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English Studies

Attitudes towards English among Italian Students

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English C: Linguistics Essay
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12 February 2009

Abstract

The aim with this essay was to investigate the relationship to the English language among Italian students, their attitudes and motivation to learn English. The background consists of theories considering second language acquisition, including gender, attitudes and motivation. For the research, questionnaires were used. The questions regarded their interest, the situation at school and in their spare time considering their possibilities to learn and maintain their knowledge. The questionnaires were handed out to both male and female students. The conclusion is that considering the years and hours at school studying English, give the students a good opportunity to learn English. All students have an awareness of the importance of English as global language though their exposure to English outside school differs as well as their motivation and attitude. Overall, a majority of the students have a desire to learn English.

Keywords: English, Italian students, second language acquisition, attitude, motivation, gender.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English is a global language and many people are of the opinion that it is a language worth learning. The reasons can be personal e.g. for the purpose of travelling, other contacts with people from abroad, education, work or a specific interest in learning a language that is common as a first language in many situations. However, attitudes towards English differ, as does the exposure to it around the world.

In some countries, such as Sweden, whether we have to use English on a daily basis or not, most of us are aware of the importance of learning English. From a very young age we are exposed to the English language at school, through television, the Internet and in our everyday speech as many words are borrowed. A reason for learning a global language might be that Swedish is a relatively small language with only 9.2 million speakers (scb.se). Is the situation different in a country like Italy whose language is more widely-spoken than Swedish? Italian, which is a Romance language directly descendant from Latin, is spoken by about 70-125 million people over the world, though primarily in Italy. It is ranked to be the fifth most taught non-native language in the world (Wikipedia). Italian is used as a lingua franca in some environments, mostly within the Catholic Church. In general, people in Italy are not known for speaking English very well. Is it a lack of opportunity, interest or only a stereotype?

This essay will investigate how the situation is for young Italians with regard to English as a Second Language. Are they exposed to English to a large extent; are they aware of the use of English in today's society; and do they have a need and interest for it? This essay will discuss young Italians' experiences and their attitudes towards the English language.

2. AIM AND HYPOTHESES

The aim of this essay is to investigate the relationship of teenage Italians with the English language. My study examines the role of school and to what extent the students are exposed to English outside school. However, the major aim is to get a picture of the attitudes and interest towards English among young Italians and how this affects their second language acquisition (SLA).

The reasons for this study on Italians are based on my own experience of how Italians in general do not communicate very well in English. They study English at school and therefore it is interesting to get an insight in the effort from the educational system and the students' personal interest, attitudes and opportunities to practice English as a second language. The

study focuses on male vs. female students, in order to make a comparison of whether their interests and attitudes differ. First, there is an expectation of the results that Italian students in general will be shown to have a medium interest rather than a high interest in learning English as a second language. The reasons for this expectation is that, society changes and the fact that English is a global language may lead the younger generation in Italy to see English as more important than previous generations. I also believe that the younger Italians have a greater opportunity to study English. In general, I believe they have a medium interest as Italian is such an important language and since a large part of the older generation e.g. their parents do have a little or no knowledge of English. Second, there is also an expectation that the students have some difficulties in learning English, such as the conversation part (pronunciation) and grammar. However, the results are expected to differ as the interest and also opportunities to practice English differ between the students. Third, I expect gender to have some effect on the students' attitudes and learning process. However, I believe that the results will focus more on the student's personality, environment and their possibilities to learn English.

3. METHOD

To obtain answers regarding the interest and attitudes to English among teenage Italians, questionnaires have been used. For my study the students were divided into two groups: girls and boys aged 16-18. The questionnaire, which contains seventeen questions written in English, was handed out to ten female students and ten male students. All students are native Italian speakers and live in Siena, in the region of Tuscany. The questions which will be presented more thoroughly in the appendix, concern the situation at school, outside school, and the students' interest and attitudes towards English. The students were also asked to write something briefly about themselves and the whole questionnaire was to be answered in English. The two groups will be compared in order to find out if the attitudes of female and male students differ. Another questionnaire was directed to teachers of English in Italy, also in Siena, and it contains twelve questions concerning the teaching methods, their opinion of attitudes among students and the teacher's own attitudes towards English. Unfortunately, the response of the questionnaire for teachers was much lower than expected. The results of the questionnaires will be presented and discussed with reference to the following theories. However, the result and the discussion of the teachers' questionnaire will be limited by cause of the low participation.

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (SLA)

Second language acquisition, henceforth SLA, is used with regard to any languages acquired after one's first language. The language can also be referred to as the target language. Factors that can have a profound effect on SLA are attitude and motivation.

In the behaviourist view language learning is seen like any other kind of learning, as the formation of habits (Mitchell & Florence 1998:23). A habit is the result of a repeated reinforcement of a certain stimulus. The behaviourists regard habits as the base for the learning of any skill (Mitchell & Florence 1998:23)

One's first language (L1) is often an influence in second language performance, for instance, the accent, characteristic mistakes e.g. if a native speaker of Italian says "I have 20 years", in English, as in Italian the expression is "ho 20 anni", which actually means "I have". Behaviourist theorists viewed this, so called, language transfer as a significant reason of error and interference in second language learning, because of first language habits. (Brown 2000:95)

4.2 MOTIVATION

Motivation is having the desire and willingness to do something. In the process of SLA, motivation plays an essential role in how active and involved in second language (L2) learning a person is. Research shows that many factors in second language acquisition are directly influenced by how motivated a student is. The use of learning strategies, the level of input, the student's ability and how long after the language study they maintain their second language skills, are some factors that motivation has an impact on. Motivation has actually been of great interest among researchers for many years (Gardner & Lambert 1972; Crooks & Schmidt 1991; Spolsky 1985; Dörnyei 1998; Gardner & McIntyre 1991)

4.3 HULL'S THEORY

One early neobehaviourist was Clark Hull. Hull (1943) suggested that factors such as the strength of the stimulus, response and also motivation have significant influences on behaviour. His theory, *Drive reduction theory*, is a general theory of learning. One important concept in his theory was the habit strength: he argued that as every individual's internal factors are unique, i.e. that an organism can respond differently to a certain signal. The concept of habit in Hull's theory is described as an association; the stimulus affects the

organism and the result of the response depends on the characteristics of both the stimulus and the organism. Hull's motivation (drive) theory includes four principles and my summary of the theory is:

1. To be able to see results in the learning process, the student needs to have an interest and be motivated.
2. The student needs to pay attention to what he/she is supposed to learn and see the connection with the result to understand.
3. The student's learning process will be encouraged if positive results are achieved and the student needs to have an active role in the process.
4. There needs to be a connection between the learning and the student's need.

