

Linguistic Diversity in Schools

Some Data on Plurilingual Classes in Udine

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Abstract

This article presents and discusses the main results of a comprehensive survey that was carried out from 2017 onwards with the aim of studying plurilingualism in the repertoires and uses of immigrant children in schools at all educational stages in the city of Udine. The subjects surveyed included pupils between ages 9 and 18 with at least one foreign (language-speaking) parent. Each pupil compiled a questionnaire aimed at collecting social and personal data as well as data about their linguistic repertoires, uses and behaviours and those of their parents, relatives, friends and other interlocutors,

both in Italy and (for those born abroad) in their country of origin. By analysing their answers, it was possible to attest the (at least) bilingual dimension of these subjects' daily lives, especially within the family context, with friends and, above all, at school. The results show that these subjects have multiple and more or less ample competences at their disposal, as well as a marked sensitivity toward plurilingualism.

Keywords: *plurilingualism, linguistic education, school, inclusion*

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1 Introduction

In Italy where the communities of foreigners are evermore numerous, various in terms of gender and age, and widely distributed on the territory and in the industrial activities, it is clear that some nexuses of the social reality, first and foremost education, are urged by the need for considerable linguistic and cultural inclusion. For this reason, we carried out a survey on a sample of students with migrant background in the schools of Udine, with the aim of collecting and re-elaborating data on the presence and use of languages of origin (LO), before and after migration, as well as on the use of Italian and of the local languages (first and foremost, Friulian, which is a minority language included in Law n. 482 of 15 December 1999 “Regulations for the Protection of Historical Minority Languages”) by the surveyed students in the host country¹. These aims are rooted in the context of personal (gender, age, provenance) and sociocultural (parents’ education and work, use of social media, friendship networks and so on) variables, so as to put forward generalizations that may be useful for the analysis of internal dynamics and of the level of plurilingualism stated.

The research hypotheses are many, but the most important are essentially two closely interrelated ones, namely: 1) the lack of quantitative studies among the student population in Udine and thus the urgency to map a trustworthy picture of the plurilingual reality of the schools in Udine; and 2) the rootedness of the migratory phenomenon and the increase of young students (many of whom born in Italy). The results of the survey will be useful to devise actions which can take advantage of the numerous data to create new opportunities for reflection and training, both for the age ranges considered and the teachers in their schools (for an in-depth study about this survey and its data see Fusco 2021).

2 Research prerequisites

The presence in schools of a significant number of students with a migratory background immediately urged the institutions to look for resources so as to provide an adequate and prompt reply to a demand whose effects on the local social dynamics are hardly without impact. The entry and integration of these children and adolescents must, indeed, proceed on several levels: first of all, on the level of the prejudices that affect how they relate with others and then on the level of the values that must be introduced or reinforced so that all the students (Italian and with migrant background) develop behaviours

¹ On the linguistic situation in Friuli Venezia Giulia and the city of Udine see Fusco (2017): the updated statistical data for the national and local level can be retrieved from the reports of the Ismu Foundation (2022), Idos (2021) and Mis (2021).

of authentic acceptance. Such operations however require other actions, namely: 1) a sound and focused attention toward the acquisition of the Italian language not only at the basic level necessary for everyday communication but also at an advanced level which is indispensable for participation in school activities and for successful learning; and 2) the focalization of the LO(s) in education, which is becoming increasingly plurilingual. The advantages obtained in terms of cognitive skills and personal learning when the LO is present in the classroom are proven by both experience and the scientific literature by virtue of the close link between the duration of teaching of /in the LO and academic success.

