Tools for advanced literacy
Functional approaches to reading, writing and storytelling

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To paper C.: two scenes from *La seconda volta* (1996) [The second time];
To paper F. to I.: *WordProf* and *English WordProf*;
To paper I.: a demo version of the text corpus, with guidelines.
Preface: an overview of this dissertation

The background assumptions of this thesis can be summarized in few basic tenets:

- art, and possibly communication at large, can be regarded in functional terms as a tool to gain leverage over aspects of personal and social life (Raskin, 1982), and a functional approach can be seen as the unifying rationale for a set of concepts – for example Bakhtin's *dialogical principle* – which permit us to consider cultural artefacts as 'solutions', as problem-solving actions devised to satisfy a need;
- stories and storytelling play a momentous role in our understanding of the world;
- moving from the role of the reader to that of the writer is a powerful strategy for understanding and mastering communication;
- technology influences the way we think (Ong, 1982) and the way we understand communication (or possibly fail to understand it); an awareness of the role of tools and technology is crucial for promoting educational change.

These principles are widely accepted within the humanities, at least in theory, but I argue that they are seldom taken together to their full potential for fostering advanced literacy – that is adult literacy, extended to different codes and to a wide range of skills, from being able to question the reliability of a source to solving word choice problems with the aid of an electronic text corpus.

Within the current debate as to the nature and identity of humanistic studies, it is of course an open question as to whether and how far 'literacy' should be a central concern for university departments. Some support to this view comes, for example, from Helge Jordheim (2001), who suggests "learning how to read" as the ultimate sense of practising the humanities. While agreeing with the idea of looking for an ultimate sense for the area of study we have chosen as a profession, I suggest that "learning how to read and write" – with an active and process-aware approach – would make an even better mission statement.

The collection of papers that constitute this dissertation originates in a long-term ongoing project on what is important to learn and teach in the humanities. My models for how to tackle such a broad issue are books like Richard Raskin's *The Functional Analysis of Art* (1982) or Jordheim's *Lesningens videnskab. Utkast til en ny filologi* [*The science of reading. An outline for a new philology*], that is works which highlight what their authors consider as the most productive approaches in their discipline and that suggest a new unifying paradigm.

The scope of this dissertation is, however, more narrow and focused on how the teaching of language and literature can be oriented towards fostering literacy at the ‘advanced’ level that ought to be promoted at secondary school and in the first one or two years at university, the educational settings of which I have experience.

Since 1984 I have been engaged in research, teaching and development of learning material for some subsets of the topic 'reading and writing': reading comprehension in a second language (Caviglia and Mandara, 1990 – developed 1985-88), introduction to syntax (Caviglia and Sarti, 1989; Caviglia, 1992), writing in one’s first language, or *L1* (Caviglia & Ferraris, 1988 and 1991; Ferraris, Caviglia & degli’Innocenti, 1993; papers G. and H. in this dissertation), writing in a second language, or *L2* (Caviglia, Earp & Ferraris, 1996; Caviglia, 2000b; papers H. and I.) and then understanding of communication and culture, that is, 'reading' in a broader sense (papers A. to E., plus Caviglia, 2000a, 2001a and 2001b).
One common denominator for the texts selected for this dissertation is that they all build on the awareness that the written word (or the broadcast word and image) are forms of communication mediated by technology, that technology plays an important role in determining the ways we organize our world (Ong, 1982 and Paper A.:2-5) and, finally, that literacy can be seen productively in terms of appropriating – learning – a set of conceptual and technical tools that are of enormous relevance for active citizenship in our culture (s. § 1 of the Introduction).

Of course, there are more or less adequate ways of using a tool, and the model of learning incorporated into educational practices may have a powerful influence on the outcome of the learning process. Most of the papers included in this dissertation provide a detailed account of the envisaged learning environment, and § 2 of the Introduction summarizes the general educational guidelines that I am adapting to the humanities in accordance with a model suggested by Carl Bereiter (2002a): they are based on an idea of understanding as a process composed of individual learning – that is appropriation of tools – and of the development of shared understanding, or knowledge building, through practices of progressive problem solving, after the model of research and development units in organizations devoted to the production of knowledge and design. Both learning and knowledge building have to be situated: there are in fact no general skills for learning and problem solving, but only ‘know how’ anchored to social-cultural practices and conceptual domains. In this perspective educational policies ought to focus on broad ranging skills and relevant domains, two requirements that curricula in language and culture are in an excellent position to meet.

‘Advanced literacy’ is also the educational goal that I am proposing. Throughout this dissertation, I consider literacy as ‘basic’, when reading and writing are means for reproducing and transmitting existing knowledge, according to a static model of knowledge as a list of items transferred from one container to another (e.g. books, heads, computer programs). As ‘advanced literacy’ I refer instead to reading and writing as means for developing and manipulating new knowledge, for solving problems, for influencing others, for questioning sources, according to an idea of knowledge as process and as dialogic relationship. ‘Advanced literacy’ requires understanding both of the mechanics of communication and of the cultural setting in which the communication occurs. Although the main focus of the dissertation is on conceptual tools for understanding communication, it will emerge from the examples that a ‘situated’ (as opposed to ‘general’) knowledge of the world is equally required, and that ‘advanced literacy’ should include this awareness.

While proposing ‘advanced literacy’ as goal in the study of language and literature I am also suggesting – and this is the more general goal of this dissertation – that the educational dimension (in Danish, formidlingsdimensionen) can help to catalyse a dialogue between the world of teaching and some progressive research programs in the Arts; this dialogue is necessary for strengthening the profile of the single disciplines in the debate internal to the faculties and to reinforce the social relevance of the Arts.

I wish then to underline that this dissertation does not propose a fully-fledged curriculum, although it is my ambition that the conceptual tools and practices that I propose be considered by policy-makers.

*This dissertation is made of a lengthy Introduction followed by a series of papers organized in two sections: the first one, made of the more recent papers (marked A. to E.), focuses on conceptual tools for understanding communication and deals mainly with questions arising primarily from reading; the second section (papers F. to I.) is concerned instead with the teaching of writing with support from computer-based tools.

Critical literacy – the ability to question sources, also a key element of ‘advanced literacy’ – is a good workbench for seeing in action some conceptual tools developed by scholars in
language, literature and education. Papers A., B. and (in part) C. in this dissertation address questions such as ‘Is it possible to learn how to detect lies?’ (paper A.) or ‘How can we tell that a text expresses a self-righteous or a dialogical attitude?’ (paper B. and C.). As discussed in Paper A. (pp. 30-32), there is no reason to believe that criticality may be learnt independently from a specific context and content. However, reading critically does require a keen understanding of communication and can therefore benefit from some advances in the understanding of culture, language and narrative whose impact is – in my view – not yet fully appreciated in educational practice. § 3 of the Introduction outlines the findings from these papers and especially the common functional trait (Raskin, 1982) that I recognize as the common denominator of the conceptual tools I have borrowed from different traditions, with special focus on Bakhtin’s dialogical principle. Moreover, I suggest that the functional approach provides a neat platform for incorporating some recent developments in cognitive and behavioural sciences that are considered by some scholars as relevant both to our understanding of human beings and to the self-understanding of our discipline.

Storytelling is also a powerful tool for patterning values and expectations: in Paper D., I try to make sense of a striking similarity between the narrative structure of a fictional story and an historical event; in Paper E., quotes from other works in film – and their misunderstanding by a major critic – are analysed in their function of steering the viewer’s expectations and of establishing at the same time his or her complicity with the director in making meaning.

The second section of papers – F. to I. – collects work carried out, mainly with others, over the last fourteen years on writing in L1 and L2; while the papers focus mainly on computer-based tools to support writing – an educational word processor in Papers F. to H. and text corpora in Paper I.– the corresponding section in the Introduction, § 4, outlines the more general issue of why writing is still perceived by many students as a problem and what it may take for writing to become more widely perceived as a resource. In particular, I suggest more coordination between L1 and L2 education as a direction for promoting a better awareness of language and of learning strategies.

Finally, the last section of the Introduction (§ 5) outlines some open questions and directions for future work.

Acknowledgements

I could not have asked for a better supervisor than Richard Raskin. In addition to a solid theoretical basis to build on, I was able to benefit from his invaluable help and guidance as I struggled to design this dissertation. The Danish word vejleder, ‘the one who shows the way’, captures well the role of the supervisor, but the German Doktorvater may be even more appropriate to describe Richard’s care and support. And Marilyn Raskin has complemented her husband’s work with equal commitment by revising the language of the Introduction until it eventually said what I meant.

Most of this dissertation was written while I was working as a foreign lecturer for Italian at the Institute for Romance Studies*, Aarhus University, where I received invaluable support on many fronts.

Svend Bach, Leonardo Cecchini and Olivia Schmitt Jensen – the ‘historical group’ at Italian – offered the best possible welcome to Denmark, entrusted me right from the beginning with challenging courses and the freedom to experiment, and remained a constant source of intellectual and human support for the last five years. It was a real pleasure working with

* Now Institute for Classical and Romance Studies.
them and later with Alexandra Kratschmer, Elisabetta Leunbach, Ib Larsen, Jakob Stagsted Larsen, Lina Melgaard Jensen and Mette Wigh Jensen, the ‘modern group’.

As cooperation in both teaching and research extended to the different languages and specialisations present at the Institute – a development which its director Henning Nølke has put much effort into fostering – I had the privilege of meeting Hanne Leth Andersen, who involved me in her courses and seminars (a daring move, at a time when my Danish was quite problematic), pronounced a decisive ‘go ahead’ when presented with the earliest draft of this work and continued to provide thoughtful comments on the manuscript until the very end.

I have had the good fortune to exchange ideas and enjoy the Danish hygge [no translation available] with other outstanding people at the Romansk Institute (grouped according to their sub-departments): Claudio Bogantes, Cecilia Martins, Stig Ramlov Frandsen, Ole Wehner Rasmussen, Ivan Almeida, Cristina Parodi and the formidable secretarial team composed of Tina Fogtmann, Birgit Larsen, Meretha Neubert, Pia Hjortlund and Annemette Haubro.

Before coming to Denmark, my research activity was carried out in Genova, Italy, at the Istituto per le Tecnologie Didattiche (ITD) [Institute for Educational Technology] of the National Research Council, and many ideas and activities described in this dissertation are rooted in those years. Even more, the very idea that learning and teaching could be an object of research came upon me in 1986 through a conversation with Maria Ferraris, who took the time to explain to a then unknown student why the personal computer might become a picklock for opening up the Italian school system to some overdue change in teaching methods. On these premises I worked with and learned from Maria Ferraris for the following 12 years. In the process I had the opportunity of sharing ideas especially with a few people who became lasting friends: Giovanna Caviglione, Jeff Earp (who deserves a special thanks for revising the language, and often the contents, of many papers in this dissertation), Stefania Manca, Giorgio Olimpo (director of the ITD), Donatella Persico, Luigi Sarti, Elena Sassi (from Naples University) and Mauro Tavella. I could feel their support despite the geographical distance.

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During my career as a student, and then as teacher, I had the sheer luck of meeting some outstanding teachers, which I wish to thank here.

Ugo Vagali was my teacher for five years in elementary school, four hours a day, six days a week: he was and still is highly respected and beloved not only by a bookworm like me, but also by his more streetwise pupils, who are often the best judges. A completely different and equally effective teacher was the late Mrs. Ermini, who was able to keep a bunch of pre-pubertal boys mesmerized with her words and never in two years had to raise her voice. I understood later from Luigi Garbato, in the last years of the secondary school, how much work it takes to be a good teacher. Finally, at university, Umberto Albini taught me how a teacher also should trust his students to proceed on their own.

When I became a teacher myself, (slightly) older colleagues Giacomo Piccardo, Camillo Gibelli and Sandro Rivella helped me survive the first school years thanks to their advice and inspiration.

The years spent at the Liceo Scientifico-Tecnologico “Primo Levi” of Borgo Fornari (Genova) gave the opportunity to share ideas with very dear colleagues, of whom I wish to mention at least Silvana Balbi, Laura Cignoli, Nunzio Cotena, Emanuele Falcone, Sandra Garaventa, Chiara Giordano, Giovanni Repetto, Luigi Sasso and the late Marco Marrano.

In Denmark, Bernard Hagen, Jan Hupfeldt, Brita Schulz and the Danish Association of Italian Teachers, Italiensklererforeningen, have been my contact with Danish secondary school and a key to understanding why both students and teachers seem so satisfied.
Both in Italy and in Denmark, students exposed to my teaching showed outstanding patience and endurance and offered plenty of constructive criticism. I am deeply grateful to all of them.

My wife Patrizia Barbieri had to live through the making of this dissertation and all the frustrations involved. I cannot promise that I will not write again, but I wish at least to thank her for taking care of a lot of nasty business and for requiring me instead to take part in the best part of family life.

Finally, I’d like to thank my parents Fulvio and Ia Caviglia, my aunt Adriana Caviglia and my sister Fulvia: their love, support, and understanding have been without bound.

This dissertation is dedicated to my father: his keen interest in the humanities, his healthy scepticism about turning them into a profession, and then the unconditioned support he gave me after my decision to study at the faculty of Arts, all of this posed a challenge to which this dissertation is an attempt at an answer.
An outline of the Introduction

1. Advanced literacy as a goal of study in the arts, and as the topic of this dissertation
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   1.2 What kind of literacy do we need today? For which media?
   1.3 Advanced literacy
   1.4 Advanced literacy as a goal of teaching in the humanities

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   2.2 Bereiter’s criticism of some current practices in education
   2.3 Bereiter’s proposal (a): focusing on understanding and expertise
   2.4 Bereiter’s proposal (b): Adopting Popper’s 3-worlds model of knowledge
   2.5 Bereiter’s proposal (c): Distinguishing ‘learning’ and ‘knowledge building’
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   3.1 Raskin’s functional approach to art
   3.2 Categories as ‘structures of expectations’
   3.3 Functions of communication: from instruction to dialogue
   3.4 Storytelling in the light of the cognitive sciences
   3.5 Two risks of functional approaches
   3.6 A concluding remark on the functional approach for understanding communication and culture

4. Reconsidering writing and teaching to write
   4.1 Traditional practice in teaching to write, an alternative model and a possibility for change
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   4.3 From L1 to L2 writing: for a coordinated L1/L2 curriculum in language awareness

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1. Advanced literacy as a goal of study in the arts, and as the topic of this dissertation

Writing has enhanced beyond the spoken word the range of tools human beings socialized in our culture have at their disposal for sharing their feelings and knowledge. Scientific reasoning, but also psychological introspection are two areas in which the written word has made possible a quantum leap forward (Ong, 1982; Gumbrecht, 1985).

Although it is so widely diffuse in our culture as to have become second nature for many, literacy is not acquired naturally as in the case of the mother tongue, but requires learning of conceptual and technical tools (a system of signs and devices for producing and transmitting them) as well as social institutions that make it possible and meaningful to share written artefacts within a given population.

Recent international surveys of literacy (OECD, 2000 and 2001) show that a significant portion of the population in most developed countries is below the level of proficiency considered adequate for active citizenship in the ‘knowledge age’ (2002). This does not mean that people have become worse readers: on the contrary, most countries show evidence that the opposite is the case but, as discussed below in this § 1, the level of proficiency required is becoming higher.

The idea that communication is an important tool of power is not new: appropriating communication – directly or through the support of a class of specialists (e.g. monks in the Middle Ages) – has been standard policy for ruling classes. The relatively new development, brought about by democratisation within nation states, is that education – at least in Western Europe – now requires ‘critical’ citizens. At the same time, wider availability of the technical tools for communication makes it possible to become producers (and not just consumers!) of cultural artefacts to an extent that was unthinkable until two decades ago.

Much of the work currently being done in the humanities, both in schools and university departments, goes precisely in the direction of promoting literacy as the mastery of technological and conceptual tools necessary for understanding communication mediated by the printed word – which is traditionally hegemonic in Western educational systems – or, increasingly, by other media. This dissertation is a contribution to this large collective effort.

In the rest of this section I will attempt to highlight the connection between literacy, technology and social institutions, to define the ‘advanced literacy’ I am advocating and finally to outline the ambitions and limits of my contribution within the current debate on the identity of the humanities.

1.1 Literacy, consciousness, social institutions and technology

Walter Ong (1982) bases his thesis that “writing restructures consciousness” on several sources, including A. R. Luria’s investigations into the onset of literacy in remote areas of the former Soviet Union in the ´30s (Luria, 1976). One experiment conducted by Luria was to

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1 In Liv Ullmann’s *Trolösa* [unfaithful] (2000), based on a script by Ingmar Bergman, the main character, Marianne, falls in love with a friend and is in doubt whether she should start an affair with him or not. The two possibilities she considers are either to take the consequences of living her love in the real world and betraying her husband, or to entrust her love to her diary and live it again and again through its pages. Marianne opts for the real world, but the viewer is given plenty of reasons to consider the advantages of the other option.

2 ‘Knowledge Age’ is the expression used by Bereiter (2002) to highlight ‘knowledge’ as the currently most valuable resource for the development of a society.
show to his illiterate or incipiently literate subjects drawings of four objects, a hammer, a saw, a log and a hatchet, and to ask them to “to group together those that were similar or could be placed in one group or designated by one word” (in Ong, 1982:51-52; Luria, 1976:56). Illiterates consistently grouped the objects according to a ‘situational’ logic – how they would fit together in practice – and it did not occur to them to group the three ‘tools’ together. Being told that the hammer, the hatchet and the saw were all tools, a 25-year-old illiterate peasant persisted in his view: “Yes, but even if you have tools, we still need wood – otherwise we can’t build anything” (ibid.). Incipiently literate subjects could more readily accept the category ‘tools’, but could not find it relevant and quickly resorted to situational logic (Luria, 1976:75). Instead, subjects who had had a more consistent contact with literacy (e.g. by one or two years of study in a village school), not only classified objects according to some abstract attribute (e.g. as tools or as being made of the same material), but insisted that his method was the correct one (Luria, 1976: 74 and 76).

Danish university students asked the same question opted by a great majority – about 10:1 in four different groups of 60 people in all – for grouping the three tools together, but also recognized promptly that the 'situational' categorization was a legitimate alternative.

Both the examples from pre-war Soviet Union and from contemporary Denmark illustrate well Vygotsky’s idea of tools – conceptual or technical (or ‘mental’ vs. ‘manual’) – as devices for mediating between the subject and the world (Vygotsky, 1997: 85-89), as well as the central tenet of researchers who, after Vygotsky, consider cognition as embedded in cultural, historical and social processes (e. g. Wertsch, 1991; see Hedegaard, 1999, for a comparison of different approaches in the Vygotzkian tradition). In particular, it is possible to observe that

- literates can master the ‘mediational tool’ of categorization;
- Luria’s barely literate peasants who failed to see a rationale for categories were right, in a way, as long as categories were not embedded in social practice;
- it is difficult to say how much practical sense the collective name of ‘tools’ made to the young literate, but there is a possibility that literacy’s authority and superiority over orality was a good enough reason to justify his defence of abstract categories against the situational logic;
- as for the Danish students, abstract categories for tools do make sense in a society where a person has to look up ‘tools’ or ‘hardware’ in the Danish equivalent of the Yellow Pages in order to buy a hatchet, a saw or a hammer; besides, the open attitude of the Danish students who considered a different point of view as ‘acceptable’ fits well with a tradition of pluralism implemented in many institutions of society.

Ong highlighted several parameters, a selection of which is presented in Table 1, to differentiate orality and literacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Orality</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>rhetorical style</td>
<td>additive, aggregative</td>
<td>subordinative, analytical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cognitive style</td>
<td>situational, analogical</td>
<td>abstract - deductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verbomotor lifestyle</td>
<td>externalized</td>
<td>introspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>source of authority</td>
<td>sounded word as power and action (f. ex. prayers, spells)</td>
<td>written word as legal authority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Some of the differences between orality and literacy proposed by Ong (1982: 31-69).

It is worth noting that literacy is more modern historically, but not necessary superior in all respects. Being socialised into the analytical rhetorical style of literacy can cause a bizarre blindness toward analogical reasoning, as suggested by a web page I once encountered, where a computer programmer with Afghan roots had included some proverbs from his land of ori-
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gin translated into English. Now, proverbs are a time-honoured genre that compresses in a nutshell some piece of common-sense knowledge, usually with the help of prosodic elements that facilitate memory. Understanding them may not always be straightforward, but one would not expect literate people to require extra help. The nostalgic computer programmer – who lives in a culture with instructions for use printed on almost everything, instead, felt it necessary to explain that “no one says his own buttermilk is sour” means “no one advertises his own faults” or, more paradoxically, that the Afghan proverb “a real friend is one who takes the hand of his friend in times of distress and helplessness” means “a friend in need is a friend indeed”. An illiterate peasant was asked the following question: “In the Far North, where there is snow, all bears are white. Novaya Zembla is in the Far North and there is always snow there. What colour are the bears?” The peasant, who answered “I don’t know, I’ve just seen a black bear” (Ong, 1982: 53; Luria, 1976: 108-9) may consider himself vindicated by the web site.

There is at least one specific feature of the written word that makes it less natural to acquire than the spoken one: that it can live detached from the living body (Ong, 1982:82; see also Zumthor, 1994, Gumbrecht, 1985 and Paper A.:2-3).

Today, a great deal of communication in our society, especially at work, takes the form of words printed on paper or on computer screens. And another important part of communication – that based on the reproduction of voices, sounds and images – is usually asynchronous and always at a distance, is also detached from the body-in-presence. Besides, the pervasiveness of computer and interactive programs in our society may add yet another dimension – non-human but man-made interactive agents – to the complexity of communication that a person in the knowledge age needs to deal with.

Within the limits and scope of this dissertation, I believe it important to raise the question of how far developments in society and technology influence our view of what it takes today to be a literate person.