(Hull 1943)

4.4 GARDNER AND LAMBERT

There are many different kinds of motivation. One of the best known studies of motivation in second language learning was made by Gardner and Lambert (1972). The purpose of the twelve years of study was to determine how second language learning was affected by attitude and motivation. (Brown 2000:162). They postulated that there are two perceptible motivations (which years later, in 1991, was referred to as orientations); instrumental and integrative. The *instrumental orientation* suggests that a second language will be acquired when the person needs to achieve another goal, for instance good grades, access to further education, for purpose of work, financial benefit *etc.* *Integrative orientation* suggests that the learner has an interest in the culture where the target language is the first language and would like to integrate into the society. It refers to a personal interest (Brown 2000). Brown sums up the difference of motivation and orientation by saying: "The difference of motivation and orientation is dependent on whether a learner's context was (a) academic or career-related (instrumental), or (b) socially or culturally oriented (integrative), different needs might be fulfilled in learning a foreign language. The importance of distinguishing orientations from motivations is that within either orientation, one can have either high or low motivation" (Brown 2000:163). The two orientations are not necessarily exclusive. Most situations involve a combination of each orientation (Brown 2000).

4.5 THE SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL MODEL

As well as there are different types of motivation, there are also individual differences between learners. Gardner & McIntyre (1992, 1993) came up with a *socio-educational model* which brings up two groups of factors that they find important in the learning process; cognitive and affective factors. The model is mostly referred to SLA in a classroom setting (Mitchell & Myles 1998).

The cognitive factors include intelligence, language aptitude and language learning strategies. Students who are above average considering intelligence tend to perform well in second language learning, at least in a formal classroom setting.

The modern language aptitude test made by Carol and Sapon in the 1950's shows that a number of sub skills can be of significance in second language learning a) phonetic coding ability b) grammatical sensitivity c) memory abilities and d) language learning abilities.

A learner often uses a language learning strategy to make their learning process as effective as possible. Learners who are more proficient use strategies that differ from those used by students who are less proficient (Mitchell & Myles 1998:18)

The affective factors include language attitudes, motivation and language anxiety. The idea that a learner's attitudes towards the target language are significant in the learning process has been of interest to social psychologists for a long time. Attitudes may be a factor that affects success in learning a second language or the opposite.

Motivation consists of three sub factors. *Desire* indicates the level of proficiency the learner wants to achieve. *Effort* refers to the time spent studying and *affect* consider how the learner feels about the language study.

Language anxiety is also considered a significant factor in the learning process. For instance, speaking in class is an occasion that commonly can increase the anxiety. The factor also refers to the opposite, i.e. self-confidence (Mitchell & Myles 1998:19)

4.6 ATTITUDES/KRASHEN'S THEORY

As mentioned above, the attitudes towards the second language can have an effect on the process of learning. The attitudes of the learner is the fundamental aspect, but also the home support, opinions in the peer group, the attitudes at school and even in the society can be of importance. A person's attitude towards something is based upon experiences. The feelings, thoughts and opinions towards an object *etc* are defined as attitudes. Attitudes can be positive, negative or neutral.

Stephen Krashen's (1985) affective filter hypothesis concerns the connection between attitude and motivation. Krashen argues that some variables play a significant, though not an exclusive role, in second language acquisition. He argues that learners with high motivation, self-confidence and a low level of anxiety regarding the target language have better conditions to learn a second language. On the other hand, if the motivation and self-confidence are low and the learner is more anxious, it will aggravate the process as the affective filter is raised and creates an obstacle to learning (Finnegan 2004)

As mentioned above, the role of motivation in SLA is paralleled with the role of anxiety and self-confidence. Spolsky (1989) for instance, has argued that "there is a specific kind of anxiety interferes with second language learning for many learners. He argues that this anxiety mostly concerns listening and speaking skills" [quoted in Norton (2000:122)]

4.7 GENDER THEORY

Sex and gender both refer to men and women. However, there is a difference as the term sex considers the psychological differences between men and women and gender refers to men and women's' behaviour of a social and cultural character. You could say that sex is made by nature and gender by society.

The study of gender can give a better understanding how men and women act when learning a second language. However, gender is not the only variable and not the most important one. There are other factors that also have an influence on second language learning; age, personality, ability, intelligence, life-experience, cultural background and even the first language.

Generally, men are more dominant in mathematics and science and women in language learning; both first and second. It is generally accepted that second language learning is a female domain. Female students choose foreign language study more frequently than men and the females have a higher motivation (e.g. Bacon & Finnemann 1992; Claessen & Oud- de Glas 1975; Pritchard 1987; Wilson 1991; Chavez 2001:27).

Strategic behaviour and achievement are areas where gender or other variables are more or less distinctive. The success of the learning can be influenced by characteristics of other people, involved in the learning process, such as the teacher, the peer group where family and classmates are included (Chavez 2001).

Researchers have found a range of gender differences considering, second language study that may be relevant to this study. For instance, in one study females showed superiority in both listening comprehension and vocabulary (Gardner and Lambert 1972). Another study

showed that the female advantage concerns vocabulary tasks in the written language and males score higher if the vocabulary tasks are based on oral delivery. However, the study resulted in women scoring higher overall (Boyle 1987). Studies with a less theoretical view indicate that men are more self-confident than women when learning a second language (Huebner 1995). Regarding the students' opinions towards the teachers, a study indicates that female students are often more critical (Jeanette Ludwig 1983; Chavez 2001:32-63). It needs to be added that several studies have resulted in no gender differences at all.

