

# TEACHING AS NARRATIVE

## The use of ELF in the IFL class in the migration setting of Southern Italy<sup>1</sup>

LORENA CARBONARA<sup>1</sup>, ANNARITA TARONNA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>UNIVERSITY OF CALABRIA, <sup>2</sup>UNIVERSITY OF BARI

**Abstract** – This article illustrates the results of a three-year research project conducted in the migration setting of Southern Italy from 2015 to 2018 focused on: 1) theorising English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as a “translingual practice” in migratory settings across the Mediterranean; 2) scrutinizing the possibility of a pedagogy of contact in the Italian as a Foreign Language (IFL) classroom; 3) highlighting issues of self-translation and reflexivity in teaching and learning practices in the migration setting. Considering teaching as a narrative phenomenon, the article explores the third phase of the project<sup>2</sup>, which was based on a series of interviews with the IFL teachers, conducted in 2017–2018, aimed at highlighting such issues as the use of ELF as a co-learning language, of autobiographical elements and self-translation practice and of self-reflexivity and improvisation. Results show the extent to which approaching students, who are also beneficiaries in a national humanitarian project, required an effort to eliminate the ideal of linguistic purity, as well as all cultural and linguistic prejudices.

**Keywords:** ELF; IFL; migration; teaching; narrative, translingualism, self-translation.

## 1. Introduction

In the following pages we will illustrate the results of a three-year research project conducted in the migration setting of Southern Italy from 2015 to 2018. According to UNHCR, in Italy, 153,842 migrant people arrived and 2,913 were dead and missing in 2015, whereas 23,370 arrived and 1,311 were dead and missing in 2018. Sea arrivals at islands including Cyprus and Malta, and sea and land arrivals at Greece and Spain, increase the figures: in 2015, 1,032,408 people arrived and 3,771 were dead and missing, whereas 141,472 arrived and 2,277 were dead and missing in 2018.<sup>3</sup> The impact of such a

<sup>1</sup> Although the authors conceived the paper together, Lorena Carbonara is mainly responsible for the Introduction and section 2; Section 3 was written by Annarita Taronna. The authors wrote Conclusions together.

<sup>2</sup> The results of phase 1 and 2 of the project are available in Taronna 2015, 2019 and Carbonara and Taronna 2017, 2018, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>, last accessed 12.02.2020.

humanitarian and socio-political phenomenon on our ontological narratives, as women living in Southern Italy, and on our research and teaching practices as linguists was important, since we acknowledged the necessity to become involved in the master narrative of migration. More specifically, we felt the urge to: 1) theorise English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as a “translingual practice” in migratory settings across the Mediterranean; 2) scrutinize the possibility of a pedagogy of contact in the Italian as a Foreign Language (IFL) classroom; 3) highlight issues of self-translation and reflexivity in teaching and learning practices in the migration setting.

In the first phase of the research, which took place in 2015-2016, we interviewed volunteer interpreters, translators and cultural mediators who worked for non-profit organizations (e.g., Connecting People, Arci, CRI, CIES) facilitating the transition for newly-arrived migrant people. These interviewees fell into three main categories: a) the native informants working within a given ethnic community and providing inside information; b) amateur bilingual translators and interpreters (including students of translation, interpreting and language-related degrees); c) activists working in the field of humanitarian, international and intercultural cooperation and diplomacy. The results obtained from these interviews testified not only to the crucial role of English as a Lingua Franca in the communication process in such a complex setting, but also to the creation of a hybrid and inclusive language resulting from the contact with other languages. Mediation was indeed influenced by the permeable nature of ELF that can be defined as a form of “translingual practice” – a practice that, although recognizing norms and conventions established by dominant institutions and social groups, is focused on the speakers’ ability to negotiate such norms according to their own linguistic repertoires (Canagarajah 2013).<sup>4</sup>

The second phase of the project was devoted to observations conducted in 2016-2017 in the Italian as a Foreign Language mandatory courses for migrants in Bari and Lecce (SPRAR/ARCI), Martina Franca (SPRAR/Salam ONG) and Taranto (Centro d’Accoglienza/Salam NGO).<sup>5</sup> The students were people enrolled in the national SPRAR project and they came from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Senegal, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Ghana, Mali and Northern Africa. The teachers were all Italian women, speakers of at least one European language (English and/or French), and in one case also Arabic. In the context of such multicultural classrooms, factors like tolerance, respect and conflict are central, and the use of ELF becomes a

<sup>4</sup> For the results of this first phase of the research project see Taronna 2015, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> The Law no. 189 of 30 July 2002 institutionalized the PNA (National Asylum Programme) by establishing SPRAR, the “Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees.” See <https://www.sprar.it/english>, last accessed 11.02.2020.

little controversial. On the one hand, it allows teachers to facilitate communication and ground their pedagogical approach on the idea of contact, exemplified by the image of the bridge that they often use to describe the role of the lingua franca; on the other hand, it can foster forms of discrimination against the students who are illiterate or lacking in English competence (Arabophones and Francophones). In the IFL class we observed the way in which ELF is used as a self-translation practice and the delicate yet important role of autobiography. This part of the research allowed us to: 1) examine the various communicative forms generated in the interaction between the IFL teacher and the migrant students through the use of ELF and the different native languages; and 2) show how the passage of English from hegemonic language to contact language brings with it the re-thinking of an Anglocentric lingua-cultural dominance.<sup>6</sup>

Phase three was eventually based on a series of interviews with the IFL teachers, conducted in 2017-2018, aimed at highlighting such issues as the use of ELF as a co-learning language, of autobiographical elements and self-translation practice and of self-reflexivity and improvisation. Results of this phase show the extent to which approaching students, who are also beneficiaries in a national humanitarian project, required an effort to eliminate the ideal of linguistic purity, as well as all cultural and linguistic prejudices. Such an attitude is indeed fundamental to creating the best conditions for learning, teaching, and also researching. The teachers involved in the project showed a certain degree of awareness of their role of educators, and we all benefited from a temporary immersion in such a complex educational environment where emotions played an essential role.<sup>7</sup> Developing reflexivity and awareness of the socio-cultural and emotional setting in which IFL teachers in the migration context work is indeed necessary because “language educators worldwide are being called upon to produce effective human capital” (Byrd Clark, Dervin 2014, p. 129). Furthermore, a consistent questioning of the teaching/learning process allows teachers to monitor their own feelings and enables students to build a more significant relationship with the external environment, which is accomplished also through the use of ELF. This last part of the research project constitutes the focus of the present study, which is intended to investigate more deeply teaching as a narrative phenomenon and the positive implication of all this in educational and humanitarian terms.