1.2 What kind of literacy do we need today? For which media?

Does a person need more knowledge today in the Western world or in a group of Neolithic hunter-gatherers? Raffaele Simone maintains that we do need more information (Simone, 2000:53); studies of technologic development taking into account recent observation of hunter-gatherers (e.g. Diamond, 1997) suggest that these communities too had need of extensive knowledge of their environment, and relied on experts who had a higher degree of understanding than the others.

The difference between us and Neolithic societies lies then in the ‘mediational tools’ at our disposal: a body of cultural artefacts accessible via communication tools and social practices that simultaneously mirror and shape time the network of interdependencies on which our social organization is based.

But what kind of literacy is necessary to deal with these tools and practices? Are there now requirements that were less evident, say, 30 years ago?

I do not believe, for example, that developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) require of us a different literacy than that already part of the more open traditions within the humanities, with roots in the written word but a keen eye on a variety of genres and media. However, I believe that the standards of literacy once belonging to an elite

4 For example, in Italian secondary schools, the anthology Il materiale e l’immaginario [The material and the fictional] (Ceserani & De Federicis, [1979-] 1985-89) has become an authoritative model for a generation of students and teachers of first language and history.
have become a standard requirement for participation in the adult life of our culture, for at least two reasons. For the first, a high level of literacy is a prerequisite for many attractive jobs, since “virtually every high-tech tool reduces the range of skills needed to accomplish tasks and puts more power into the hands of those with [...] general intellectual abilities” (Bereiter, 2002a:246). But even if intellectual unemployment becomes in the future an even worse problem than it already is (Rifkin, 1995), the access to a rich intellectual life is a goal in itself, given the correlation between education and ‘social capital’ (Putnam, 1996), that is the disposition to trust and civic engagement that is largely responsible for the well-being of a community. Some examples of once elitist and now increasingly standard educational requirements in European countries are that:

- mastery of one or more foreign languages – and understanding of the associated cultures – is a prerequisite for a range of work activities and for social life at large;
- many objects and practices of our everyday life keep changing: *lifelong learning*, already in the unpretentious form of being able to read instructions, is a common necessity;
- writing has become almost as important as reading, since many workplaces and also leisure activities require writing skills (with optional multimedia extensions), in part as a consequence of the growing pervasiveness of technology-mediated communication;
- being able to evaluate the trustworthiness and the non-explicit agenda of a source is vital in a society with a multiplicity of voices and little dialogue, with large concentrations of power in the media and – at the same time – the possibility for many to publish or broadcast (almost) anything.

I would also tentatively suggest defining ‘literacy’ as mastery of communication tools that permit us to orient ourselves and others in a complex world. It is an open question as to how inclusive the definition of ‘literacy’ should be, with respect to the different media that may shape our perception and representation of the world.

Linguist Raffaele Simone – in a book whose subtitle is *Forme di sapere che stiamo perdendo* [Forms of knowledge we are losing] (Simone, 2000) – laments that the overwhelming presence of visual stimuli from TV and videogames, together with the ‘hypertextual’ reading practices promoted by computers, are jeopardizing – in favour of easier and shallower associative processes – the role of *sequential* and *reflecting* reading and writing, which has established itself as the hegemonic key to knowledge in our culture over the last five centuries.

Psychologist Domenico Parisi – who shares with Simone the same concern for education – laments instead the overrepresentation of language as a somehow sterile learning tool and suggests focusing on alternatives, like computer simulations, which permit the creation of models of reality and foster an inclination to *act* rather then to *describe* (Parisi, 2000).

In yet another perspective, *popular culture*, “one picture is worth 1000 words” – a slogan born in the world of advertising – is now an established proverb.

Although this dissertation is mainly centred on the written word, my long-term project about ‘advanced literacy’ suggests an inclusive form of literacy that points towards the need for cooperation and even competition among the different media, and awareness of their possibilities and limitations. What I am trying to promote in some of the papers in this collection is ‘technological awareness’ as a necessary dimension of literacy, in a perspective of ‘moderate Whorfianism’, that is considering “the potential for thinking to be ‘influenced’ rather than unavoidably ‘determined’” by language and media (Chandler, 1995:18).

But is there really a need to advocate ‘advanced literacy’ as an educational goal? Is it not almost a commonplace that reading and writing have to be critical and open to a plurality of genres and media?

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5 At least, according to a well documented website on proverbs:
1.3 Advanced literacy

The standards for being considered a member of the literate community have changed over time, and two recent surveys on literacy – the IALS survey on adult literacy (OECD, 2000) and PISA 2000 on literacy at the age of 15 (OECD, 2000b and 2001) – reflect the change quite well. The traditional approach – still represented in the IALS survey – measures literacy by assuming that the would-be literate person is at the receiving end of communication and verifying primarily his or her ability to extract information from a text and to deliver it back in written form. The difficulty of the reading tasks was evaluated according to parameters like the presence of distracting information, or the number of inferences necessary to answer a question, that is according to the ‘computational’ effort required for processing the sentences (OECD, 2000:93-97). The underlying view of the reading and writing process is also that of receiving and transmitting information as an object that migrates from one container to the other, from the page to the head or the other way round: the student has understood a text if the ‘content’ he puts in his head corresponds – as far as it is possible to test – to the contents of the text.

This view of reading and writing is relatively easy to evaluate and makes sense as long as language and text are considered means for representing reality, and learning – for which reading is a kind of prerequisite-skill – is understood (maybe implicitly) as storing facts and rules in one’s head. But a literacy for the so-called knowledge age requires a more dynamic model of reading, writing and learning, one that takes as its overarching goal the ability to develop new knowledge rather than reproducing existing knowledge (Bereiter, 2002a and 2002b). According to this model, which will be discussed in greater length in the next section (§ 2) in this Introduction, the key is transformation and building of knowledge, rather than transmission: in the case of writing, for example, knowledge telling – that is writing according to the ‘transmission’ model – is the strategy of the beginner writer, while the expert writer is he or she who uses writing as a resource to transform and refine her or his understanding of a topic (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986).

By contrast with the IALS survey, the more recent PISA 2000 survey entailed a much more active role on the part of the reader, who was required to recognize genre, function and point of view in a text and to cooperate in making meaning by drawing inferences from her or his knowledge of the world. In other words, a certain degree of ‘criticality’ has been recognized as an explicit requirement; this is in accordance with the spread of a view of communication whose function is not only to ‘transmit’ contents, but also to construct relationships and identities (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) or, in another formulation that I will follow more often in this dissertation, ‘patterning expectations and values’ (Raskin, 1982:16; Raskin was actually referring to functions of art).

My suggestion for distinguishing ‘advanced’ literacy is then to consider ‘basic literacy’ as being focused on the ‘representational’, face-value layer of language, and founded on a view of communication as simple transmission of contents or as self-expression; ‘advanced literacy’ implies instead a view of reading and writing as a means for creating and transforming knowledge, for understanding and influencing others, for constructing identities and relationships.

Which conceptual tools are a requisite for ‘advanced literacy’? I propose in the following – together with short references to the theoreticians I am building on – a few streamlined propositions which relate advanced literacy to an understanding of cognition, communication and learning beyond the implicit assumptions of folk theory:

• advanced literacy entails an attitude to reading and writing with the purpose of furthering knowledge; ‘knowledge’, however, should not be imagined as a list of items in a container, but rather in dynamic terms, as a relationship whose outcome is ‘understanding’, which manifests itself through intelligent action; besides, an idea of knowledge (or under-
standing) as an exclusively individual dimension is reductive, since knowledge is especially valuable when it is manipulated and shared, and action is inherently embedded in social practices;\(^6\)

- advanced readers and writers are aware of the role of the subject’s expectations in steering the process of understanding (of a situation as well as of a text; see Tannen, 1979, in a synthesis paper); this entails in turn that understanding the context of communication is crucial, and that an advanced reader is conscious of his or her own expectations and of the limits of her or his background knowledge;

- communication is a purposive act which can be analysed from the point of view of its function; Raskin (1982) has provided a general framework for a functional approach (to art, in Raskin’s formulation, with focus on its role as means “to gain leverage over aspects of personal and social life”), while other theoreticians have highlighted more specific facets and roles of communication, which still can be consider in functional terms:
  - to enter a dialogue, with the goal of understanding the Other (Bakhtin, 1974 1986; Todorov, 1981 1984), or to establish and fine-tune a relationship (Tannen, 1989, 1992 and 1997);
  - to reflect and construct world views (“patterning values”, in Raskin, 1982; connecting language and ideology, in Fairclough & Wodak’s *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 1997; reflecting value systems through largely unconscious metaphors, in Lakoff & Johnson, 1980 and 1999 and Lakoff, 1996);
  - to give a narrative account of how the word works (Bruner, 1996; Turner, 1996, Ugazio, 1998), and to simulate experience (Oatley, 1999);

- advanced readers and writers have ‘language awareness’ (White, 2000) that is explicit knowledge about communication and language down to the level of words and sentences, which they can discuss and manipulate (although there is some disagreement on which approaches and meta-language are more appropriate to achieve this goal);

- advanced literacy is a requisite of learners with a goal of ‘intentional learning’ (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1989) and a ‘strategic competence’ (Oostdam & Rijlaardsam, 1995) about communication and learning; ‘advanced’ writers, for example, make use of the writing process for restructuring their thoughts, while novices simply translate their thoughts into written code (this distinction between ‘knowledge telling’ vs. ‘knowledge transforming’ has been proposed by Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987).

Furthermore, ‘advanced’ is not so much a matter of age or school year, although the overall complexity of reading and writing tasks does reach an adult-like complexity around the final years of secondary school; ‘advanced’ refers specifically to the idea of working – both students and teachers – on the edge of one’s understanding in a process of *progressive problem solving* (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993: 81-83; 96-98 and below, § 2; the idea of ‘progressive’ has strong assonance with Vygotsky’s *zone of proximal development*, although Bereiter and Scardamalia have developed their concepts independently).\(^7\)

As to my contribution, I wish to underline that a significant part of this project is synthesis work. However, the attempt to integrate findings from several research fields into one theoretical framework as a basis for educational practice is to large extent original. Moreover, most of the practical instructional proposals are original results of my work as both a teacher and an educational technologist.

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I believe that much teaching carried out in the humanities, especially at levels from secondary school to university, does foster ‘advanced literacy’, and the problems and activities described

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6 Bereiter, 2002a, revisits Popper, 1972, in the light of cognitive psychology; in a different but in my view convergent perspective, see also studies inspired by Vygotzky as Hedegaard, 2001a or – integrating Vygotzky with Bakhtin – Wertsch, 1991.

7 The only reference to Vygotzky (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993: 114) reveals a recent contact with his work.
in Papers A. to F. seek to contribute to this goal, which I consider an important and possibly underestimated reason for studying the humanities.

1.4 Advanced literacy as a goal of teaching in the humanities

“Learning (and teaching) how to read” has recently been proposed by Helge Jordheim (2001) as the ultimate sense and central role for the humanities.

After placing in an historical perspective the current gap and lack of communication between specialists in language and culture, and advocating the need for “strengthening the connection between teaching in language, literature and history” (id.:119), Jordheim devotes large part of his book to explaining the contribution of three leading scholars – Reinhard Koselleck, Michel Foucault and Quentin Skinner – in providing tools for making sense of the relation between text and history: history of concepts, discourse analysis and speech acts theory, which according to Jordheim could become the building blocks of a ‘new philology’.

I mention here Jordheim's proposal – although my work has no direct connection with his – because I see his approach as an example of a daring and constructive answer to the question of the identity of the humanities, for at least three reasons:

1. Jordheim provides a frame for introducing to a larger group of scholars what he considers to be the raison d'être of his field, the tools that helped him make an advance in understanding;
2. his concern “for opening more doors than [he] shut[s]” (Jordheim, 2001:15) reflects an utterly dialogical style of argument and a language designed to let the reader perceive complexity without being overwhelmed;
3. he defines a competence – reading, in this case – as the lowest common denominator of the field.

About twenty years earlier, Richard Raskin also proposed in The Functional Analysis of Art (1982) a broad and even more ambitious platform, he examined the contribution of ‘functional approaches’ in different fields of the human sciences and then proposed examples of his own functional analysis of a variety of important works that were different in genre and media.

In my view, Raskin and Jordheim have in common the broad spectrum and ‘openness’ of their approaches, the urge to share with others what they consider best in their field, an attitude of looking for similarities across differences, the courage of concentrating only on the theoreticians they really build upon and even the idea that “anything worth saying about a work of art can [...] be stated in relatively straightforward terms, intelligible to non-specialists”, stated explicitly by Raskin (1982: 114) and incorporated into the style of writing of both authors. Given these premises, it is interesting to observe that the indexes of names in their books have almost no theoretician in common. I suspect also that a book on the humanities written by a scholar with a background more oriented toward linguistics might suggest yet another different and loosely related reading list.

In the light of all these divergences, is there any use in trying to establish a dialogue between these and other approaches, or should we conclude that it is more honest to admit a de facto incommunicability across traditions – as Hans Hauge (1995:96) suggests apropos current directions in studies of language and literature? The recruitment policy and sometimes the administrative structure of universities often implements a separatist choice, albeit at the price of what I would call – borrowing an expression by Hans Lauge Hansen (2002:73) apropos language studies – a Balkanization of the human sciences.

8 "Á lære â læse", the title of the introductory chapter in Jordheim’s book, means both ‘learning to read’ and ‘teaching to read’.
I believe however that establishing a dialogue across disciplines and traditions in the human sciences is necessary and possible, on the condition that we focus the discussion on common operative goals – educational ones in the first place – and that we try to avoid the risk of making one dimension ancillary to the other. This suggestion has no claim to originality: Hans Lauge Hansen and Hanne Leth Andersen do suggest teaching as a one common ground for cooperation (both in Hansen, 2002), but I wish to reiterate it with special emphasis on the role of the educational dimension in the humanities:

- education is a likely area of employment for many who study in the human sciences; in other words, teaching is in the human sciences not just a step for educating specialists who will be experts in something else, say, eye surgery or copyright legislation; for specialists in the human sciences, teaching may well be the most influential and valuable part of their work, the service they will be paid for;
- if this is true, teaching ought not be considered a by-product, a spin-off of research activity, but rather as a source of questions for research, and a field of cooperation and also competition among the sub-disciplines to answer those questions.

This is not to say that any research ought to be subordinate to teaching, but is rather an attempt to address the problem of the lack of impact of much research in the humanities, a condition polemically lamented for example by Hans Hauge (2001). Hauge sees research in the humanities as too often condemning itself to uselessness as a consequence of betraying its ‘critical’ vocation in exchange for mimicking the form of scientific research in the ‘hard sciences’. Although it may be not too difficult to find examples of pedantry and uselessness in humanistic research – as probably in most other academic areas – my concern is rather the opposite, that there exists a body of research that can make a difference in the understanding of culture and communication of many people, but remains disconnected from teaching practices because of poor mediation between the culture of research and the culture of teaching.9

But what educational goals can be perceived as common and relevant within the different traditions at the faculty of arts?

*Reading – as proposed by Jordheim – is a good candidate as a major goal for the humanities, since it is both relevant and broad, it requires a high degree of proficiency and lends itself to be ameliorated ad infinitum. However, accepting the hegemony of reading seems to me tantamount to renouncing the role of the writer. There is no doubt that most Arts Faculty departments are more oriented to reading rather than writing, but this not the only possibility.

My suggestion is to set instead as a goal an advanced literacy, that is understanding but also production of communication at advanced level, with the focus on different languages and genres.

9 To make a concrete and self-critical example, electronic text corpora are a promising tool for language education; I became conscious of the possibility of the tool in 1997 when an inexpensive corpus of Italian language first became available. I looked then on the Internet to find some literature about the use of text corpora in language education and found indeed a large amount of published material, and even a Conference on Teaching and Language Corpora which has been held every two years since 1994. I found most of the material I read about text corpora as relevant and well-written. There is, however, an unbalance between the many contributions in form of academic publication – inclusive now my own, Paper I. in this dissertation – and the lack of impact that this approach has had, to the best of my knowledge, on classroom practice in Italy and in Denmark. Maybe this is because the tool is not as suitable for the classroom as researchers tend to believe, but the enthusiasm showed by many of the teachers to whom I demonstrated the tool suggests the opposite; moreover, more and more text corpora are now available directly on the net, inclusive an excellent Danish one (Korpus 2000, available at http://korpus.dsl.dk/korpus2000/, seen 1.12.2002). However, to make the tool ready for classroom use there would be need for teaching material developed ad hoc for the target languages; but as long as teaching material has a low academic status and text corpora remain too elitarian for raising the interest of publishers of schoolbooks, not many will feel encouraged to embark in this task.
Communication is not only a working tool, but also a research object, and in my view the best candidate as a common object of study across various sub-disciplines in the humanities. I expect everybody to agree that understanding languages (mediated by different media) and cultures plays an important or even central role in the identity of most departments. But I propose that production of communication be granted a similarly important role; in addition to the growing role that writing has in the workplace, I suggest two other reasons which are internal to the world of education:

- writing, and more generally “bridging the creative and the critical” (Woods, 2001) is a powerful strategy for understanding communication (this point is discussed in a few notes in Papers 1 and 3 and further below, § 3. and § 4.);
- among the reasons for the current political weakness of the humanities is some uncertainty about the area of proficiency corresponding to a degree in the arts. Doctors cure people, political scientists suggest policies, physicists investigate the laws of nature. I would propose that a degree in the humanities should ensure a common base of proficiency in, and deep understanding of, reading and writing, with primary reference to cultural artefacts and genres of our culture and then an area of specialisation corresponding to the more specific topics, media and approaches of the discipline.

I hope to demonstrate throughout this dissertation that focusing on educational issues is not a reductive or ancillary vision of the humanities, but rather a way to appeal to its most progressive function.
2. Knowledge, learning, understanding

After an initial definition, in the previous section, of ‘literacy’ and of the role of technology, it is now time to define some terms connected with learning and teaching.

The fundamental educational assumptions underpinning this dissertation are largely connected with the research into writing, learning and the mediational role of technology and social institutions that has been carried out by Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia over the last 15 years. The WordProf project (Papers G. to I.) found strong inspiration in their effort – supported by tools from experimental psychology and cognitive science – to understand the process of written composition and envisage ways to assist it (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). Their subsequent work has focused on defining ‘expertise’ (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1993) and on how to foster ‘knowledge building’, that is the ability to produce and manipulate new knowledge, which they consider a key ability for education that meets the needs of the knowledge age (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1999 and in press; Bereiter, 2002a; Scardamalia, 2002).

Their work, however, is mainly focused on elementary schools and on natural and social science as subject matters, despite Bereiter’s acknowledgement of the educational potential of the humanities (Bereiter, 2002a: 318-322). An underlying ambition of my work in the last 10 years – most explicitly in Paper A. and Caviglia (2000a) – has been to help bridge this gap.

In this § 2. section of the Introduction I will outline Bereiter and Scardamalia’s vision of knowledge, learning and teaching, integrated with a few observations connecting their views with more specific topics of this dissertation.

2.1 A widespread and misleading metaphor: ‘mind-as-container’

Although almost nobody in the profession of teaching would consciously defend it, the idea that ‘knowledge’ corresponds to a list of items in someone’s head, or in a text, is a persistent one. For example, the already mentioned IALS survey on adult literacy (OECD, 2000) can be seen as implicitly endorsing this view. This folk-psychological theory, which Bereiter considers to be based on a mind-as-container metaphor, is not devoid of sense: “it is important to keep belief, desires and so on connected with the people who hold them” (Bereiter 2002:13).

The metaphor has even been re-instated as theory in cognitive science and artificial intelligence in the ’70s and later, with knowledge represented as a set of facts and rules on which a ‘computational unit’ can operate (for example, Winograd, 1983); and, again, this model makes sense in the implementation of rule-based expert systems able to perform non-trivial tasks, from medical diagnosis to chess playing at Grand Master level.

To this folk-psychological view of knowledge corresponds a folk-epistemology and -pedagogy posing two entities:
- the physical, ‘real’ world; let’s call it, following Popper’s terminology, World 1 (Popper, [1972] 1974:154-158);
- mental content as facts and rules, World 2.

Knowing something also means having in one’s head (World 2) a ‘copy’ of World 1, or better a representation. The more accurate the representation, the better the knowledge. Once again, this view deserves the highest respect: Einstein’s theory of relativity was born out of an epistemological view based on these two worlds.
2.2 Bereiter’s criticism of some current practices in education

Within the *mind-as-container* folk theory, some aspects of cognition are difficult to explain, such as (Bereiter, 2002a: especially 14-21).

- knowledge of which we are not conscious: if we see a cup on the edge of a table, why do we push it to the middle? How can we catch a ball in mid-air? Do we really ‘have’ in our head a system of facts and rules for everything?
- knowledge embedded in tools or in social practices: what does it mean to ‘have’ the knowledge necessary to extract a square root? Or to fly? Or to make a decision when there are different points of view in the group?
- feelings, which are hard to define as facts and rules, but do play a big role in cognition (Oatley, 1992);
- composite abilities such as expertise or ‘sense for something’, where something often refers to things that really matter (e.g. language, interpersonal relations);
- development of new knowledge.

But the container metaphor really does a poor job, according to Bereiter, when it is applied to learning and teaching. Before proceeding, I wish to underline that teaching ought to be regarded as a craft more than a science, and its practice not just as the translation of a theory. The point is also not to put the blame for any shortcomings of the educational system on an old metaphor, but rather to show how this largely unconscious metaphor is inadequate for understanding the learning process. It is difficult to find theoreticians openly defending the folk-psychological / -epistemological / -pedagogical view, but I expect the reader will recognize from experience the kind of practice criticized by Bereiter (2002a:266-270) who, as already stated, is my main source for this section § 2.

