



PRESENTATIONS

10.00 Keynote Speaker: Sonia Cunico. “**Strapianti: viaggi e miraggi tra lingue, culture, e confini**”
(in Italian)

Abstract

Questo contributo analizza il tema della diversità attraverso la metafora del viaggio materiale, o mentale, reale o virtuale, singolo o collettivo che si intraprende nello studio di una lingua straniera, e quindi anche della migrazione che l’incontro con l’altro, diverso da me, necessariamente implica. Il viaggio come metafora esperienziale (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) dello studio della lingua straniera non è certo nuovo (Ellis, 1999; Block, 1992; Cortazzi and Jin; 2001, Caballero, 2006) e in questo contributo si cercherà di problematicizzare il tema del viaggio, che è fatto anche di sogni, aspirazioni e miraggi. La migrazione che si compie studiando una lingua straniera è sempre a senso unico, è un biglietto di sola andata perché il cambiamento non è reversibile. L’altro/the other, necessariamente rende anche noi diversi, diversi da quello che eravamo prima dell’incontro in quel processo di specchi su cui si gioca il confronto linguistico e culturale. Ma questo processo di straniamento, di strapianto non può che essere sempre e comunque problematico, scioccante (Bennett, 2004) ciclico, mai lineare, e infinito. L’incontro con la diversità a livello culturale, di classe, ma anche di competenza linguistica con ‘the other’ non è necessariamente un incontro equo perché è spesso asimmetrico e il contesto ne definisce e limita la partecipazione al discorso e all’espressione di una propria identità (Piller, 2017). Il contributo analizzerà questi temi usando esempi tratti da vari libri di testo e generi per trarne alcune considerazioni pedagogiche.

Teaching diversity in the Italian classroom conference
30 June 2020

11.00 Gabriele Paleari: **“Beyond Italy’s political (b)order: why we should incorporate the diversity of San Marino, Switzerland, Slovenia, and Croatia in Italian teaching and assessment.”**
(in English)

Abstract:

This paper asks why Italian language teaching should cross state boundaries. It has been observed that Italian language teaching revolves around the national discourse of political Italy. There is a widespread practice of associating flags to languages, as if the two coincided. On the one hand, flags are used “to legitimate local or national authorities or groups” (Nas 1993: 3). On the other, “language [...] is not simply a functional instrument for communication; it also has great symbolic value in relation to national identity” (Magocsi 2004: 25). However, “flags represent countries not languages. In some cases, a language is shared by many countries” (Aykin 2005: xix).

To reflect the international dimension of the Italian language, which is a national or regional language of countries such as Switzerland, Slovenia, and Croatia, innovative teaching and assessment materials have been successfully introduced across Italian on the university-wide language programme at NTU. By debating wider issues, which reflect the resources used our students have not only helped dislodge assumptions set within contemporary debates about cultural and national identity that the Italian nation-state and Italian language are synonymous, but also broadened their horizons when considering future employability.

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11.30 Giusy Stott: “Improving the learning environment: promoting inclusive practices with students of different language backgrounds studying ab initio Italian.” (in English)

Abstract:

This presentation draws on a study seeking to explore ways in which to minimise the attainment gap between speakers of Romance languages and East Asian learners of Italian with no prior knowledge of a Romance language.

This study deliberately steers away from literature and lines of enquiry which represent ‘false stereotypes about non-Western students’ (Holliday, 2017:p. 2) where, for example, students with an East Asian educational background are seen as lacking autonomy, as passive learners, with an inclination towards memorization and an appreciation of teacher-centred pedagogies.

This study is consistent with emerging views of East Asian students attuned to student-centred practices and to a collaborative learning culture. Consequently, this enquiry seeks reasons for the attainment gap by identifying elements which might not be conducive to effective interaction and collaboration, and it aims to highlight weak areas of the curriculum (e.g. feedback) as possible contributing factors to the attainment gap.

To this purpose, I shall present evidence collected through students’ interviews, peer review exercises and MEQs, and evaluate these against the principles of inclusive pedagogy. Finally, I shall share conclusions about active steps in order to create a learning environment that is congruent with the experience of all students and with the idea of developing a practice to include all, so that no students find themselves at a disadvantage because of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

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12.00 Rasha Soliman. “Linguistic variation and the CEFR descriptors: how compatible are they?” (in English)

Abstract

In an ever-changing and a competitive world, language learners need to be aware of the diversity of the languages they are learning in order to succeed in a variety of communicative contexts. Linguistic variation is an inevitable aspect of every language which leads to questioning the concepts of mono-lingualism and the ‘Native Speaker’ (NS) which have always dominated the field of L2 teaching. However, and in the last two decades, some linguists and language teachers started to have a broader view of the language form they choose to teach. An example of this broader view is the concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) which views English language teaching in a more globalised way rather than limiting it to one variety of English. Yet, resources and approaches on how to introduce language variation in class are still limited (Davies & Patsko, 2013).

Recognition of dialectal and linguistic variation is one of the sociolinguistic competences that the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) promotes especially at higher proficiency levels i.e. B2 plus. Nevertheless, this may not be clear enough to most L2 teachers as the CEFR does not give much details of the teaching techniques or the range of variation that is ought to be incorporated in class. In fact, the CEFR descriptors may give an impression of a (single) standard form when it refers to skills and linguistic knowledge; however, it is the same descriptors (especially in the 2018 volume) that emphasizes the importance of integrating variation and diversity into teaching as one of the multiilingual competences that help learners achieve the level of a proficient user (Council of Europe, 2018).