It is well-known that the migratory phenomenon and the focus on second generations have rekindled a dormant debate on the role of education in containing disadvantages and marginalization as the basis for democratic participation and the promotion of fairer teaching approaches. In relation to this, it is necessary to recall the still fashionable principles at the basis of *Dieci tesi per l'educazione linguistica democratica/Ten theses for democratic language education* (1975), which are addressed to teachers of all disciplines and are at the basis of this study. *Dieci tesi/Ten Theses*, which we owe to Tullio De Mauro, is the policy document of the GISCEL (Intervention and Study Group in the field of Language Education), since it contains some “educational issues that effectively link the theoretical-linguistic aspect with the political-educational aspect” (De Renzo 2019, 129 trans. mine). Although it is impossible herein to list all the contents discussed, suffice it to quote the following passage, which takes linguistic diversity as a starting point to provide practical rather than abstract didactic indications: “The solicitation of linguistic skills must start from the identification of the pupils’ personal, family and environmental linguistic-cultural background, not to bind and chain the pupils to this background, but, on the contrary, to enrich their linguistic patrimony through additions and improvements that need to be planned as gradual in order to be effective” (Loiero & Lugarini 2019, 47 trans. mine).

In support of this statement it is considerable that some scholars have also taken on the task of monitoring the linguistic situation, since a detailed and updated mapping of the languages and dialects present in a given territory (the above-mentioned linguistic-cultural background) is the essential prerequisite for any type of action. Indeed, evermore numerous surveys are being carried out on the presence, rootedness and vitality of the languages spoken by the so-called new Italians on the national territory and on the types of interactions with the host community. One such noteworthy study was carried out in the provinces of Pavia and of Turin by Marina Chini and her research group from 2002 onwards and replicated in 2012, which is the basis of our current study as well (Chini

2004 and Chini & Andorno 2018)². The results of these studies confirm that students with migrant background have articulate repertoires which, in most cases, comprise more than one LO besides Italian. An even more significant aspect is that Italian emerges in the various contexts of use: it often becomes an integral part of the repertoire of the languages used within the family and is used in combination with these languages especially among siblings, but also with one or both parents, as well as outside the family, with friends.

The multifaceted linguistic articulation which emerges from the expressive practices of students with migrant background and their ability to alternate the use of several languages and dialects are not always adequately acknowledged and appreciated at school. Here there is still a widespread praxis to focus on what is lacking (competence in the target language) rather than on what is already present (the linguistic and cognitive patrimony rooted in the LO): Ongini (2019, 8, trans. mine) reminds us that: “far too often the narrative and praxis pertaining to the integration of foreign children and adolescents has focused on the lacks, difficulties and gaps to bridge (‘s/he does not know a word of Italian’), while it has scarcely acknowledged the skills acquired, the competences in other languages, and the ability to move among various languages”. Rather than emotional evaluations, we are dealing with a certain resistance on the part of teachers who have confessed that they are often unaware that the competences of the LO can be transferred to the L2, provided that both languages are developed synergistically and the LO used in the family on a daily basis is not halted (Andorno & Sordella 2017, 135; Favaro 2013)³. If the repertoire and linguistic competences of the pupils is not preliminarily taken into account, so as to teach the new competences on the basis of those already possessed, we are faced with what Favaro (2012, 259 trans. mine) aptly describes as follows: “when the mother tongue becomes silent, clandestine and marginal, immigrant children experience a split from their previous history, a situation of loss and regression, since the message they get is ‘if you don’t know Italian, you don’t know, in general’”.

² See also other surveys carried out mainly in schools, such as those found in Chiappelli, Manetti & Pona (2016), Corrà (2017) and Vedovelli (2017), as well as the studies by Alessandrini (2020), Arici, Cordin, Masiero, Vender & Virdia (2020), Gianollo & Fiorentini (2020), Fiorentini & Gianollo (2021), from whom we have taken inspiration for interpreting the analysis in our sample.