In its purest form, the *mind-as-container* metaphor stands (more or less explicitly) behind two possible unfortunate scenarios:

- the students get theirs heads stuffed with a lot of facts and some rules;
- educationalists may decide that facts change so quickly that learners are better off becoming ‘general problem solvers’ and ‘learning to think’.

The first approach – which can be symbolized by traditional lecture-style teaching, with students taking notes as the teacher speaks – has a solid tradition and is functional whenever the students need information to be simply ‘transmitted’ to them. The problem may be then how to turn this information into ‘active knowledge’ and how to avoid it becoming ‘inert’. Moreover, educational intervention based only on the idea of stuffing contents into the learners’ heads assumes that the social need is to master a body of stable knowledge, with no need to improve it; which is by no means the case in the contemporary knowledge age.

The second approach – teaching ‘problem solving’ or ‘high order thinking skills’ – is probably a spin-off of the computer-inspired version of the *mind-as-container* metaphor and does not earn much respect, at least in Europe, among professionals in education. However, there are companies investing a lot of money in courses like ‘training to think’, which are at best short courses in something else (e.g. communication) and at worst pure fraud. A milder version of the idea of the ‘general problem solver’ can be encountered in education whenever a subject matter or activity is considered endowed with a special potential for fostering ‘thinking skills’ – Latin, for example, in the ’60s in Italy, computer programming in the late ’80s, and tomorrow maybe chess playing\(^\text{10}\). While all three activities can make sense *per se*, con-

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sidering them as all-round cognitive boosters clashes with all observation of real-life human experts, who have typically developed through long engagement in a meaningful relationship with a given domain (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1993 and below).  

Neither of the two previous mentioned approaches, both focused on World 1 – the ‘real world’ – has much credit in educational practice today, which tends to be more centered on the learner, World 2. For example, in a more fashionable, constructivist view, it’s the learner itself who constructs the objects to put into his or her head, rather than ‘receiving’ them from the teacher. In some post-modern forms of radical constructivism, World 1 tends to disappear.

However, learner-centered activities may too turn into reductive practices, with focus on the learner’s self-expression or on the product of the activity, often without a solid link to ‘real’ learning, that is, a kind of learning the student can build upon (Bereiter, 2002a:268-9). Taken to the extreme, this can mean leaving the students alone in hope that they ‘discover’ something by themselves; this ‘modern’ approach can be found for example in practices of pointless discussions, or sometimes in activities in which the object to produce – in the cases I have witnessed, typically a hypertext and later a web site – becomes a goal in itself, unrelated to any advance in understanding. ‘Learner-centered’ activities may be great fun for the students, who anyway probably end up learning more than with rote learning, but the result may be that the important learning of ‘skills for life’ occurs outside of the school, to the great disadvantage of students who lack the right learning environment at home.

At any rate, neither approaches focus on a static vision of the subject matter, nor do approaches focused only on the learner’s self-development offer a model for enabling the learner to appropriate the know-how in a given area and to contribute to its further development.

Bereiter’s answer to the theoretical and practical shortcomings mentioned so far involves three moves, which will be examined in the following sub-sections:

- rethinking the different kinds of knowledge in terms of understanding as intelligent action;
- overcoming the learner/subject matter dichotomy by incorporating another dimension in the design of educational intervention, that is Karl Popper’s World 3 made of conceptual artefacts;
- suggesting learning and knowledge building as different but equally important goals for educational intervention.

11 ‘Problem solvers’ seem indeed to exist in fiction, for example in the character of Mr. Wolf (“I’m Winston Wolf. I solve problems”; Pulp Fiction, 1994). Interestingly, director Jane Champion puts the same actor, Harvey Keitel, in basically the same role in Holy Smoke (1999), but this time the efforts of the ‘problem solver’ are spectacularly thwarted by the power of urges and feelings. As discussed in § 3, fiction can be a powerful tool for compressing complex concepts into an understandable form.

12 This is for example – in my view – the attitude that caused the editors of Social Text to take at face value Alan Sokal’s parody of the post-modern attitude to knowledge (the so-called ‘Sokal’s hoax’; Sokal, 1996a and 1996b).
2.3 Bereiter’s proposal (a): focusing on understanding and expertise

Speaking a language, writing a letter, driving a car, chairing a discussion and playing chess are all actions that require and activate some form of knowledge, which may actually differ in kind even for people engaged in the same task. For example, in the first case a mother-tongue speaker typically has a lot of implicit knowledge, while a non-native speaker of the same language may have a different mixture of explicit and implicit knowledge; a student or teacher in the same language have at least another layer of knowledge about learning and teaching strategies (see Bereiter, 2002a:137-148 for a classification of different kinds of personal knowledge).

Theories of cognition and learning in the ’80s-’90s explicitly challenged the folk-theory of the mind as a container of facts and rules and pointed to other dimensions, such as:

- the role of implicit and impressionistic knowledge (Bereiter, 2002a:138-140;141-143);
- the way cognition is embedded in social praxis and tools, in accordance with approaches in the Vygotskian tradition (e.g. Hedegaard, 2001a and 2001b);
- the role of emotions in steering cognition (e.g. Oatley, 1992).

Bereiter (1997; 2002) discusses and accepts several contributions, especially from traditions that highlight how cognition is embedded in social praxis and tools (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989; Lave, [1990] 1997), but suggests expressing educational goals in more manageable terms of ‘understanding’. For example, for Bereiter (2002a: 101-104) understanding a person means:

- the ability to act intelligently in relation to the person (of course, there are many ’right’ ways to understand a person, depending on your relationship to her/him);
- becoming interested in the person;
- understanding the person’s relationship to a broader context (family, occupations, personal history, etc.);
- being able to talk about the person, her/his underlying motives, dispositions, strengths, weaknesses.

A deep understanding is demonstrated by an insightful resolution of problems involving the person and by telling stories that have depth of characterization; not least, deep understanding can only arise from a deep involvement. Furthermore, understanding is not necessarily accompanied by explaining (although explaining is certainly a way of showing understanding). Finally, there is may be no single optimal understanding, but there are wrong (and possibly correctable) forms of understanding.

If we now try to substitute a person with ‘a tool’ (e.g., a computer) or ‘a story’, our definition of understanding still holds: there are many appropriate ways of understanding. For example, understanding a joke may range from laughing, to re-telling and adapting it to another audience, to deep analysis of the genre such as in Raskin’s Life is Like a Glass of Tea. Studies of Classic Jewish Jokes (1992). But ‘misunderstandings’ are also possible (s. a discussion of the limits of interpretation, in Eco, 1990).

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13 In Bereiter’s taxonomy, the act of catching a falling fragile object is performed on the basis of ‘impressionistic knowledge’, ‘similar to perception’ (Bereiter, 2002:139); the impression left by the reading of a fiction book is a kind of ‘impressionistic knowledge’ or ‘extremely vague implicit understanding (Bereiter, 2002:142). Bereiter himself regards his taxonomy as work in progress, aimed at overcoming the shortcomings of the mind-as-container metaphor and also some limitation of the distinction between declarative and procedural knowledge, that Scardamalia & Bereiter still accepted in 1993.

14 Bereiter’s long discussion of ‘understanding’ (2002: 94-124) and the idea of ‘understanding as intelligent action’ have some similarities with Popper’s idea of ‘understanding as problem solving’ (Popper, [1972] 1974: 162-183); but while Bereiter explicitly borrows from Popper the concept of ‘World 3’, the category of ‘problem-solving’ is for Bereiter associated first of all to the tradition of cognitive psychology.
A person who possesses a deep understanding in an area is an expert. According to the already mentioned research conducted by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) on the nature of expertise, there are no ‘general problem solving’ or ‘thinking’ skills. Besides, the transfer of skills over different subject areas is not automatic (see Paper A. on the lack of transferability of lie-detecting skills across different domains).

**Experts** are also people who:

- know a lot (have learned a lot) in a given area;
- can exercise progressive problem solving (that is, they are able to add new insights when they solve problems; they work on the edge of their knowledge and learn more while working; for this reason they succeed where longtime practitioners fail, because they stick to their routine).

**Progressive problem solving** in a given area is also at the core of effective learning and is what differentiates experts and expert-like novices from long-time practitioners.

*The phenomenon of understanding also involves some mental activity, but rather than regarding it in terms of facts and rules in one’s head, it can best be considered as a deep relation that leads to acting in an appropriate way with regard to someone or something*. And *teaching for understanding* means helping to establish, take care of and deepen a relation with some relevant and useful subjects and tools.

2.4 **Bereiter’s proposal (b): Adopting Popper’s 3-worlds model of knowledge**

As a conceptual tool for defining the object of understanding for educational intervention, Bereiter adopts Popper’s epistemological views in order to go beyond seeing learning simply as a relation between the learner and the world (or its personification as subject matter).

In Popper’s ([1972] 1974:153-161) epistemology, *World 1 (W1)* is the physical, ‘external’ world, while *World 2 (W2)* comprehends a person’s individual beliefs, ideas, feelings and skills. Popper posits in addition another world, *World 3 (W3)*, as the seat of man-made real artefacts like theories, concepts, histories. Bereiter borrows Popper’s epistemology and maintains that education has to focus on W3 objects, that is artefacts which help make sense and get some leverage on the world. Popper’s W3 is not the only theory available for distinguishing the object we want to know from the knowledge (or understanding) which is being developed about that object. Researchers in the tradition of Vygotsky have developed a model for human action positing a human subject interacting with an object (the world) by mean of ‘mediational tools’, that is technical and conceptual tools that make it possible to act on the object. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to compare systematically Bereiter’s approach and the model for learning proposed, for example, by Hedegaard. The original theoretical backgrounds are quite different – North American cognitive psychology, and traditions of societal knowledge with roots in early Soviet psychology, respectively. Moreover, Bereiter accepts the idea that all cognition is socially situated, but stresses the need to overcome the

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15 Bereiter’s view of cognition in terms of relation is rooted not only in ‘classical’ traditions in psychology and philosophy, but also in a model of cognition – *Parallel Distributed Processing* (PDP) – developed and simulated by researchers in cognitive sciences (Rumelhart, 1989). While the simulation of cognition on computers had been previously based on the model of a program with facts and rules sequentially elaborated by a single processor – that is a structure that does not bear any resemblance to the functioning of the brain – one idea behind the PDP-project was to simulate the organisation of a network of neurons.

16 The category of W2 as other than W1 ought not be taken for granted: the idea of a hidden ‘inner life’ can be seen as a recent phenomenon (Gumbrecht, 1985).

17 Vygotsky, 1997: 85-89; see also Hedegaard, 2001a and 2001b for a more recent model in this tradition, and Hedegaard, 1999 for a portrait of different schools within the tradition of societal knowledge.
limitation of this condition by developing ‘knowledge objects’ which may be manipulated and improved (Bereiter, 1997), and maintains that his is the more appropriate model for educational intervention. On the other side is Gordon Wells (2002), a representative of the Vygotskian tradition who enters into dialogue with Bereiter, despite some disagreement with aspects of Popper’s (and Bereiter’s) epistemology. Wells is explicit in highlighting how both Bereiter’s and his own approach share first of all the same bold idea that educational institutions ought to “encompass both the grasping of what others have already understood and the sustained, collective effort to extend the boundaries of what is known” (Bereiter, 2002b:24 and approvingly quoted by Wells, 2002). At the same time, the two authors propose similar and in a way complementary guidelines for intervention and must face similar problems of seeing their program rejected or more often misunderstood, since “a large part of the world has no experience of treating ideas as objects of inquiry and discussion” (Bereiter quoted by Wells, 2002).

* Positing Popper’s ‘artefacts’ in W3 or Vygotskian ‘mediational tools’ as entities different from the physical world and from the learner’s subjective world offers definite advantages to our model of understanding.

W3 artefacts (and most of the mediational tools) are man-made entities (from a cooking recipe to a narrative, to the theory of evolution) with which it is possible to establish relationships. These entities can be appropriated (learned), improved, discussed, possibly discarded when a better alternative is available. Education deals precisely with enabling learners to entertain a meaningful relation with these entities.

2.5 Bereiter’s proposal (c): Distinguishing ‘learning’ and ‘knowledge building’

Bereiter further suggests distinguishing between two components of the learning process:

- ‘learning’ as the individual process at W2 level;
- ‘knowledge building’ as work done in W3 to produce, refine, amend conceptual artefacts.

Both learning and knowledge building are worthwhile aims to be pursued in education.

*
‘Learning’ can be regarded in its own right as activity focused on W2, that is on the single student and on his/her skills and pieces of knowledge in a given domain. What the individual learner appropriates is important, it is what he or she takes with him/her after finishing school or leaving a company.

‘Knowledge building’ means something different, that is producing W3 objects (of an appropriate scale) in the form of social, situated artefacts that should represent an improvement over the current status of the knowledge in a given working group. Knowledge building means then creating something new, rising above the previous ‘state of the art’. If knowledge building is the educational goal, it is important to design knowledge building activities in such a way as to overcome the student’s temptation to focus on the task or, in the best case, on his/her own learning alone.

To give an example, if I learn to use a new word processor or to understand enough Swedish to be able to follow a lecture, the outcome of my efforts is that I can do something that I could not do before, but I have not (yet) made any contribution to the state of common knowledge. If participants in a seminar analyze the “Dear Sir” section of an Italian Catholic magazine, and make what they have understood available for others, the group has built new knowledge20; of course, this activity of knowledge building has required individual appropriation (‘learning’) of vocabulary, historical background, theories, which is by no means less important. But it is the conjunctions of the two dimensions of learning and knowledge building that has produced both individual and collective progress. Bereiter and Scardamalia have been working over the past 10 years helping groups of various kinds – from schoolchildren to nurses – to develop into ‘expert groups’ able to develop knowledge, obviously at a level of complexity appropriate for the given group.

Learning how to develop knowledge is a rewarding activity and a goal in itself. But – let us not forget – educational intervention cannot and should not focus on knowledge building alone. If an apprentice climber needs to learn how to secure her harness or if she needs to know the plural of the Danish word mand (English ‘man’), she will be better off being taught it the fastest and safest way (easier said than done; that requires method and skills as well). So every student of a foreign language may need to learn, for example, how to use a dictionary, or – if she studies Italian – that Italy did not become a nation until 1861. It will be the teacher’s and student’s concern to assure that this knowledge will not remain inert.

2.6 Subject matters, learning, knowledge building and originality

As for subject matters and their contents, Bereiter is an advocate of a modern version of ‘liberal education’ as a cosmopolite answer to the question “What should it mean to be an educated person in the 21st century?” (Bereiter, 2002b: 2521). More specifically, Bereiter suggest teaching broad-spectrum, productive abilities like literacy (including numeracy), fostering understanding of key-artefacts (or conceptual tools) of our culture, like the theory of evolution, and finally to put putting abilities and contents to work in contexts that matter to real life and make it possible to acquire the body of factual knowledge that a cultivated person needs to possess. As for the specific role of the humanities, Bereiter underlines the quite important role that literature and history can play in promoting understanding of our social environment, but he does not go a long way beyond this acknowledgment and some criticism of current practice (318-322). I suspect that Bereiter considers the teaching of the humanities in schools especially prone to ‘reductive practices’ in education like ‘reduction to subject matter’ with no regard for the relevance of a topic for understanding ‘real life’, or to equally useless ‘reduction to self-expression’ in which nothing new is learnt (Bereiter, 2002a: 266-270). In the previous

20 This example is taken from Caviglia (2000a), reported in the Appendix to § 2 and paper B in this dissertation (on CD-ROM).
21 Again, the page number is an ‘educated guess’ (see above, note 18).
paragraph of this dissertation, I proposed ‘advanced literacy’ as a key ability that can be fostered with profit within the humanities, which I believe is an obvious choice but, interestingly, not the one made by Bereiter and Scardamalia, who take most of their examples of activities involving reading and writing from the teaching of natural sciences.

In this section, and later in some of the examples in this dissertation, I further suggest that the humanities offer a wealth of possibilities for implementing the model of teaching and learning proposed by Bereiter. Much of the work done in secondary schools and universities is indeed knowledge building: this happens whenever a topic is analyzed and/or a project is developed that actually concerns and challenges students and teacher alike, and where the goal is rising above the previous level of understanding. This is at least what I intend as ‘research-based teaching’: not the transmission of the results of research, but research (knowledge building) integrated in the learning process.

The papers in this dissertation all have a different relationship with teaching, which is explained in the summary-page preceding each, but all those in Part One, Advanced Literacy and the Power of Storytelling, focus on knowledge building activities that require learning of conceptual tools (and, most often, factual knowledge on a given topic); the second section is devoted to individual learning of writing, and some tools and approaches to ease the process in L1 and L2.

* This current section on learning models should also contribute to reinforce the definition of ‘advanced literacy’ hitherto proposed: I wrote in the previous section about reading and writing as a means of ‘transforming knowledge’, and I now suggest considering this transformation oriented toward goals of individual learning and of shared advancement in understanding, on an appropriate scale.

Apropos the scale, my main focus is, as already stated, education during the last years of secondary school and the first years of university, that is at a level high enough to come eventually in touch with the ‘state of the art’ in the discipline. A large part of my efforts has been directed to making available some trends in humanities research—the ‘state of the art’, to the best of my knowledge—as tools for knowledge building within a learning group of which I was part. I cannot claim, however, that our work group has discovered anything new; actually, we may have been the only scholars to investigate some specific pieces of crime news or hoaxes, but I am aware that most of the analyses we have carried out can hardly be considered an advance in the overall knowledge on the topics. But ‘originality’ ought to be considered in relative terms:

One major prejudice must be overcome if knowledge building, as real productive work similar to what goes on in industrial laboratories and university research centers, is to find a foothold in educational policy. This is the prejudice that bestows credit only on the first person to come forth with an idea. Although this may be a perfectly reasonable principle in patent law, when generalized it virtually denies the possibility of children’s being real creators of knowledge; for rarely if ever will a child produce knowledge that is new to the world. But originality is always relative to context. If it should turn out that there are intelligent beings on another planet and that everything scientists on earth have discovered is already old hat to them, would that mean that Newton and Darwin were not scientists after all? (Bereiter, 2002b:22)

Of course Bereiter is thinking of children, and it is reasonable that university students eventually become able to produce something original. But in education the process is often more important than the product, and I don’t believe that reinventing the wheel is too bad, as far as it means a better understanding of how the wheel works and why it matters.
3. Tools for ‘advanced literacy’: functional approaches to communication and storytelling

This section highlights some conceptual tools that have been used in answering the questions posed in Part One of this dissertation, Advanced Literacy and the Power of Storytelling (Papers A. to E.).

The tools or approaches that will be proposed originate from different traditions, but I suggest considering them as sharing a common functional approach to communication, in the non-technical sense of the word, as proposed by Richard Raskin apropos a work of art:

> For the functionalist, a work of art is not an object, product, expression or system, but rather a means – a means for gaining leverage over social and psychological problems, for meeting needs, for making possible a variety of pleasures and satisfactions, for patterning expectations, assumptions, values and behavioral norms. The artist’s activity in producing the work, as well as the public’s involvement in experiencing the work, are seen as forms of purposive, goal-directed behavior. (Raskin, 1982:16; emphasis original).

Only part of the cultural artefacts and activities which I will take into consideration in this dissertation are ‘art’, but all of them involve an attention to communication as ‘purposive, goal-directed behavior’ as indicated by Raskin.

‘Function’ and ‘functionalism’ are concepts that – in addition to their plain-language meaning – often carry with them different association according to the tradition within which they are used. Raskin highlighted the consonance of functional approaches in psychology, anthropology, sociology and then literary and media studies, where he placed his contribution; at the same time, Raskin made clear from start how his functionalism did not have anything to do with the use of the term ‘function’ in other contexts, e.g. of “formalist structuralism” (Raskin, 1982:8).

Twenty years later, I would also take in research threads in the cognitive sciences – driven by the idea of a the ‘functional’ and ‘adaptive’ design of the mind – as a natural addition to the list of functional approaches proposed by Raskin. On the other hand, what I am not building on is ‘functional linguistics’ or ‘systemic-functional linguistics’, a research paradigm “aimed at clarifying the relationship between form and function, and at determining the nature of the functions which appear to influence grammatical structure” (Thompson, 1992); ‘function’ is in functional linguistics first of all linguistic function, while the purposive element in communication I am interested in is rather captured by linguists paying attention to the ‘pragmatic’ or ‘social’ function of language or to the ‘communicative competence’ of language learners.

To give a couple of examples of what a functional approach is and is not, in a functional perspective Death in Venice was not written because Thomas Mann was a closet homosexual, nor did Pierre Riviere kill his mother and siblings because he was mad or because his mother was mean towards his father, although Mann most probably had homosexual tendencies and Pierre Riviere would have needed psychiatric help and his mother must have been a disgrace to her family (as a reader can draw from Foucault, 1973). A functional analysis – while taking all these background factors into account – would rather focus on the “processes originated by the artistic [or criminal] act” (Raskin, 1982: 43, my addition), that is what the artist (or the

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22 As in the proposition “works of art fulfil vital social and psychological functions for artist and public” (Raskin, 1992:8).
different objects of study lend themselves to a functional approach: even more, it is the functional approach as an overarching principle that makes it possible to see commonalities between different objects of study like crime news and discourses on violence (Paper B. and, in part, C.), lies (Paper A.), fictional narrative (Papers D., E. and, in part, C.).

