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WHATEVER HAPPENED TO CLT? EXPLORING METHODOLOGIES FOR C21 ITALIAN UNDERGRADUATES, WHO COMMUNICATE IN AN INCREASINGLY GLOBAL COMMUNITY

1. Introduction

Both the English our learners need and appropriate methodologies may have to change to stay in tune with the world we live in. This article will discuss two questions which are closely related to this:

Which model of English do Italian undergraduate students need to learn in the C21?

Which methodology is the most suitable one for these individuals at this point in time?

2. Profiled Student background

The Italian university language centres were set up in the Eighties and Nineties to meet general language requirements supplementary to specialized existing faculty courses. The majority of students attending these courses in the University of Verona, are language undergraduates, particularly at B2+ levels. With additional students from other departments, however, particularly at lower levels. Despite an increasing percentage of overseas students, our learners tend to be Italian with an Italian cultural and linguistic background. It is in the language centre that work on developing linguistic and communicative competence, therefore, is done, and these courses have the opportunity to act as a starting point for learners to explore L2 language and how to use it in today's world. Which model of English, then, is appropriate for these learners?

3. Is British English an appropriate model?

The most common model of English which ELT is based on in Italian university language centres is "British English," the native speaker (NS) variety which is geographically closest to Italy. The use of NS models is still common throughout ELT today despite criticism (Alptekin 2002; McKay 2002). McKay, for instance, cites Graddol (31) as considering "native speakers" (NS) and native-speaking countries as the centre of the global use of English and, by implication, as providing the models of English that learners should aspire to. She then describes, however, the reasons why this is appropriate for those wishing to live in Inner or Outer Circle communities where integration into the NS community is a key factor but not for those in the expanding circle like Italy who have different goals. These "bilingual speakers," as McKay calls them, will use English mainly for academic, professional or social purposes to communicate with other non-native speakers (NNS). McKay cites Cook as criticizing Bley Vroman's "comparative fallacy" where NS models lead to learners being constantly compared to native speakers leading to what amounts to "a failure to achieve native-speaker competence" (Cook 1999, cited in McKay, 39), which is one of Alptekin's major criticisms too. Italian undergraduates, in fact, will probably never need to achieve NS competence.

What they need to be able to use, therefore, is English as an International Language (EIL) or Lingua Franca (ELF), and not British English. EIL or ELF, however, are terms that refer to the English used by multinational participants in a "community of practice" as Seidlhofer refers to it (2007, 98) rather than an actual language *per se* and, as such, they are not a codified language and cannot be presented as a model to study, and so the question of what to teach and study remains.

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4. A Clear Model is Needed

Competence of the lexico-grammatical and phonological systems of the language itself for many undergraduate students is actually the greatest challenge and, whilst NS competence is not required, earners need to have a clear model, which will be understood by others. This is the Global English described by Crystal as a language for "mutual intelligibility" (2003, 22) where the different participants come from what Cogo refers to as "numerous linguacultural backgrounds" (2012). To be able to use this global language successfully means knowing how to apply the "code." The various ELF varieties, in fact, have developed from English users firstly studying a standard model, which they then apply in various ways. Differing discourse communities have different models and standards as well, so that informal social use of language is completely different from the register required for academic writing, for instance. It seems, therefore, to make sense to teach our learners the nuts and bolts of the closest "Standard NS model" in this case, "British English" to begin with and sensitizing them to other models. The work that learners can then do may involve using the NS model as a springboard towards developing their own "voice."

5. Implications for the Classroom

The implications for the EFL classroom in the Italian context are complex as a clear model must be provided for explicit study but the use that learners make of that model and the ownership that they develop becomes their own and the methodology adopted must recognize that ownership. This means that rather than adopting a new model, teacher attitudes need to change to recognize that NNS language production may not be the same as NNS production but the key factor is intelligibility, not NS accuracy.

This need for teacher awareness development means challenging traditional beliefs in the absolute authority of the native speaker model. This is no mean feat, but is already underway as a result of the policies and thinking of the writers in the field or the researchers of such bodies as the British Council, whose CEFR highlights what language users can do rather than what they cannot (Council of Europe 2001). Their ideas and insights filter down to materials writers and publishers and to Examination Boards as well, so that finally they reach the teachers, the classroom and the learners too.

