 19 years): this level of school is not uniform and there are several different types of specializations and orientations offered, from classical to scientific, from technological to artistic, etc. English, however, is compulsory in all of these different secondary schools. The number of hours taught per week changes according to the focus of the school. A second and/or a third foreign language (mainly Spanish, German and French, and more recently, Chinese and Arabic) may be taught. At the end of the 5 years of school, students must have acquired a B1 level (CEF) in the language(s) studied.
- *University*: students of all Faculties must pass a B1 test (from a couple of years officially, but not in practice everywhere, raised to B2) in a foreign language, which, in 90% of cases is English, but may also be French, Spanish

or German. In some BA degree courses a B1 test is required for admission, whereas the expected and assessed exit knowledge required is at a B2 level.

3. English teaching in the Italian School System today: An outline

In the previous paragraph I provided an overview of foreign language teaching in the Italian educational system from which it emerged that, although other languages are taught, English, as expected, takes the lion's share. In this paragraph, however, I would like to focus the attention on English only, describing in detail its status in all the different cycles of schools. Please be aware that, in some cases, in order to make the contents more accessible to those who are not familiar with the complexities of the sometimes chaotic and ever changing Italian educational system, some simplifications will be necessary. In general it must also be pointed out that, wherever and whenever present (i.e., from the age of six) textbooks are almost exclusively based on a communicative approach. That said, I will concentrate on five aspects:

1. Mandatory Teaching.
2. Average teaching hours per week.
3. Teachers' qualification and proficiency required.
4. Pupils' expected final proficiency.
5. Main methodologies and approach employed.

Child care (not free of charge, from 0 to 3)

English Language Teaching	Average Teaching Hours per week	Teachers' Qualification And Proficiency	Pupils' Expected Final Proficiency	Main Methodologies/ Approaches Employed
Optional (depending on teachers' availability and presence)	?	?	None	Only sporadic experimental projects/ Ludic (Edutainment)

For some of these aspects (e.g., numbers from 3. to 5.) it will also be necessary to further distinguish between what the "official" requirements, when and if existing, like from primary school onwards, are and what actually occurs in the classroom. We shall see that, unfortunately, on many occasions, the two conditions do not coincide. This problem is even worsened by a very patchy situation across the country, where, traditionally, Northern regions tend to meet the desirable standards more than the Southern ones. Besides, for completion's sake, we will also include in this outline Child care and Kindergarten, which are currently not compulsory in the Italian Educational System, although increasingly popular and requested by parents around the country.

At Child care English is not compulsory and not even provided for. As a result, no hours per week, nor teachers' qualification are expected. Nevertheless, in spite of the parents' fear of confusion that may grow in the infant's mind in having to cope with learning two languages at the same time at such an early age, a certain awareness of the importance of early bilingualism is progressively catching on. In order to meet such an increasing demand, more and more Child cares are starting to develop projects to work on early language awareness and to expose infants right from their very first months of life to both Italian and English. The main difficulty here is represented by the lack of preparation of the educators, since the University degree (laurea in Scienze dell'educazione e della formazione) to teach infants at such an early age in Italy does not provide a specific formation either in English or in English teaching. Statistics emerging from analysis of English exam results at the degree course at the University of Padua in the last five years (2011-2015) show that no more than 32% of candidates pass at every session and that on average in order to pass the exam more than 50% of them have to sit it at least three times. Moreover, around 30% of students leave the exam as one of the last in their University career, considering it only marginal and most of the times a real "nuisance" or even a hindrance to their educational path rather than an opportunity to improve their knowledge of the language. All this, most of the times, leads to poor preparation, definitely not enough to teach the language or even to work on raising its awareness in very young children. As a consequence, even where such pilot projects are implemented the results are mostly unsatisfactory because of the teachers' inadequate linguistic and methodological competence.