Besides the functional approach, all the papers in Part One demonstrate the use of tools of ‘advanced literacy’. The term ‘advanced literacy’ as common denominator of a large part of my work was not there from the beginning, but is the result of many discussions and attempts to single out things that really matter in learning and teaching language and literature. My original idea of the overarching goal of my work was ‘critical literacy’, the ability to question and evaluate sources. Papers A. and B. discuss for example what is possible and not possible to achieve with respect to ‘critical literacy’, and ‘criticality’ on the side of the reader and of the writer is indeed a central issue in all of Part One: a recurring idea in all its papers is especially that storytelling itself can be an expression of understanding and ‘criticality’ in a possibly more powerful way than non-narrative criticism of other texts (one more reason for highlighting, as already mentioned, the need to “bridge the creative and the critical”, as suggested by Woods, 2001). However, I prefer now to speak of tools for ‘advanced literacy’, for two reasons:

- ‘advanced literacy’ is a more comprehensive term, which can incorporate ‘critical literacy’ as essential component, but also apply to a wider range of issues;
- while it is difficult to find an approach which is ‘uncritical’ and still worth becoming an educational aim, ‘basic literacy’ is instead relevant, and yet worth to be distinguished from the ‘advanced literacy’ I am proposing.

The first part of this section § 3. outlines Raskin’s functional approach; this is followed by a brief description of the main conceptual tools I have used in the papers, and finally a note about the reason for considering the functional approach more appropriate as an overarching principle than two other possible alternatives, Bakhtin’s dialogical principle or the research program of the cognitive sciences.

3.1 Raskin’s functional approach to art

Richard Raskin (1982; 1987; 1989; 1992 and 2002) has developed a ‘functional approach’ to art as a tool to gain leverage over aspects of personal or social life (Raskin, 1982:16). He has himself applied this method to the analysis of a broad range of works, from literature to visual arts to film, and it becomes more and more clear in his later works that both producing and analyzing a work of art can be regarded as complementary forms of ‘understanding’ the world in the sense described in the previous § 2 section.

Moreover, Raskin’s approach – which originally drew ‘functional traits’ mainly from the most productive insights of the Marxist and psychoanalytic traditions – lends itself to the incorporation of other conceptual tools that share the attitude of looking at culture and language, and more generally at purposive behavior, as (possibly wrong) solutions rather than as an outcome of a system.

A functional approach also implies that art – and more generally agency – enjoys a “relative autonomy vis-à-vis constraining social and psychological forces” (Raskin, 1982: 43, referred to art; my emphasis); in other words, words or acts are not to be considered as the in-
evitable result of external forces, but as more or less successful attempts to deal with individual or social problems.\(^\text{23}\)

In 1982, Raskin set as polemic targets first structuralism, or better some ‘mechanist reductionist’ traits of structuralism, and then equally reductionist applications of psychoanalysis and Marxism, which regarded art as a ‘symptom’ of an individual or social phenomenon, rather than as an attempt to cope with it. Raskin’s latter two targets – mechanic Marxism or psychoanalysis – can be regarded today, 20 years later, as no more than bizarre fashions of the past, while precisely the functional traits that Raskin defends in both Marxism and psychology continue to be productive.\(^\text{24}\)

Raskin’s attitude towards structuralism is more articulated. Although in his 1982 book the structural element does not play a key role, Raskin never doubts that structure is relevant and an appropriate object of study:

> Any serious critical work necessarily deals with questions of structure within the work of art [...] and at no point [...] do I intend to suggest that a concern with esthetic structure is either unnecessary or in any sense symptomatic of an erroneous conception of art. [...] My critique to structuralism is [...] not directed against the study of the structure – but rather against those approaches to esthetic structure which implicitly deny the purposive dimension of art. (Raskin, 1982:15)

Moreover, Raskin mentions as his overriding goal “to convince the reader of the need of functional analysis alongside and in addition to structural analysis” (Raskin, 1982:16, italics in the original). That Raskin really meant this becomes most explicit in his analysis of Jewish jokes (1992), which is focused precisely on the ‘function of the structure’.

In the spirit of Raskin’s synthesis, which is explicitly “open and comprehensive enough to build on insights of whatever origin [...] which prove useful for understanding the function and effects of art” as well as “to accommodate new concepts” (Raskin, 1982:118), I will propose in the rest of this section a set of conceptual tools – developed within different traditions in the human sciences and put to work in Papers A. to E. – that I deem important for understanding some aspects of communication as purposive behavior.

3.2 **Categories as ‘structures of expectations’**

What is the function of framing phenomena within categories?

To start with an example, while trying to understand crime news (Paper B.) we encountered approaches proposing terms in opposition for identifying different attitudes to moral questions (left vs. right, liberal vs. communitarian, strict-father vs. nurturant-parent morality, gallows-invoking vs. social critic stance); or, in papers A. to C., it has seemed useful to accept the construction of representations, relations and identities as complementary but different functions of discourse.

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\(^{23}\) A striking example of a work that would have gained enormously from a functional approach is an analysis (Krull, 1991) of the relation between biography and fiction in the works of Thomas, Heinrich and Klaus Mann, with special focus on Thomas. Krull produces a wealth of interesting observations, but assumes that the correspondences she finds between the Manns’ family life and the fictional stories in their novels were unconscious to the writers. I cannot exclude that this may be in part true (although I cannot fully appreciate the point of exposing it), but Krull ’s general assumption is contradicted by the novel *Lotte in Weimar* (1939), in which Thomas Mann portrays – most probably in a conscious way – his own influence on his intimates, mirrored in the figure of his literary model, Goethe.

\(^{24}\) See for example Ugazio (1998) for an approach explaining how social and cultural constraints set the borders that make a ‘story’ (and the underlying condition) more or less acceptable for a person (or for a fictional character). As for cases of bizarre practices, I propose in Caviglia (2001b, also in the Appendix of this dissertation) a couple of funny examples of how Pinocchio’s nose has become a victim of folk-psychoanalytic criticism.
While building and discussing categories is at the heart of academic work, students may well find these theoretical frames arbitrary and pointless, and I think it is worth suggesting a ‘strong’ rationale behind the whole activity of building systems and categories.

Categorization can be seen as a way to create ‘structures of expectations’.

‘Structures of expectations’ or ‘frames’ – an umbrella term which Tannen employed to group together a range of concepts such as ‘frames’, ‘scripts’, ‘schema’ (Tannen, [1979] 1993) – have been recognized by different traditions in the human sciences as playing a crucial role in a range of cognitive processes, from observing to recalling. ‘Frames’ are built on our previous experience about situations, people, objects, conventions of genre, and define our ‘horizon of expectation’ by instructing us to expect certain events and feelings more than others. Frames develop naturally as dynamic sets of mental associations that are mostly unconscious; but ‘advancing in understanding’, a key concept in this dissertation, may require the passage from the stage of implicit knowledge or understanding to ‘intentional learning’ (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1989). Building and applying categories, like the ones we used in Paper B, for systems of values, is a way to restructure expectations with respect to a goal: this means that categories are neither given nor arbitrary, but rather a tool in form of conceptual artefact that can be discussed, ameliorated or even discarded and substituted. Running classroom activities on the model of a research and development team working to push forward understanding means taking responsibility for the interpretative categories, that is discussing, appropriating or rejecting them consciously.

3.3 Functions of communication: from instruction to dialogue,

Raskin’s object of analysis ranges from a whole genre (detective fiction, or Jewish jokes: Raskin, 1982: 126-167 and 1992) to a single nod in a film scene (Bogart’s assent to the orchestra to play La Marseillaise in Casablanca: Raskin, 2002b), most often with keen attention for the form, but not especially for language. Given my role as a teacher of language and literature and my ambition to bridge the gap between research in the two areas, I have been looking for points of contact between the two traditions.

In my analyses of communication I began building especially on insights from Textlinguistic (Weinrich [1966] 2000 and 1976 and Paper 1) about the ‘instructional’ function of language and then on the assumption by ‘critical linguists’ that language constructs identities and relations, in addition to representations (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997 and Paper A. to C.). But it was Bakhtin’s (utterly functional) ‘dialogic principle’ which I found especially fruitful for framing some characteristics of communication as purposive action. Todorov ([1981] 1984) synthesizes Bakhtin’s basic tenet as follows:

[...]

‘Dialogue’ is in Bakhtin and his circle not just a matter of reacting to stimuli or competing for hegemony, but rather the principle for understanding in the human sciences (Voloshinov 1973:102), whose object of knowledge is itself a subject, and not an object as in the ‘hard’ sciences (Bakhtin 1986: 161).

Papers B. to E. (and especially B. and C.) are strongly influenced by Bakhtin, but the possibility of a few insights into the form of language come from linguist Deborah Tannen and her observations about the ‘patterns of sense and sound’ through which ‘involvement’ is con-

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25 See Paper A. (p.17) and note 10 for a longer explanation.
structured between partners in conversation, or between writer and reader (Tannen, 1989, 1992 and 1997; Papers A., B., C. and E. 26).

Not only the papers in the first part of this dissertation, but my whole concept of learning and teaching in the humanities is deeply informed by the idea of dialogue as a principle for understanding, for construction rather than ‘transmission’ of meaning 27.

As observed towards the end of Paper B., my analysis leaves out aspects of language, especially syntax, of which I can now better appreciate the relevance, but which I have not been able yet to cover satisfactorily. Exploring Henning Nølkes’s extension of the dialogic principle to linguistic analysis (Nølke, 1999 and 2001) is one direction for my future work (see also below, § 5.1).

3.4 Storytelling in the light of the cognitive sciences

Telling a story is one of the most powerful ways of “making possible a variety of pleasures and satisfaction and for patterning expectations, assumptions, values and behavioral norms” (Raskin, 1982:16). This concept plays a role in all of the first group of papers, with papers C., D. and E. explicitly focused on understanding the power of stories.

The more commonly recognized functions of narrative include vicarious satisfaction of desires and elaboration of fears (Freud [1908] 1959 and [1920] 1989), the highlighting of contradictions in society (Gramsci 1975, e.g. in Notebook 21), and stimulation of social or group cohesion (Anderson, 1991; Banti 2000). – In this Introduction I wish to bring to attention the contribution of a converging body of research in cognitive sciences that gives yet another and more general reason why stories matter, namely that stories incorporate a type of knowledge which plays a crucial role for understanding 28.

There seems to be broad agreement that being able to recognize and/or produce patterns in stories and to connect them to other stories, real or fictional, is a way of embracing and making sense of the complexity of the world (Bruner, 1996: 130-149). An especially bold version of this idea has been proposed by Mark Turner, who suggests that the human mind is ‘literary’, in two senses:

Narrative imagining – story – is the fundamental instrument of thought. Rational capacities depend upon it. It is our chief means of looking into the future, of predicting, of planning, and of explaining. It is a literary capacity indispensable to human cognition generally. This is the first way in which the mind is essentially literary. (Turner, 1996: 5)

and

This projection of one story upon the other may seem exotic and literary, and it is – but it is also, like a story, a fundamental instrument of the mind. Rational capacities depend upon it. It is a literary capacity indispensable to human cognition generally. This is the second way in which the human mind is essentially literary (ibid.).

26 Although I do not quote Tannen explicitly in the last of these; see the introductory note to Paper E.

27 Since the late ’80s I have considered what Harold Weinrich (1983) called ‘interrogative competence’ as maybe the most important and difficult-to-foster educational goal (see Papers G. to I). I have not changed opinion, but I prefer now to reframe the idea of an ‘interrogative competence’ as a component of Bakhtin’s ‘dialogue’ as a principle for understanding, a concept which is in itself more comprehensive and has been more influential for educational thought, especially in the sociocultural tradition (Wertsch, 1991).

28 Recognizing stories and storytelling as a principle of knowledge is not the preserve of recent research in cognitive science. For example, in Bakhtin’s ‘dialogic’ view, literature was a privileged principle for knowledge thanks to its ‘polyphonic’ potential; and in yet another unrelated perspective, Northrop Frye, in the spirit of 2 Cor. 3:6, saw literature as a way to promote vivifying ‘double vision’ of the world as opposed to a ‘literal’ vision (Frye, 1991:14-21;83-85). I choose the cognitive perspective because of the relevance of its attempt to become the hegemonic paradigm in the human sciences, for example with works like Lakoff and Johnson (1999) or Turner (1991, 1996, 2001).
Interestingly, Turner’s focus on the cognitive processes as mirrored by narrative and poetry was seen at first as a way of ‘rescuing’ the human sciences, and especially literature, from the self-referential discourse of literary criticism (Turner, 1991). From literature, Turner then moved on with Gilles Fauconnier to investigate a smaller unit of analysis in the mechanism underlying the ability to associate patterns – not only narrative ones; they claim to have identified the building block of cognition in the mechanism of ‘conceptual integration’ or ‘blend’ (a recent synthesis of the theory now in Fauconnier & Turner, 2002).

To give an example of conceptual integration, fables often blend together elements of human and animal life by selecting some properties of each world and projecting them onto a third space where animals behave like humans and while retaining elements of their original nature (this is true from Aesop to J. K. Rowlings, and children can understand this non-obvious mechanism from a fairly young age). Other examples of ‘blends’ may include for example metaphors like the desktop in computer interfaces, elements of rituals, advertising.29

Fauconnier and Turner’s ‘conceptual integration’, as well as of Lakoff and Johnson’s ‘metaphors’ (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980 and 1999), are mechanisms working most of the time below the threshold of awareness, also outside the jurisdiction of ‘communication as purposive behavior’ that has defined until now our field of investigation. The difference between the purposive elements of storytelling and poetry and the largely unconscious mechanics of cognition is a typical opposition between explicit and implicit knowledge (s. above, § 2.3) that might be one reason for the difficult dialogue between traditions within the human sciences, and especially between linguists and literary scholars. The latter may find rather uninteresting and, worse, monologic, approaches “oriented towards anti-subjective and authoritatively closed systems, ruling out actions and ideas behind our back like for instance economy, psychodynamics and grammar”, and advocate instead “the study of the human agency within the cultural processes” (Hansen, 2002:74)30. But the “dialogised relation between positivist and hermeneutic approaches” (ibid.: 75) that Hansen himself suggests for language studies does require an attention for the threshold between conscious and unconscious elements of communication. Research like Lakoff’s explanation – on the basis of his theory of metaphor – of the internal consistency of different moral systems in the USA (Lakoff, 1996 and Paper B) opens perspectives that work precisely towards an understanding of these limits; our research on cultural artifacts need not submit itself to the cognitive paradigm, but ought to be informed of its development and possibly in dialogue.

* * *

Within the same broad frame of ‘cognitive’ approaches, but in a direction closer to more traditional research in psychology, an theory which is especially interesting for our interest in storytelling proposes a view of narrative as a ‘simulation that runs on minds’ (Oatley, 1999). Oatley, who has conducted research within a biological-cultural evolutionary perspective on the function of feelings for orienting cognition (Oatley, 1992; Oatley & Jenkins, 1996), sug-

29 Conceptual integration is at work not only in storytelling and other high-level processes, but more generally in all associative processes of human and animal cognition; the most complex cases of blends, the ones which create new meaning by integrating inputs with different and often clashing structures, are however exclusively human and are, in Fauconnier & Turner’s hypothesis, at the origin of language, art and science (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002:113-138). Instead of a schema of the cognitive process, an example may offer a more direct insight: the invention by J. K. Rowlings of the Prior Incantato spell – modeled after the ‘redial’ button of modern phones – for discovering the last action performed by a magic wand discovered on the scene of a crime (Rowlings, 2000:121).

30 Indeed, as underlined by Andersen (2002:44), current threads in linguistics like e.g. pragmatics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and conversation analysis have already widened the focus of the discipline beyond phonology, morphology and syntax. Moreover, “in linguistics, the object is no longer only an abstraction, langue, and the goal is no longer only to establish the system, but also to study its manifestations and the relation of those manifestations to situation, medium, genre, culture, identity, acquisition and communication” (ibid.). The goal of studying also ‘the manifestations of the system’ is shared indeed by the linguists the reader will encounter throughout this dissertation.
gests that writing and reading fiction and more generally narrative is a way of prompting feel-

ings and thereby experimenting with situations and choices that are somehow out of reach in
everyday life. His theory could be regarded as old wine into a more fashionable bottle, and
Oatley acknowledges his debt to Aristotle and Freud, but his idea of fiction as simulation is
powerful, since it brings together a strong theory about nature and function of feelings with
the purposive dimension of producing or enjoying a story.

3.5 Two risks of functional approaches

A risk inherent to any functional approach is the so-called teleological fallacy, that is confus-

ing the function of something with its cause (Raskin, 1982: 61). In order to counteract this
risk, Raskin envisages two strategies: one, which is typical of functionalism in the social sci-
ences, is to keep a clear distinction between causes and consequences; the other, which may
be most appropriate to the analysis of purposive behaviour like art, and more generally com-

munication, is

to leave room for the possibility that the process under investigation was specifically designed
to fulfil a particular function, in which case no distinction need to be drawn between cause and
function, motive and consequence, goal and effect. (Raskin, 1982: 61)

The investigation has then to deal with the complexity arising from the multiplicity of goals
behind human behaviour and by the far-from-perfect awareness that people have about goals
and motives behind their own and others’ often dysfunctional actions (a more articulated dis-

cussion of countermeasures to the risk of teleological fallacy in understanding behaviour in

Another aspect of functionalism which is especially under accusation today is its possible
contiguity with ‘essentialism’. Such a risk can be exemplified by a passage from the entry

Function from The MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences

[...] Neurons and neutrons are examples of physical kinds; planets and pendula exemplify func-
tional kinds. Physical kinds are identified by their material composition, which in turn deter-
mines their conformity to the laws of nature. Functional kinds are not identified by their mate-
rial composition but rather by their activities or tendencies. All planets, no matter the differ-
ences in their composition, orbit or tend to. All pendula, no matter the differences in their com-
position, oscillate or tend to (Maloney, [retrieved] 2002; my emphasis).

What do human beings tend to? Do they all tend to the same things?

A functional approach to the human sciences should indeed try to identify human beings
in terms of their activities and tendencies, as for example in the research program of the
branch of the cognitive sciences known as ‘evolutionary psychology’ (Tooby & Cosmides,
1992), which has the explicit goal of discovering the nature of Man by identifying the lasting
cognitive structures calibrated to the stone-age environment in which we have evolved. How-
ever, the very idea of a human nature which is historically and geographically decontextual-
ized is anathema to other scholars. Clifford Geertz, for example, sends a strong attack not as
much against specific research programs, but more generally against “efforts to draw context-
independent concepts of ‘Human Nature’ or ‘The Human Mind’ from biological, psychologi-

cal, linguistic or for that matter [...] cultural inquiries” (Geertz, [1983] 2000:51), and presents
as proof of such an attitude a list of quotations from anthropologists writing in almost reli-

gious terms about their own conversion from a ‘culture-is-all’ relativistic stance to the recog-
nition of the Nature of Man as something indelibly written in the genes.

Geertz’s critique is not against functionalism, but first of all against religious over-
tones in intellectual life and specifically against one neo-Darwinian research program, ‘socio-
biology’ (a recent account in Wilson, 1998). Indeed, advocates of a functional model of hu-
man agency with strong inspiration from the theory of evolution do explicitly challenge – e.g., already with such a title as _The blank slate: The modern denial of human nature_ (Pinker, 2002) – what they consider a blind faith in social constructivism as dominant paradigm in the social sciences. Discussing the _Darwin wars_ would be outside the scope of this dissertation, but – with respect to our need of understanding culturally-situated communication – any approach that helps advance appreciation of the constraints of human agency should be welcomed: even the discovery – as long as it is convincing by scientific standards – that we are even more pre-determined in our drives and wishes than we like to believe, would improve our ‘relative autonomy vis-à-vis constraining social and psychological forces’ (Raskin, 1982: 43, referred to art; my emphasis). The idea of a ‘relative autonomy’ – which Raskin actually referred to art – may be extended to human agency _tout court_ and captures well, in my view, the awareness of the constraints that biology and culture set to our autonomy, and also the possibility of understanding and in some measure confronting them.

As Geertz puts it, from the perspective of the anthropologist,

> The issue is not whether human beings are biological organisms with intrinsic characteristics. Man can’t fly and pigeons can’t talk. Nor it is whether they show commonalities in mental functioning wherever we find them. Papuans envy, Aborigines dream. The issue is, what are we to make of these undisputed facts as we go about explicating rituals, analyzing ecosystems, interpreting fossil sequences, or comparing languages. (Geertz, [1984] 2000: 50-51)

### 3.6 A concluding remark on the functional approach for understanding communication and culture

Both Bakhtin’s dialogic principle and the research program of cognitive sciences have a broad scope, show utterly _functional_ traits and have been proposed as a research program for understanding man and culture (see for example, respectively, Wertsch, 1991 or Fauconnier & Turner, 2002, Pinker 2002).

Why not choose one of them instead of the functional approach as an overarching principle for understanding communication and culture?

Although ‘dialogism’ is by definition open, Bakhtin is traditionally associated with a ‘culture is all’ position, with a clear-cut division between ‘monologic’ hard sciences and the humanities (Bakhtin 1986: 161; also in Paper B., § 4.1). Now, I am aware that it is precisely the ‘weak’ epistemological status of the human sciences, their method based on ‘clues’ rather than ‘proofs’ (Ginzburg, [1979] 1992), which makes it possible for them to say something which is both falsifiable and relevant about complex phenomena; but what is ‘true’ in the humanities ought to be at least not incompatible with the state of knowledge we have from the hard sciences. This is not to say that biology should dictate the agenda for research in the humanities, as might be implied in Wilson’s idea of the ‘unity of knowledge’ under the guidance of physics and biology (Wilson, 1998); but I see as equally damaging for the common pursuit of understanding that, for example, some educated people still take psychoanalysis as ‘literally true’ rather than as an influential theory which has offered some insights that still hold (e.g., that we don’t always know the reason why we act in a given way) and other ideas which

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31 A humorous and informative introduction to the dispute in Schwarz (1999); a collection of arguments against neo-Darwinism in Rose & Rose (2000); Pinker (2002) could be taken as example of the current position of neo-Darwinism. Functionalistic approaches rooted in an idea of humans as biological-cultural beings, with a strong accent on the biological, can indeed endorse a conservative attitude in politics, quite explicitly the case of Wilson’s sociobiology (now in Wilson, 1998).
are historically meaningful but simply wrong (e.g., that boys usually wish to have sex with their mothers). The functionalistic approach outlined by Raskin has never proposed any dualism with scientific understanding and can ‘naturally’ enter in dialogue with research programs influenced by the cognitive sciences, from Lakoff, Fauconnier and Turner’s ‘cognitive semiotic’, to the empirical study of art (Miall & Kuiken, 1998) to the much discussed ‘evolutionary’ approaches to psychology and culture (Tooby & Cosmides, 1992).