<sup>6</sup> For the results of this second phase of the research project see Carbonara and Taronna 2017.

<sup>7</sup> For the results of the third phase of the research project see Carbonara and Taronna 2018, 2019.

## 2. Theoretical framework and methodology

### 2.1. Narrative inquiry and reflexivity

Our aim is to contribute to the examination of IFL teachers' testimonies as significant examples of reflexive practices in migration settings. To do this, it is necessary to acknowledge the role of narrative in reflexivity and the crucial role it plays in the creation of more ethical teaching and research practices. Narratives are indeed part of everyday life since we are all storytellers and we need stories to make sense of the world and of our place within it. Since stories and narratives are used as data in thematic, linguistic, structural and visual analysis, and as forms of representations in different qualitative and quantitative methodologies, such as translation in health science, education, and other professional disciplines, it is necessary to clarify our use of the term narrative (Clandinin 2013). This notion of narrative draws on Mona Baker's sociological approach, which explains it as the specific way in which individuals participate in the configuration of reality. According to Baker, both institutions and individuals create and circulate stories "complete with characters, settings, outcomes or projected outcomes, and plot." (Baker 2014, p. 159) In 2006, she pointed out four different types narratives: 1) Ontological narratives, existing within a culture and transmitting also collective narratives to individuals; 2) Public narratives, namely, narratives circulating around groups that can vary with time as public perceptions change; 3) Conceptual narratives, namely, disciplinary narratives which exist within a field of study; 4) Meta/Master narratives, namely, the narratives which can surpass geographical and temporal narratives (Baker 2006).

Researchers, as well as teachers, must pay attention to their role in the production of individual and circulation of collective/public narratives, and this is especially true when confronted with such a complex setting as the migration one. A lot has been said about the narratives of migration, which can provide interesting insights into how migrant people try to understand, tell and retell their story of displacement and violence and to reconstruct a sense of self after a great trauma. Less work has been done on the narratives that teachers use to describe their own teaching practice and their experience in such delicate settings. Narrative inquiry – since it is "situated in relationships and in community, and it attends to notions of expertise and knowing in relational and participatory ways" (Clandinin 2013, p. 12) – has been chosen as a qualitative research methodology. It allows one to study experience as a narrative phenomenon highlighting the importance of the relationship among all actors in the communication setting. In Connelly's (2013, p. 18) words:

The focus of narrative inquiry is not only valorizing individuals' experience but is also an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted. Understood in this way, narrative inquiries begin and end in the storied lives of the people involved. Narrative inquirers study the individual's experience in the world, an experience that is storied both in the living and telling and that can be studied by listening, observing, living alongside an other, and writing and interpreting texts. Through the inquiry, we seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others.

As already mentioned above, the portion of corpus analysed for this study contains the interviews conducted with four IFL teachers, and it is focused on three main narratives: 1) the controversial use of ELF and the students' native languages; 2) the importance of self-translation and autobiography; 3) the relationship with the teaching practice. At the root of the discussion there is the idea that reflexivity considers the ways in which meaning is created through complex and multiple modes of representations, including gesture, movement and voice (Byrd Clark, Dervin 2014, p. 3). It is extremely interesting to examine the ways in which teachers talk about their teaching experience and practice, making sense of their role as instructors and educators in the complex migration setting, where the narratives by migrant people are usually the protagonists. Teachers were easily guided, in the course of the interviews, along the path of reflection on their practice and responded with enthusiasm to the possibility of being heard and considered an essential part in the educational growth of their students.

## **2.2. Ethnographic approach**

The three phases of the research were conducted in the participants' real-life environment because observation and interaction were crucial for the study, in line with a qualitative ethnographic approach, and because of the contingent situation: migrant people have to follow a specific daily program as they are enrolled in a national humanitarian project (especially if they are unaccompanied minors). Aware of the danger of potential bias, we focused on the lesson observations and on the interviews, collecting data when possible and acknowledging the contemporary de-territorialization and de-traditionalization of language and identity as essential for approaching the study of language in migration contexts. Words like 'hybrid', 'contingent' and 'fluid' are now frequent in the social sciences, and there is a general tendency to acknowledge that in order to understand the new complexities of

the contemporary world, vocabulary needs to be reshaped.<sup>8</sup> A reference to Dell Hymes's ethnography of communication seems necessary here, since his studies have been crucial in the investigation of "how communities contend with the 'detraditionalization' brought on by demographic change, shifting relations of capital, communications technologies and systems of representation" (Hymes 1996, p. VIII).

Demographic change in migration settings is indeed a key factor in the de-traditionalization process, which goes hand in hand with the evolution of ELF and the subsequent changes in the role of standard English worldwide. Echoing Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the "contact zone," Suresh Canagarajah and Yumi Matsumoto (2016, p. 3) point out that

the outcomes of contact zones negotiations are not always guaranteed. While there is immense creativity in certain encounters, there is misunderstanding and silencing in others. Much depends on the nature of the negotiation, and much cannot be predicted beforehand. The attitudes and motivations of those engaged in these contact zone encounters will shape the outcome. While some may exercise their power and insist on their norms, others will be prepared to collaborate in co-constructing meaning. In either case, the very process of contact engenders new genres and indexicalities for literacy.