According to Monica Chavez, gender matters in learning and teaching behaviours; it matters in motivation, beliefs, attitudes and, generally in social interactions. However, Chavez also points out that it is not only gender that matters and that the degree or the sort of influence that gender exerts varies also (Chavez 2001:198).

Researchers have attempted to decide how language-learning should be measured. There are two possible ways to measure; quantitatively (more or less by degree) or qualitatively (for example instrumental versus integrative) (Chavez 2001). However, the results from research on gender and achievement are often vague. For instance, there are studies that argue that females have a want to please (for example the teacher) rather than a desire to achieve good results for themselves (Herner 1970; Stein and Bailey 1973). There are other researchers that do not agree that females have a lower achievement motivation, as there is not enough evidence for that argument. (Hyde 1996) The unclear results of studies make it difficult to reach a conclusion. ([Chavez 2001)

There are conclusions drawn in some studies, like the one made by Muchnik and Wolfe (1982), who, in their study, used eight variables (including gender). The result showed that gender was the strongest variable. Regarding the female students, the study resulted in the females having a preference for learning Spanish and their attitudes towards the course or the teacher were negative. For the male students in the same study, the results were the opposite in both aspects. However, in general, females had a more positive attitude and motivation to study a second language (Chavez 2001).

On the other hand, according a study made by Ludwig (1983) among students in French, German and Spanish, Chavez argues that there is no considerable difference between males and females regarding attitude. However, she says that males tend to be more instrumentally motivated (Chavez, 2001).

To conclude, it seems that motivation is rather difficult to measure. However, according the results gender is one of many influential factors.

5. RESULTS FROM THE STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The quantitative results are given in table format in the Appendix. The result for each question is discussed below. Then I take a closer look at some of the students' answers and their interest in learning English and also their different opportunities.

5.1 THE USE OF ENGLISH

Question A.1 and A.2 (Do you think it is important to learn English? Why?)

The result shows that all students in the investigation have an awareness of the role of the English language in the world. There were no doubts in the answers; both the female and the male students have a clear opinion about it and as can be seen they agreed that English is a global language. All of the students answered the question more or less in the same way; that it is very important because it is an international language. Though the research was on a small scale, it shows that the teenage students have a positive attitude, at least considering the power of the English language and an awareness of the importance in learning it.

Question A.3 (Are there occasion when you use English outside the classroom?)

The answers show that there are some occasions when the students use English outside school, though only eleven of twenty said "yes". It could be that most the female students (7/10) use English quite often. However, when you take a closer look at the examples where four females of seven who answered "yes" use English when a tourist asks for information, it is quite clear that they do not practice English to a large extent. Even though there are a lot of tourists in Italy, most of them visit the country during summer and the coincidence that those four girls will be asked very often is small. The situation is different for the remaining three girls who answered yes, because they have the possibility to practice English by taking private lessons with an English speaking teacher and the third has English speaking friends.

The situation for the male students differs, which can be a coincidence. If the question had been answered by another group of boys the answers could have been different and the same for the girls. Only four male students answered "yes" and two of them mentioned tourists as an example of occasions. One of the four boys uses Internet quite often and as he (age 16) mentioned "chatting on the Internet" as an example he probably does the "chatting"

in English occasionally. Another boy (age 16) said that he uses English outside the classroom when he goes abroad; he spends two weeks every summer at an English college.

I also believe that the students who answered “no” or “not many” had in mind that they once in a while give information to a tourist but do not consider it to be “using English outside the classroom” as the occasions are rare.

Question A.4 (Do you think you will use English in the future?)

As the results show (totally 15), the female and the male students believe that they will use English in the future. Two (2/9) of the girls even said “certainly”. Most of the girls answered with a plain “yes”, though some of them emphasized the importance of using it, a hope and a couple of them believe that they will mainly use it in their future work. Two girls (aged 16 and 18) said that they would like to study in England.

The result was similar among the boys, with six of ten being positive about the possibility that they will use English in the future. Most of them only gave a short “yes” as an answer, which is understandable as the question was directed in a way that required a “yes or a no”. However, one of the boys (aged 16) thinks he will use it if he travels. Two of them mentioned work and among those two one (aged 18) emphasized that if he will not use English for work purposes, he will at least use it on the Internet.

Four of the students (one female and three male) are not sure if they will use English in the future and those students do not mention if they have a desire or not. It is also worth mentioning that one of the male students (aged 16) answered the question by saying “hope not”.

Question A.5 (Is there a need for English in Italy?)

The majority of both the girls and the boys (eighteen of twenty) agreed on that there is a need for English in Italy and the answers between the genders were similar. Most of the students answered with a “yes” and three (two male and one female) said that there is a need as there are a lot of tourists in Italy. One girl said that “there are very few people who can speak good English” (aged 16).

Question A.6 (Do you sometimes use any English words in your everyday speech?)

Half of the group of male students uses English words in their everyday speech and all the female students. There is no difference between the genders in the words or expressions that the students gave as examples. The major part of the words is connected with technique; such as computer, Internet, mouse, Bluetooth and hi-fi. Other words that both groups suggested were of an “international character” like; Mc Donald’s, hamburger, cool, okay, jeans, hotel, taxi etc.

5.2 KNOWLEDGE

B.1 (What do you find most difficult about learning English?)

B.2 (What do you find easiest about learning English?)

As the study covers a small group of students, it is natural that the answers differ significantly and it is not easy to get a result that indicates a certain difficulty or easiness which can be generalized. However, “speaking and pronunciation” is the part that the major amount of students (four male and four female) mentioned to be most difficult about learning English. On the other hand, five of the female students found speaking and pronunciation to be the easiest part, but none of the male students indicated it in particular to be the easiest part. Among the male students, six of ten, mentioned grammar to be the easiest part, but only one of the girls. In fact, grammar came in second for the females regarding the most difficult part. Listening comprehension came in second among the male students regarding the easiest part about learning English. Three of the girls think writing is the easiest part about learning English, but no males gave that suggestion. However, no male student suggested it to be the most difficult part either. One of each gender finds everything easy.