*The cognitive sciences too offer a paradigm with explicit ambitions to become hegemonic in the human sciences and are enjoying visibility and good cultural momentum. Helping to explain the way we think, feel and act is indeed an enormously ambitious research project. And yet, with regard to our goal of understanding communication, the social practices around the relationship between author, reader and cultural artefacts are more central than the underlying cognitive processes. Again, a functionalistic approach along the guidelines provided by Raskin still seems to me more apt to integrate what is still productive in the established tradition(s) of the human sciences with more recent and interdisciplinary developments in the understanding of mind, culture and communication.

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32 Humans, as well as other mammals, tend to avoid mating with those they spent the first months of their life in company of. This mechanism – named Westermark-effect after the scholar, a contemporary to Freud, who first described it – has been observed for example in Israeli kibbutzim or in unhappy couples in Taiwan that had been married together by their parents as infants and then raised up together (Bateson & Martin, 1999: 234-6). The widespread taboo of incest can be read in this light as deeply rooted in biology and then reinforced through myths and laws. In Freud’s defence, it should also be said that his mistake originated from the ideas – culturally productive and also supported by the evolutionary approach – that people are often poor judges of the reasons of their own behaviour, and that family relations can be a battlefield for conflicting drives and feelings.
4. Reconsidering writing and teaching to write

In the previous section I discussed conceptual tools for reading critically, that is belonging to the high end of ‘advanced literacy’; at the same time, my main goal with the activities was shared advance in understanding – knowledge building – rather than individual learning. In the activities carried out – or more often suggested – writing was not the primary goal: for example, in the case of lie-detecting (Paper A.) the students had to produce their own lies and hoaxes, but learning how to conjure up lies was a way to get insight into the mechanics of lying in order, first of all, to recognize them.

The papers in Part Two of this dissertation - Tools for Writing and for Raising Language Awareness – reflect instead different aspects of my activity in devising ways to help apprentice writers in L1 or L2 toward proficiency. The point of departure for addressing the educational problem that was my main research focus from 1987 to 1996 is the fact that writing and learning to write are difficult, but at the same time writing is a powerful tool for learning: the ambition of the projects and activities I have been involved in has therefore been to turn writing from a problem into a resource. In the following I will look back at this work and discuss, to what extent the different approaches we took have proved successful or have fallen short of expectations, and especially how I believe now that the teaching of writing ought to involve a higher degree of language awareness – again, ‘advanced literacy’ – than my colleagues and I had initially assumed. The role of technology as a vehicle for change in educational practice is another common denominator of the four papers: while in the papers design and functionality of the tools were in the foreground, in this Introduction I will focus more on the relationship between technical tools and social practice.

The groups with which I have experimented are Italian secondary school students aged 14-16 and (mainly 2nd and 3rd year) university students of Italian in Denmark.

4.1 Traditional practice in teaching to write, an alternative model and a possibility for change

In 1987 I was asked to join a project for the production of educational software for Italian secondary schools: the project was based at the Institute for Educational Technology of the Italian National Research Council (ITD-CNR, Genoa), which at the time was playing a central role in steering the process that saw computers enter the Italian school system (Ferraris, Midero & Olimpo, 1985). The project was initially sponsored by IBM, while ITD-CNR had total freedom of choice with regard to the subject matter and approach, as long as computers were involved and secondary school was the target. The group of researchers and teachers of which I became part decided to focus on the teaching of writing, because the area was a highly relevant educational problem and it was believed that computers might have an influence in eliciting change in classroom practice.

As opposed to elementary school, Italian secondary school too often failed to offer proper instruction for writing, even though students’ writing skills weighed heavily in evaluation. The typical exam task in Italian was to write an essay, often on one of the big problems facing the world (e.g. racism, hunger, AIDS). The student wrote her or his essay usually without receiving any support before or during the writing process, and the teacher evaluated the final product. The student did not do any follow-up work based on the notes from the teacher. Good practice existed, of which I maintain grateful memories, but it was not mainstream. The soundest piece of advice commonly given for improving writing was to read a lot;[33] not mis-

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[33] One recent confirmation in Stephen King: “If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot. There is no way around these two things that I’m aware of, no shortcut” (King, 2000:
takenly, writing was seen as part of enculturation into the world of adults, but proper support for the process was not recognized as necessary.

At the same time, however, many teachers admired the ‘revolutionary’ approach to writing customarily enacted at the School of Barbiana by Don Lorenzo Milani, a priest with a deep concern for education as a way to emancipation. The following is the description of a writing session of a collective document edited by the students under Don Milani’s supervision; it is important to note that the document – just like the whole written production at the School of Barbiana – had a clearly defined receiver (in the text quoted below, a teacher who was considered responsible for the failure of one of Barbiana’s students to pass an examination one year before) and a goal (nothing less than bringing about a major change in the educational system), while structure and style were the outcome of a common effort of ‘knowledge building’:

This is the way we do it:
First of all everybody keeps a notebook in his pocket. Whenever you have a good idea, you write it down. Each idea on a separate page and written on one side only.
One day we lay all the pages out on a large table. We sort them out, one by one, to weed out doubles. Then we gather all the pages that are alike in big heaps and these are chapters. Then each chapter is split into smaller heaps and these are the sections.
Now we try to give a name to each section. If this is not possible, it means it does not contain anything or contains too much. Some sections disappear, some others multiply.
Working with the section names we discuss the logical order until a scheme is worked out. The small heaps are rearranged according to the scheme.
We take out the first heap, spread the pages on the table and work out the order. Now we write down a first rough draft.
Then we mimeograph it so that everybody has a copy. Time for glue, scissors and colour pencils. We mix everything up. We add new pages. We print it again.
The game is now to find words to get rid of, redundant adjectives, repetitions, lies, overly difficult words, overly long sentences, two concepts in one single sentence.
We call in one outsider at a time, making sure that they have not gone to school too long. We ask them to read it aloud. We check whether they have understood what we meant.
We accept any suggestions that are aimed at further clarity. We reject cautionary advice.
And at the end of all this, after following rules that apply to everyone, there is always some stupid intellectual who decrees: this text has a highly personal style.

Scuola di Barbiana ([1968] 1996:126)\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{34} The original Italian text:

\begin{quote}
Noi dunque si fa cosi:
Per prima cosa ognuno tiene in tasca un notes. Ogni volta che gli viene un’idea ne prende appunto. Ogni idea su un foglietto separato e scritto da una parte sola.
Un giorno si mettono insieme tutti i foglietti su un grande tavolo. Si passano a uno a uno per scartare i doppioni. Poi si riuniscono i foglietti imparentati in grandi monti e son capitoli. Ogni capitolo si divide in monticini e son paragrafi.
Ora si prova a dare un nome a ogni paragrafo. Se non si riesce vuol dire che non contiene nulla o che contiene troppe cose. Qualche paragrafo sparisce. Qualcuno diventa due.
Coi nomi dei paragrafi si discute l’ordine logico finché nasce uno schema. Con lo schema si riordinano i monticini.
Si prende il primo monticino, si stendono sul tavolo i foglietti e se ne trova l’ordine. Ora si butta giù il testo come viene.
Si ciclostila per averlo davanti tutti eguale. Poi forbici, colla e matite colorate. Si butta tutto all’aria. Si aggiungono foglietti nuovi. Si ciclostila un’altra volta.
Comincia la gara a chi scopre parole da levare, aggettivi di troppo, ripetizioni, bugie, parole difficili, frasi troppo lunghe, due concetti in una frase sola.
\end{quote}
But applying the same principles in everyday classrooms simply did not seem feasible. Looking back now, as I see it, a generation of teachers raised in a tradition of individual writing, performed mainly for the purpose of evaluation, could hardly conceive of proposing in the classroom a kind of practice they themselves were not accustomed to. However, the model proposed by Don Milani represented an ideal for many teachers in the ’80s.

In the same period, research on the psychology of writing was pointing to the non-linearity of the process and to the multiplicity of constraints the writer has to respect (Hayes & Flower, 1980), while research on the learning and teaching of writing was equally focusing on differences in strategy and in attitudes towards the function of writing – knowledge-telling vs. knowledge-transforming – as a key to the differences between differently proficient writers (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1986).

The word processor, which by 1985 had become the preferred writing tool for many professional writers, seemed to embody the ideal features for producing change both in the individual process of writing and in the conditions of text production at school; for example, the word processor could adapt to different individual writing styles, could easily and economically produce clean copies of the text after each revision and permitted more than one student to work on the same text, either in small groups in front of a computer screen or asynchronously (a review of educational implications of the use of word processors in Calvani, 1989).

But a student sitting in front of a word processor will not automatically produce a better text than one sitting in front of a blank sheet (although the writing process may be less painful, provided the student is familiar with using a keyboard). Our group decided then to develop an ‘educational word processor’, WordProf, integrating within the word processor a set of writing facilities and writing activities for classroom use with 14-16 year-old students at lower secondary school (Ferraris, Caviglia & Degl’Innocenti, 1993; Paper F. and G).

4.2 WordProf’s approaches, goals and results

Given that more writing practice in the classroom was badly needed, and given the writing-is-difficult vs. writing-is-a-resource dichotomy, we decided to focus on three goals:
1. promoting a range of motivating and easy to implement writing activities;
2. reducing the cognitive load on the writer by offering some ready-made ingredients;
3. promoting strategies for replacing the knowledge-telling style of apprentice writers with a more mature strategy of knowledge-transforming.

Although the ‘learning by doing’ approach entails the risk of becoming a ‘reductive practice’ (Bereiter, 2002a: 268-70), or even of enforcing a dogma of writing instruction which leaves little room for different pedagogies (Couzijn & Rijlarsdam, 1996b: 253-4), I still defend the decision to look for ways to have more classroom time devoted to writing and to enlarge the...
range of text types practised at school, for a practical reason: at the time in secondary school in Italy the students often wrote too little, sometimes only once a month, and mostly in one single genre, the ‘school essay’, devoid of any function in the outside world.\(^{36}\) We therefore built into WordProf a set of activities devoted to writing under constraint (the Giochi\(^ \text{\textit{\L}}\)\)\_[\textit{games}] environment) and proposed a library (the Biblioteca environment) with a repertoire of situations and possible communication goals as a point of departure for purpose-oriented writing, often with some funny element. Ten years latter, thanks to the convergent efforts of many professionals in school, research and textbook publishing – of which WordProf is an example\(^ {37}\) – the principle of more and more varied writing has become explicit in Italian secondary school curricula and fairly common in classroom practice.

So it is of greater interest here to discuss the other two goals.

Providing model texts to imitate and rewrite was the main strategy adopted to reduce the cognitive load on the writer. The main initial problem with Italian students (and teachers) in secondary school (and also, later, with Danish university students of L2) was some reluctance to renounce ‘originality’ as an absolute value for a written product; for apprentice writers in our European school tradition, the act of writing retains a strong connection with self-expression, and imitation can be perceived as ‘morally’ less valuable.\(^ {38}\) And yet imitation is a precious cognitive mechanism that relies on the recognition and selection of relevant features (Leland & Bateson, 2001); it is recognized in research as a sound approach to learning to write (Geist, 1996) and is very effective from the point of view of the final product, which is probably the reason why most students eventually do embrace imitation.

But to really become a writing strategy, that is to improve not only the product, but above all the process, imitation needs to be integrated with a higher awareness of textual and language constraints. Our approach with WordProf, and later with English WordProf (Caviglia, Earp and Ferraris 1996; Paper H.), was to attach to most text models a short description of their constraints. I don’t think there was much more we could have done from the point of view of software design, but language awareness can hardly be fostered only by encoding it in the teaching material; awareness can however be fostered within the social practice of writing, especially in the revision process (both as peer-review and review by the teacher) or in discussion prior to actual writing. My experience confirms especially the effectiveness of ‘focused’ peer-review, as suggested in the literature (in Rijlaarsdam, Couzijn & van den Bergh, 1996:x); e.g., public discussion of different solutions to the same communicative goal – with focus on one parameter at the time - can give both students and teacher some valuable insight into the process of writing and revising. Motivated students may well challenge the teacher to compete at ‘doing it better’, as long as the focus is limited enough to give them a chance to outperform him or her, as occurred for me (being challenged and sometimes outperformed) both in Italy and in Denmark.\(^ {39}\)

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\(^{36}\) The typical curriculum for Italian in the first two years of secondary school devoted an inordinate amount of time to the reading of two canonical literary works, respectively Virgil’s \textit{Aeneid} and Alessandro Manzoni’s \textit{I promessi sposi [Betrothed]} (1821), which were all too often treated as a subject matter on their own.

\(^{37}\) It is difficult to judge the impact of WordProf. The publisher sold about 2000 copies in two editions, the large majority of them to schools. Each copy, priced at the equivalent of 75 Euros, gave the right to install the software in a computer room with 8 computers, but school administrators usually installed the software on all computers available to the students. ITD received some form of feedback from about 200 teachers. At least until 1997 – when the interface of the software begun to look a bit too old-fashioned for the evolving taste – we had frequent notice of teacher training courses based on WordProf. Sadly, we did not manage to run a formal evaluation of the software apart from interviews with the first pilot group of expert and motivated teachers. The French Centre National de Documentation Pédagogique (CNDP) used WordProf as inspiration and basis for \textit{Gammes d’Écriture} (1996) for learners of L1-French.

\(^{38}\) A classroom discussion about the difference between ‘honest’ imitation and plagiarism may be appropriate.

\(^{39}\) Again, the value of the activity is largely in the discussion about which pieces of information are to be kept in writing a summary, or whether or not a communicative goal is fulfilled through a text.
By the same token, taking the student to a stage in which writing becomes a tool for knowledge-transforming, rather than knowledge-telling, is not a goal achievable even through the best writing tool design. Although aware of that, we put maximum effort into devising ways to show how the writing process can help to develop ideas and organize them in a text. We concurred with Weinrich (1983) that ‘interrogative competence’ was the key ability for entering the world of knowledge-transforming, and our approach to fostering this competence was to show how a set of appropriate questions – provided by the software (see examples of student-computer ‘dialogues’ in the Assistant environment, Papers G. and H.) – could help the learner develop his or her idea further. In our ideal classroom situation, which we proposed in numerous seminars for teacher training over the years 1989-1996, the students were supposed to receive ever more encouragement to develop themselves the questions necessary for exploring a topic.

Both students and teachers usually found the lists of questions helpful. They seem to have fostered some sensitivity to the ‘dialogic’ idea that a text has to answer some questions and that these questions have an influence on the structure of the text: some students used the questions provided by WordProf even if not explicitly requested to do so by the teacher, and in other cases they lamented the lack of supporting questions when facing other writing tasks. But attempts to get the students themselves to develop the questions – which we considered a sign that they had developed knowledge-transforming strategies – have not been successful, to the best of my knowledge. Once again, limited success from the point of view of the final product was not matched by a corresponding success at the level of the process.

Despite falling short of its most ambitious goal, I am still proud of WordProf’s contribution to demystifying at least one aspect of writing, namely making students and teachers more confident that there is no magic involved in putting together a text appropriate to the standards of a given genre. Using Bereiter’s terminology, I dare say that WordProf makes some worthwhile ‘learning’ possible, although not entirely of the strategic and self-reflective type that I now associate with ‘advanced literacy’, nor integrated with activities of ‘knowledge building’.

But why does knowledge-transforming still remain out of reach, and what does it take to make the big step towards it? And what does it take to bring writing instruction to the level of ‘advanced literacy’?

As Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987:13) made clear, knowledge-transforming is an attribute of the process, not of the product. The result of all of WordProf’s activities is always a text, or the outline of a text. According to the two rules of thumb proposed by Bereiter about what is learned as a result of instruction,

- people learn what they process;
- the skills most likely to be learned are the minimal ones necessary to accomplish the range of tasks presented (Bereiter 2002:274),

it is no wonder that students using WordProf learnt how to process texts rather than knowledge.

If writing is to serve knowledge transforming or building, educational intervention must focus explicitly on activities requiring the whole range of tasks involved – asking questions, reading, identifying problems, discussing possible solutions and writing. The next section (§ 5) on ‘directions for future work’ offers examples of activities that might integrate these various levels.

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40 WordProf is designed to make it possible for teachers and especially students to add their games, models of texts and lists of questions to the program. I have received from colleagues or found in the Internet a number of games and some text models, but never a list of questions. Nor was I successful as a teacher in bringing the classroom to produce a good one.
As to the third question, how to transform students from ‘apprentice’ into ‘advanced’ writers, I now believe that language awareness ought to play a bigger role than it did in the WordProf project.

WordProf was not designed as a whole L1 curriculum, and we could therefore afford the choice largely to avoid explicit references to grammar and meta-language. In addition to pragmatic reasons for keeping writing and knowledge about language as separate goals, at that time my answer to a question like “how much meta-linguistic knowledge is necessary for writing?” would have been (at least for L1 and until 1996) “not much”, as implied by a meta-survey on research on written instruction (Hillocks, 1984) suggesting that teaching grammar may even have a negative effect on learning to write.

After revising for some years the form (in L2) and the content and structure (in L1) of students’ writings, and learning more about different approaches to language, I see now more clearly how sensitivity to the form of language is a requirement for writing and how a shared language for speaking of language is sorely needed, although what kind of meta-knowledge is at the core of language awareness is for me an open question of which I can now appreciate the complexity, but not offer more than a limited contribution.

4.3 From L1 to L2 writing: for a coordinated L1/L2 curriculum in language awareness

English WordProf (Caviglia, Earp & Ferraris, 1996; Paper H. with appendix on CD-ROM) for teaching to write L2-English seemed a natural extension of the experience with WordProf. The main addition with respect to the L1 Italian version came from the request of teachers who had been using WordProf for some time: a list of proposals for writing tasks with references to text models, games and lists of questions that are available through the various menus. The target group is also somewhat older: secondary school students aged 16-18.

Even more than the Italian version, English WordProf’s approach is based on the idea of reducing the cognitive load on the learner by means of lists of expressions associated with given communicative purposes (e.g. to apologize, to make excuses, to complain, etc.), in addition to whole texts to imitate. Further, special consideration was given to dialogues as a genre that might have provided a link between written and oral activities.

Despite being on the whole a richer piece of courseware, especially thanks to the articulated list of tasks invented by Jeff Earp, English WordProf proved less successful than its Italian counterpart, possibly because L2 writing does not play a central role in current L2 curricula and because only a portion of the Italian students ever reach a level high enough to take advantage of the many examples. Moreover, existing textbooks for L2 English already provided a number of activities involving reading, writing and speaking, and English WordProf was therefore not as groundbreaking as WordProf was.

The pragmatic principle of reducing the cognitive load on the writer by offering strategies of imitation still seems to make sense to me, despite the limitations described in the previous sub-section on WordProf. The low-cost availability of text corpora and electronic concordancers has offered a powerful new tool for making imitation possible on different unities, from the whole text to clusters of words (Paper I. and Caviglia, 2000b). Using a text corpus for finding a model text or the solution to a syntax or word choice problem is an active strat-

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41 We did propose activities focused on specific items such as connectives; but we did not want grammar as subject matter to interfere with the goal of teaching to write (we had not read Hillocks at the time, but knew of the results of his research).

42 English WordProf (Caviglia, Earp and Ferraris, 1996) is a patent, and is distributed free of charge by ITD-CNR to all the schools asking for it. About 200 copies have been distributed after request or in teacher training courses; the number of schools which installed it is then much higher. If there is a future release of WordProf (for L1 or L2), as envisaged in Caviglia (1995), it will incorporate much of the work done in English WordProf.
egy, requiring the non-trivial ability of defining a pattern to search for and of deciding which of the results can be of use.

As I reported in Paper I., in 2000 only a minority of ‘my’ students could see a clear advantage in using a text corpus as a dictionary-like writing tool. The situation has now slightly changed and more students routinely use electronic corpora – especially since they are allowed to use them alongside dictionaries at written exams. Nevertheless, in learning to use a text corpus in L2 two difficulties risk adding up, i.e. using the tool effectively and dealing with the L2 problem. It would therefore make more sense to get acquainted with electronic corpora first of all for exploring language in L1, which is indeed the first and most typical educational use of this tool, as exemplified for example by Tribble & Jones (1990). At any rate, the use of text corpora in language education is but an instance of a more general need for a coordinated L1/L2 curriculum, an issue that I can only treat here in a cursory way, as a prologue to the ‘directions for future work’ of the next section (§ 5).

Reducing the cognitive load on the writer is not the only strategy for fostering the acquisition of a composite ability – writing – that is at the same time a learning tool, i.e. a tool for dealing with complexity, in first or in second language.

L2 writing proficiency has a strong precondition in L1 writing proficiency: poor L1 writers will not produce better texts in L2 than they do in L1, and although acquiring L2 writing strategies may well have positive effects on a writer’s overall L1/L2 performance, there is strong evidence that general ‘learning strategies’ are best acquired first through the mediation of the mother tongue (Thomas & Collier, 1997 and 2002).43 At the same time, L1 writing proficiency does not guarantee a smooth transfer to L2: ‘good’ writers in L1 can even be hindered by their own high expectations in the first stages of their apprenticeship in L2 writing.