³ Ongini (2019, 34, trans. mine) writes: “the idea that one must forget the mother tongue to learn Italian, so as to avoid confusion and interference is a commonplace to dispel and one which is also widespread among foreign families. As if there were place for only one language in the brain: either one or the other can fit in there! Children’s brains are like sponges, not hydraulic systems that have to make space for only one liquid” (see his Decalogue entitled *Dieci false convinzioni sul bilinguismo e i bilingui/Ten False Beliefs about Bilingualism and Bilinguals*, pp. 37–42). Learning one language does not happen at the expense of another: this statement underlies a multitude of bibliographical references, among which Lüdi (2011), Grosjean (2015), Bonifacci (2018), Carbonara & Scibetta (2020), Cognigni (2020), Garraffa & Sorace and Vender (2020), and Gallina (2021).

If we were to interpret the considerations made so far, we could say that minors who grow up in a plurilingual context can develop a full competence in the various languages of their repertory, provided that we consider the key role of the LO in the acquisition of the L2 and that we bear in mind that “the bilingual is not two monolinguals in one person”, (Grosjean 1989, 3), that is, the bi- or plurilingual repertory is not a sum of languages, each of which is interchangeable with the others, but rather a flexible inventory in which languages bear specific values that make up the plural identity of the speaker. Favaro (2012, 253 trans. mine) points out that “the linguistic patrimony of an individual is not a solid and immutable system, defined and established once and for all. It is instead a fluid constellation, in which the hegemony of one language over the other, the internal hierarchy, and the degree of absolute and relative mastery, vary constantly in time and space”.

For minors with migrant background, including those born in Italy, the need to avoid losing their LO (intended also as heritage language; see Montrul 2015 and Polinsky 2020) is not less important than learning the L2, which they often have some competence of. However, in order to preserve it, besides daily conversation within the family circle, the child needs innumerable opportunities of communication with different subjects, various linguistic input capable of stimulating the use of formal and informal registers, and the passage from orality to writing, especially through the reading of texts.

We are aware that putting all these indications and suggestions into practice is not always easy for teachers, especially considering that every class is a peculiar microcosm in terms of make-up and of the geographical, cultural and socioeconomic context of reference. Nevertheless, we are convinced that the first step to be taken and requested urgently is the undertaking of a careful and systematic preliminary survey of the pupils’ linguistic repertory, with the aim of gathering information on their linguistic background and their communicative habits within the family, outside of school and in the community. This will allow us to detect what the pupils already know and what they can do, both at the cognitive and linguistic level and at school.

3 Brief profile of the sample

Our study was modelled on the above-mentioned input and always took into consideration the reality that the students with migrant background experience daily inside and outside the schools of Udine. From school year 2016/17 onwards, we started submitting a questionnaire among the schools of the city; said questionnaire was inspired, with some slight changes, to the vast and noteworthy survey promoted by Chini & Adorno (2018) on the types and features of plurilingualism among minors with migrant background in

schools. The questionnaire comprised 7 parts and was shared with teachers and families during laboratories on linguistic diversity both in and out of school. During the compilation, one or more members of the university research group was present in the classroom in order to illustrate its parts and answer questions.

After a short trial and adjustment period, we started a more structured research phase and in the school year 2017-18 we were able to involve 1,056 children and adolescents who either immigrated to Italy or were born here and had foreign parents (both or one); they were enrolled in grades IV or V of 13 elementary schools (total 231 pupils), in grades I, II and III of 6 middle schools (total 466) and in 7 high schools (total 359 pupils).