Kindergarten (from 3 to 6)

English Language Teaching	Average Teaching Hours per week	Teachers' Qualification And Proficiency	Pupils' Expected Final Proficiency	Main Methodologies/ Approaches Employed
Optional (depending on teachers' availability and presence)	?	?	None	Ludic (Edutainment)

The situation at Kindergarten is probably a little better than the one described at Child cares. Several studies (cf. Balboni, 1999; Balboni, Coonan, & Ricci Garotti, 2001; Ricci Garotti & Stoppini, 2010) have been devoted in Italy to teaching and learning a foreign language between the age of 3 and 6, which have led to a relative spread of good practices across the country. In an official report by the Italian Ministry of Education on foreign language (FL) "teaching" or "awareness" experiences, as well as on their implementation and effects as carried out in Italian pre-primary schools[1] we read: (MIUR, 2014, pp. 10-11):

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[1] "[. . .] A questionnaire, aimed at collecting information and investigating the main features of currently existing early FL learning experiences in both state and non-state Italian pre-primary

[...] 2.1 The teacher in charge

As for FL experiences, non-subject specific [Author's note: my correction of the original text which used the ambiguous word "generalist"] teachers in the school are in most cases in charge of the FL lessons (49.4%), however different types of teachers (external specialist 31.4%, external mother-tongue 14.2%, external voluntary mother-tongue 3.5% for a total of 49.1%) are also used in FL lessons. As for FL awareness experiences non-subject specific teachers in the school are in most cases responsible (56.3%), however different types of teachers (external specialist 25.5%, external mother-tongue 12.7%, external voluntary mother-tongue 5.5% for a total of 43.7%) offer awareness activities.

2.1.1 Teachers' qualifications

The majority of teachers involved in the FL experiences are primary school teachers with either a university degree in Primary Education Sciences and/or a university degree in foreign languages and/or a primary school diploma with a special qualification in teaching FL. Most teachers have attended in-service courses on FL methodology or have a FL teaching international certified qualification. The FL competence of the majority of teachers is between B1 and B2 level, in some cases also C1 and C2.

2.2 "FL teaching and awareness" experiences.

In a large number of schools (48.7%) both types of experiences have been implemented: 84.8% of the schools state that they implement FL "teaching" experiences, 53.4% of the schools offer FL "awareness" experiences.

2.3 Models of implementation

Most schools introduce FL teaching when children are aged five, fewer experiences occur for children aged either 3 or 4. The average length of the FL exposure is thirty minutes once a week.

2.4 Activity types

Most teachers define the type of activities implemented in their FL classes as game-based. The most cited ones are: role-play, bingo, language games, nursery rhymes, musical games, dances, drama, hands-on-activities, narratives, fairy tales, use of flashcards, use of puppets, use of finger friends, use of toys, iconic mediators, posters, etc. A large number of teachers use multimedia resources and the interactive white board. Among the teaching approaches used in this age range, teachers mention: Total Physical Response and the narrative format, such as the one offered In The Adventures of Hocus and Lotus.

2.5 Use of the FL in the classroom

Over 60% of the teachers declare that they use the FL in the classroom always or almost always, while over 30% say that they sometimes use the FL. This last piece of information is worrying and it is worth further research. [...]

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schools, was administered online. Valid responses to the questionnaire were 1740 – 1425 from state schools and 315 from non-state schools. Their responses are being analysed in this report. The total number of state "scuole dell'infanzia" is 5145, whereas the total number of non-state schools is 9781. The 1740 schools represent a total of 257.713 children, 29.150 of them non-native Italians, mostly children from migrant families." (MIUR 2014, p. 10)