A coordinated L1/L2 perspective can make it easier to allocate meta-linguistic knowledge where it can be further used, as in activities of text revision, in the search for alternative writing solutions with the help of dictionaries and text corpora, in translation and also in discussing the limits of translation as a communicative strategy. For example, the idea that the ‘ground meaning’ (Bedeutung) of a word is broad while its ‘intended meaning’ (Meinung) becomes precise in texts (Weinrich, [1966] 2000:14-24) can be a quantum leap in the learner’s understanding of language, and can much more easily be explained in L1 and within a vocabulary that the learner already masters: but it really becomes a tool for improving language proficiency when it is applied to improve the learner’s strategies of word choice within her/his zone of proximal development, be it in L1 or L2.

What is then the kind of linguistic and meta-linguistic knowledge that can help overcome the difficulties of L1 or L2 writing and turn them into a resource for fostering ‘advanced literacy’? There is no widespread agreement on the question (an analysis of options in Kasper, 2001; see Bach, 2002, on the debate in Denmark). ‘Strategic awareness’ about language learning, as advocated by Oostdam & Rijlaardsam (1995), is a component that does play a key role in steering different learners to make effective use of their implicit or explicit knowledge of language.

But it is ‘language awareness’ – that is “explicit knowledge about language in the process of language learning” or “development in learners of an enhanced consciousness of and sensibility to the forms and functions of language” (Carter, 2003) – the concept that seems to me to best incorporate a crucial but also somewhat elusive element at the core of language educa-

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43 The studies by Thomas & Collier are based on a 20-year-long observation of the school-career of young people from language minorities in the USA. According to the study, the single most important factor coordinated with success in study is having received schooling in the mother-tongue until about the age of 12, possibly in a variety of subject matters. More generally, policy-makers are advised to sustain long-term programs of bilingual education. I owe to Gitte Leonessi – who is writing her cand. mag. dissertation on the subject – the reference to Thomas & Collier’s research.

tion and, as I now see more clearly than a few years ago, of ‘advanced literacy’. ‘Language awareness’ is also the name of a movement of linguists and language teachers aiming at integrating and systematizing “lessons that unite studies in linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, rhetoric, cognition, and literary analysis” (White, 2000:92) under the goal of “one description of language that may serve educators” (ibid.:91) and an interest for both L1 and L2: in other words, a program which is quite convergent with the ‘advanced literacy’ I am advocating.
5. Limitations of this work and perspectives for future activity

I hope to demonstrate with this dissertation how contributions from the world of teaching, of educational technology and of research in the human sciences can join together in projects where educational intervention – in this case aimed at fostering ‘advanced literacy’ – is not a spin-off of research, but rather a resource and a challenge for researchers.

I am aware, however, of some limitations of my work. First of all, the historical dimension plays a marginal role throughout this dissertation. Whenever I make use of texts belonging to the near or remote past, my main interest remains focused on understanding and explaining the present. This is a limitation of my research, as entering into a meaningful relationship with the past is a part of my everyday work, a continuous challenge and a powerful resource for overall self-understanding. Only, I am not sufficiently satisfied with the contribution I can make, especially because in the teaching of history I have merely read enough to perceive the complexity of some questions. Besides, the object of this dissertation is already broad enough.

But I can also see unresolved questions in areas which I do consider, especially with respect to three problems:

- the concept of ‘language awareness’ needs more integration with the practice of reading and writing, while smaller units of analysis (words and sentences) need to be taken into consideration more than I have been able to provide (I am aware that I have covered until now but a portion of the objects and levels of detail that may play a role in communication);

- at other end of the generality vs. specificity scale, the analyses I propose, for example on crime news and discourse on violence, have a self-imposed limit of discussing discourse alone, while the human act that precedes the specific discourses (in Papers B. and C., different kinds of violent behaviour) remains out of reach; this may be an unfortunate but unavoidable condition, but this point may deserve further discussion;

- the papers presented here focus more on the object of knowledge (e.g. texts) and on the mediational tools (e.g. theoretical approaches or technical tools) and less on the social practices (classroom or teacher training situations), which are the ultimate benchmark for any hypothesis for educational intervention.45

In this last section of the Introduction I will go over these three problem areas in terms of ‘directions for future work’, by outlining some ideas at different stages of incubation and concluding with a remark on the kind of contribution I am seeking to offer to education and to the human sciences.

5.1 Knowledge building and/for language awareness

As outlined above (§ 3.3 and 4.3), explicit knowledge about language is a goal of advanced literacy that I have not yet been able to cover in a satisfactory way, but for which a coordinated L1/L2 curriculum offers interesting perspectives that I wish to explore further,46 first of

45 This criticism comes from educationalist Pablo del Rio, during very supportive personal communication at seminar and Ph.D. course Cultural Historical Approach to education, literacy and organisations (community, institution, state), Aarhus, 14-15 Juny 2001. Del Rio is right, although it is no wonder that my published work had to reflect to some extent the culture of the institutions I was affiliated with at the moment of writing, that is an Institute for Romance Studies and an Institute for Educational Technology.

46 The idea of changing the way – often devoid of relation with production or understanding of language – in which grammar was taught in the Italian secondary school was at the origin of an attempt (Caviglia & Sarti, 1989) to enable students, through tools from Artificial Intelligence like parsers or Prolog-based grammars, to explore syntactic and semantic structures by defining a grammar and a small lexicon and letting the computer
all by continuing to learn how to use some conceptual tools to understand aspects of language.

There is one combination of object of investigation and tool that I already see as a promising resource for promoting language awareness: conversation in films and subtitles for the hearing impaired.

Conversation in fiction films can be an interesting object of study in the classroom, since language in films is usually close enough to everyday speech to be a good model for ‘natural’ speech, but more disciplined and less difficult to analyse than conversation in real life.

DVDs and videos with subtitles for the hearing impaired are a handy device for capturing and analysing portions of conversation and making available to the classroom or study group some advances in research on language. The mismatch between what is heard and what is written on the screen can prompt questions which lead, inductively, to a better understanding of both spoken and written codes, for example along the guidelines proposed by Walter Ong’s (1982) analysis of orality vs. literacy. Also Deborah Tannen’s (1989) approach to ‘patterns of sound and sense’ recurring in conversation and in literary discourse, and Henning Nølke’s (2002) extension of Bakhtin’s dialogical principle to linguistic analysis lend themselves to exemplification using conversation in film as a point of departure.

My idea is to build – in cooperation with colleagues – a list of examples of conversations as video or audio files\(^{47}\) plus guidelines for developing sensitivity to the ‘function of the form’ in language through classroom activities involving understanding and production of communication in L1 and L2.

5.2 Critical and creative ways of understanding discourse and human behaviour

Paper B. and (implicitly) C. and D. led me to ask, without actually coming to a solution, whether studying the humanities should only deal with the ‘simulation’ (that is, ‘representation’ or ‘discourse’) and leave the phenomena to ‘harder’ scientists (for example, psychologists or criminologists), or whether the phenomena (for example, an act of violence) represent a legitimate interdisciplinary object of study to which ‘we’ can make a contribution.

If we is meant to include storytellers – a hypothesis that I did not mention in the papers – my answer would be an unconditional yes: journalists and writers of fiction do it already, for better or worse, ‘mixing the creative and the critical’ all the time, and storytelling will continue to be a powerful source of insight into individual and social behaviour.

If we means instead the contribution from scholars more exclusively versed in the critical, the question should involve assuming an explicit theory of human agency, and integrating this theory with the insights of a specialist in culture and communication. A sequel to Paper B. taking into account different approaches to violence as a phenomenon, and some contribution that the human science can offer, is in part written, but not yet ready for peer review.\(^{48}\)

\(^{47}\) Technical questions are minimal, but there is a serious copyright problem if the material has to be available outside the single classroom. I expect it to be possible, however, to receive from copyright-holders permission to reproduce one picture from a film plus a short portion of the audio track. If not even this is feasible, providing – in addition to guidelines for the activity – a ‘real’ transcript of the conversation, of the related subtitles plus an indication of how to find the corresponding spot on the DVD should make it relatively easy for teachers to implement classroom activity.

\(^{48}\) For this line of research, which is part of my theoretical interests but somewhat peripheral to the even broader focus of this dissertation, I had been dwelling for some time on the need for ‘compatibility’ between research in
More interesting with respect to the scope of this dissertation would be initiatives to bring storytelling to the pen of learners. For example, the parameters which Richard Raskin proposes as a grid for ‘reading’ a short fiction film (Raskin, 2001 and 2002a) are at the same time guidelines for production, and can be adapted both to analysis and production of short stories.

Some sort of balance, or at least contiguity and dialogue between reading and writing stories can indeed be established. This condition is customary overseas and can be found in Europe at schools and in university departments of media studies, where students cannot limit themselves to analysis only, but have to make films or multimedia as part of their education; but also in other departments it may be possible and desirable to introduce and reinforce elements of creativity.

5.3 Knowledge building for teachers and researchers

My current teaching praxis and the proposals for educational intervention described or proposed in this dissertation are strongly influenced by Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia’s idea of creating situations in which learners behave as a community engaged in knowledge building, that is in the collective pursuit of goals of understanding and design. But for knowledge building to become a keyword in the classroom it needs to take root in the culture of teachers and researchers (and of the many that cover both roles).

In addition to the above mentioned ideas, in the following I will make a few suggestions for projects – made possible by cooperation through the Internet across geographical barriers – that would make the integration of research and teaching both a necessity and a resource, in domains close to those examined throughout this dissertation.

Reading for understanding (secondary school, L1 or L2, advanced). Especially in conjunction with emerging social problems or technology-mediated changes, there are periodically new subjects in the headlines that are worth understanding beyond sensationalism, e.g.: Is child labour in the developing countries a disgrace or a resource?; Is hydrogen going to be the fuel of the future?; Why are young males more likely to commit crimes than any other group?; What is ‘open source’ software?

In the globalized world of information, these questions often reflect an ongoing transnational debate. For example, the Italian weekly journal Internazionale periodically selects a theme and publishes within a few months a list of articles from the international press offering different and deepening views, often in explicit dialogue with each other and with references to other more comprehensive sources of information. These articles (or other articles chosen according to the same principle) are a precious resource for showing the way that understanding can advance, but are written for an adult and informed public; in order to integrate these articles in classroom activities where the problem will be identified, the text decoded and its contribution confronted with the current status of knowledge in the classroom and possibly in the outside world, there is some important work to be done, like introducing the subject, writing questions to stimulate reading, explaining aspects that are likely to be obscure. In other words, there is a space between the printed article and the classroom activity that would benefit from the joint work of a small group of networked teachers and researchers engaged in choosing and preparing material not only for their classroom, but also for others.

Understanding that knowledge is dynamic and that learning is becoming part of a process is not a trivial achievement. In addition, showing in practice how reading and discussion at school can help to understand what is happening in the world at a deeper level than is offered by TV is a much-needed contribution to the self-understanding of schooling.

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the humanities and the state of the knowledge in the natural sciences, and proposed in Caviglia (2001a) a human science, ‘softer’ perspective on Edward O. Wilson’s (1998) idea of unity of knowledge.
A critical eye on public discourse (secondary school, L1 or university, L1 or L2) As I suggest in Papers A. to C., public discourse is often biased, sometimes based on lies, and only at times honest, insightful and balanced. In more than a few cases it is possible to help the students tell the difference, and it is important for educational institutions not to miss this opportunity.

Promoting ‘criticality’ on the basis of current discourse in the media would require, however, a reaction time quick enough to keep up with the flow of events. Again, a network of researchers and teachers, possibly not too homogeneous in their world views, could provide a place to discuss which pieces of news may deserve to be used in the classroom as examples of good or bad practice, and to propose how (and how not) to handle the ensuing classroom discussion.

Chapters for an electronic handbook in text analysis (university, L1/L2) Text and media analysis are part of the curriculum in many university departments. There is a huge amount of material to take inspiration from, both in the form of printed books and web-based material. Many of the books, however, are written under the constraint of being evaluated as research work and are therefore not equally suited as textbooks for students at the pre-graduate level. Web-based material is often easier to read, but seldom usable, since it has not been designed for use by anyone else than its author. Without the pretence of developing a full-fledged course, I believe that the process of developing a few ‘common’ teaching units on text analysis within a work group of specialists in language, communication and literature might result in an advance in mutual understanding between different traditions in the human sciences, in the spirit of cooperation on educational goals suggested by Hans Lauge Hansen and Hanne Leth Andersen in their public debate on the identity of departments of modern languages (in Hansen, 2002).

Revisiting WordProf (secondary school, L1 and university, L2) A recent development in the world of software development – the sudden availability of high-quality free or ‘open source’ software – makes it possible to develop and distribute courseware with a relative ease and even to attract on a project more contributions than was possible only a few years ago (Scharff, 2002). A revised edition of WordProf – not necessarily limited to the Italian language (a first draft of the idea in Caviglia, 1995) – would be a useful product and also an almost ideal workbench both for the technology and the social practice of collaborative development of teaching material.

5.4 A risk and a challenge

My whole activity as a teacher and researcher has been driven by two forces: the need to help students reach some relevant and difficult learning goals, and the feeling of ‘advance in understanding’ associated with the conceptual tools that seemed to made those goals attainable.

From reading and writing as points of departure, I have landed and found inspiration in different academic provinces. I am aware that there is a risk of amateurism in my attempt to bridge traditions and bring them to the students, a risk of having or, worse, forcing anybody to do anything (Hansen, 2002:74).

However, I believe it necessary to take this risk and accept the challenge, exercising the utmost care not to fall in the trap of oversimplification, with a readiness to seek help from those who have gone deeper into the problems, but also with an awareness that there is a need

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49 Of course, it will hopefully be up to the students to recognize which elements are good and which bad practice.
for the work I am offering to the community of teachers and researchers in the human sciences.

If I am allowed the comparison, I am taking as a model the dialogic stance proposed by Umberto Eco when, in the keynote speech to a conference organized by a research foundation sponsored by the Italian Communist Party, he vindicated the right to advocate “a major degree of objectivity” as a goal of information in the media, and yet when discussing information with readers and supporters of the *Times* he questioned “the myth of objectivity”, (Eco, [1983] 1995: 130). In an academic world which tends to overspecialisation, deriving research questions from educational needs and focusing on mediation and dissemination (Danish *forsmidling*) may be an antidote.

Trying to cope with complexity without being overwhelmed is a daunting task, and yet there is no choice but to try, lest we leave educational institutions to reproduce the fragmentation that already informs large part of our everyday experience.
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INTRODUCTION: REFERENCES


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Part One:

Advanced Literacy and the Power of Storytelling
## Paper A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Caviglia, F. (2002). Lie Detecting as a Step Towards Critical Literacy.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
First presented at the 2001 IAIMTE (International Association for the Improvement of Mother Tongue Association) Conference, Amsterdam, July 2001; a first version was submitted August 2001, the accepted one in July 2002. |
| **Connected teaching activity** | Teaching of Italian (L1) in Italian secondary school, mainly 2nd year (age 15), years 1992-1998.  
A course on Collodi’s *Pinocchio* (1883), held at Aarhus University, Spring 2001. |
| **Other connected publications** | Some ideas first discussed in:  
| **Addenda & corrigenda** | The concept of ‘critical language awareness’ (Fairclough, 1992) and the practice of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) share more than one common view with the ‘critical pedagogy’ movement, but have largely developed within a tradition of studies in language. The sentence “Critical Pedagogy translates for example into Fairclough’s campaign for a Critical Language Awareness” ought therefore to be rephrased in terms that do not suggest a direct connection, but rather the common Marxist background.  
I should also have quoted Oatley (1992; see the reference in the Introduction) as “an important contribution to the understanding of the function of feelings” along with Oatley & Jenkins (1996). Oatley (1992), which I could not locate before, is indeed a more original work; but Oatley & Jenkins (1996) remains absolutely worth reading. |
| **Contribution to advanced literacy** | This paper on ‘critical literacy’ contributes to profile ‘advanced literacy’ by means of:  
- a rejection of the idea of ‘criticality’ as a general and context-independent skill (knowledge of both communication codes and of the topic are a requisite for not being deceived);  
- a first list of conceptual tools, based on a functional approach, for understanding potentially deceptive written communication (§ 4);  
- the use of fiction for exploring a real-world phenomenon;  
- the suggestion of turning the learners into writers.  
Furthermore, the categories of ‘lie’ vs. ‘truth’ used in the paper are appropriate for explaining the need for critical literacy, but may turn out to be inadequate in most real-life cases. |
LIE DETECTING AS A STEP TOWARDS CRITICAL LITERACY

Abstract

A lie mediated by the printed word can be more difficult to spot and more dangerous than one told in a face-to-face situation. However, lies are not a common item of study in the L1 curriculum. This paper describes an attempt to foster better understanding of lies as an initial step towards critical literacy. A survey of approaches to ‘criticality’ suggests that while general skills for lie detecting may not exist, there are cases in which expertise about lies pertaining to a given domain is demonstrated. Fiction provides a wealth of examples to establish a language for discussing lies in the classroom and to highlight the key role of the victim’s expectations and how a lie often sports multiple layers of deceit, such as misleading representation of reality and of the liar’s relationship to the victim and to the topic. The paper then describes classroom activities carried out with Italian students aged 14–16, who were either told a lie in controlled situations or encouraged to fabricate innocuous lies. A reassessment of that experience confirms that it is extremely difficult for lie detecting to be learned on a general basis, as personal motives and topic knowledge are decisive in triggering a critical attitude. On the other hand, working with lies at school seems effective in raising students’ communication awareness. Finally, cross-curricular contributions and attention to non-verbal communication are suggested for more general and ambitious approaches to lies and criticality.

KEY WORDS: cheating, critical discourse analysis, critical literacy, lie, literacy, literature teaching.

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1. Introduction

This paper proposes a way of teaching the ability to recognize situations in which a written text may be instrumental in a lie. Attention will first be focused on the connection between literacy and lies, and on the reasons why that connection should concern education. I will then review some tenets of the existing critical traditions involving education, language and culture, and finally proceed to describe and discuss the conceptual tools and activities that I employed in the classroom. L1 teaching provides a wealth of possibilities – a selection is examined here – for fostering this kind of ‘enhanced literacy’; special focus will be placed on literature’s ability to reproduce and expose the mechanics of the lie. At the same time, it is worth remembering from the outset that discovering whether a statement is accurate or not usually requires in-depth inquiry about facts as well as about motives and ideologies of all the parties involved in the communication. This complex approach may best be addressed from a cross-curricular point of view.

A note on terminology. At least in the first part of this paper, lie will be used to label a “statement made with the will to state the false” (enuntiatio cum voluntate falsi enuntiandi, Augustinus, De mendacio, I,4 – in Weinrich, 2000: 9); this excludes euphemisms, courtesy and irony, while including hoaxes, frauds and inaccurate or misleading messages, as long as they seek to induce misjudgement and error in the reader. In addition, I will sometimes use ‘cheating’ or ‘deceiving’ instead of ‘lying’ when referring to a course of action rather than to statements. As for the slippery epistemological status of ‘truth’ and ‘falsehood’, I would take the empirical stance of accepting any claims for ‘truth’ as a clue to potential cheating. I do believe, on the other hand, that it is sometimes possible to be adequately confident that a statement is a lie (a more detailed discussion below, Section 6.2).

2. Defining the Problem: Lies and the Culture of Literacy

Lying has long been part of our culture: not being gullible and being able to invent effective lies have been valued qualities since the times of archetypal characters Odysseus and Jacob (the latter as opposed to Esau in the Bible). Recent diachronic accounts of the lie (Bettetini, 2001) mainly focused on the interplay of literature, history and ethics while the more philosophically oriented Tagliapietra (2001) provides a wide choice of examples and insightful observation. Neither, however, pays much attention to the influence of communication tools in shaping our understanding of lies (and truth, for that matter). Hence, I will try to highlight briefly the connection between lies and literacy in a cultural-historical perspective, with the aim of defining the educational problem more clearly.

The onset of literacy may have had mixed effects on the attitude to lies and truth(s). Ong (1982) suggests that writing has played a crucial role as the ‘thinking tool’ that made possible the development of scientific reasoning and psychological introspection; for example, the very distinction between facts and fiction, as can be seen in ancient Greek historiography, notably in Thucydides (Ginzburg, 1999: 45–48), coincides with the development of a modern scientific prose clearly distinct from poetry. However, the transformation of Western societies from the mainly oral to the mainly literate only arrives much later, fuelled by the advent of print technology; the inception in Europe of this process is observed by Gumbrecht (1985) through examples from late fifteenth-century Spain. As the paramount element of change Gumbrecht recognizes the end of the tie between the word and the ‘body in presence’, which Zumthor (1987, 1994) had recognized as a typical mark of the ‘theatrical culture’ of the Middle Ages. In this respect – and back to our concern on lies – Gumbrecht sees a modern trait in the Inquisition’s refusal to content itself with the defendants’ ‘spontaneous’ public
declarations of Christian faith and obedience to the Church. Indeed, by that time literacy had
provided a frame for conceiving inner thoughts as both accessible and ‘more true’ than osten-
sible behaviour. Hence, for example, the Inquisition’s claim for full access to and control of
inner life (Prosperi, 1996).¹

Obviously, that does not mean that people could not hide their thoughts before. However,
both the diffusion of records of inner thoughts in the form of diaries and letters and the devel-
oment of a modern scientific method – both mediated by literacy – contributed to defining
today’s standards for what we consider reliable in terms of truth.² Over recent centuries, then,
the written and later the broadcast word has largely replaced the spoken-in-presence word as
the most important and official source of authority (Ong, 1982), with the notable exception of
time-honoured rituals in churches and tribunals.³

However, a large part of everyday life is still based on interaction with and in the presence of
other people through acts and words. Children usually learn fairly well how to cope with a
full range of communication devices, including lies, simply by taking part in social practice,
the same way they learn to talk or to walk, even though (or maybe even because) lying is offi-
cially discouraged in families and school institutions (Chandler & Afifi, 1996). For the neo-
Darwinist branch of Evolutionary Psychology, humans (together with a few other animals)
might be innately endowed with ‘cognitive modules’ for cheating and for detecting cheaters
(Cosmides & Tooby, 1992: 19–196 and 163–228), that is with biologically evolved mecha-
nisms that under environmental pressure could ‘evoke’, for example, a sensitivity to a poten-
tial breach of the social contract. The modular view of cognition and the assumption of bio-
logically transmitted behaviour patterns have been seriously criticized (Kamiloff-Smith, 2000;
Bateson, 2000, with important distinctions), but – for our purposes – the very hypothesis of
biological roots of cheating and anti-cheating points to deeply rooted knowledge and skills.