The selection criteria of the participants mainly revolved around two crucial factors: on one hand their age and place of birth and on the other the parents' country of origin (CO). A first key aspect is the distribution between males and females in the sample: 52.7 percent males (557 children and adolescents) and 46.7 percent females (493) (Six children did not provide an answer). Another interesting aspect is the increase of children born in Italy, and thus belonging to the so-called second generation. At the time of the survey, 62.1 percent of the informants indicated that they were born in Italy, while the remaining 37.8 percent came from multiple places, about a hundred in total⁴. This datum poses a first question about the condition of these pupils, who can hardly be defined as foreigners since in the majority of cases they were born in Italy and gained only indirect knowledge of their family's homeland and language(s) through their parents. This consideration is however linked to another one related with the subjects' perceived identity, which was revealed through some of the questions. If the question is generically formulated as "Where are you from?", so as to highlight a certain sense of belonging rather than the place of birth ("Where were you born?"), only 15.4 percent of the informants feels linked to Italian-ness and there is an emergence of many hyphenated or uncertain identities, such as 'Italian-Rumanian' or 'Italian-Albanian' which recur the most. Thus, if it is true that "the link between language and identity construction in migration is intricate and inseparable" (Favaro 2013, 33 trans. mine), then it is plausible to consider what the linguistic effects of this uncertain, variable and evolving situation are.

As far as the place of origin of the parents is concerned, in general, a great part of the sample – precisely 78.5 percent – comes from sixteen countries, half of which (51.9 percent) from central-eastern Europe, namely Albania, Rumania, Serbia and Kosovo, followed by China, the Philippines, Ghana, Nigeria and Morocco.

The conditions linked to the linguistic biography of minors with a migratory background are thus very diversified and subject to numerous factors which induce us to think

⁴ For a more detailed analysis we adopted Rumbaut's scale (1997 e 2004), which measures belonging to the host country on the basis of the age of arrival, that is, generation 2.0, 1.75, 1.5, and 1.25.

that there is considerable scope for unpredictability in the use of the languages that these speakers have at their disposal. It is hence apt to think that “everyone is bilingual in their own way” (Favaro 2020, 288, trans. mine).

4 Linguistic uses and competences indicated by the sample in relation to the languages of the repertoires

Observing the linguistic repertoires that count about a hundred languages and dialects, the subjects surveyed show great linguistic awareness, since they act within bi- or plurilingual family contexts where there is often an emergence of Italian and, to a lesser extent, of dialects and Friulian. It is thus in the family context that we can observe the mixing or overlapping of LO preservation and the spread of Italian. The outcome of such mixing reveals new trends as well as those that are already consolidating, namely linguistic deterioration in the case of the LO(s) and language shift in the case of Italian (see Chini & Adorno 2018). These phenomena need to be studied from a broader perspective, that is, by considering a series of decisive factors, such as place of birth, the family’s socio-economic possibilities and access to services, to which we must necessarily add the impact of good inclusion praxes at school. Let us now analyse the data we have collected more thoroughly.

A consideration which is crucial to shed light on the linguistic behaviour of the sample regards the configuration of the repertoires that were constructed in light of the answers given. Table 1 shows that the intra-family linguistic repertoire is mainly distinguished by a monolingualism dominated by the LO (other language)⁵ or by a plurilingualism reduced to two languages (including Italian) and, with a few percentage points less, by a more articulate plurilingualism which comprises the use of three or more languages.

⁵ In this part of the analysis we decided to extend the label LO and replace it with the broader “other language(s)” in the tables because we observed that, albeit useful for statistical purposes, attributing a single LO did not correspond to what the sample stated. In our commentary on the tables we refer to the LO keeping this correction in mind.

Monolingual Repertory	Number	%	Bilingual Repertory	Number	%	Plurilingual Repertory	Number	%
Italian	29	6.8	Italian and other language	259	64.4	Italian and other languages	116	62.0
Friulan	7	1.6	Friulan and other language	12	3.0	Friulan and other languages	10	5.4
Other Languages	393	91.6	Italian and Friulan	7	1.7	Italian, Friulan and other languages	27	14.4
			Other language	124	30.8	Other languages	34	18.2
Total	429	100.0		402	100.0		187	100.0

Table 1: Configuration of the linguistic repertory in the family context.