6. An appropriate methodology for Italian undergraduates

6.1 Educational Methodology Background

Italian high school teaching is based on classical approaches. The methodological focus, both at school and university, is often on memorizing information, and on providing students with knowledge for reference in later life, rather than developing independent thinking skills. Expression of opinion is developed at school in written "essays" but there is a certain amount of confusion between what fact and opinion are (Sherman 1992). The methodology is generally teacher-centred, with frontal lessons and continuous assessment, in the form of oral testing, is a common feature.

6.2 Freedom to teach

Added to this there is a very strong independent streak in Italian teaching. A key concept, known as *freedom to teach*, "la libertà dell'insegnamento," is written into the Italian Constitution (Article 33). This is open to interpretation but is generally thought of as meaning that individuals are free to teach any notions or ideas related to Humanities or Sciences that aim to educate their students, in any situation, as long as those ideas are not related to propaganda (Simonescuola). It is also interpreted as meaning the freedom to choose methodology. This may be one reason why teacher training courses in Italy often focus more on theoretical, psychological and legislative aspects of teaching (Cosentino 1998) rather than attempting to impose methodologies on teachers. Having said that, however, ministerial guidelines also advocate the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching, in particular with the Language Project 2000 ("Progetto 2000") introduced in the 1999-2000 academic year. CLT techniques, despite training initiatives, however, are not always understood or interpreted in the same ways by learners and teachers (Hawkey 2006). Consequently, globally produced coursebooks, based on the Presentation, Practice and Production paradigm (PPP), for instance, may be adopted in schools and then used purely as grammar resources,

rather than applying PPP where language is presented to learners in meaningful contexts, and then practiced in controlled activities and finally in a freer production phase, where the new language is thought to be integrated with the language previously acquired by learners. The language work in schools, then, often becomes a matter of studying grammar rules to complement the teaching of literature.

6.3 The situation in the university language centres

What this means for university language centres is that the learning strategies of undergraduates, on arrival at university, are memorization driven. This is a situation which continues to be the norm in most departments at least in the Humanities. It is also a system which, whilst preaching freedom of teaching, paradoxically, and which claims to prepare learners for the professional field (University of Verona 2013), does not encourage those learners to develop their own "voice" or critical thinking skills, both of which, as has already been mentioned, are essential for effective participation in a global community.

7. Is CLT a suitable methodological approach?

7.1 What is CLT?

CLT is possibly the most widespread language teaching approach to EFL in the world today and, as a result, has been recommended to teachers in Italy as a suitable language learning methodology. One of the problems connected with this approach, however, is that it may mean everything and nothing. Today it is largely an umbrella term that covers many different methodologies and as Harmer (2003) says, it is not a "describable phenomenon" unless we take it to mean, as he says, something like "We want students to communicate" (288). It covers, nowadays, in fact, a whole series of methodologies ranging from possibly the dominant CLT paradigm of PPP which many mass market coursebooks task progression is based on, to models which were developed as a reaction to perceived problems with PPP, such as Scrivener's ARC (1994), which advocated a balance of authentic, restricted and clarification phases in a lesson, taking various forms but intended to be a measure catering for variety of structure, unlike PPP which follows quite a rigid progression through its stages. Harmer developed his ESA model (1991) which emphasizes student task engagement and Lewis (1993), as a methodology for teaching his "lexical approach," emphasized the element of "discovery" techniques in learning, which are inherent in his OHE model. This, once again, however, bears a certain resemblance to PPP. The "Lexical Approach," based on the notion of language as "grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar" (Lewis 1993), which was initially met with considerable enthusiasm, actually proved to be difficult to implement due to its lack of systematicity (Timmis 2008). Other methodologies, which were radically different from PPP, were also being developed such as Task Based Learning, which grew out of Prahbu's work on his Bangalore Project and which was then developed by others (Skehan 1996; Willis 1996; Ellis 2003) and which moves away from the cognitive study/practice PPP cycle to a focus on meaningful tasks carried out in the L2 with study coming later or as language awareness raising micro-slots inserted into the task work in progress.