A couple of the female students gave more than one example about the easiest part and therefore the figures are higher in that table.

B.3 (Do you feel that you are good at English?)

B.4 (What helps you to maintain your knowledge?)

The result in the table shows that approximately half of both groups (five girls and four boys) believe that they are good at English. Six of the students considered themselves being quite good (three of both genders). Among these students the answers varied regarding what helped them to maintain their knowledge. The girls gave suggestions like; reading, music, watching

films, school and having contact with English speaking friends. Among the male students the answers differed a bit; study abroad once a year, music, writing, Internet and interest. The figure was quite low regarding the students who do not think they are good at English. Two of the girls added “unfortunately”. The boys who answered “no” emphasized that they got most of their knowledge from school and also the Internet as they use terms in English, by chatting and the fact that exercises in English are available on the Internet. An answer from one of the female students that captured my interest was a girl who said that she sometimes was good at English and she also said “but when it comes to talk to an English person I realise how much I don’t know”.¹

B.5 (English language programmes are dubbed on Italian television. Do you think it would increase your knowledge of English if you could hear the language when you watch television?)

Most of the students (sixteen of twenty) answered “yes” to this question and the results were the same for both genders (nine girls and seven boys). Some of them also added that it would make a significant difference and that it would be very helpful for them. A connection can be drawn to question B1 where eight of twenty mentioned “speaking and pronunciation” to be the most difficult part about learning English. For anyone who is learning a second language it should be an advantage to both hear the language and the “correct” (there are dialects) pronunciation and if you are a quick reader you can translate with the help of the subtitles. The view of the behaviourists (with regard to language transfer) says that one of the reasons why learners of a second language make errors is because of their first language. Habits in the first language influence the second language.

As all programmes in Italy are dubbed, it does not give the students the possibility to actually hear the language. Generally, teenagers watch television quite often and they only hear Italian on television, though the programme or film is actually in English. This situation “steals” their opportunities to a “free lesson in English”.

Only one of the students (a male) does not believe it to be necessary. Three of the students do not know. As the table shows, three of the female students indicated that it would be helpful as long as there were subtitles in English. The intention with the question was to

¹ As some of the female students gave more suggestions than one, the figures are higher than ten.

mention the inclusion of subtitles, but unfortunately it was left out. This may explain why the three students answered “do not know” as they could have believed that the question only referred to programmes in English without subtitles.

Modern technology gives the possibility to watch “foreign programmes and films” by satellites, but not everybody has that possibility.

5.3 SCHOOL

C.1 (When did you start learning English at school?)

C.2 (How many hours a week do you study English at school?)

There is not much to comment on these results. As the table shows, there is a slight difference when the students started their learning of English. However, most of them (seventeen) began at the age of eight. The fact that three of the students started at the age of six can have to do with which school they attended.

It is also obvious that there is a small variation regarding the studying hours at school. This can also be dependent on which school they attend but mostly it seems that their age is involved. As the students’ ages vary from 16 to 18, it is natural that there are differences, and as the tables in the appendix reveal, the students who study English about four hours a week, are all eighteen.

C.3 (Which part of the lesson is most helpful?)

C.4 (Do the lessons give you enough knowledge of English?)

C.5 (What would you change about the teaching to make it better?)

Both groups of students had very similar answers regarding question C.3. When conversation is part of the lesson eight of the students (four girls and four boys) find it to be most helpful. The same figures counts for listening comprehension. There is a pattern to be seen in that many of the students regard the speaking and pronunciation part to be most difficult, though five of the girl found it to be the easiest part. When you look at what the students would like to change to make teaching better, four of the girls suggested more conversation. It seems like they consider this to be an important part of their learning process. Among the male students the answers were quite spread out, but most of them (three of ten) suggested more hours of English at school. For the question whether the lessons give them enough knowledge, the

result shows that half of both groups are pleased with the lessons and the other half is not. However, when you see their answers on what to change to make the lessons better, they gave some suggestions. Apart from the suggestions mentioned above they mentioned; more reading, watching films and more grammar, though the female students who suggested this were not many. Two male students suggested that no part should be changed (one) and another student suggested that every part should be changed. Two students suggested that changing the teacher could be a possibility. Four of the students (two female and two male) seem to be rather pleased, at least they did not give any suggestions about what to change about the teaching.

In the study by Muchnik and Wolfe (1982), it was argued that the female students in their study were positive toward learning Spanish and negative toward the course or the teacher. Males indicated the opposite. In this case there is no indication of that argument as both genders had more or less the same opinions and attitudes towards the lessons in English. Instead differences seem to be connected to personality and not to gender.

C.6 (If you need help with English homework. Do you get the help you need at home?)

The female students get more help with their English homework than the male students: six of ten, compared to four among the male students. Among the male students one of the boys mentioned that he gets help from his parents. Among the female students who answered “yes”, one mentioned the Internet as a source of help. The other five girls actually mentioned that they get help from their mothers or sisters. It is not clear why the family members who help the girls with their English homework are mostly all females. There are many possible reasons: it could be that there is no male in the family, that it is only the mother or sister who knows English or that it is usually the mother who helps with the homework. Some of the students who answered “no” also give an explanation to it. For instance, among the boys, one said that he does not get any help at all and another one says that he only gets help with Latin and Maths. Among the girls who answered “no” to this question, one says “surely not from my parents but the Internet is useful” (female, aged 18). Another girl says that her parents do not speak English.

It is clear that the situation varies for the students and perhaps some of the students who do not get any help at home are the ones who need most help with their language study. I will return to this question in the discussion where a few students have been singled out for comparison.

The home support, as mentioned above in the section about attitude, is also an important factor in the process of learning a second language.

5.4 DISCUSSION

I agree with the argument, mentioned in the section of gender theory, that the approach by females and males towards learning a second language can be better understood by the study of gender. However, I also believe as also mentioned that there are other variables that play a more significant role. This study shows no significant differences between the genders, which also could be because of the small scale of the study.