The situation that emerges from this outline seems to be, even if not ideal, definitely promising in terms of future developments, and these are also the conclusions the authors of the document seem to suggest. Nevertheless, our experience on the field has pushed us to be less optimistic or, at least, more careful, in so far as present and short-term expectations are concerned. Indeed, although, apparently, a high percentage of the schools surveyed in the report deem exposure to foreign languages a valuable experience for children, several weaknesses persist. To explain this statement, we need to consider the situation described above concerning the passing of English exam at degree courses to become educators at Child care. As a result of this it is important to analyse what happened at a national selection carried out by a private institution in 2015 for posts as teachers and educators at both Child care and Kindergarten. There were two main requirements for the candidates: 1. to have a degree either in Scienze dell'educazione e della formazione (cf. paragraph on Child care), Primary Education Sciences or Psychology; 2. to have an internationally recognised B2 certificate in English[2] obtained not more than two years previously. Only about 120 applications were presented, from all over Italy. Of these 50% were not even admitted to the oral interview: the main reason for this being the lack of an adequate certification of their proficiency in English. The interview consisted of two parts: the first one was a conversation in English on every-day, general topics or on the candidate's life and professional experiences; the second one (which was held in Italian) regarded pedagogical aspects. Of the remaining 50% who were interviewed about 80% did not give proof of sufficient knowledge and mastery of spoken English. Taking all of this into account, it is hard to believe that the results illustrated in the report by the Ministry correspond to the real state of the art. Without wishing to question the professionality and the good faith of the authors of the document, a possible explanation of the discrepancy between statistics and experience on the field may lie in the informants' tendency to overestimate their preparation. Nonetheless, it must be underlined how some successful projects in English teaching or language awareness at Kindergarten level have actually been carried out around the country at least since the 1990s[3].

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[2] By "internationally recognised B2 certificate" it was meant a certificate issued by such institutions as Cambridge, Trinity, TOEFEL, etc. and not by local or even British or American but not recognised schools. Some of the candidates presented certificates of attendance of summer schools or of recreational clubs or the likes of them.

[3] To quote but a few of them: 1. PROGETTO LESI (Lingue Europee nella scuola dell'infanzia), carried out in the Province of Trento between 1998 and 2001. 2. PROGETTO "6 IRRSAE" educational research on the pedagogical and teaching orientations for the introduction of a foreign language at Kindergarten,in the regions of Lombardy, Piedmont, Marche, Liguria, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Sardinia between 1999 and 2001. 3. PROGETTO "APPLE" (Apprendimento Precoce Lingue Straniere) carried out in 10 regions (Emilia Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Lazio, Liguria, Lombardy, Marche, Piedmont, Sardinia, Sicily, Veneto, from 2001 ("European Year of Languages") to 2005). 4. PROGETTO LiReMar (Lingua

Primary School (from 6 to 11)

English Language Teaching	Average Teaching Hours per week	Teachers' Qualification And Proficiency	Pupils' Expected Final Proficiency	Main Methodologies/ Approaches Employed
Compulsory	2/3	Degree in Education with B1(former)/B2 (now) English Language teaching education (formerly)/None (now)	Officially: A1 Actual: A1-	Officially: • Ludic • CLIL • Communicative Acutal (common): • Basic grammar • Some vocabulary • Some basic expressions

At Primary school, after several years of semi-improvisation, the state of English teaching is much better than at the younger levels of education (cf. Balboni & Daloiso, 2011). Here, its teaching is compulsory and teachers, although not specialists in English, are required to have at least a B1 certification, which from 2015 was raised to B2. In this case, however, problems mainly regard the methodology used to teach the language: when teachers do not feel confident enough to speak English, despite their supposed qualification, they often resort to teaching some basic grammar (personal pronouns, to be, to have, interrogatives, negatives, and little more), some mostly little contextualised vocabulary (mainly colours, numbers, names of some animals, of everyday objects and of the commonest sports, about the family and the school contexts) and some very down-to-earth expressions (what's your name?, what time is it) how old are you? etc.). This is because in the past future Primary schools teachers while at University had to pass an exam on how to teach English as a foreign language, called "Didattica della lingua inglese". Today, on the contrary, with the reform of the degree course introduced in 2010 which stipulates the exit proficiency in English from B1 to B2, such an exam was removed from their curriculum (cf. Santipolo, 2011, 2012).

Secondary School 1st level (from 11 to 14)

English Language Teaching	Average Teaching Hours per week	Teachers' Qualification And Proficiency	Pupils' Expected Final Proficiency	Main Methodologies/ Approaches Employed
Compulsory	3	Degree in Foreign Languages or similar B2/C1/C2	Officially: A2 Actual: A1	Officially: • Communicative • CLIL Actual (always rarer and rarer): • Grammar

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inglese in Rete nelle Marche) developed in the Region of Marche in collaboration with the University of Urbino between 1999 and 2005 and which involved 27 schools (MIUR, 2014, p. 17).