In our experience, we actually saw language in motion, the very nature of a lingua franca that is used as an anchor, and the creative possibility embedded in the relationship between ELF and the students' native languages. Moreover, as researchers working in the field, conducting interviews and observing lessons, we came to terms with our own interiorized narratives about migration and migrant people. And so did the teachers we worked with. Eventually, the fruitful exchange that occurred in the course of our research project could be described as a reflexivity practice. As stated by Ben Rampton *et al.* (2014),

Ethnography recognises the ineradicable role that the researcher's personal subjectivity plays throughout the research process. It looks to systematic field strategies and to accountable analytic procedures to constrain self-indulgent idiosyncrasy, and expects researchers to face up to the partiality of their interpretations (Hymes [1978] 1996, p. 13). But the researcher's own cultural and interpretive capacities are crucial in making sense of the complex

<sup>8</sup> It is useful to briefly clarify the difference between linguistic ethnography and linguistic anthropology. The first one was born in Great Britain in the mid-'90s when applied linguists and ethnographers shared an interest in how language and society are created and influenced by their mutual interaction; the second one was born in the United States in the '60s and was mainly centered on questions of ethnicity and race, as descriptors of social difference. See, among others, Copland and Creese 2015 and Duranti 2004.

intricacies of situated everyday activity among the people being studied, and tuning into these takes time and close involvement.

Participant observation plays an important role since the researcher's presence in the setting introduces a series of contingencies that need to be considered. In our case, the phase of lesson observation that preceded the interviews with the teachers was particularly interesting in this regard. The presence of an external element was indeed felt in the classroom, a place where, on a daily basis, teachers strive to create intimacy and establish contact.

### 3. Data analysis

#### 3.1. Use of ELF as a co-learning language

The interviews with the IFL teachers provided us with a substantial narrative set of data which can be analysed according to three main thematic cores: 1) an in-depth reflection on the use of ELF as a co-learning language in multicultural classes; 2) a close focus on teachers' and students' personal narratives embedded in autobiographical elements and self-translation practice; 3) an examination of reflexivity and improvisation as central distinctive factors in IFL teaching. The first thematic core develops from the analysis of the following excerpts:<sup>9</sup>

Interviewer: Ti capita a lezione di utilizzare degli elementi della cultura italiana come spunto. E ti capita mai della loro cultura?

Teacher 1: Sì, per esempio parlando del mio matrimonio, mi sposerò a breve, abbiamo fatto un confronto su come il matrimonio funziona in Italia o in un altro Paese. Oppure anche sulla condizione della donna in Italia, nel mondo, nei loro Paesi.

I: E loro come percepiscono l'interesse per la loro cultura? Gli piace parlare?

T1: Sì, a volte per iniziare gli faccio vedere dei filmati dei loro Paesi, li coinvolge molto. Questo li avvicina molto perché possono scoprire anche la cultura del loro compagno di stanza, che non conoscono. Crea un rapporto più stretto tra di loro, oltre che con me. Imparare la loro lingua è difficilissimo, io generalmente uso l'inglese per comunicare con loro, però aiuta molto imparare delle parole della loro lingua.

I: Questa è una strategia molto interessante.

T1: Si tratta anche di creare un rapporto di fiducia, perché se capiscono che io cerco di imparare la loro lingua, loro sviluppano un maggior interesse nell'imparare il mio modo di pensare e di parlare. In questi casi cambiano proprio espressione, ti sorridono; perché capiscono che con te possono avere

<sup>9</sup> Teacher 1 – 30 years old, Degree in Political Science – No CEDILS.

un rapporto diverso che magari, anche per mancanza di tempo, non riescono ad avere con un operatore. Io ci passo cinque ore con loro, si crea un minimo di amicizia. Cerco anch'io d'immedesimarmi in loro.

The leitmotiv underlying the above excerpts is the shaping of IFL classes as the ideal place in which teachers can activate intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding as strongly advocated by the Council of Europe. Specifically, in the Council's *White Paper* (2008) the concept of intercultural dialogue is defined as follows: "(...) an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures that leads to a deeper understanding of the other's global perception."<sup>10</sup> In a very similar way, intercultural dialogue is built by IFL teachers as the space between cultures, attitudes, skills and such values as attention to diversity, communication, connection, acceptance, openness, positive attitude, a dynamic process. To this end, IFL teachers actively encourage their students to talk about their personal stories or the cultural traditions of their own countries. As a consequence, the intercultural dynamic activated and reported by the teachers implicitly recalls some of the crucial conditions suggested by the Council of Europe (Oprescu, Lungoci 2017). Such conditions must be assured from the very outset, or achieved during the process:

- Equal dignity of all participants;
- Voluntary engagement in dialogue;
- A mindset (on both sides) characterized by openness, curiosity and commitment, and the absence of a desire to "win" the dialogue;
- A readiness to look at both cultural similarities and differences;
- A minimum degree of knowledge about the distinguishing features of one's own and the "other" culture
- Resorting to a common language to assure intercultural communication.

The very last condition is precisely what the interviewee teacher mentions above as the most important element which can contribute to create a true, meaningful intercultural dialogue in an IFL classroom. In her case, ELF is used as the common language for understanding and respecting cultural differences, as much as to learn some basic vocabulary from the foreign students' languages as a way to build trust and to create a safe, inclusive, and culturally responsive learning environment. All the interviewed teachers agree with the fact that they occasionally shift to using ELF combined with some L1 vocabulary to form a connection with students and to establish a rapport in their classrooms. In doing so, they attempt to lower the students' affective filters to create a learning environment where they feel more at ease

<sup>10</sup> See [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/concept\\_EN.asp](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/concept_EN.asp), last accessed 4.4.2020.



and have more confidence speaking and participating in class.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, evidence from both cognitive linguistics and neuroscience point strongly towards the successful use of the co-learning languages (e.g., their mother tongue, second or foreign languages) in the classroom since new knowledge is constructed on a basis of old knowledge (Safonova 2014).