In this presentation, I will refer to how linguistic variation is mentioned at the different levels of the CEFR, and I will give suggestions and recommendation of how to integrate linguistic variation in classes from ab initio levels in order to practically benchmark L2 learning with the CEFR competences.

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12.30 Luca Malici: "Queering the Italian and Modern Languages Syllabi: some BGILQT and feminist annotations towards a Queer Language Pedagogy." (in English)

Abstract

In the past three decades, there have been growing discourses surrounding sexual nonconformity and gender identity as well as important socio-political advancements in numerous countries regarding – in alphabetical order – bisexual, gay male and intersexed, lesbian, queer and trans (BGILQT) individuals and issues. In 2016, after considerable enduring debates, Italy legally recognised civil union arrangements for same-sex subjects, yet to date the country still lacks specific legislation against homo-lesbo-transphobic crimes able to protect against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics. This is significant because, for instance, together with gender violence and femicides, Italy is sadly at the top of European rankings also for the number of homicides of trans people (37 in the decade 2008-2018 and second only to Turkey). BGILQT historical invisibility and abuses are being slowly replaced in most Western societies by increasing constructive media representation and institutional attention which have had an affirmative impact on public perception of and attitudes towards these dissident subjects and matters. We must not forget that just over 30 years ago, the UK government used to prohibit any form of discussion that could "intentionally promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality" (Section 28, 24 May 1988). From a taboo, BGILQT identities have started to gain greater visibility even in the education sector and academia. Higher education and universities have now shown more consideration, focusing towards the integrated teaching of citizenship, equality, diversity and inclusion alongside the main subjects of most of their courses. Universities have also introduced specific training for staff and are applying for charters and programmes that recognise and celebrate good practices in higher education towards the advancement of gender equality such as the Stonewall Diversity Champion Programme or the Athena Swan charter. In my presentation I will discuss and examine Queer Language pedagogy (QLP). This is an academic discipline devoted to exploring the intersection between queer theory and critical pedagogy which challenges the so-called "compulsory cis-heterosexual and normative structures, practices, and curricula" (Atay and Pensoneau-Conway 2019:10-17) that tend to marginalize or oppress non- heterosexual and cisgender students and teachers. Increasing visibility in society and higher education, in fact, does not still seem to equate greater availability of alternative narratives and discourses in the language classroom where, for example, most textbooks and resources still have clear and outdated patriarchal and cis-heteronormative approaches. By looking at some of the practical examples and resources I have created and employed with beginner, intermediate and advanced classes of Italian, I will discuss and analyse how BGILQT subjects and topics can be incorporated in the teaching and assessment process. As well as discussing all the above mentioned aspects in greater details, my presentation aims to show how language tutors could easily include and embrace QLP on our daily teaching practice while encouraging and facilitating a more free conversation on these topics in the Italian classroom.

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14. 00 Chiara La Sala: “Developing language skills and intercultural competence in language classes: the novel *In Altre Parole* by Jhumpa Lahiri.” (in English)

Abstract

In altre parole is the autobiographic story of the linguistic journey of Jhumpa Lahiri, an acclaimed author of several novels. Born to Bengali Indian immigrants, she grows up speaking her parents’ mother tongue. When she begins school, English becomes her dominant language. Neither of these languages is a spontaneous choice; the first is naturally decided by fate, the second predictably imposed by circumstances. Aside from Bengali and English, Lahiri is also acquainted with the Italian language, but contrary to the first two, learning Italian is a personal desire. It flourishes unexpectedly in 1994 after a one-week trip to Florence. On this occasion, she travels to Italy during graduate school to get a closer glimpse at the Italian Renaissance. While there, she becomes infatuated with the language. Lahiri describes her linguistic awakening as *un colpo di fulmine*. Upon returning to the States, she experiences an unexplainable desire to learn it.

This paper focuses on self-video activities as a tool for developing language and intercultural skills. The students were asked to film themselves and produce videos based on extracts from Jhumpa Lahiri's book *In altre parole*. The extracts were selected having in mind the stage of the students’ linguistic journey towards language proficiency.

During the last twenty years, there has been a growing body of research on the link between linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness. This paper seeks to explore how literature can allow tutors to support the development of language proficiency and intercultural competence. Furthermore, this paper evaluates how the development of these skills can be pursued, using video activities as a new approach. The outcomes of the initiative will be presented and possible future developments in this direction will be discussed.



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17.00 Keynote Speaker: Judith Rifesser: **“The praxis of teaching diversity and intercultural understanding in the languages classroom.”** (in English)

Abstract

In this talk, I place into dialogue practical examples from the languages classroom, with key research in intercultural communication and critical pedagogy to show the importance of context-embedded teaching that centres around nurturing intercultural understanding and diversity. On the example of film (making) and the use of other authentic resources, I discuss how the engagement of both teachers and pupils in exploring diversity and intercultural understanding in the classroom, provides a vehicle to develop critical thinking, empathy and creativity and serves as a call to action to engage them in key contemporary questions and issues in and beyond the languages classroom.