7.2 The Humanistic Influences

At the same time as these methodologies were developing an influential humanistic perspective was appearing from the work of writers and educators such as Stevick (1976), who, among many other insights, stressed the importance of *how* activities are carried out in a classroom as well as *what* is done. His work was extremely influential on many educators, who developed his ideas in teacher handbooks and other writings (Maley and Duff 1982; Morgan and Rinvolucri 1983; Van Lier 1988) and that influence is still very much felt today. This work not only put the learner at the centre of the process, but added that learning should be meaningfully, learner centred, in that as well as empowering learners with agency in the classroom, the tasks and texts should reflect the individual human beings in the group and the wealth of personal experience that they bring with them to the learning process.

7.3 Two major criticisms of CLT

Firstly, in the minds of some, CLT is equated to the problematic PPP model, criticized for being too rigid a structure and moving too quickly from controlled practice to production without allowing time for learners to

elaborate and experiment with new language (Skehan). For others, however, the approach is associated with the use of authentic materials and developing communicative competence at the expense perhaps of cognitive study of the lexico-grammatical and phonological systems.

Secondly, It has been criticized as being significant in the spread of what Phillipson (1993) refers to as "linguistic imperialism" which is relevant in many contexts such as Vietnam (Kramsch and Sullivan 1996), Asia (Ellis 1996), Africa (Phillipson 1993) and Chile (McKay 2003). Although this is not perhaps the case in Italy, there is a surprisingly similar resistance to group work here as has been observed by MacKay in Chile and Kramsch and Sullivan in Vietnam.

Holliday (1994, "The house of TESEP [...]") argues that the CLT paradigm is not suitable for application in institutionalized learning contexts which he calls TESEP (Tertiary, secondary and primary) educational contexts, since it was originally developed and implemented in private schools, adult education or Inner Circle contexts, and this is a criticism which is definitely relevant to the Italian context. The approach, however, has moved a long way in recent years and many of these different models have generated techniques and notions now grouped beneath the CLT umbrella term, which are invaluable when it comes to EFL. To reject the whole approach, then, is rather like throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Finally, CLT teaching techniques have also been criticized as being too superficial, where feedback to student work after reading a text, for instance, has become little more than superficial checking to see if the answers were correct, and the teacher takes a back seat letting the materials drive the process (Scrivener and Underhill 2012; Underhill 2013; Scrivener 2013). This has in some cases led to wasted opportunities as texts are skimmed over to develop reading sub-skills, but not actually explored for all the language riches that may be unlocked from them. Underhill and Scrivener have recently written and spoken about what they call "Demand High Teaching," which involves digging deeper, and mining texts for their treasures. If an element of personalization is added to this work, which is very much in line with the aforementioned humanistic perspective, this also helps learners to take ownership of these forms and to adapt them for their own purposes.

7.4 Pair and Group work

One aspect of CLT that meets with resistance worldwide (Holliday, Kramsch and Sullivan, McKay) is group work. Whilst some Italian teachers are enthusiastic about CLT, introduced, in the Language Project 2000 in Italy (Hawkey), others remain ambivalent as do learners and still others are openly resistant. Classroom management and discipline problems coupled with a reluctance of many learners to use the L2 with each other in group work means, in fact, that worldwide in TESEP contexts many teachers do not use this format. Group work, however, does not necessarily always have the aim of "L2 fluency practice," although it can do in the right circumstances, but it also the ideal format for the constructivist aim of socially constructing knowledge. In our Italian context, learners need acculturation to group work but, if their other expectations are met, they are usually open to this format and classroom work done in groups, followed by individual exploration and experimentation can be extremely fruitful.

7.5 Acculturation in the Classroom

Breen (2000) describes the classroom as a coral pond or a cultural context where relationships are built and developed along with classroom discourse and trust between individuals must be mutually earned. Holliday (1994, *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context*) also underlines the fact that teachers who understand their learners' cultural beliefs and expectations can meet them halfway and develop new ways of working successfully. Borg (1999) interviewed one teacher who actually implemented classroom practices such as explicit correction of grammar, that went against his own beliefs in order to cultivate a more open-minded attitude in his learners towards other classroom practices, he held to be effective, but that learners might view as suspiciously innovative. Italian undergraduates expect their lessons to be teacher-centred and if teachers respect this and respect them, the learners will gradually acculturate to new ways of doing things, if the experience proves to be positive. When it comes to group work with the objective of L2 language practice, it is not particularly natural for monolingual groups to use the L2 in monolingual Italian groups, asking learners to reflect on why this is happening, however, can be a way of helping them to overcome their anxieties (Hartle 2014). Holliday also points out that in large classes monitoring is difficult if not impossible,