In this study the use of ELF as a co-learning language along with Italian and students' native languages can stand as a further successful teaching move in IFL classes in the way that communicative education with multicultural and bilingual/trilingual orientations is expected to prepare students to use a variety of forms of communicative interaction and demonstrate communicative flexibility and creativity. In choosing and pursuing communicative strategies that help to find a way out of cultural misunderstandings and gaps, IFL teachers reveal themselves as a sort of linguistic peacemakers and intercultural speakers or mediators (Byram 2009; Houghton 2009). The intercultural speaker or mediator is translingual, cosmopolitan, consensus-oriented, supportive and open to negotiation, that is, they negotiate meanings with others on equal terms departing from their own positionalities. To this end, the selection of excerpts reported below can show how IFL teachers play as intercultural speakers by using language as a means for establishing empathy and creating trust, as much as a means for humanizing the beneficiaries' stay in our country:<sup>12</sup>

I: Veniamo alle domande più specifiche, linguistiche. Quindi, quale lingua franca viene utilizzata per facilitare la comunicazione tra te e gli studenti provenienti da lingue madri diverse?

T2: Per rispondere bisogna procedere su due piani diversi ma connessi. Lo svolgimento reale di un corso d'italiano è ben diverso da quello che ho studiato, bisogna capire quando la metodologia può essere applicata o quando deve subentrare il lato umano. Chi parte da zero utilizza espressioni semplici come "buongiorno" perciò è molto più semplice con loro fare riferimento ad immagini, gesti o espressioni del volto di modo da utilizzare solo la lingua italiana. La lingua inglese è molto utile quando si passa alle parole astratte, ai verbi che non possono essere spiegati graficamente. I nepalesi e i pakistani conoscono benissimo l'inglese, le somale che ho seguito non avevano una grande dimestichezza ma vivendo con le nigeriane, capivano comunque l'inglese. La ragazza eritrea che ho adesso non parla bene l'inglese, mentre i nigeriani, che sono la maggioranza, lo parlano benissimo, anche se non è la loro lingua madre. La lingua inglese è uno strumento utilizzabile [...]. Bisogna far riferimento anche all'aspetto umano, in nessun caso di docenza può essere escluso: se le persone vogliono parlare e gli s'impone l'italiano perché si è

<sup>11</sup> On this specific topic we suggest Cook 2001 and Edstrom 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Teacher 2 – 32 years old – Degree in Philosophy – CEDILS; Teacher 3 – 41 years old – Degree in Modern Italian Literature – DITALS.

all'interno del corso...è brutto, perché, che accoglienza dai a delle persone che magari vorrebbero aprirsi?

I: L'elemento autobiografico interviene sempre, sia nella loro storia sia nel rapporto umano con l'insegnante, aldilà del fatto che insegna la lingua?

T2: Sì non c'è mai una concezione distaccata rispetto anche agli aspetti quotidiani come la lite con il fidanzato, la lite con la coinquilina...il duro compito dell'insegnante d'italiano è cercare di comunque fare lezione perché loro devono imparare, siamo lì per quello; però anche fargli capire che non sono solo il file di lingua italiana che si accende e si spegne ma che sono lì per aiutarli, naturalmente in lingua inglese. In quel caso si fa uso dell'inglese, quando siamo in pausa parliamo inglese. Mi diverte molto durante la lezione fare domande in italiano e loro mi rispondono in inglese, però hanno capito tutto.

I: Conoscere la loro lingua può essere vista come una forma di accoglienza?

T3: Ovviamente sì. Si sbloccano, hanno qualcosa di cui parlare. Quando hai la lingua di mezzo è davvero un sollievo per tutti. Un giorno sono arrivata a lavoro e l'educatore mi ha detto che c'era una ragazza che parlava solo francese, analfabeta. Quando ho risposto, in francese, che non c'erano problemi, lei si è illuminata.

I: Usi materiale culturale proveniente dalle tradizioni d'origine?

T3: Vorrei ma non posso poiché dovrei mettermi a studiare. Bisognerebbe che gli insegnanti si aggiornassero sui contenuti politici in divenire. Ciò che stava accadendo in Afghanistan io l'ho saputo dal mio allievo! Bisogna anche sapersi porsi nei confronti del loro paese, della loro cultura. La linea del fraintendimento è in agguato, è pericoloso. La competenza interculturale è importantissima.

All of the testimonies gathered here refer to language as hospitable by its own nature because we all are invited to live a broadened intimacy with the other and to welcome those who are in transit. Hospitality is not only crucial to the teachers' language practice, but also to their model of plurilingual, participative and active citizenship that recalls Derrida's sense of welcoming the other with her/his diversity, of unconditionally offering one's hand to all that is new and alien (Derrida 2000). In the migration emergency context a double threshold of hospitality is coming to light. The approach of the migrant subject – entering our space, appropriating our language, touching us and forcing us to change – compels the IFL teacher who works in migrant contexts to move to the other side, to a decentred point from which she/he can observe herself/himself and the world. The teacher, positioned between languages, responds to the partiality of each language with a border crossing, thus exposing the richness entailed in language plurality. Each teacher, with her/his own story, proves how this language plurality is fundamental: without it, it would not be possible to teach and construct an intercultural dialogue, and it would not be possible to explore the unknown and experience the difference of the other. More specifically, taking into consideration the

intercultural communication and language dynamics experienced by IFL teachers during their interactions with migrant students in their language classes, it might be interesting to conceptualize language as a form of hospitality for the other, of her/his difference, of her/his distance that requires forms of responsibility towards the guest.

In this respect, the figure of hospitality is also at stake in the hybrid, permeable and translingual nature of ELF as experienced by numerous Italian teachers who describe it in particularly meaningful terms:

I: Quindi l'inglese lo consideri come una lingua-ponte?

T2: Sì. Mi diverto anche a imparare il *pidgin English*, la lingua parlata dai nigeriani, che sta contagiando anche gli altri beneficiari. Per cui, invece di dire "How are you?" glielo chiedo in *pidgin English* "How far?" che è molto divertente. Ci identifica come gruppo perché è una cosa che facciamo tra di noi ma non con altre persone.

T3: Sì, è un'interlingua.

This brief statement echoes Canagarajah's (2013, p. 2) "motto" according to which "we are all translinguals" in contact zones: we speak a flexible, contingent, unstable bridge language that is suited for the cooperative co-construction of meaning, and that leads toward successful intercultural communication. A consequence stemming from this practice is not only the sense of ease and familiarity that Italian and non-Italian mediators feel about the lingua franca, but also the creation of hybrid and inclusive language formulas resulting from contact with other languages, re-territorialization needs, and the will of the speakers.