As no other subjects are involved it is impossible to find any indications that the study of foreign languages would be a “female domain” as suggested by several researchers (Bacon and Finnemann; 1992, Claessen & Oud de Gils; 1975, Pitchard; 1997, Wilson; 1991). The questions only concern English.

In the part considering knowledge, I did not find any major differences. Regarding the difficulty and easiness about learning English, the results show that the male students find grammar easier than the girls do, and also listening comprehension. On the other hand, not even half of the female group mentioned grammar as being difficult and none mentioned listening comprehension. Regarding “speaking and pronunciation”, both female and male students seemed to find it as difficult. However, a larger part of the girls (5/10) also found it to be the easiest part, but none of the boys shared their opinion. Other parts that were mentioned by the girls as being easy were; reading and writing, though none of the boys brought this up. Actually, three of the girls said that they read books and newspapers in English to maintain their knowledge. One of the boys does it by writing. This “discovery” does not necessarily indicate any gender differences, as it also can be a matter of a personal interest. Therefore I cannot connect it to the specific gender differences that were mentioned in the section of gender theory. The same goes for the argument that males seem to be more self-confidence than women, which I do not agree with, as my study gives the result that five female student compared to four male, feel that they are good at English.

When you look at how the students maintain their knowledge of English, it seems like the male students use the Internet more frequently and the female students use other sources, as watching film and reading books in English. As mentioned above, that two of the girls uses English in their spare time, might be a coincidence. However, nothing in their answers point at the opposite, that, it would be a deliberate choice. Though, one student in each gender group has made a deliberate choice to study English in England every summer. The male

student take studies for two weeks, but how long the studies for the female students are is not revealed, only that it has been a regular study every year since she was eight. Both students find it very important. The girl says “I’ve been going to England since I was eight and I love everything about that place. In three years time I’ll finish high school and I’ll go to the university in London” (aged 16). I really believe that this female student is having a clear integrative motivation towards the English language and its culture.

The male student who studies every year does not express a will to actually study at a university or to stay in England for a longer period of time. On the other hand, he says that English is his favourite subject and he hopes that he will be good at it, and that the studies every summer is of great help to maintain his knowledge of English. However, it seems more to be an instrumental motivation rather than integrative.

Four students (both genders) maintain their knowledge only through school, and it would be interesting to know what will happen to their knowledge when they finish school. To give an example: a male student (aged 16) does not feel that he is good at English; the lessons do not give him enough knowledge. He gets help from his parents with homework, but he does not use English outside school and he thinks that he might use English in the future if he travels.

Concerning the students’ attitudes towards the lessons the results do not indicate a significant difference between the genders. They seem to more or less agree in most matters. For instance, about half of the group (both genders) is of the opinion that the lessons do not give them enough knowledge and the other half of the students believe they do. Most of the students make suggestions about what they would like to be changed to improve their learning. Only four students (two female and two male) gave the answer that nothing needs to be changed. It would be interesting to know whether the teachers in English ever have had the idea to give the students a kind of questionnaire where they are able to express their opinions about their second language learning. Hopefully, the teachers are attentive enough to understand what is most important for the students and that the lessons are varied, which I believe, makes the lessons less boring. Unfortunately, this topic was not mentioned in the teachers’ questionnaire.

The fact that the students begin their education in English at the age of six or eight, and depending on their age the subject is on their schedule three-four hours a week. These conditions should give them a good possibility to learn English well. According the behaviourist view, language learning can be seen like any kind of learning and the fact that the students study English regularly since a young age could be considered a habit. Naturally,

as mentioned in the theories above and other reflections regarding second language learning, there are many variables involved.

For instance, Hull's (1943) drive theory; which, in short, argues that the student needs to have a drive, be motivated to learn. For learning to occur, the student needs to be attentive, active and satisfied with the learning. In other words, drive, stimuli and response are connected for conditioning to occur. The results from the questionnaires, indicates that the students have more or less a different drive, as some students seem to be more interested and eager to learn English and the students are also being more or less active in their learning process, which is based on what they do to maintain their knowledge. There are students who are pleased with the lessons and others are not. However, many of the students (of both genders) express a will to learn English well and some girls mentioned that they "unfortunately" do not have more knowledge.

Considering the two kinds of orientation (motivation) that have been suggested by Gardner & Lambert (1972), most of the students seem to have an instrumental orientation. This conclusion is based on the fact that the students believe that it is important to learn English as it is an international language and that it can be useful in various situations. However, there are students who are unsure if they will use it in the future, but most of them believe they will. Some of the students (both genders) mentioned that it can be useful for work purposes, travels, and the fact that Italy is a country with many tourists visiting, and in these cases it is an advantage to know English. There are two female students who indicate an integrative orientation; based on their will to study in England and a desire to live there (the length of the stay is not mentioned). It could be seen as an instrumental orientation as it involves further education, but they also express positive feelings towards the culture.

The socio-educational model, brought up by Gardner and McIntyre (1992, 1993) brings up factors that are important in the learning process. All factors mentioned in the model are not possible to consider in a study of such a small scale like this one. However, there are some factors that are indicated by the students' answers. For instance, "language learning strategies"; the students seem to have different kinds of strategies to learn English. Some of them settle with what they achieve at school and others seek to learn the language in other contexts, in their spare time. It needs to be taken in consideration that the conditions for the students vary. For instance, there are students who get language support at home and those who do not get any help at all, though it could be necessary. Two students have the opportunity to study in England every year and that also suggests support from home. The students who purposely seek English outside the classroom indicate a higher level of

motivation so it seems like there is a variation regarding their desires and efforts to learn. Language anxiety can also be a part of the students' learning process. There are students who feel that they are good at English, which is a more positive feeling than the opposite. The students who do not have confidence in their abilities to learn English might be less motivated as they do not feel confident in their learning and perhaps they are more reserved during the lessons. On the other hand, a student can still have a great deal of motivation to learn in spite of anxiousness, if the desire to learn is stronger.