but trusting the learners to explore tasks and activities for themselves, without teacher monitoring, can be very effective too, although he also stresses the need for teachers to be vigilant to see that their learners are actually on task in these activities. Encouraging learners to develop their own voice in the L2 is essential if they are to become successful bilingual language users and this involves using the L2 to communicate individual values, cultural backgrounds and beliefs.

7.6 Language and Culture

It is easy to think of language as being a deculturalized code, as McKay suggests EIL should be (McKay 2002) but actually it is not. It is also a semiotic system, which is used to express culture at an almost instinctive level. Words are not simply words but are often positioned within a cultural context. The word "overseas" in British English, for instance, makes sense when describing "international students" because Britain is an island so that students coming from different places are traditionally coming "from over the sea." Kramsch (2001) argues elegantly that what is needed is for learners to find their own "voice" to express their own cultures, and she maintains that it is often only possible to find that voice by reaching a "third place" between the English Culture and the L1 culture, where distance from both the cultures can enable learners to develop their own voice and their own English: "Between text and context, they have to learn to cherish that third place that the Malaysian-American poet Shirley Geok-Lim calls 'walking between water and land'" (18).

Successful non-native speakers of English, in fact, do just this. They do not attempt to become "natives" but they develop their own voice. To remain with the Italian context the journalist Beppe Severgnini is an excellent example of this. He has close ties to Britain but when he speaks his Italian accent with its characteristic ghost vowel is proudly in evidence like a banner pronouncing his identity. He respects the norms of the grammatical system but his lexis is particularly interesting in that it also expresses his identity and cultural background. When expressing the notion of "from another place" which in British English, as mentioned above, may be expressed with the culturally marked choice of "overseas", he tends to choose his own Italian culturally marked "North of the Alps," which is an eloquent way of bringing his own cultural viewpoint into the English he is speaking (Severgnini 2007).

Removing language from culture, then, is impossible; what is more pertinent is to recognize that language is more than an a-cultural code. It is also the expression of individual experience through individual voices, choice of expressions used to weave meaning into the rich tapestry of plurilingual communication by means of English. It is, in fact, through exploration of the L2 in socially constructed activities, carried out with peers in a reassuring, motivating environment, that individuals are given a framework to develop their own highly individual competence of what is their personal L2, rather than memorizing a disembodied code.

8. Weaving the various meaningful CLT techniques into a tapestry of "principled eclectism"

The most suitable methodology for Italian undergraduates, then, is probably the judicious implementation of certain aspects of CLT which build on areas of study that they are familiar with such as memorization and explicit study of the lexico-grammatical system, which, in turn, creates a reassuring environment where innovations can be introduced and integrated into what Dornyei calls a principled Communicative approach (2013). This combines explicit and implicit teaching, and pair and group-work here are used both with the aim of developing fluency and of discussion and the construction of knowledge. Whilst there may be initial resistance to this the aim of "speaking the L2" is often stronger than the discomfort of the artificial use of the L2 in what is a monolingual discourse in Italian classrooms (Hartle 2014). Maley argues for what he terms a "principled eclecticism" (2013) which can be developed by selecting successful principles from all these methodologies and combining them into a meaningful approach to teaching practice, which respects the expectations of Italian learners but leads them in innovative directions as well, which help them to develop their critical thinking skills together with their linguistic competence in meaningful learner-centred ways that are appropriate for learners in the C21.

9. An Example of weaving the strands together

To describe *how* learning takes place is difficult, but an example can be given of principled eclecticism in practice to show how these differing strands can be meaningfully woven together into a motivating learning

experience, where both teacher and learners work on a constructivist way to construct knowledge and develop skills cooperatively. This is an example of a C1 skills lesson for undergraduates, where learners work with the text of the song: "Somebody that I used to know" sung by Gotye and Kimbra and available both on *YouTube* and *Lyricstraining.*[1] The lesson can be accessed on my C1 digital classroom (Digital Classroom), complete with the relevant links, and is an example of how these differing strands can be combined into a meaningful whole.