The use of ELF in IFL classes can also entail asymmetric and conflictual interactions when, for example, teachers clearly state that they perceive English as a barrier to the construction of the relationship and to the immediate interaction with the migrant. In such cases, the knowledge and use of the migrant's native language is better at creating a bridge for communication, as we see in the following testimony:

I: Nascono conflitti interculturali? E come vengono gestiti? Possono essere di natura linguistica?

T2: Sì, ci sono varie tipologie di conflitti soprattutto quando vivono sotto lo stesso tetto [...] In questi casi, facendo da mediatrice, naturalmente non si può che fare ricorso all'inglese. In momenti di confronto non si pensa alla coniugazione del verbo irregolare ma l'inglese può funzionare per sedare i conflitti, imporre di non utilizzarlo perché si è al corso d'italiano, sarebbe una forte imposizione e probabilmente questo potrebbe potenziare i conflitti e coinvolgerebbe anche l'insegnante. L'inglese è una lingua fondamentale perché quasi tutti la comprendono, ma bisogna capire quando diventa discriminante. Se immagino una situazione di conflitto al primo livello, con due studenti nepalesi, una studentessa nigeriana e la new-entry eritrea che non parla inglese, lei sarebbe tagliata fuori perché siamo in quattro a capire l'inglese contro una.

The excerpt reported above also brings together the perspective on mediation as a basis for understanding how teachers mediate an intercultural orientation in language teaching. In doing so, the notion of mediation moves beyond a process of transferring meaning in communication or scaffolding knowledge for learning. Instead, it can be understood as the act of bringing (at least) two linguistic and cultural frameworks into a relationship, with an educative purpose. As a consequence, in these vulnerable situations ELF is used as a language of mediation no longer embedded in one national framework and in a strict set of standard rules, but in multiple nuances in terms of phonetics, lexicon and morphosyntax due to the contamination of global cultural flows. In this logic, as suggested by Canagarajah (2013) we should re-think English as a contact language that needs to be regarded as a variety in its own right, moving and transforming along with the migration flows of subjects passing through border zones who resort to personal varieties of English. Such considerations inevitably recall Pratt's (1987) idea of a "contact linguistics" that allows observing the formation of new geo-localities and new language policies in the light of the numerous contaminations of global cultural flows escaping from neo-colonial dystopias and hegemonic discourses of abuse and language extinction and to embrace new practices of linguistic and cultural crossing.

### ***3.2. Use of autobiographical elements and self-translation practice in IFL classrooms***

The second thematic core provides a close focus on teachers' and students' personal narratives embedded in autobiographical elements as it emerges from the following excerpts:

I: Ti capita di raccontare di te? E loro raccontano di sè?

T1: Sì, per esempio parlando del mio matrimonio poi loro raccontano ad esempio del matrimonio della sorella.

T4:<sup>13</sup> Io considero molto l'aspetto autobiografico. Per creare nella mia aula un ambiente che li accolga, loro rivedono in me una figura femminile materna (che hanno lasciato). Quando s'insegna, sai, si arriva ai domini. Quello della famiglia mi crea difficoltà. Insegnare i nomi madre, padre...loro spesso abbassano lo sguardo. Altri hanno bei ricordi e vogliono stare qui e aiutare la loro famiglia ma non parlano mai del viaggio. Racconto anche di me, per creare empatia. Scherzo. Io estrapolo molto dalla vita reale per le lezioni, per esempio, hanno l'abitudine di lasciare i rubinetti aperti, dunque, prossima

<sup>13</sup>Teacher 4 – 26 years old – Degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures – Didactics courses taken as an undergraduate.

lezione: l'acqua! Poi io chiedo molto delle loro culture, il cibo per esempio. E loro mi fanno domande e lamentele.

I: A proposito di questioni personali, loro parlano della loro esperienza? Capita che raccontino dell'attraversamento?

T3: Dipende. Quando li incontro la prima volta parlo di me: I have two kids etc. Questa cosa li rassicura. Il fatto che loro colgano che tu non hai problemi a parlare di te, va bene. Ma allo stesso tempo meglio non chiederglielo. A volte ho chiesto della famiglia e mi rendevo conto che pensare lì era motivo di sofferenza. Non lo faccio più. Arrivano a parlare di sé quando li hai conquistati. Di alcuni allievi sono arrivata a sapere morte e miracoli: mi hanno anche mostrato le ferite di guerra. Questi racconti avvengono sempre in lingua veicolare. In due casi mi è capitato ed è stato significativo che usassero alcune parole in italiano perché ci tenevano che io capissi tutto. A un certo punto iniziano a vederti come alleato...anche se alleato dà di guerra. Come vicino, come una persona di cui si possono fidare.

The excerpts reveal the perspectives of three IFL teachers as they pertain to the development of basic language skills in multilingual classes where students are asylum seekers, refugees or unaccompanied minors. The emergence of teachers' and students' personal involvement in this context reflects the distinctive features of the narrative inquiry method and of the ethnographic approach as introduced in section 2. The rationale here is based on the idea that when migrant students enter the classroom IFL teachers enhance their specific belongings and stories, and allow them "the right to narrate." Telling their own stories protects democratic practice by creating a classroom in which students have equitable access to learning and in which they are not dehumanized by having to accept ascribed identities.

On the basis of such assumptions, it is particularly interesting to examine how the IFL teachers make sense of their teaching and learning experiences in relation to various discourses of autobiography and self-translation. Questions and answers were collected in order to show the teachers' attitudes towards their role as cultural mediators and educators, their awareness of cross-linguistic practices and socio-cultural conflicts, and the incidence of autobiography and self-translation. Throughout the whole research, attention was focused on four main aspects: creation of trust, autobiography/self-translation, linguistic dynamics, and teaching practices. As already mentioned earlier, the creation of trust appears as a *conditio sine qua non* in all interviews, as well as the necessity to establish a relationship with the students, based on shared autobiographical elements (when possible). The peculiarity of such a teaching environment helps the teachers develop a stronger sense of awareness of their role as mediators and educators.