The quite sophisticated knowledge involved in handling lies and cheaters is also diffi-
cult to elicit, because it is eminently ‘situated’, that is, amenable to the culture of a given so-
cial group, but mainly informal in its contents and largely unconscious in use (Brown, Collins
&Duguid, 1989; Lave, 1990; a criticism of ‘situated cognition’ in Bereiter, 1997). An exam-
ple may help clarify this point. During the 1960 presidential campaign in the USA an anti-
Nixon poster portraying an unshaven Richard Nixon asked the voters “Would you buy a used
car from this man?” Though there is no obvious connection between buying a second-hand
car and voting for a president, the poster was perfectly designed to activate a setting (buying a
used car) that elicits a cautious and basically mistrusting attitude. Moreover, the picture of
Nixon was carefully chosen to exemplify an image that many people would readily have la-
belled with his nick-name: Tricky Dick; recognizing signs from people’s faces is a kind of in-
formal, impressionistic knowledge that may be difficult to explain, but seems shared (another
hallmark of ‘situated cognition’) inside and even across cultures (Darwin, 1872; Eibl-
Eibesfeldt, 1989). Twelve years later, Nixon’s face again betrayed him by undermining the
effect of carefully chosen words during the crucial TV speech in which he responded to the
accusations levelled at him during the Watergate scandal and tried to talk the American peo-
ple into trusting him. Umberto Eco suggests that a large part of the audience, noticing the

¹ A formal homage to religious and political authority, without questioning inner thoughts, was usually consid-
ered sufficient during the Roman Empire or the first wave of the Inquisition, between the XIII and the XIV cen-
tury; investigation of a deeper level begins with the Spanish and proceeded with the Roman Inquisition, respec-
tively XV and XVI centuries (the totalitarian regimes of the XX century have displayed an analogous concern
for control of inner thoughts). The separation of the word from the body in presence could even help define a
semiotic awareness of and disposition to language manipulation that, according to Todorov (1982), facilitated
the Spanish domination over illiterate populations in America.

² Albeit at the price of a devaluation of the body and the consequent misunderstanding of the ‘embodied’ charac-
ter of our knowledge [Descartes’ error, according to Damasio (1994) and Lakoff and Johnson (1999)].

³ The cultural hegemony of the written word may actually be seen as challenged by the broadcast image plus
word (Simone, 2000). At any rate, writing or broadcasting both enhance a lie’s potential danger.
mismatch between the reassuring rhetoric of the speech and Nixon’s appalled gaze, decided he was guilty (Eco, 1977; Nixon, 1973). In both cases all the actors involved – Nixon, his supporters, his adversaries and the audience – showed a keen awareness of an informal but consistent body of knowledge about cheating.

What about lies mediated by the written word? Despite being almost second nature for many, literacy is far less natural than the spoken language and is acquired more slowly than either talk or body language. Its asynchronous nature frees the liar from the risk of betraying him- or herself by emitting unintentional body signals. Besides, the differences in language proficiency among the population are much wider with regard to the written word. In addition, the institutions in charge of fostering literacy seldom incorporate a culture of questioning the reliability of written statements. Literacy itself is usually measured as the ability to decode a text, that is, to understand it well enough to answer questions about its content, assumed as trustworthy (OECD, 2000: 94). This limitation in a OECD’s International Adult Literacy Survey may be understandable (it can make sense to distinguish clearly between critical and decoding skills), but the ability to question the authority of a source remains a crucial requirement for functional literacy in a society which depends heavily on written or broadcast information, whose reliability is sometimes a matter of life or death.

Indeed, several people – many of whom would score in the higher end of the literacy scale – do become easy victims of lies, as in the case of this little harmless hoax:

Dear customer,

Our main competitor, Nokia, is giving free mobile phones away on the Internet. Here at Ericsson we want to counter their offer. So we are giving our newest WAP-phones away as well. They are specially developed for Internet happy customers who value cutting edge technology. By giving free phones away, we get valuable customer feedback and a great Word-of-Mouth effect. All you have to do, is to forward this message to 8 friends. After two weeks delivery time, you will receive a Ericsson T18. If you forward it to 20 friends, you will receive the brand new Ericsson R320 WAP-phone. Just remember to send a copy to xxxx.xxxxxx@ericsson.com, that is the only way we can see, that you forwarded the message.

Best of luck
xxx xxxx, Executive Promotion Manager for Ericsson Marketing

This message has been forwarded by incautious Internet users who even took the time to translate the original (whose source I do not know) into a number of languages, including Italian, French, German and Swedish (Emery, 2001). I received this piece of junk-mail myself from four people, three of whom would never be regarded as gullible by people knowing them from face-to-face interaction.

Not all hoaxes are so harmless, as the last 100 years of European history has repeatedly manifested and as demonstrated, for example, by records of judicial errors. In this respect, I assume there is a need for empowering individuals and societies by providing conceptual tools and training in detecting lies, with special focus on the written ones or, more generally, on those mediated by devices, like printing or broadcasting, that detach communication from the ‘body in presence’ and therefore seem to shield the lie somewhat from already available cultural antibodies. But is a ‘didactic of the lie’ possible?

3. Different Traditions Approaching Lies and Criticality

There are people who are extremely proficient in debunking lies (at least in their domain of expertise) and they must have learnt how to do it. But serious questions emerge as soon as we try to elicit the knowledge that triggers a critical attitude and how to shape educational intervention to foster it.
It is beyond the scope of this paper to review the vast literature about lies and cheating [150 references in Castelfranchi and Poggi (1998)]. Instead, I will start with a brief reference to the approaches that first made me aware that lies can be a legitimate subject for studies in the human sciences, and led me to consider how to implement a didactic of lie detecting. I will then focus on educational approaches to ‘criticality’ – the larger area of which lie detecting can be viewed as a subset – to highlight some disagreement about what knowledge is involved in being critical, how general and transferable this knowledge is, and about the goals and scope of educational intervention in the area of language education. Within the review of the educational literature, I will first consider approaches – such as Critical Thinking or Critical Pedagogy – that explicitly incorporate the goal of helping people to recognize when they are at risk of being deceived. I will then consider the same goal from two other viewpoints on education and criticality – Wertsch’s focus on societal knowledge and Bereiter’s on ‘expertise’; these were especially useful in defining and fostering the specific kind of criticality necessary to spot (some) lies within the possibilities and limitations of language education. Table 1 categorizes approaches to lies and to teaching criticality according to degree and kind of specificity or generality, main focus for educational intervention and the model of knowledge incorporated.

3.1 Lies, Language and Beyond

In a study that took lies as a starting point for explaining the theory later known as Textlingvistik, Harald Weinrich focuses on the instructional trait of language that leads the listener or reader to form expectations that may be fulfilled, frustrated or further refined as long as the speech or text proceeds (Weinrich, 2000, 1976). But language not only provides decoding instructions, it also gives the listener instructions for action. Lying can be considered in this context as giving someone an incorrect basis for behaviour.

Looking at language as instruction rather than representation is a first step toward understanding its power to build (possibly false) expectations and beliefs. Weinrich then presents some compelling examples from literary texts of lies announced by “signals of lying”, that he sees as “inherited in rather stable form over the centuries” and defines as “topoi in form and content, that don’t even need to be forwarded through conscious learning, but are triggered automatically whenever one tries to write a story about lies” (Weinrich 2000: 72, my translation and emphasis). But how can one recognize indications of lying in fiction? According to Weinrich “literary education is not even necessary: [...] It just takes some knowledge of mankind” (Weinrich 2000: 74); Weinrich insists, however, on literature’s special aptness in reproducing such signals for the pleasure of the (clever) reader: “The signals of lying are necessary ingredients of the lie in literature [...] They are a constituting element of the information and transform, for those who have ears to hear, the information in its opposite” (Weinrich 2000: 74). But are lies accompanied by signals of lying in real life too?

Weinrich is not explicit about this point, but his study implicitly suggests – at least, suggested to me – that a transfer to real life is possible. As discussed below in Section 4.4, I believe that fiction can teach us something relevant about lying behaviour, but I am sceptical about finding a general rule for spotting signals of lying in asynchronous communication; as a form of linguistic disguise, an effective lie will comply as closely as possible with the con-

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4 Original: “Die Lügendichtung [...] ist von einer Fülle von Lügensignalen durchsetzt, die sich übrigens mit großer Beständigkeit durch die Jahrhunderte vererben. Es sind formale und inhaltliche Topoi, die nicht einmal durch bewußtes Lernen weiter-gegeben zu werden brauchen, sondern die sich wie von selbst einstellen, wenn man eine Lüngengeschichte zu schreiben versucht. Die Lügensignale gehören genauso notwendig zur literarischen Lüge wie die Ironiesignale zur Ironie [analyzed in a previous chapter]. Sie sind Bestandteil der Information und kehren für jeden, der zu hören Ohren hat, die Information in ihr Gegenteil um.”
### Table 1: Different approaches to lies and to teaching ‘criticality’.

#### Approaches with main focus on analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special focus on individuals/institutions/tools</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistics of the lie</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lying as cheating behaviour</td>
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</table>

#### Approaches with main focus on educational intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specificity vs. generality</th>
<th>Main focus on individuals/institutions/tools</th>
<th>Model of knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>Strong claim for generality and transferability of the skills involved</td>
<td>Individual ‘Faulty’ reasoning processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Pedagogy / Critical approaches to language or discourse</td>
<td>Strong claim for generality of the problem</td>
<td>Institutions Ideology and power relations hidden in language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalogues of lies</td>
<td>Domain-specific (e.g. health frauds, urban legends, etc.)</td>
<td>Lies and hoaxes Contents developed by a community of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-cultural approach</td>
<td>Learning as taking part in social practice and teaching as creating a setting with a ‘culture’ that makes learning necessary and possible</td>
<td>Interplay between society and individuals and groups’ motives Language as conceptual tool mediating action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Being critical’ as ‘being expert’</td>
<td>Against claims for generality Need for specific factual knowledge but focus on (see next column)</td>
<td>Progressive problem solving Wide range competencies (e.g. on language, communication, cognition) Relevant content areas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focusing on the instructional trait of language remains, however, an important first
step for highlighting the motives of the persons involved in communication, as independently
proposed also by Bakhtinian approaches to linguistics that show how utterances reflect and
answer (often unspoken) questions in a dialogue with the listener (Nølke, 1999, 2002; Tan-
nen, 1997). The notion of ‘strategies of involvement’ as rationale beyond different styles in
verbal communication, as developed by Tannen (1984, 1986, 1989, 1992, 1997), brings us a
little further in understanding the function of discursive resources, like the use of details or
expressive vs. understated evaluation, in shaping the relationship of the speaker or writer to-
wards the listener/reader and the topic. But, as Deborah Tannen’s life-work itself illustrates,
understanding a communicative situation requires help from disciplines other than linguistics,
such as anthropology or social and cognitive psychology. Looking at language as a device for
influencing others rather than just conveying information enables us to frame lying within the
dichotomy of co-operation and cheating, as the opposite of a pattern of behaviour and com-
unicating that is associated by default in our society with some readiness to co-operate, or at
least to negotiate. An analysis of the different kinds of relationships and roles assumed by
partners in communication, and their implications for lying and believing in lies, is a major
contribution of Castelfranchi and Poggi’s (1994; and especially 1998) vast inventory of de-
ceitful behaviour. The notion of co-operation and its opposite (‘cheating’ or ‘aggression’) is
also useful for defining the goals and results of lies, and for identifying the kind of antisocial
examples we wish to spot and counteract.

The power of language – including its ability in the field of fiction to simulate lies –
but also the inadequacy of considering language alone as the criterion for assessing credibility
will remain the pillars for the model of lying and lie detecting that I try to integrate into an L1
curriculum (see especially Section 4.2), after considering the contribution of different ap-
proaches to criticality.

3.2 Teaching Self-Defence: Critical Thinking

The mission of the body of research and intervention known as Critical Thinking is to provide
the individual learner with appropriate thinking skills and the training for activating those
skills. This tradition – which usually incorporates a view of knowledge as a body of facts and
rules for manipulating them – is also positive about the existence of skills for thinking criti-
cally that are to some extent general and transferable across domains (Halpern, 1998; Paul,
1992, for examples of integration of Critical Thinking across the curriculum). Research in
cognitive science, especially in problem solving skills and the pitfalls of flawed reasoning
(whether autonomous or induced), provides much of the theoretical background for a tradition
committed to endowing the learner with tools for rational inquiry and decision-making, as re-
cently described for example in Halpern (1998) or in Burbules and Berk (1999).

A comparison of these two accounts, the first from a leading representative of Critical
Thinking, the latter from more detached observers, gives some insight into the traditional ba-
sic tenets and the more recent concerns of this approach. Burbules and Berk’s (1999) docu-
dmented and prototypical description of Critical Thinking, with scientific reasoning as a central
reference, is clearly recognizable in Halpern’s as well, for example in her suggestion that
“people function like intuitive scientists to explain, predict and control events” (Halpern,
1998: 452) and in her persistent concern with “faulty thinking patterns”. The model of inter-
vention she proposes, however, also seems concerned with countering and integrating criti-
cisms about the tradition’s lack of attention to dispositions or to institutional context (as for
example in Burbules and Berk (1999)); Halpern (1998) places much emphasis on the “dispo-
sitional or attitudinal” component (p. 452), pays attention to the “skills needed to comprehend and defend against the persuasive techniques that are embedded in everyday language” (p. 452) and finally finds the transferability of the high order critical-thinking skills to educational settings consistent with a ‘situated cognition’ viewpoint (p. 453). On the same wavelength, Tsui (2001), another representative of Critical Thinking, focuses on the culture of the institution as a key condition for developing student criticality.

The ways in which the Critical Thinking approach has some relevance for our educational problem become more evident when we compare this approach with another kind of criticality.

3.3 Teaching Self-Defence: Critical Pedagogy

Critical Pedagogy shares with Critical Thinking the same set of general emancipatory goals but has a quite different agenda, as Burbules and Berk (1999) illustrate in their informative and insightful paper.

Rooted in neo-Marxist Critical Theory, committed to social and political engagement and devoting greater attention to the institutional settings, Critical Pedagogy seeks to shape education as a way to enable citizens to resist unjust power relations by fostering their critical capacities. Applied to language education, Critical Pedagogy translates for example into Fairclough’s campaign for a Critical Language Awareness; in this approach the student is assisted not only to meet the literacy needs imposed by society, but also to challenge and possibly change them through adaptation to her/his (and the group’s) real needs (Fairclough, 1989: 233–247 and 1992: 7–12). In a collection of papers on Critical Language Awareness, Wallace (1992: 59) illustrates a kind of classroom practice aimed at “reading between the lines” through activities that help the students to expose some subtle ideological biases that are potentially harmful to the unaware reader. This kind of critical approach has further developed into Critical Discourse Analysis, a research program about how discourse not only represents reality, but constructs it by shaping relations and identities (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997).

Burbules and Berk (1999) have highlighted important differences in roots and agendas between Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: while for example a typical polemic target for Critical Thinking would be an unsubstantiated truth claim, Critical Pedagogy (or Critical Discourse Analysis) would also (and maybe primarily) attack language-constructed assumptions that help reinforce an unjust status quo, such as power inequality between men and women.

Critical Pedagogy may be accused of crossing the threshold between criticism and indoctrination, while Critical Thinking’s concern for impartiality is prone to accusations of naïve positivism. As Burbules and Berk (1999) put it, “Critical Thinking’s claim is, at heart, to teach how to think critically, not how to think politically; for Critical Pedagogy, this is a false distinction”.

I will try to highlight the contrast by discussing the implicit ideology in a Critical Thinking text. Halpern (1998) uses the ‘sunk cost argument’ as a typical example of flawed reasoning, because “prior investments are not relevant to decisions about future costs”; that is, if I have to decide whether my old car is worth an expensive repair job, the amount of money I already spent on it should be irrelevant, as the only thing that matters is whether my car is now worth the repair. So far, so good, but Halpern wants to avoid the same flawed reasoning in the decision to eventually marry a longtime girlfriend because of the many years already

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5 Paulo Freire is possibly the best known representative of this tradition. A critical analysis of his relevance to today can be found in Glass (2001).
6 This accusation lurks for example in Widdowson’s criticism of critical discourse analysis [Widdowson (2000), with references to other instances of a debate opposing himself to Fairclough].
spent together (p. 453). Now, framing together the decision to repair an old car and to marry an old girlfriend means (implicitly) assuming a wife-as-commodity metaphor, which I find both misleading and morally disgusting. Halpern might in turn answer – I suppose – that she meant something different, as she was referring to ‘investments’ in terms of quality of life; she might even retort, borrowing ‘my’ tools, that I misunderstood her because of an anti-capitalist bias of mine, and that anyway the ‘sunk cost argument’ remains bad reasoning whatever the realm, real or metaphorical.

I refrain now (with effort) from replying to that retort, but the point is that this discussion should continue. This is the conclusion reached by Burbules and Berk (1999), who see a value precisely in the unreconciled tension between the two ‘critical’ traditions and propose therefore to establish criticality as a practice based on dialogue, “a mark of what we do, of who we are, and not only how we think” . A focus on open dialogue aimed at further understanding will become extremely important when examining statements whose status as ‘lies’ is bound to remain unresolved.

3.4 Teaching Self-Defence: Catalogues of Lies on Specific Topics

On the other end of the generality-axis, I wish to include some collections of domain-specific lies, although they are not traditionally part of the literature on education. As we saw in Section 2, the knowledge activated in lie detecting is typically situated, connected to a given setting. Providing knowledge about that setting plus some examples of typical frauds is the obvious, rather widespread and probably effective approach adopted by some short guides to evaluating online information that I have been able to locate on the Internet (e.g. Starr, 2000; Emery, 2001; Barrett, 2001; Harris, 1997). All follow a hands-on and rather prescriptive approach, though with different degrees of generality: Emery’s and Barrett’s sites offer a list of known hoaxes (urban legends for the former, health frauds for the latter) plus some rules of thumb for detecting cases that deserve suspicion, while Starr and Harris propose some guidelines plus a checklist.

These lists bear some resemblance to parents’ advice to children not to accept candy from strangers and to keep away from some notoriously nasty neighbour: sound, valuable advice, to be later integrated in a more adult and general model for relationships with others. The above-named sites indeed provide plenty of material that might be used in a classroom for raising awareness of the potentially deceitful character of information. However, the sites themselves do not provide any general understanding of the mechanics of lying and do not have any pretence of transferability to other domains. They content themselves with delivering updated information about hoaxing in some domains, thus giving the reader a chance for expanding her/his expertise and possibly empowering her/him eventually to spot not-yet-debunked lies. Quackwatch, for example (Barrett, 2001), works explicitly as a community of practice for people committed to exposing junk-science. Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate research on the educational impact or use of these resources.

3.5 Teaching Self-Defence: a Note on A Socio-Cultural Perspective

The Vygotskian traditions, which may share the political agenda of Critical Pedagogy but represent a quite unrelated line of research, move from the tenet that all thought and communica-

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7 As a first step toward finding these sites, I searched in turn for “hoaxes”, “debunking”, “urban legends”, and “bad science” on the Google search engine (www.google.com), which orders its results by placing the ones linked to “authoritative sites” on the top of the list (Specter, 2000).
tion are embedded in cultural, historical and social processes, with language as a cultural tool for shaping both social and individual activity (for example, Wertsch, 1991; a review of different approaches inside the traditions of societal knowledge in Hedegaard, 1999 and 2001). Learning is considered in this tradition as a form of participation in social practice, while teaching means creating a setting with a culture – incorporated for example in the tools and in the attitudes of the institution – that makes learning both necessary and possible. Lying and lie detecting could also be viewed in this tradition as mastering of cultural tools like language and narratives.

During a seminar on literacy, responding to a question about the possibility of teaching how to detect lies, James Wertsch answered that he had never encountered such widespread and advanced lie detecting skills as in the (then) Soviet Union (J. Wertsch, personal communication). At a more analytic level, Wertsch has demonstrated – through analysis connecting the macro level of social processes with the micro level of individual action – the centrality of different or even clashing motives, like passing an examination and affirming one’s identity as a rebel, in determining the strategies for appropriation and resistance to historical narratives in the former Soviet Union after 1991 (Wertsch, 1998). If we were to translate these observations into educational suggestion, a totalitarian state with pervasive propaganda – or maybe just a reproduction thereof on a small scale in school and family – would be a perfect setting for fostering the development of lie-detecting skills. On a more positive note, motivation, meaningful activities, but also dialogical confrontation as opposed to monovocality (Rodrigues Rojo, 2001) emerge again as central ingredients for the cognitive development of individuals and groups. A clear problem emerges however in this context: the qualities that make a good lie detector are dangerously close to those of a good liar and at any rate a distrusting attitude can be at odds with the values of the institution and of the families. He or she who engages in teaching lie detecting should let moral issues emerge and be willing to negotiate them.