These are interesting clues which point to two typical situations: on one hand, the use of a single language in the family context and on the other, the coexistence of two (or more) languages. Looking at the combinations in the family context, we can, indeed, observe the recurrence of Italian + LO (from 62.0 to 64.4 percent), even if the privileged behaviour is an almost exclusive use of the LO (91.6 percent). While the LO and other languages impose themselves in the three configurations (even with marked percentages, from 18.2 to 30.8 percent), Friulian occupies a rather small space, especially in mixed practices alongside Italian or other languages (from 1.7 to 14.4 percent), and Italian appears randomly in the behaviours described (6.8 percent). Within such an articulate framework, it is easier to understand the correlation with the subjects' sense of belonging and the hesitation they sometimes showed in defining themselves as Italians or of other nationality. The latter can also be symptomatic of an evolving identity, the effects of which will emerge more clearly in the future.

At the linguistic level, crucial to the definition of identity is the need to preserve the languages learned through socialization within the family, even in relation to the contexts

of use of Italian, the majority language in the country where these young bilingual speakers live. Studying the language use of the subjects with different interlocutors within the home can thus provide us with additional information.

We shall thus integrate the above-described picture with the information we gathered on the behaviours the informants stated. This will allow us to identify the languages and dialects used by parents, siblings and relatives when speaking to the minors and the languages and dialects used by the minors with their family members⁶.

L/D	Father	%	Mother	%	Siblings	%	Grand- parents and rel- atives in the CO	%
Italian	224	22.4	180	17.6	369	41.7	113	11.3
Other language(s)	488	48.9	502	49.0	252	28.5	791	79.4
Italian and other languages	286	28.7	343	33.4	263	29.8	92	9.2
No answer	58		31		172		60	
Total	1056	100.0	1056	100.0	1056	100.0	1056	100.0

Table 2: Languages and dialects used by family members with the subjects.

By observing the data contained in Table 2, it is not difficult to notice that when speaking to their children the parents prefer using the LO; although there is one percentage point more in the case of mothers, this does not generate relevant effects. If these data are implemented with the preference for the combination “Italian and other languages” (which recurs more among mothers, 33.4 percent vs. 28.7 percent), we gather that most of the sample indicated a certain resistance of the LO, not comparable to the exclusive use of Italian which is 22.4 percent among fathers and 17.6 percent among mothers.

The linguistic behaviours among siblings show a predictable difference compared to those of the parents. Most of the siblings show a greater tendency toward the exclusive use of Italian (41.7 percent) and subordinately, with slight differences, the mixed use of Italian and the LO (29.8 percent) and the use of the LO (28.5 percent). We must not

⁶ The questions “Which languages or dialects are spoken in your family?” and “Which language or dialect do you speak with these people?” were followed by a series of suggestions that allowed us to separate family usage from use in other domains. The subjects were also granted the possibility to indicate more than one language or dialect.

underestimate the use of the LO because it covers 58.3 percent of the sample and thus resists in the communication among family peers. The comparison between parents and children shows that the latter tend to more willingly favour the shift toward the host repertory and to abandon the LO, even if not abruptly and all of a sudden. The figures attesting this trend in the parents are, instead, different, by virtue of a certain language maintenance rooted in the LO. It is not surprising that the frequency of use of Italian increases when the age gap between the subjects and their siblings is small, while it is weaker when the family members are older.

We must briefly mention the interactions with close relatives who live in the place of origin. In this group, not surprisingly, we notice an explicit attachment to the use of the LO (79.4 percent).

Let us now turn to the linguistic uses of the minors with their family members in order to identify their practices in relation to their parents, siblings and relatives and to evaluate any differences or innovative behaviours, that is, whether they tend to favour the choices intercepted in the domestic sphere.

L/D	Father	%	Mother	%	Siblings	%	Grand- parents and rel- atives in the CO	%
Italian	310	31.7	272	27.0	403	45.6	179	18.3
Other language(s)	430	43.9	435	43.2	234	26.5	714	73.1
Italian and other languages	239	24.4	299	29.8	247	27.9	84	8.6
No answer	77		50		172		79	
Total	1056	100.0	1056	100.0	1056	100.0	1056	100.0

Table 3: Languages and dialects spoken with family members by the subjects.