As it stands here, the exchange of autobiographical material is important for both the relationship and the learning practice. Indeed, in different ways

and to various degrees, all of the interviewed teachers consider teaching as a life practice and reflect on their personal engagement in the job. Since the ultimate objective of Italian L2 courses for refugees and asylum seekers is the acquisition of a sufficient level of written and spoken language in order to interact in the social context of the country, the teachers have to mediate between this and the human factor, urging them to consider biographical aspects. In this process, they become personally involved as human beings and start to share, rethink and reshape their own pedagogies and autobiographies. This is particularly easy to observe when they describe the language teaching/learning dynamics in the following terms:

T3: Allora, sì, è complesso. Io insegno italiano in inglese e chiedo loro di “think in Italian” mentre io sto pensando in inglese! Quando le due parti si auto-traducono si crea una lingua di mezzo. Il codice che devi trovare sta lì dentro. Tutti adattiamo la lingua che stiamo usando per farci capire.

The result of such a cutting-edge dynamics is an unconventional form of self-translation that holds in its interstices the double threshold of a contagious and unexpected hospitality in a new language. In the IFL student-teacher interactions, an unprecedented vision of language and language contact is unfolded with different linguistic and cultural heritages, thus problematizing the traditional understanding of language as a social projection of territorial conviviality held together by shared behavioural norms, beliefs and values. Indeed, this old view of language originated at a time when society consisted of human populations confined within geographical boundaries and structured by local imaginings of their social identity. As a consequence, self-translation can be also conceived here as a form of translanguaging practice that lead both teachers and students to go beyond the mother tongue. This move may situate them in the path of a new generation of speakers who experience and narrate from a post-monolingual condition.

Crucially, crossing language boundaries and shifting from mother tongues to Italian and vice versa is experienced by both IFL teachers and students as an intimate process of daily self-translation or of translation of themselves in the double time dimension of an active intercultural citizenship and of a new space for shaping identity. Echoing Rainier Grutman and Trish Van Bolderen (2014), we must admit that nowadays self-translation<sup>14</sup> deserves close attention because in the context of migration, mobility and intercultural exchanges it can help to raise critical questions and assumptions about translation. Indeed, by drawing attention to the overlap between its

<sup>14</sup>Today, the definition of the term “self-translation” (or “auto-translation”) has been extensively studied by a number of researchers, such as Boyd (2016), Evseeva and Kozlova (2016), and Hokenson (2007).

metaphorical and literal meanings, self-translation is not only a question of texts, but also a question of what happens to the subject in the overlap between languages and cultures: it is a translation of the self, and thus of the self in translation. The potentiality of such an epistemological move may be the catalyst for positing self-translation as an important and more nuanced domain for scholarly engagement in language teaching in multicultural classrooms that may privilege the investigation of daily experience and the modes of expression used by such translingual learners. Consequently, the constant act of self-translation, which is unavoidable in such multilingual contexts, can be seen as a possibility to explore multilingualism and hybridity, a way to give voice to plural autobiographies and to enhance intercultural communication-oriented pedagogies.

### ***3.3. Use of reflexivity and improvisation as central distinctive factors in IFL teaching***

The third thematic core is based on the interviewed teachers' testimonies that report on reflexivity and improvisation as central elements to IFL teaching. By narrating her own training experience, one of the teachers sheds light on the fact that the lack of a specific language training is often underestimated since it has been traditionally relegated to the field of volunteering within Catholic or non-profit organizations:

I: Qual è il titolo di studio?

T2:<sup>15</sup> Ho una laurea specialistica in Filosofia e Storia delle idee dopodiché l'insegnamento dell'italiano agli stranieri è nato come volontariato. In seguito ho conseguito la certificazione CEDILS [...] Pensare di poter insegnare italiano solo perché si è madre lingua italiana è la cosa più stupida che si possa fare, si può anche avere una predisposizione, però se non si hanno gli strumenti o delle indicazioni precise, si fanno dei grossissimi errori. Quindi, questo è il mio percorso formativo [...] Nell'ambito del volontariato, solitamente promosso da associazioni cattoliche ma non solo, come vi dicevo, spesso ci sono queste improvvisazioni, ma d'altro canto io stessa ho improvvisato creativamente la mia prima lezione. Ve la racconto... Entro in classe e comincio a "didattizzare" l'aula: prendendo spunto dai colori dalle pareti ho spiegato i colori, ho insegnato il nome degli oggetti presenti in inglese e in italiano e poi soprattutto le frasi più utili, come "Sto male, ho bisogno di aiuto". I beneficiari all'inizio sembrano spaesati, poi si lasciano andare e si fanno sempre più coinvolgere fino a mostrare grande entusiasmo per le mie improvvisazioni. Questo è stato il mio esordio come insegnante d'italiano, poi capisci che si ha bisogno di molti più strumenti e non solo la lingua. Rimane importante il fare riferimento a quello che si ha intorno e quindi ho pensato di specializzarmi in questo perché mi piaceva parecchio.

<sup>15</sup> Teacher 2 – 32 years old – Degree in Philosophy – CEDILS.

I: L'altra domanda riguarda la motivazione, ma in realtà hai già risposto.

T2: Se volete vi posso anche specificare che impegnarsi per fornire alle persone uno strumento che possono spendere per inserirsi positivamente in una società, secondo me è molto filosofico. La mia concezione della filosofia è assolutamente concreta. Per questo la mia formazione è così variegata e non è strano per me insegnare italiano, anche se ho studiato filosofia. Devo anche alla mia formazione filosofica l'uso che faccio dell'auto-riflessione ed auto-critica nella mia pratica di insegnamento dell'italiano come L2 in classi multiculturali in cui cerco di incoraggiare una trasformazione personale e sociale dei partecipanti.