Spolsky (1989) argues that anxiety is often focused on skills in listening and speaking and actually nine out of twenty students expressed difficulties concerning "speaking/pronunciation" and "listening comprehension". As mentioned in Section 4.1, one's first language (L1) is often an influence in second language performance. The difficulties and possible language errors can be a question of language transfer. Further examples of this are brought up in section 6.1 where two of the female students are more thoroughly compared. On the other hand, eight students mentioned that those parts are the easiest. These results also indicate a difference in learning among the students.

The affective filter hypothesis by Krashen's (1985) can also be considered in this study. There are students with high self confidence and a low level of anxiety and it seems like they have an advantage in their learning process. There are also students whose answers suggested a raised affective filter which can be an obstacle in their learning.

6. COMPARISON OF QUESTIONNAIRES

In this chapter, four of the questionnaires (two of the females and two of the males) will be further discussed and compared with each other. The first comparison will be based on the students' attitudes and motivation towards English. The preferable method is to find one student (of each gender) that seems to have a more positive attitude towards English and another (of each gender) that has a less positive attitude. The other comparison is based on the students' possibilities to practice English. It needs to be mentioned that among the female students it was difficult to find a girl with a less positive attitude, at least none with comparable to the negative attitudes found among the male students. Therefore the comparison between the two girls will be based on their own belief about their knowledge of English.

As mentioned in the method section, all students were asked to write something briefly about themselves in English at the end of the questionnaire and this part will be brought up in this discussion in order to find out some more about the students' knowledge of English. Not all questions will be brought up in this discussion, only the most essential ones.

6.1 THE MALE STUDENTS

To be able to separate the two boys in the discussion they will be called by letters; A for the boy with a stronger positive attitude and B for the boy with a more negative attitude.

The two students are the same age, 16; they began to study English when they were eight years old and they both study English three hours a week at school. They had similar answers to some of the questions. They are both of the opinion that it is important to learn English, though boy A added that it is very important and boy B said that it is useful. To the question whether they use English in everyday speech they both mentioned the use of the Internet. They also agreed on that there is a need for English in Italy as there are a lot of tourists. It needs to be mentioned that there cannot be a fair comparison on the question regarding dubbed programmes on television as the answer from boy B cannot be interpreted. Finally, they both believe that conversation is the most helpful part of the lessons to learn English. Apart from these questions the answers were not similar at all.

Boy A finds it most difficult to get a correct pronunciation and the easiest part is the grammar. Boy B mentioned "tasks" to be the most difficult part and as it could cover a large part of the English lessons it is difficult to understand what he is referring to. However, he finds "understanding" to be the easiest.

Boy A hopes to be good at English and he likes it very much. Boy B, on the other hand, says that he is not good at English.

Boy A is of the opinion that the lessons give enough knowledge, but he would like to increase the hours at school to be able to speak more English. Boy B is of another opinion as he says that the lessons do not give him enough knowledge of English, and on the other hand, he has no idea what to change to make it better.

Regarding the English homework, boy A seldom or never needs help with his homework, but boy B does not get any help at home.

Boy A uses English outside school when he goes abroad. Boy B says that he does not use English outside the classroom, though he mentioned that he uses English in his everyday speech when he is using the Internet. It could be that he was referring to words and expressions concerning the Internet, but he does not “chat” in English very often. This is naturally only an assumption.

Spending two weeks at an English college every summer is very important for boy A to maintain his knowledge of English and he is also sure that he will use English in the future. Boy B maintains his knowledge of English by using the Internet and he hopes that he will not use English in the future.

Regarding the presentations, boy A wrote a presentation where he introduced himself, talked about his interests and mentioned what he likes and dislikes. The English was correct. Boy B wrote a very brief presentation, where he used nine words. However, the English was correct.

6.2 THE FEMALE STUDENTS:

To simplify the two female students they will also be called by letters; A for the girl who believes that she is good at English and B for the girl that thinks she is not very good at English. Girl A is seventeen years old and girl B is eighteen.

The younger girl studies English three hours at school and the older four hours. They are both of the opinion that it is very important to learn English as it is an international language. Otherwise, their answers were not similar, apart from the answer that the lessons give them enough knowledge; that there is a need for English in Italy and that it could be very helpful if the English programmes on television would not be dubbed.

Girl A feels that she is good at English and she thinks that the grammar and literature parts are the easiest and that nothing is difficult, apart from some authors. Girl B does not believe that she is very good at English. She thinks that the grammar is most difficult as there

are a lot of difficult rules to learn. She is also of the opinion that the speaking part is easier than the writing.

Girl A believes that reading and conversation is most helpful and she would like to have more conversations during the lessons. Girl B thinks that the part when the teacher explains the rules is the most helpful and she also believes that more listening and translation could make the lessons better.

None of them mention a parent or sibling at home that helps them with the homework. Though it seems like girl A has the possibility, she says that she mainly uses the Internet. Girl B does not get help at home.

The question whether they use English outside school, girl A says that she speaks with American friends who live in the United States and girl B uses it when a tourist asks for help. Girl A maintains her knowledge of English by talking to her English speaking friends, reading books in English and watching films in English. She believes that she will use English in the future and she also added that she hopes she will.

Girl B mention school as the only example of what helps her to maintain her knowledge and to the question of whether she believes that she will use English in the future or not, she answers “maybe yes”.

Regarding the presentations, girl A wrote a quite long one, where she mentioned where she lives, which season she likes and dislikes. She also said that English is one of her favourite subjects and that she would like to study in England and then live in London. Her English was good, no mistakes apart from one where she used the wrong tense; “I wish I went to...” in a sentence where she talked about the future.

Girl B, gave a presentation of herself and her family. She mentioned her interests and the importance of her friends. Her English was quite good, but regarding the mistakes I assume that the lack of knowledge would have been more significant if she would have written a longer text. The assumption is based on a pattern in her mistakes, where I believe her first language is the reason. She did not use prepositions in a couple of places; “I like go out, go to party” for which I consider language transfer to the explanation. In Italian, you say “mi piace uscire” (=I like go out). Prepositions are used in Italian as well, though not in these examples. However, further on in the same sentence she used prepositions; “go to the cinema, to the disco”. In Italian you say “andare al cinema, alla discoteca (=go to the cinema, to the disco). Another mistake, included in this pattern is; “I like enjoy myself” which actually is a direct “translation” from Italian;”mi piace divertirmi” (=I like enjoy myself). She called

herself “a nice girls”, which I actually believe was a mistake by coincidence, as she got the rule right in other contexts.