The data in Table 3 reveal a certain symmetry between the behaviours of the minors and their self-evaluations on the interlocutions with their family members. In other words, the above-described trends are confirmed, even if the direction of the communication is reversed, that is, the LO prevails with parents and Italian prevails with siblings. The weight of Italian is, however, greater than in the previous picture, because there is an increase of the percentages with all the components (+9% with the father and mother;

+4% ca. with siblings). This means that the use of Italian, considering even mixed usage, has a more pervasive role in the family context, at least from the point of view of the minors surveyed. We can thus hypothesize that in their interactions with their parents, the minors answer in Italian even when their mothers or fathers speak to them in the LO. We must also point out that the LO nevertheless ‘defends’ its space in intra-family communication, above all with close relatives.

As previously said, there are multiple variation factors according to the interlocutors involved. In general, it is however possible to point out that, in the family context, the preference for the LO or Italian is linked to the subjects’ greater competence in one or the other language or the prevalence of their orientation toward the country of origin rather than the host country. The children’s greater inclination toward Italian compared to their parents’ is ascribable, on one hand, to the fact that many were born in Italy and, on the other, to educational actions, since they attend school and thus have greater and more diversified contacts with the national language.

After having commented on the linguistic repertory of the family and the uses of the components, it is useful to consider the statements the minors made about their competences in the languages of the repertory, that is, the language which they consider their LO and Italian. The questions pertaining to this aspect in the questionnaire are: “How well do you know the language or dialect spoken in your country of origin?” and “How well do you know Italian?”. For each of these, the informants were asked to give a self-evaluation of their receptive skills (that is, those pertaining to listening and reading) and productive skills (writing and speaking) through two Likert scales, one from 1 to 10 and the other within the variables “yes”, “a bit” or “no” (see Tables 4 and 5).

As far as the competences of the LO related to orality (comprehension and production) are concerned, the situation is encouraging since 85.4 percent and 80.3 percent of the sample provided a positive self-evaluation, matched by equally satisfactory indications, that is, from 8 to 10. While most of the minors shows a promising oral competence in the LO, there is, however, a part of them (12.7 and 16.1 percent) who do not deem this competence fully adequate and who provide much lower self-evaluations. For this group it is plausible to hypothesize two different trends, according to whether they were born abroad or in Italy: generation 2.0 was the most represented among those who chose “a bit”. It is thus possible that for this part of the sample there is an initial or advanced phase of linguistic deterioration, while for the other smaller ones, we can suppose that LO acquisition was started but not completed.

Conversely, the self-evaluations on the competences in reading and writing in the LO are lower, namely 57.8 and 50.4 percent, even if the level is good (judged between 7 and 10). In this case, too, the reasons can be mostly ascribed to a scarcely widespread (reading)

or totally unknown (writing) practice, especially among those who arrived in Italy in early childhood or who were born in our country. That these competences are possessed only partially is confirmed even by the percentages of those who answered “a bit” or “no”, which comprise more or less the other half of the sample (see Gianollo & Fiorentini 2020, 376–377).

LO	Can you understand?	%	Can you speak?	%	Can you read?	%	Can you write?	%
Yes	877	85.4	821	80.3	590	57.8	515	50.4
A bit	130	12.7	165	16.1	289	28.3	288	28.2
No	20	2.9	36	3.5	142	13.9	218	21.4

Table 4: “How well do you know the language or dialect spoken in your country of origin?”.

In support of these results, it should be pointed out that the questionnaire offered us other insights related to the competences in the LO. Of interest were, for example, the answers to questions about the frequency of LO use in the watching of TV programs, telephone conversations, reading, listening to music and writing emails, messages and chats. Predictably, even in these contexts, the contact with and use of the LO varies from scarce for reading to satisfying for listening to music (a passive competence). There were no significant differences among those who use TV or the internet to watch programs. The active use of the LO is, instead, preponderant in telephone calls, perhaps with friends from the same country or relatives who remained abroad and, partly, in new media writing.