The excerpt is an example of the extent to which IFL teachers resort to reflexivity as a self-critical process when approaching the complexities of developing and applying intercultural communicative competence in foreign language education. Such a process may coincide with what Byram (1997) defines in terms of “critical cultural awareness”, that is an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries (p. 53). The development of criticality has been taken up by others (Byram, Guilherme 2000), and Houghton (2012) argues that criticality triggers and helps to manage personal and social transformation through intercultural dialogue. In this perspective, ‘transformation’ coincides exactly with what the teacher states above, that is, a process of conscious and deliberate personal and social transformation flowing from the critical exploration, analysis and evaluation of self and other. It becomes central to intercultural citizenship experience in the (foreign) language classroom when students in one country (or one cultural group) create a sense of transnational identification with learners in another country (or another cultural group) and develop a new transnational way of thinking and acting.

A further research issue which emerges from the narrative analysis of the excerpt is the teacher’s resort to improvisation in teaching as a way to repair or compensate for a lack of specific training or competence, which is not intended to be negative. Indeed, as the teacher states, improvisation is a source for creativity and a tool for developing students’ competence in the foreign language. Improvisation in English is the act of using alternative resources to facilitate instruction for teaching wherever there is a lack of specific first-hand teaching aids (Tikon 2006). After decades of educational research, it has been discovered that improvisation offers unique benefits for certain types of learning. In effective English Language teaching/learning, the topic and the flow of the class emerge from the collaboration between teacher and student. Social constructivists have found that the unpredictability of multiple competing voices is what makes improvisation a uniquely effective teaching tool and an unscripted, unrehearsed, spontaneous set of actions in



response to minimal directions from a teacher, usually including statements of who one is, where one is and what one is doing there (Bearison *et al.* 1986; Cobb 1995; Doise, Mugny 1984; Landy 1982; Perret-Clermont 1980). Despite all this, it must be considered that at the beginning improvisation for teaching purposes in an IFL classroom is not always easy to be implemented (see above: “I beneficiari all’inizio sembrano spaesati, poi si lasciano andare e si fanno sempre più coinvolgere fino a mostrare grande entusiasmo per le mie improvvisazioni”) and students will be hesitant and shy to participate in the activities. But after a few sessions they will become more enthusiastic, and there will be a phenomenal improvement in their confidence level. Finally, improvisation provides learners with opportunities not only to improve their language communication skills, but also to improve their confidence, which will ultimately lead to the development of positive concepts.

#### 4. Conclusions

The data analyzed for this study confirm that a constant questioning of the teaching/learning process and practices allow teachers in the migratory context to monitor their own attitudes, feelings and intercultural competence, and permit migrant students to establish a more useful relationship with the external environment, which is achieved also through the use of ELF. In these vulnerable situations, ELF is used as a contact language no longer embedded in a strict set of standard rules, but in multiple nuances in terms of phonetics, lexicon and morphosyntax due to the contamination of global cultural flows. The use of ELF also stands as an effective strategy to prepare students to use a variety of forms of communicative interaction that help to find a way out of cultural misunderstandings and conflicts in intercultural settings, as much as to demonstrate communicative flexibility and creativity. In this light, the act of self-translation, which is unavoidable in multilingual IFL classes, can be seen as a way to give voice to plural autobiographies and to enhance intercultural communication-oriented pedagogy. The practice of teaching has been investigated here as a narrative phenomenon – with specific attention paid to the positive implication of self-reflexivity in educational and humanitarian terms – that is able to shed light on: the shaping of IFL classes as the place in which teachers can activate intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding as strongly advocated by the Council of Europe in the *White Paper*; the development of basic language skills in multilingual classes where students are asylum seekers, refugees or unaccompanied minors; the practice of reflexivity as a self-critical process when approaching the complexities of developing and applying intercultural communicative competence in foreign language education. Narrative indeed has proven to serve as a medium and

method in IFL classrooms in the migratory context, allowing for meaningful engagement with migrant students' experiences and with their self-perception and self-representation in different situations. Finally, their narratives are a powerful mixture of interactive discussions and interweaving issues concerning monoculturalism and interculturalism in IFL classrooms, multidimensional identities, the tensions between the local and the global, and the relevance of the migration experience.

**Bionotes:** Lorena Carbonara is Researcher in English and Translation (Department of Human Studies, University of Calabria). She has been a member of the a®tivist research group "S-Murare il Mediterraneo" since 2009. She coordinated the project "Traduzione audiovisiva, saperi interdisciplinari e nuove professionalità" at the University of Bari (2015-2018, in cooperation with Apulia Film Commission). She has published: *Writing from the Contact Zone: Native American Autobiography in the Nineteenth Century* (2009), *Senza Riserve. Geografie del contatto* (2013), *Dances with Stereotypes. La rappresentazione linguistica e visuale dei nativi americani: una prospettiva multimodale* (2018) and numerous articles in national and international journals.

Annarita Taronna is Associate Professor of English and Translation at the University of Bari. Her main research areas include gender in/and translation studies, cultural and post-colonial studies, ELF uses in migratory settings, language mediation in intercultural context. On these topics, she has published, among others, the book *Black Englishes. Pratiche linguistiche transfrontaliere Italia-Usa* (2016) and the articles *Writing in the foreign as a self-translation practice in the new aesthetics of migration and cosmopolitanism* (2020); *The Role of Non-professional Translators and Interpreters in Emergency Migratory Settings* (2019); (with Lorena Carbonara) *English as a Lingua Franca in the Context of Migration* (2018).