Secondary School 2nd level (from 14 to 19) (changes considerably according to school typology)

English Language Teaching	Average Teaching Hours per week	Teachers' Qualification And Proficiency	Pupils' Expected Final Proficiency	Main Methodologies/ Approaches Employed
Mainly Compulsory	2 to 5	Degree in Foreign Languages B2/C1/C2 + Native speakers (lettori)	Officially: B1 to B2 Actual: A2 to B2	Officially: • Communicative • CLIL • Microlanguages Actual (always rarer and rarer): • Grammar • Translation

Secondary school (both 1st and 2nd level) are definitely the level of schools in which English teaching is at its best in Italy, although, once again, the situation is not uniform across the country and, especially at the 2nd level, it varies a lot according to the orientation and typology of school. In any case, all teachers must have an MA degree in English and their average proficiency ranges from B2 to C1. Not all of them, however, have received an adequate pedagogical preparation while at University and this may affect what they actually teach during their classes. Native speakers "lettori" (lecturers) are also employed, especially in schools with a linguistic orientation, but they often have a limited array of action, with only limited time available and always under the supervision of the "standard" teacher. There might still be exceptions to good practices, with grammar and translation still being the main objectives, but these are, fortunately enough, becoming always rarer and rarer. At the 2nd level there may be great differences in terms of contents taught: In "classical" schools English literature prevails, whereas in technical schools English for Special Purposes is predominant.

University (except Foreign Languages and similar)

English Language Teaching	Average Teaching Hours per week	Teachers' Qualification And Proficiency	Pupils' Expected Final Proficiency	Main Methodologies/ Approaches Employed
Compulsory (mainly "idoneità": a qualifying examination which gives no mark but that only states "pass" or "fail")	Extremely variable	Mainly Native Speakers with a degree in English (lettori)	Officially: B1 (former)/ B2 (mainly reading and writing) Actual: B1-	Communicative

Some Universities are introducing English medium, especially scientific degree, MA and PhD courses which will probably have some impact on students' language proficiency but which may, in the long run, impoverish and diminish the use of Italian as a scientific language.

4. What English? Some preliminary observations

The complexity and variability both in terms of English language teachers' preparation (and their attitudes towards what it means to know and thus to teach a foreign language) and of school contexts that I described in the preceding paragraphs in Italy go hand in hand with the by now universally-recognised complexity and variability of the English-speaking world today which I hinted at the very beginning of this paper. As pointed out, among others, by Graddol (1997, p. 2),

> [. . .] in many parts of the world, where English is taken into the fabric of social life, it acquires a momentum and vitality of its own, developing in ways which reflect local culture and languages, while diverging increasingly from the kind of English spoken in Britain or North America.

One may question whether this should still be considered English or rather *Globish* (Global + English), (cf. McCrum, 2010; Nerrière, 2004), or even worse, with a strong pejorative and conservative judgement *Glubbish* (Globish + rubbish), but that is not the point, since what matters in the end is keeping communication going effectively. Literally thousands of works and studies have been devoted, from many different perspectives, to the analysis of the features, problems and consequences of this unprecedented state of things, and it would be too ambitious and beyond me just even to sum them up here. Suffice it to say, however, that among the most relevant aspects that have raised scholars' attention is the question of how to take into account such a complexity and variability when teaching the language, but without making it a mountain too tall and too challenging for students to climb. The debate has revolved around English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English as Second Language (ESL), English as an International Language (EIL), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (cf., among many possible others, Grazzi, 2013; Kirkpatrick, 2007; MacKenzie, 2014; Santipolo, 2012; Sharifian, 2009). The main problematic issues touching all of these categories have been related to the concepts of correctness, acceptability, intelligibility and the role of the native speaker as opposed to or along with the role of the non-native speaker. To cut a long story short, the big challenges English language teachers have to face today may be summed up as follows:

1) English as a global phenomenon (like all other language, but probably even more than any other) changes today faster than ever before (cf. the role the Internet plays on such changes);

2) globalisation of English: English teaching as a whole should involve teaching learners to grow variety-aware, to be ready for huge difference and variability;

3) teachers themselves (especially, but not exclusively, if non-native speakers) must keep up with points 1 and 2 above and should adopt strategies to work on them in the classroom.