6.3 COMPARISON OF RESULTS

The two male students have different attitudes and levels of motivation towards the English language. They share the same opinions considering the importance of English in today’s society and that English is needed in Italy.

Boy A seems more confident in his learning process and shows a more positive attitude towards the English language. He has a great interest in learning English; he only finds the pronunciation part to be difficult and he hopes to be good at it. Boy B, on the other hand, seems to have more difficulties at school and he does not get enough knowledge during the lessons. Their English language support at home is very different as boy A hardly needs help and since he has the opportunity to study in England every summer. Boy B does not get any support at home at all with his English, though he seems to be in greater need of it.

Overall, boy A is more motivated to learn English and the attitude towards learning probably increases his effort and the choice of learning strategies. Boy B seems to be less confident in his learning and much less motivated and the fact that he expresses an unwillingness to use English in the future certainly indicates a negative attitude.

The two female students also share the same opinion, that English is an important language to learn. It seems like they both have a desire to learn English and their attitudes are similar, as none of them expresses any negative feelings towards the language. However, it seems like girl A is more confident, has greater possibilities to practice English and also seeks to practice it. The belief is based upon the fact that she feels that she is good at English and she thinks that nothing is difficult. She has other opportunities outside school to practice the language and it seems like she would get home support if she would need it. Girl B, on the other hand, indicates less confidence as she feels that she is not very good at English and she has more difficulties at school. She does not use English outside school and she has no home support. As mentioned, there is no difference in their attitudes, though it is the motivation that differs. Girl A has an integrative orientation and girl B is not even sure if she will use English in the future.

8. TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRES: RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The idea behind the questionnaire for teachers who teach English was to receive answers from at least ten teachers. However, it did not turn out as planned as only two teachers took the time to answer. Therefore, the result will not be presented in tables as was done for the students. Instead the questions will be presented along with the answers from the two teachers. Both teachers are female, work in secondary schools and they will be referred to as teacher A and B. The answers are presented in their original form.

1. At what age do children start studying English?

- A) Six
- B) Six

2. For how many years is it compulsory to study English?

- A) Eight years
- B) Until the students are eighteen years. About fifteen years ago English was compulsory until the students were fourteen.

3. Do you find that the students have an interest in English (if the answer is yes, in what way does it show)?

- A) Yes, because the students have an interest in American and English "soaps" and they use the computer.
- B) They consider it important for their future careers, job opportunities, and travel.

4. Are there other second languages that are of greater interest than English?

- A) No
- B) Spanish is not as popular as English, but it is gaining ground. Also classical languages are popular, especially Latin.

5. What do the students seem to find difficult when learning English?

- A) At first the pronunciation and above all the different way of expression.
- B) It largely depends on the students. Syntax, vocabulary, listening comprehension, written production, pronunciation.

6. What do the students seem to find easy when learning English?

- A) Nothing
- B) They start speaking about familiar subjects pretty quickly.

7. What kind of methods do you use when you teach English?

A) Oral

B) Grammar in context, communication, text analysis, literature.

8. What is important for maintaining your/the students' knowledge of English?

A) Reading English books, watching films and above all, going to Great Britain and living there.

B) Reading books and articles, surfing the net, watching films and TV programmes in English, going abroad.

9. How do you feel about the fact that English and American programmes are dubbed?

A) It is ok.

B) I think it is absolutely negative.

10. Is there a need for English in Italy?

A) Yes

B) Of course, English is the language of global communication.

11. What are the attitudes to the English language among young Italians?

A) They are fond of it, but it is difficult for them.

B) Quite positive.

12. In your opinion, have the attitudes changed since ten years ago?

A) Yes, it has become of the computers.

B) Yes a lot. There is much more awareness on the importance of knowing English to be able to live in a globalised world.

It is not easy to make a fair discussion of opinions from teachers in English with answers in such a small scale. However, it seems that young Italians have rather positive attitudes towards the English language. At least they have an awareness of the importance of learning it, and it does not surprise me that the situation has changed during the past ten years. According the teachers' observations the students have various goals for their interest in learning English. It seems like the teaching methods vary and the teachers agree that the students have difficulties with some parts and that no specific feature seems to be easy for them. The teachers agree about the activities that can be helpful for maintaining knowledge of English, but the thing that surprised me was their different opinions considering dubbed programmes. Teacher A believe that watching films in English is a way to keep up the

knowledge and she mainly focuses on speaking skills at school, but still she believes that it is “ok” to have dubbed programmes on Italian television.

9. CONCLUSION

As the study only covers how the situation is today for young Italians, it is not easy to give a picture of the past, but according to the answers from the teachers it seems like the situation concerning the English language in Italy has changed during the past ten years. First of all, English is given more attention at school, by increasing the years of compulsory education. Other factors, such as the Internet and above all, the young Italians' awareness of the importance to learn English has generally changed their attitudes. All students in the study agreed that English is an international language and most of them also believe that there is a need for it in Italy.

The students are given a good possibility at school, to get a good basic knowledge of English, as they begin their education at the age of six or eight, and since it is compulsory until the age of eighteen. The students have different opinions regarding the lessons at school, as some believe the knowledge they receive during the lessons is enough and others do not share that opinion. I truly believe that it could be of great value for the teachers to become aware of the students' opinions regarding the lessons in English. The students in this study gave suggestions about parts that could be changed, like for instance more conversation, to improve their learning process. I believe that if the lessons in English are varied and follow the students' requirements and interest, they can also increase their motivation and attitude.

Second language learning involves many different variables and the students have different personalities, which include their abilities to learn, learning strategies and interest. The situation outside school is certainly also significant in their learning process. There are students who seek more exposure by reading books, watching films, listening to songs in English, take private lessons, use the Internet etc. to maintain or improve their knowledge. Students who do not have the possibility to study in England, those who do not get any support at home or who by themselves make efforts to use English outside the classroom; do not get exposed to English to a large extent.