We should not underestimate the fact that a good amount of the sample tends to preserve the LO in oral conversations and in the comprehension of musical texts; this is matched by a progressive deterioration of reading and writing skills, even if the latter can be retrieved through the use of social media. Using the LO in the new modes of communication represented by emails and chats can become a resource for these youngsters and allow them to valorise their LO more effectively. Indeed, if writing in the LO can be useful for “chatting” with friends and relatives, who live both in Italy and abroad, it can also take on a more decisive role at school, where these new means, which are habitually used on a daily basis, can become a didactic tool through which to approach and enhance the LO.

Turning to the pupils’ self-evaluation on the Italian language, the percentages reported in Table 5 show that most of the children and adolescents of the sample self-evaluate their

competence in Italian positively, in all four skills (oral and written). This assessment is confirmed by the Likert scale which oscillates between 8 and 10, with the exception of writing where the interval is between 7 and 10.

LO	Can you understand?	%	Can you speak?	%	Can you read?	%	Can you write?	%
Yes	1000	97.7	985	96.8	981	96.8	982	96.9
A bit	24	2.3	33	3.2	31	3.1	28	2.8
No	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.1	3	0.3

Table 5: “How well do you know the language or dialect spoken in your country of origin?”

If we break down the data by generation, and more specifically, between those born in Italy and those born abroad, we will notice homogenous trends since all informants show a lot of confidence in their (productive and receptive) competences, except for generation 1.5 that answers “a bit” or “no” more often, especially with reference to reading and writing. (Negative answers are, instead, absent among informants belonging to generations 1.75 and 2.0). Despite such hesitation, it needs to be said that this generation is very much inclined to evaluate their competence in Italian positively (see Gianollo & Fiorentini 2020, 375). It is probable that members of this group overestimate their abilities, perhaps because of an excessive appreciation on the part of teachers. We do not, however, intend to dwell on this aspect which must be tackled with caution and verified carefully in the pertinent contexts (see Andorno & Sordella 2018, 192-193).

As for the LO, even for Italian the questionnaire had a series of questions pertaining to TV or internet programs, the reading of stories, books and comic books (even online), written communication on social media and listening to songs. The data point to a considerable satisfaction with TV and online programs, which are, unsurprisingly, followed by new media writing, reading for entertainment, and music. The latter is perhaps less appreciated compared to international songs, which are more widespread among youngsters. In general, these preferences are confirmed by the answers the informants gave to questions regarding their free time activities: the things they prefer doing are “listening to music”, “watching TV” and “surfing the net”.

The datum on reading and writing should however be taken into more consideration by schools in order to enhance competence in Italian. In fact, when we analyse the prospect above more carefully, we notice that there is a good percentage of informants who state that they can read Italian (96.8 percent); yet this seems to be slightly challenged

by the uses they state, namely 15.7 percent states that they read often, 24.7 percent only sometimes, and 59.6 percent never or almost never. The deviation between these figures is rather marked: on one hand, it could conceal a certain overestimation of their skills and, on the other, a certain disaffection for a practice, which schools should instead encourage (especially in view of plurilingual education) by fostering comparisons and exchanges with readings in the LO.

Let us conclude this section by analysing the answers pertaining to the possibility of beginning or resuming the study of the LO. 17.0 percent of the sample (a total of 179 subjects) is involved in studying the LO; they can thus take advantage of resources to enhance their oral and written competences in the LO⁷. Depending on the languages involved, this type of teaching can also be offered by the schools attended by the children and adolescents as an extracurricular activity or by private associations run by immigrants. Among those involved in said associations there are mostly people belonging to generation 2.0 (followed, at a certain distance, by generation 1.5). This trend does not come as a surprise since it is reasonable to think that those born in Italy or those who did not have the possibility to attend school in their country of origin (or, in both cases, their parents) would want to recreate a connection with their family's language and culture.