So, eventually, what English should be taught? No straightforward or ultimate answer is possible to such a challenging question, but I think that some guidelines can be singled out starting from the observation of some matters of fact about the English language today which have some kind of impact on its teaching (cf. Santipolo 2016):

- English as a native language, despite its huge internal variation, at least in its internationally and universally accepted version, is relatively stable and thus easier to describe and teach. This has made it possible to produce a huge wealth of teaching materials.
- New Englishes are now moving towards some degree of stability, but there are hardly no teaching materials for them;
- EFL and ELF are extremely unstable (MacKenzie, 2014, p. vii) and no systematic teaching materials exist for them, although something has started to come along[4].

Of all this, the decision-makers at the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) finally seem to have become aware. So much so that in an official announcement of selection[5] recently released (25th February 2016) by the Ministry, candidates to posts as teachers of English in Secondary schools were required to:

> have a command of the subject language under examination (i.e., English) at least at a C1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages;
> - know the culture of the countries where people speak the language under examination, with particular reference to the historical, social, literary, artistic and economic

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[4] The most significant example of this kind is probably the so-called VOICE Project or *Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English* whose homepage reads (https://www.uni-vie.ac.at/voice/): In the early 21st century, English in the world finds itself in an "unstable equilibrium": On the one hand, the majority of the world's English users are not native speakers of the language, but use it as an additional language, as a convenient means for communicative interactions that cannot be conducted in their mother tongues. On the other hand, linguistic descriptions have as yet predominantly been focusing on English as it is spoken and written by its native speakers. *VOICE* seeks to redress the balance by providing a sizeable, computer-readable corpus of English as it is spoken by this non-native speaking majority of users in different contexts. These speakers use English successfully on a daily basis all over the world, in their personal, professional or academic lives. We therefore see them primarily not as language learners but as language users in their own right."

[5] Article 97 of the Italian Constitution prescribes that in order to obtain a post in a state institution of whatever kind (school, University, public transportation, health care, and so forth) candidates must sit what is known as a *concorso pubblico*, a "competitive state exam" or a "public competition" consisting in a written and oral exam used to recruit workers/people.

areas, as well as the linguistic varieties of English, from World Englishes, to English as a Language Franca; know how to read, analyze and interpret literary texts with reference to the various literary genres related to authors of literary tradition of the countries where the language under examination is spoken; know how to read, analyze and interpret technical and scientific texts with reference to several specific languages for technical and professional sectors[6].

Similar requirements, but of course language-specific, which for the first time in Italy, reveal a considerable degree of sociolinguistic awareness, are also present in the announcements of selection of posts as teachers of French, German, and, though only in a less detailed form, Spanish – the main foreign languages taught today in Italian schools – and Portuguese.

What remains to be clarified is if the Ministry expects teachers to introduce such competences related to variability in the English classroom, and if yes, how they are expected to do it.

4.1. Introducing *Utility* and *Usability*

In order to achieve such an ambitious objective I suggest that two concepts may be borrowed and adapted from computer sciences: utility and usability. If the concept of utility is intuitively understandable, usability probably needs some explanation. Nielsen (2003) defines usability as a quality attribute that assesses how easy user interfaces are to use. The word "usability" also refers to methods for improving ease-of-use during the design process.
Usability is defined by 5 quality components:

1. *Learnability*: How easy is it for users to accomplish basic tasks the first time they encounter the design?
2. *Efficiency*: Once users have learned the design, how quickly can they perform tasks?
3. *Memorability*: When users return to the design after a period of not using it, how easily can they reestablish proficiency?
4. *Errors*: How many errors do users make, how severe are these errors, and how easily can they recover from the errors?

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[6] This is the original text in Italian: [...] - avere una padronanza della lingua oggetto d'esame almeno a livello C1 del Quadro Comune Europeo di Riferimento per le Lingue;
- conoscere la cultura dei paesi in cui si parla la lingua oggetto d'esame, con particolare riferimento agli ambiti storico, sociale, letterario, artistico ed economico, nonché alle varietà linguistiche dell'inglese, dai World Englishes, all'English as a Lingua Franca; saper leggere, analizzare e interpretare testi letterari con riferimento ai vari generi letterari relativi ad autori della tradizione letteraria dei paesi in cui si parla la lingua oggetto d'esame; saper leggere, analizzare e interpretare testi tecnico-scientifici con riferimento ai vari linguaggi specifici relativi ai settori tecnici e professionali; [...]