Many of the students find pronunciation and conversation difficult and the fact that all programmes in English are dubbed on Italian television does not give them a possibility of "extra lessons" in English. Several students, actually sixteen students (16/20) believe that it would be of significant help for their learning if they could hear the programmes in English, with subtitles in Italian. I am also positive that it would make a significant difference if they can get exposed to English in a more "relaxed" situation. According to one of the teachers, many of the young Italians are interested in American and English programmes.

According to the results, the Italian students are not exposed to English very often, unless they have a personal interest or by coincidence. Many of them mentioned the large number of tourists visiting Italy, though it is not on a daily basis that they get an opportunity to speak English and when it occurs, it is mainly to give information.

Regarding gender, there is no significant difference apart from the fact that none of the female students expressed any negative feelings towards learning English. In that case, the results indicate a slightly more positive attitude on behalf of the female students. With respect of the two types of motivation, two of the female students obviously indicated an integrative motivation. Otherwise, the figures for instrumental motivation were higher. It needs to be mentioned that there were also students with an instrumental motivation that had a strong desire to learn English well. However, the reasons differed; work purpose, travel or mainly because it is necessary in today's society with English as a global language. There were some students who showed less motivation, or more insecurity about whether they would use English in the future, apart from others who were sure of that they would use it.

The conclusion of this study is that the situation for English as a subject in Italy has changed in a positive direction. The young Italians are well aware of the importance of learning English and a large part of them have a great interest in learning it and are highly motivated. Their possibilities of exposure and their motivation are related to their proficiency levels.

The study generally confirms what I expected; that there would be no significant difference with regard to gender, that the students would have some difficulties with their speaking skills and some grammar issues that probably are influenced by their first language. However, an expectation that was not completely confirmed was the belief that the students would have a medium interest towards English and it made me positively surprised that the interest and motivation was higher than expected. On the other hand, the study confirms the expectation that the motivations and attitudes towards the English language is highly affected by the students' personality, environment and possibilities to learn English.

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Appendix A: The use of English

A.1 Do you think it is important to learn English?

	Female	Male
Yes, it is very important	10/10	10/10

A.2 Why is it important?

	Female	Male
It is an international/global language	10/10	10/10

A.3 Are there occasions when you use English outside the classroom?

	Female	Male
Yes	7/10	4/10
No	2/10	4/10
Not many	1/10	2/10

Examples of occasions:

	Female	Male
When a tourist asks for information	4/10	2/10
English speaking friends	1/10	0
Activity with English speaking teacher	1/10	0
Private lessons in English	1/10	0
The use of Internet	0	1/10
When going abroad	0	1/10

A.4 Do you think you will use English in the future?

	Female	Male
Certainly	2/10	0
Yes	7/10	6/10
Maybe	1/10	2/10

No	0	1/10
Do not know	0	1/10

A.5 Is there a need for English in Italy?

	Female	Male
Yes	9/10	9/10
Not much	1/10	1/10

A.6 Do you sometimes use any English words in your everyday speech?

	Female	Male
Yes	10/10	6/10
No	0	4/10

Appendix B: Knowledge

B.1 What do you find most difficult about learning English?

	Female	Male
Grammar	3/10	2/10
Writing	1/10	0
Speaking/pronunciation	4/10	4/10
Listening comprehension	0	1/10
Nothing	2/10	1/10
Everything	0	1/10
Do not know	0	1/10

B.2 What do you find easiest about learning English?

	Female	Male
Grammar	1/10	6/10
Writing	3/10	0
Speaking/pronunciation	5/10	0
Reading	2/10	0
Listening comprehension	0	3/10
Everything	1/10	1/10

B.3 Do you feel that you are good at English?

	Female	Male
Yes	5/10	4/10
No	2/10	3/10
Average	3/10	3/10

B.4 What helps you to maintain your knowledge?

	Female	Male
Listening to music with	3/10	2/10

lyrics in English		
Watching TV/films	3/10	0
Reading books/newspapers	3/10	0
Using English in spare time(activity/friends)	2/10	0
Writing	0	1/10
Internet/chatting	0	4/10
School/the teacher is English	3/10	1/10
Studies abroad every year	1/10	1/10
Interest	0	1/10
Private lessons, in English, once a week	1/10	0

B.5 English language programmes are dubbed on Italian television.

Do you think it would increase your knowledge of English if you could hear the language when you watch television?

	Female	Male
Yes	2/10	4/10
Yes, significantly/could be very important/helpful	3/10	2/10
Yes, Italians need to know English better	1/10	0
Yes, with subtitles	3/10	0
Yes (often watches films in English)	0	1/10
Do not know	1/10	2/10
No	0	1/10

Appendix C: School

C.1 When did you start learning English at school?

	Female	Male
At the age of six	1/10	2/10
At the age of eight	9/10	8/10

C.2 How many hours a week do you study English at school?

	Female	Male
3 hours	6/10 (age 16-17)	6/10 (age 16-17)
4 hours	4/10 (age 18)	4/10 (age 18)

C.3 Which part of the lesson is most helpful?

	Female	Male
Grammar	1/10	0
Conversation	4/10	4/10
Listening comprehension	4/10	4/10
Explanations by the teacher	2/10	0
Reading	1/10	0
Watching films	1/10	0
Every part	0	1/10
No part	0	1/10

C.4 Do the lessons give you enough knowledge of English?

	Female	Male
Yes	5/10	4/10
No	5/10	6/10

C.5 What would you change about the teaching to make it better?

	Female	Male
More conversation	4/10	2/10
Less grammar	1/10	0
Less literature	3/10	0
More hours at school	0	3/10
More translation	1/10	0
The teacher	1/10	2/10
Nothing	2/10	2/10
Everything	0	1/10
Do not know	0	1/10

C.6 If you need help with English homework, do you get the help you need at home?

	Female	Male
Yes	6/10	4/10
No	3/10	5/10
Do not need help	0	1/10
No answer	1/10	0