**Authors' addresses:** [lorena.carbonara@unical.it](mailto:lorena.carbonara@unical.it); [annarita.taronna@uniba.it](mailto:annarita.taronna@uniba.it)

## References

- Baker M. 2006, *Translation and Conflict. A Narrative Account*, Routledge, London/New York.
- Baker M. 2014, *Translation as Re-narration*, in House J. (ed.), *Translation: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. 158-177.
- Bearison D.J., Magzamen S. and Filardo E.K. 1986, *Socio-cognitive conflict and cognitive growth in young children*, in “Merrill-Palmer Quarterly” 32, pp. 51-72.
- Boyd B. 2016, *Nabokov as translator: Passion and precision*. <http://www.revistas.usp.br/rus/article/download/88678/91555> (20.03.2016).
- Byram M. 1997, *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon.
- Byram M. 2009, *Intercultural competence in foreign languages. The intercultural speaker and the pedagogy of foreign language education*, in Deardorff D. (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, SAGE, California, pp. 321-332.
- Byram M. and Guilherme M. 2000, *Human rights, cultures and language teaching*, in Osler A. (ed.), *Citizenship and democracy in schools: Diversity, identity, equality*, Trentham Books, Stoke-on-Trent, pp. 63-78.
- Byrd Clark J. and Dervin F. 2014, *Introduction*, in Byrd Clark J. and Dervin F. (eds.), *Reflexivity and Multimodality in Language Education: Rethinking Multilingualism and Interculturality in Accelerating, Complex and Transnational Spaces*, Routledge, London, pp. 1-62.
- Canagarajah S. 2013, *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*, Routledge, London/New York.
- Canagarajah S. and Matsumoto Y. 2016, *Negotiating voice in translingual literacies: from literacy regimes to contact zones*, in “Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development” 38 [5], pp. 390-406.
- Carbonara L. and Taronna A. 2017, *ELF as a self-translation practice: Towards a pedagogy of contact in the Italian as a Foreign Language (IFL) classroom*, in “Cultus” 10, pp. 67-91.
- Carbonara L. and Taronna A. 2018, *English as a Lingua Franca in the Context of Migration: An Italian Perspective*, in “Pogranicze. Polish Borderlands Studies” 6 [4], pp. 263-276.
- Carbonara L. and Taronna A. 2019, *English as a Lingua Franca in the Italian as a Foreign Language Class: Issues of Self-Narration and Reflexivity*, in Coppola M.M., Di Blasio F. and Francesconi S. (eds.), *Contact Zones: Cultural, Linguistic and Literary Connections in English*, Labirinti edizioni, Trento, pp. 253-288.
- Clandinin J. 2013, *Engaging in Narrative Inquiry*, Routledge, London/New York.
- Cobb P. 1995, *Mathematical learning and small-group interaction: Four case studies*, in Cobb P. and Bauersfeld H. (eds.), *The emergence of mathematical meaning: Interaction in classroom cultures*, Erlbaum, Hillsdale NJ, pp. 25-129.
- Cook V. 2001, *Using the first language in the classroom*, in “The Canadian Modern Language Review” 57 [3], pp. 402-423.
- Copland F. and Creese A. 2015, *Linguistic Ethnography: Collecting, Analysing and Presenting Data*, SAGE, London.
- Council of Europe 2008, *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue “Living together as equals in dignity”*. [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/Source/Pub\\_White\\_Paper/White%20Paper\\_final\\_revised\\_EN.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/Source/Pub_White_Paper/White%20Paper_final_revised_EN.pdf) (01.04.2020).

- Derrida J. 2000, *Hostipitality*, in “Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities” 5 [3], pp. 3-18.
- Doise W. and Mugny G. 1984, *The social development of the intellect*, Pergamon Press, New York.
- Duranti A. (ed.) 2004, *Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Edstrom A. 2006, *L1 use in the L2 classroom: One teacher’s self-evaluation*, in “The Canadian Modern Language Review” 63 [2], pp. 275-292.
- Evseeva K. and Kozlova Y. 2016, *Modality in English and Russian languages and methods of its transmission in bilingual translation*, in “International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies”, July issue, pp. 552-559.
- Grutman R. and Van Bolderen T. 2014, *Self-Translation*, in Bermann S. and Porter C. (eds.), *A Companion to Translation Studies*, Wiley-Blackwell, West Sussex, pp. 323-332.
- Hokenson J.W. 2007, *The Bilingual Text. History and Theory of Literary Self-Translation*, St. Jerome Publishing, Manchester, NY.
- Houghton S. 2009, *Intercultural mediation in the mono-lingual, mono-cultural foreign language classroom: A case study in Japan*, in “Cultus 2: Training and Competence”, pp. 117-132.
- Houghton S.A. 2012, *Intercultural dialogue in practice: Managing value judgment in foreign language education*, Multilingual Matters, Bristol.
- Hymes D. 1996, *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality*, Taylor & Francis, London.
- Landy R.S. 1982, *Handbook of Educational Drama and Theater*, Greenwood Press, London.
- Oprescu M. and Lungoci C. 2017, *Guidelines for Citizenship Education in School Intercultural Dialogue, Children’s Identity and Citizenship in Europe CiCe Jean Monnet Network*. <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-Content/31d1d2a2-f62f-43f4-b758-0622462e4261/GUIDELINES%20FOR%20SCHOOLS%20Intercultural%20Dialogue.pdf> (01.04.2020).
- Perret-Clermont A.N. 1980, *Social interaction and cognitive development in children*, Academic Press, New York.
- Pratt M.L. 1987, *Linguistic Utopias*, in Fabb N., Aldridge D., Durant A. and McCabe C. (eds.), *The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments between Language and Literature*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, pp. 48-66.
- Rampton B., Maybin J. and Roberts C. 2014, *Methodological foundation in linguistic ethnography*, in “Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies” 102.
- Safonova V. 2014, *Communicative Education in the Context of the Dialogue of Cultures and Civilisations*, in “Social and Behavioral Sciences” 154, pp. 57-63.
- Taronna A. 2015, *La mediazione linguistica come pratica di negoziazione, resistenza, attivismo e ospitalità sulle sponde del Mediterraneo*, in “Lingue e Linguaggi” 11, pp. 159-175.
- Taronna A. 2019, *The Role of Non-professional Translators and Interpreters in Emergency Migratory Settings: A Southern Translocal Perspective*, in “I-Land Journal” 2, pp. 117-131.
- Tikon B. 2006, *Improvisation of materials and teaching aids in Physical education at the primary schools*, paper presented at training workshop for Physical Education supervisors of LGUBEA, Game Teachers and Physical Education Teachers, pp. 14-19 August 2006.
- Zaccaria P. 2017, *La lingua che ospita. Poetiche, politiche, traduzioni*, Rome: Meltemi.