Although this part of the sample is rather small, it is worthy to mention that most of those who study their LO come from areas of central Africa (28 subjects), who plausibly consider English or French as their language of origin. Right behind them, there is the group of Chinese-speakers and Arab-speakers (from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia), whose parents invest in the LO for cultural and identity issues, but also to allow their children to have a linguistic advantage on the international market. Finally, there are the Albanian-speakers and Rumanian-speakers, whose number is inconsistent if compared to their numerous presence in the sample. The rest of the subjects is less cohesive and breaks down into small units who state that they learned the LO in Italy.

Among those who stated that they do not study their LO (832 subjects, that is, 78.8 percent of the sample), it is interesting to note that about half of them, 49.8 percent, would like to learn it (even in this case the highest numbers are those among generations 2.0 and 1.5), while 32.4 percent cannot decide and 17.9 percent is against it⁸. Schools should equally be aware of this desire, in connection with what has emerged about the declared competences in the LO illustrated above, in order to plan didactic actions for an authentic plurilingual education.

⁷ The data we are commenting on refer to the questions: "Do you study languages or dialects from your country of origin here in Italy?" and "If you answered no: Would you like to continue studying your language of origin?"

⁸ A similar (and perhaps more promising) result can be found in the sample studied by Alessandrini (2020, 407-415) who also looks at the pupils' reasons which were inferred from the interviews collected.

5 Some concluding remarks

The data commented on herein are part of a broader study and have the aim of providing an overview of the (socio-)linguistic and educational trends of the school classes found in the specific context of the city of Udine, so as to infer some indications and reflections on the “linguistic background” which may be useful for teachers and educators to promote good practices of plurilingualism and inclusion. The data analysis seems to suggest that a restructuring of the repertoires is underway, since the domains in which the young informants use their communicative resources are evolving and being rebalanced. This situation is also reflected in the perception that the speakers have of themselves and their identity and in their efforts to univocally situate themselves in a precise and well-defined sense of national belonging. Two trends emerge from the survey. The first is a shift towards the Italian language, which is gradual (considering the co-presence of the LO in the repertory) but generally used in most contexts. Indeed, the data seem to point to a sample that is competent in Italian, almost regardless of the date of arrival in Italy, even if there are some differences regarding the activities involved (the minors are less confident in reading and writing). The second trend shows that the LO, inherited from the parents, resists quite well, above all in communicative exchanges with family members (less with siblings), in new media writing and in the desire that part of the sample has to improve their competence in it. The absence of targeted actions, however, makes it plausible to believe that this rich patrimony will be drastically reduced over time. This phenomenon should worry both expert scholars and teachers, by virtue of the numerous studies on the linguistic and cognitive benefits that children and adolescents with migrant background have from maintaining their LO. There seems, instead, to still be a widespread monolingual vision which considers inclusion only and always in terms of acquisition and use of the national language, despite that fact that its limits are clearly visible, especially when it indulges in some sporadic interlinguistic incursions or in folkloristic and stereotyped views of languages and their speakers. It is thus advisable to resume that plural language education which has been emerging prominently for some time in the indications, recommendations and official stances of the national and European governments (a patrimony not always known and shared by teachers and educators)⁹, and to remember that “the cultural, linguistic and intellectual capital of our societies will increase dramatically when we stop seeing culturally and linguistically diverse children as ‘a problem to be solved’ and instead open our eyes to the linguistic, cultural, and intellectual resources they bring from their homes to our schools and societies” (Cummins 2001, 20; see also Cummins 2021).

⁹ Suffice it here to quote Cognigni (2020) and his accurate focus on plural approaches, which include the planning of actions aimed at developing plurilingual teaching practices.

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