5. *Satisfaction*: How pleasant is it to use the design?

All of these components of usability can easily be read and re-interpreted having language teaching in mind:

1. Learnability is connected to how easy it is to turn the linguistic input into intake and, at last, into output.
2. Efficiency is defined by the relation between the effort (which includes time as a variable) necessary to learn something and the targets actually reached in terms of communicative competence acquired, especially from a pragmatic viewpoint.
3. Memorability: the more meaningful what is learnt is for the student, the more he/she will remember it.
4. Errors and mistakes are an essential part of the language learning process (cf. Corder, 1981, p. 11).
5. Satisfaction lies at the basis of any learning process and language learning is no exception. Therefore, it goes without saying, that the more a student is satisfied with what he/she has learnt, the more he/she will be willing to carry on learning, little affected by how demanding that might be.

From all this we can derive the definition of *Sociolinguistic Usability* as the degree of correspondence that there is between the learner's current or future actual needs, features and interests and the answers to them that the language course he/she is attending can and does provide.

If we apply these principles to the specific complexity and variability of the English-speaking world, what emerges is the need to shift from a single-norm model to a multi-layered adapting/suiting model, which, taken as a whole, may be called *Teaching variety*. Far from being a simplified form of the language similar to what is traditionally known as *teacher talk*, the *Teaching variety* I'm introducing here implies a considerable enlargement of the number of varieties of English students should be exposed to in the class, practically changing the model from *the* language to its linguistic repertoire. This, quite clearly, doesn't mean that learners should be exposed to, or even worse, taught *all* varieties of English, an unfeasible and meaningless challenge, but rather that the varieties of English they are to be presented with will be selected on the basis of what is useful and usable to them. The added value of such a strategy will be not only to provide learners with what they may feel to be more relevant to them, but also to help them grow more variety-aware.

4.2. Criteria to build the *Teaching variety*

In practice, the *Teaching variety* as defined here above, will be built by having recourse to the following criteria:

1. Teaching what is useful before what is not useful. Utility will be determined by analysing the learners' present and/or future needs, motivations and aspirations (not just in relation to language learning) and may consequently change a lot from one student/group of students to another;
2. Teaching what is more widespread (both in terms of grammar and vocabulary and of actual sociolinguistic use) before what is less so or not even used (anymore) at all. This is again extremely variable, depending on the type of language to be taught and the specific purpose and context of the course;
3. From this, it entices that it will not always be possible to teach what is easier before what is more complicated, but the advantages deriving from learning something that is perceived as useful and usable will be rewarding thus triggering off new motivation to carry on working and learning.

4.3. Bespoke Language Teaching (BLT)

Exposing students to as many English varieties as possible, regardless of whether native or non native, right from the lowest levels of proficiency but selecting them on the basis of what might be more useful and usable, or, as it were, more "tantalizing" to them, corresponds to building student-tailored courses and will eventually turn language teaching into *Bespoke Language Teaching* (BLT).

Provided teachers are adequately prepared and perhaps even more importantly, that they themselves are open-minded towards language variation, I firmly believe that a model of this kind could be adapted to and implemented in all the different levels and types of schools illustrated in the first part of this paper and may, in the long run, help improve the quality of "real" English teaching in Italy. This promises to be effective, even if, absurdly, English should ever turn into *Newspeak*

> "[. . .] reduction of vocabulary was regarded as an end in itself, and no word that could be dispenses with was allowed to survive. Newspeak was designed not to extend but to *diminish* the range of thought, and this purpose was indirectly assisted by cutting the choice of words down to a minimum. Newspeak was founded on the English language as we now know it, though many Newspeak sentences, even when not containing newly created words, would be barely intelligible to an English-speaker of our own day."
> George Orwell, "The Principles of Newspeak." An appendix to *1984* (1948)

Acknowledgments

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