The stages of this lesson are:

LESSON STAGE	METHODOLOGY
Previewing of video with no sound (Pre-listening work and discussion of opinions and beliefs)	Learners are engaged in Harmer's ESA terms by the "puzzle" of the video and seek to interpret it, with prompts. It also encourages PPP style fluency work and the exploration of beliefs and opinions: a problematic area for these students. Reaction to visual prompts is also a humanistic way into the learner's interior world.
Listening to the song with follow up questions	Learners work on classic PPP skills and sub-skills such as global comprehension, comparing the song to the video, and then listen again to answer questions that work on both lower order thinking skills such as comprehension and higher order thinking skills such as analysis, interpretation and inference. This corresponds to Harmer's study phase, Scrivener's restricted phase, and encourages debate and exchange of views.
Analysis of utterances: interpreting what those utterances might say about the speakers	Explicit work on cultural reconstruction in the Humanistic tradition, combined with implicit work on the lexico-grammatical system. (This may also include explicit micro-slots where language points are reviewed, highlighted or extended). The structure "used to" is highly significant in this song, for instance, and by implicitly understanding its force in the context of the song, the grammatical structure is reinforced whilst becoming more memorable because of both its repetition and semantic strength in this context. This work also included elements of Lewis' observation phase, as learners come face to face with lexical chunks.
Memorization and study phase	Practice, corresponding to PPP, Scrivener's "restricted use," Harmer's "study phase" or Lewis' "experimentation phase," where learners work explicitly on memorizing lexis and implicitly on reinforcing structural concepts and phonological features. The ludic element is also motivating in the humanistic tradition so that the memorization here is in no way simple rote learning, but still respects

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[1] Lyricstraining is an internet site where songs are taken from YouTube and transformed into gap filling exercises at various levels.
http://lyricstraining.com/play/gotye_kimbra/somebody_that_i_used_to_know/HRFPTX6H8R# Last visited June 24, 2014

	tasks, which are familiar and reassuring for Italian learners.
Choosing language, which has personal relevance, working on the pronunciation and contextualizing it in personalized contexts.	Personalized High Demand: learners work on their own intralanguage by elaborating phonological features (Underhill and Scrivener) and then producing them as well as developing fluency. The personalization phase developed from the production phase of the PPP model combined with a humanistic focus on drawing on individual resources of learner experience, also plays a key role in developing ownership of this new language.
Follow up webquest work and informal exchange of information on the Facebook Page	Extending the learning phase beyond the four walls of the classroom encouraging independent learning, discovery, digital literacy and informal exchange of ideas, facts and opinions. This takes learning out of the PPP framework into autonomous, meaningful discovery, and enables learners to position their L2 discourse in a "real world" context, which is the online community.

Table 1

An examination of the methodological elements in this lesson reveals CLT hard at work but combined with other techniques and viewpoints, which respect traditional Italian memory work, to develop into an extended approach, which is suitable both for the Italian context and for the C21 digital world.

10. Conclusions

In conclusion, it would seem that what is required for Italian learners in the twenty-first century is an acculturation towards a series of techniques which have their basis in CLT methodologies but can be developed into what Maley (2013) calls "principled eclecticism" and the development of meaningful ways of working, rather than complete rejection of CLT. The appropriate model of English for these learners is more complex but a distinction needs to be made between the model learners study, which will probably continue to be British English and the development of individual English language varieties. The variety learners develop will incorporate elements of ownership and personal "voice" for the communication of personal cultural insights and experiences to other non-native speakers as well as native speakers.

Using NS models such as British English may be seen as a constraint, but it is a starting point, and as Van Lier argues, constraints may also be resources, quoting Kant (2013, 244): "the light dove cleaving in free flight the thin air, whose resistance it feels, might imagine that her movements would be far more free and rapid in airless space" (1934, 29).

If the native speaker model is a resource, the learner can build on and enrich it developing his or her own ELF version and participating in the global English-speaking community from his or her own individual, cultural viewpoint.

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