3.6 Teaching Self-Defence: Being Critical as Being Expert

Carl Bereiter, in a chapter with the polemic title Critical Thinking, Creativity and Other Virtues, acknowledges that there is often “some value” in teaching inspired by Critical Thinking approaches, but sees motivation as a crucial factor for criticality, one that weakens the whole notion of critical thinking skills, as “people are usually quite adept at finding the flaws in arguments they are opposed to; logic tends to desert us when it comes to recognizing the flaws in arguments we are disposed to believe”. Critical thinking should also be considered “as a virtue rather then a skill”: but “the problem, as with all virtues, is to practise it in the face of temptations to do otherwise” (Bereiter, 2002: 363).

The key to being critical, according to research that Bereiter first carried out with Marlene Scardamalia (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993), is being expert. Experts, however, are never general experts, but rather people who

- know a lot in a given area, that is, dispose of a large body of factual but also of implicit and impressionistic knowledge (for a discussion of different kinds of knowledge and understanding see Bereiter, 2002: 131–173; a previous elaboration in Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1993: 43–69);
- can exercise progressive problem solving (that is, are able to move to increasing levels of complexity when facing a problem).

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8 Wertsch’s focus is not primarily on educational intervention, but on cultural-psychological analysis, with Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Kenneth Burke and de Certeau as the main reference figures. The appropriation/resistance dichotomy comes originally from de Certeau (1984).
The very core of *becoming* an expert, or *continuing* to be one, lies especially in the ability to engage in progressive problem solving; here lies the difference between experts (or expert-like novices) and long-time practitioners, that is, people who can handle even complex routine tasks but perform poorly when things stop working the usual way (as may be the case – I would add – when decoding the surface of a text without perceiving its hidden agenda).

As for defining the knowledge possessed by experts in the form of educational goals, Bereiter – who wishes to keep his distance from learning models and teaching practice that imply mind-as-container metaphors – prefers to use the broader concept of ‘understanding’ as the ‘ability to act intelligently’ on the basis of a meaningful relation with something or someone. Understanding a person means also being able to act intelligently in relation to her/him (there can be of course many right ways to do so, depending on one’s relationship to that person); this in turn entails becoming interested in the person, understanding the relationship set in a broader context (family, occupations, personal history) and being able to talk about the person, her/his underlying motives, dispositions, strengths, weaknesses. A deep understanding is then demonstrated by insightful solution of problems involving the person and by telling stories that have depth of characterization. It is worth noting that a deep understanding can only arise from a deep involvement (the whole example is from Bereiter, 2002: 101–115). If we apply such a relational view of understanding to a text, we should not only become able to decode it, but also to feel about it, or – in the case of a narrative – to use it to exemplify or to produce other stories showing similar patterns. For example, laughing may reveal an adequate understanding of a joke, while an even deeper understanding is revealed by being able to adapt the joke to a different public (Bereiter, 2002: 194–195). In this relational view of understanding, teaching means assisting the learner to establish and deepen a relation (Bereiter, 2002: 111–115), while the teaching model – a redefinition of the ‘community of practice’ after the model of a research and development team – suggests the need to provide a community with the necessary conceptual tools and to engage in activities of progressive problem solving, with students and teachers alike operating on the edge of their knowledge (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993; Bereiter, 2002).

This is the general educational platform of which my proposal for a didactic of the lie is an instance. But what does it mean to have expertise about lies?

### 3.7 In Summary: Bringing Expertise about Lies into the Classroom

Adequate understanding of a lie may range from becoming slightly suspicious to fully exposing both the lie and the motives of the liar. The literature reviewed above indicates that reaching such understanding requires some knowledge about language and communication and their role in shaping relationships among people, some knowledge about the people involved in the communication and their motives, and finally some knowledge about the topic which is lied about (see Section 4.3 below for examples). As for any educational intervention, all the revised approaches propose to involve a community in meaningful (that is, based on or close to real life) and motivating activities.

From 1992 to 1998 – the period when I introduced lie detecting in my agenda as a teacher of language and history in an Italian secondary school – and then to the present moment, my confidence that lie detecting could be taught as a rather general ability has diminished, as a retrospective analysis of my classroom practice will illustrate in Sections 5 and 6. I still believe, however, that it is possible to inoculate some awareness about lies, why they may be so successful and how it is possible to recognize ‘danger zones’. It is now especially Bereiter and Scardamalia’s concepts of ‘criticality as expertise’ and ‘understanding as intelligent action’ that encourage me to put students in contact with the approaches of writers, rhetoricians, psychologists, semioticians and linguists, taken in their role as experts on lying.
In particular, my proposal for a strand of ‘lie detecting’ within the institutional constraints of first language education incorporates the following principles:

1. teach enough about beliefs and communication to make the students aware that meaning is always constructed with the co-operation of the receiver (and not simply transmitted and received);
2. examine lies from literature and film from the point of view of the victim, of the liar, of the form of the lie, of the encyclopaedic knowledge involved; prompt the students to look for similarities with real life situations;
3. put the students in controlled situations where they are lied to, and then discuss the similarities with the other lies encountered;
4. let the students build lies and discuss them, since the requirements for being a successful lie detector are similar to those of the liar, who also needs a good understanding of the potential victim’s beliefs and expectations and of the communication tools at his/her disposal;
5. confront potential lies as problems posed to the classroom as a community of practice.

The next section will describe the activities 1–2, that is how concepts related to communication and beliefs can be integrated in an L1 curriculum; Section 5 will then focus on activities 3–5 with ‘real’ lies (controlled or not). The whole educational proposal is designed to run over two school years, with students aged 14 to 16.

4. The Study of Lies in Language Education

This section, which owes much to the comments of an anonymous reviewer, integrates some experience and reflection after I stopped teaching L1-Italian; in other words, the conceptual tools for discussing lies are described using the more evolved theoretical frame that I would propose to a classroom now. On the other hand, the activities involving lies from the real world – in Section 5 below – will be described exactly as they were originally carried out, so that the actual experience can be evaluated.

4.1 Meaning Is Always (Re)constructed, Not Just Transferred

A folk-psychological and folk-epistemological view of learning as mere transfer of knowledge from one source (the teacher, the book) into the head of a listener or reader (the student) still plagues a good deal of classroom practice and the culture of schooling as perceived by many pupils, parents and even teachers (Bereiter, 2002). However, by the age of 14 – at least in my experience – most Italian pupils have been exposed to classroom practice requiring them to take responsibility for their own and the group’s understanding. Not many of them, however, are capable of reflecting on their and the classroom’s learning process. My contribution to raising their epistemological awareness – in the sense indicated by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1989, 1996; also Bereiter, 1997) – focuses on a better understanding of communication, especially the all-but-passive role of the listener or reader.

This requires criticizing the transfer-of-knowledge view of communication and learning in favour of a more active role of the receiver in terms of appropriation and maybe resis-

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9 Until very recently, teachers in the Italian school system have usually received an amount of instruction in pedagogical issues which is inversely proportional to the age of their students. Teachers in kindergartens and elementary school (3–6 and 6–11) are on average pedagogically far more advanced than their colleagues in secondary schools, who were educated almost exclusively in their subject areas.
tance, that is actions involving awareness of and responsibility for one’s beliefs. Lie detecting activities also place themselves inside a more general educational path towards understanding communication and learning.

4.2 ‘Structures of Expectations’ (‘Frames’) Steer our Understanding

The use of prior (linguistic and non-linguistic) knowledge is at the core of many methods of reading strategy instruction (Bimmel, 2001) and also the approach I practice most in language education in the first year of junior secondary school. A conceptual tool that my students become most acquainted with right from the start is the ‘structure of expectations’.

Tannen (1993) has demonstrated how terms such as ‘frames’, ‘scripts’ and ‘schema’ – all referring to what she generally defines as ‘structures of expectations’ – have been recognized by different traditions in the human sciences as playing a crucial role in a range of cognitive processes, from observing to recalling. In the same paper, Tannen then examines how such structures of expectations are reflected in language, by analysing a corpus of stories told by viewers of a short film; the examples show clearly how the whole process of understanding and recalling the film is steered by expectations (or ‘frames’) about situations, people, objects, genre, conventions. ‘Framing’ a speech act or a text means, in this perspective, recognizing its relevance to a situation and activating the related knowledge, attitudes and feelings involved. When communication occurs in a face-to-face situation, it is often the voice pitch and body language of the speaker (usually fine-tuned by the immediate feedback from the partner in communication) that help the listener to frame the message according to the intentions of the speaker (e.g. irony, sarcasm or friendliness). Elsewhere, Tannen (1986) provides convincing examples of how interpersonal misunderstandings are most likely to arise when technology transfers speech-like verbal content into a situation devoid of immediate feedback or mitigating devices, as with answering machines or hastily written e-mails.

All in all, however, language – through its instructional trait, see Section 3.1 – is an effective way for steering the listener’s expectations to build (possibly false) expectations and beliefs.

To help students grasp the notion of frames and the role of expectations, I would introduce riddles, and then prompt some reflection on how easy they became to understand, once given a small clue. In the subsequent study of written language and longer texts, the students became accustomed, during the whole first school year, to predicting activities based on prior knowledge about genre conventions and general knowledge about the topic.

As we will later discuss, the most difficult problem for spotting a lie is to frame a speech act or a text as a potential lie. Activating this frame is often 90% of the work, as with the clues to solving a riddle. My working hypothesis is that theoretical knowledge about language and the psychology of communication blended with examples of lies – the subject of the next two paragraphs – provides a basis for establishing a more alert attitude towards believing what one is told. At the same time, becoming aware of the paramount importance of expectations for understanding should make it clear that the more we know, the more appropriate our expectations will be; conversely, a shallow understanding of a topic makes a person a more likely victim of lies and hoaxes, like the economically naïve academics eager to receive free mobile phones.

10 Tannen’s proposal to recognize similar “structures of expectation” in the “frames” proposed by Bateson (1972) and by Minsky (1975), or in Schank and Abelson’s (1977) “scripts, plans and goals” or already in Bartlett’s (1932) “active, developing patterns”, can in my view also apply to later approaches, such as George Lakoff’s (1987) theory of metaphors or Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner’s concepts of “mental spaces” and “conceptual blends” as building blocks of imagination and creativity (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002).
4.3 Language Can Lie, but Also Tell the truth

Human beings mainly lie with words, or rather with speeches and texts (German even uses the expression ‘er lügt wie gedruckt’, ‘he lies like a printed book’). This does not mean that language itself is untrustworthy. The natural languages at the basis of speeches and texts are adequate tools for communicating: they have developed into the blend of precision and generality required by interpersonal communication inside the community of reference and are by far more apt to convey any nuance in meaning than any known artificial language (Weinrich, 1976: §4; Winograd & Flores, 1986). Adequate translations of texts are possible (Weinrich, 2000: 14–24). This does not mean that language is easy; it is a quite complex device which often has conflicting goals to satisfy, such as showing affection, maintaining independence, or obtaining something from others without imposing on them (Tannen, 1986). In many situations, one will not and cannot say what one means, and communication then relies on a rather sophisticated exchange requiring that words and sentences not be taken at face value but at a meta-level. However, as long as communication proceeds on a co-operative basis, no form of indirectness – such as courtesy or understatement – is devised to hide rather than to reveal thoughts (Weinrich, 1976; in a more problematic perspective, Tannen, 1986, 1990).

In summary, language (or ‘discourse’, as it is now often referred to) not only represents and constructs reality, but also the identity of the communication partners and their relationship (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997); understanding also makes it necessary to recognize (to frame!) these different levels. Given this presupposition, we can now attempt a definition of the ‘lie’.

If we look at language as instruction, as proposed in Sections 3.1 and 4.2, lying means giving someone an incorrect basis for behaviour. More precisely, if we integrate the instructional function with the multiple layers on which language operates, a lie is typically aimed at misleading the potential victim from several points of view: about the ‘facts’, about the identity of the speaker and about her/his relationship to the listener. But how can a person be so thoroughly fooled?

Let us consider ‘total lies’, like Hitler’s statement at the 1938 Munich conference that Germany had no further territorial claims after settling the dispute with Czechoslovakia, when he was actually organizing the invasion of Poland; or the radio transmissions persuading Serbian-Bosnian citizens to fight their Muslim neighbours, who were allegedly planning to kill Serbs and imprison their women in harems, at the onset of civil war in the former Yugoslavia (Maass, 1996: 113–114 and 227–229). In both cases, the lie fell on fertile ground, that is a situation loaded with expectations: war or peace? And the listeners and victims believed these lies, as long as they matched their expectations, desires or fears.

It would be a dangerous mistake, however, to think that the people who became victims of these and other lies were just stupid or back-wards; journalist Peter Maass, after describing the decisive role of Serbian propaganda in the outbreak of civil war, notes that “[i]t was simple, clean, effective. Serbs swallowed it. In a similar situation, so might we” (Maass, 1996: 228).

A recent and most gripping document permits first-hand observation of a lie that played a role in the loss of 7,000 human lives. During the siege of Srebrenica by the Bosnian Serb army in 1995, the town was supposedly defended by a small troop of Dutch peacekeeping soldiers under the UN flag. General Ratko Mladic, the Serb commander, carried out negotiations with the Dutch UN commander in order to assure a ‘peaceful’ takeover of the town. The encounters were tape-recorded and long sequences can now be heard in Leslie Woodhead’s documentary Srebrenica: A cry from the grave (2000). General Mladic, who was at the time by far the strongest player on the field, acts as the hard but honest soldier, trustworthy in his claim not to harm civilians in the case of a peaceful surrender. Almost everybody knew instead that a massacre was likely to happen as soon as the Dutch troops were out of sight, and plenty of precedents could confirm this fear, but the Dutch general – under the
pressure of the situation, and feeling abandoned by the UN and NATO, who failed to provide military assistance – was possibly acting in good faith when he finally ‘believed’ Mladic and left Srebrenica’s citizens to their destiny.

In these three examples, as in most others cases taken from real life, the liars lied first of all about their personal trustworthiness – respectively as statesmen, journalists or soldiers – but their victims also had a part too, as willing accomplices.

But how is it possible to expand one’s awareness about lies through ways different from bitter personal experience?

4.4 Fictional Narrative Can Also Help Understand Lies

Literature can be used as a tool to provide insights into many aspects of real life, “..for gaining leverage over social and psychological problems, for meeting needs, for making possible a variety of pleasures and satisfactions, for patterning expectations, assumptions, values and behavioral norms” (Raskin, 1982: 16; the quotation actually refers more generally to art).

Following another metaphor, compatible with Raskin’s functional view of art, and with Rosenblatt’s (1995) idea of exploration, literature can be seen as a safe space for simulation (Oatley, 1999, 2001). Oatley, a psychologist who made an important contribution to the understanding of the function of feelings (Oatley & Jenkins, 1996), re-reads Aristotle in the light of research on cognition and underlines how mimesis by the writer or narrator and identification by the reader or spectator make fiction a safe playground for expanding experience, and therefore a resource that may have played an important role in the development of the human species.

Of course, any human behaviour can be simulated through fiction. My point, however, is that language and especially the lie can find in fiction a ‘natural’ representation. Tannen (1986, 1989, 1992, 1997) has focused much of her research on the strategies of involvement operated by communication partners and has demonstrated how everyday conversation and literature share a good deal of stylistic tools designed to create involvement in communication. Combining Tannen’s view with the above mentioned levels at which language constructs and reflects the world (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), we can finally spot possible lies by setting our focus on the rhetorical devices that promote involvement with the topic, with the speaker’s or writer’s identity, with the relationship of the partners in communication.

This is how I would now explain Weinrich’s assertion that fictional lies are made recognizable to the reader through ‘lie signals’ (Weinrich, 2000: 70–76). In a typical narrative situation, the reader or spectator realizes that a character is lying; the lying character may even call the attention of the audience to his/her mastery in the art of lying, as in the scene (1,2) in which Richard III seduces the wife of the man he has just murdered and turns her hate into trust by exploiting her distress and need for protection.

I will present now other instances of fiction which can contribute to our understanding of lying behaviour and even provide a language for discussing lies in the real world.

Collodi’s Pinocchio (1883) invented a symbol, a nose growing longer with every lie, that has become part of the language for talking about lies in Western culture. The tale of Pinocchio can be seen as a kind of Bildungsroman in which the puppet/boy has to learn through bitter experience not to lie to friends, but also to keep silent when necessary and not to trust strangers who make improbable claims (Caviglia, 2000). As the story was written for barely literate young people at the end of nineteenth century, the lie signals are sometimes almost too evident, as when the Fox and the Cat, claiming to “work only to enrich others”, persuade Pinocchio to sow his five gold pieces in the Field of Wonders, in order to harvest two thousand after one night. This emblematic tale of naivety bears, however, more than some resemblance
with the true story of the loss suffered by many investors in dot-com firms, according to culture critic Michele Serra (2001), who laughs at

the silent and bewildered crowd that for months have been switching on their computers every morning to go to the Field of Wonders site, and can’t find their gold pieces any more, and curse the day they believed that the old economy, the one based on labour and sweat, had been replaced by a brand new one where money ceaselessly grows out of money, by natural cloning [...].

Serra recalls Pinocchio’s wondering question to Cat&Fox Consulting, “But how can they [the five gold pieces] possibly become so many?” and answers: “This is possible, in Collodi’s tale as well as in today’s story, only in a kingdom of infinite naivety. And thanks to an instinctive, dreaming greed, as of children who can still believe that money is a magic fruit [...].” In any case, if Pinocchio may seem too naive for today’s teenagers to identify with, the Harry Potter series offers a more refined picture of the power of lies, expectations and fears.

One of the main characters, Sirius Black, though innocent, still faces a pending life sentence for complicity in the homicide of a friend, while the true supposedly dead traitor is still officially revered as a hero (Rowling, 1999). The vicious journalist Rita Seeker spreads misinformation through the whole fourth book; she even makes up a story about Hermione being Harry’s girlfriend and then betraying him; it is worth noting that even a positive and anything-but-stupid character like Mrs. Weasley falls victim to this outright lie (Rowling, 2000: 476).

Throughout Rowling’s books, the reader also witnesses how lies work and how it happens that good and even clever people – characters he or she may easily identify with – can be victimized by liars. Moral implications are handled in an increasingly sophisticated way across the four books, for example in the dialectic between fair play and cheating (possibly by necessity) in games and in real life. Magic powers can produce dangerous illusions: the Mirror of Erises reflects a person’s deepest, most desperate desires (Rowling, 1997: 157), while the wicked Dementors can evoke the worst memories and deepest fears (Rowling, 1998). But at the end of lies, disguises and mysteries, ‘truth’ is the only keyword to personal development and action, a point made most clearly in the gripping finale of the fourth book (Rowling, 2000: 590, 610–617, 626).

There is surely other fiction that can be used just as well (Homer and Shakespeare, in the first place), but J. K. Rowling’s books do provide a consistent body of enjoyable material for building theoretical knowledge on lies.

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11 Original: la folla silenziosa e smarrita che ogni mattina, da mesi, quando apre il computer sul sito «Campo dei Miracoli» non trova più i suoi zecchini, e bestemmia il giorno in cui ha creduto che davvero la vecchia economia, quella fondata sulla maledizione del lavoro e del sudore, fosse rimpiazzata da una nuova di zecchini, nella quale dal denaro nasce denaro, ininterrottamente, per naturale clonazione [...].

12 Original: “È possibile, nel racconto di Collodi come nel nostro, solo nel regno della sua sterminata ingenuità. E in virtù di quella spontanea, sognante avidità che è tipica dei bambini, che ancora possono illudersi che i soldi siano un frutto magico [...].”

13 Variations on this pattern are possible, of course, like in Chaplin’s film Monsieur Verdoux (1947), where the viewer would probably sympathize with the liar. But in the most typical pattern we find, an ‘innocent’ character tricked or seduced by some villain that he or she recognizes as such only too late, and anyway later than the reader or spectator, like in Martin Scorsese’s film Cape Fear (1991), where maniac Max Cady (Robert de Niro) seduces and kisses his enemy’s teenage daughter. The same pattern applies to Kathrin Bigelow’s Blue Steel (1990) or Wes Craven’s Scream (1996), while in the more sophisticated The Usual Suspects (1995) by Bryan Singer and The Sixth Sense (1999) by M. Night Shyalaman, the audience is also misled until the last scene. An absolute masterpiece on lying, truth and narrative, maybe too old for the standards of most of today’s students, is Akira Kurosawa’s Rashomon (1956), where the same story of murder and rape is ‘seen’ through the eyes of the murderer, the victim, the raped wife of the victim and finally a casual witness, who reveals the human misery of the other three.

14 Actually, during my teaching in Italy 1992–1998 I mainly used texts from Homer’s Odyssey and Shakespeare (especially Richard III, also with help from Al Pacino’s Looking for Richard, 1996), combined with some of the
Fiction can also provide the insight that focusing on language may not be enough for lie detecting. In Mohsen Makhmalbaf’s *The Sun behind the Moon* (2001), a street-wise Afghan boy is offered a sum for leading an Afghan-Canadian woman through the desert to Kandahar; as she is completely covered with a burqa, the boy asks to see her face before coming to a deal: “Show me your face, I want to see that you are not a liar”.

The typical lesson based on fiction in literature or film consisted of reading or viewing the piece of work together and then discussing the topics which most interested the students, with some prompting questions from me in the few cases when the students failed to address a topic on my list. Other activities such as putting short scenes on a classroom stage or rewriting stories were used as well. On the whole, however, I have been using fiction in the classroom with as little intervention as possible from my side, in part as a compensation for a much tougher approach in teaching reading comprehension, which was almost exclusively based on non-literary texts; during the first year of secondary school, fiction and creative writing were also a kind of reward for the whole classroom and I believed that literature’s sheer power was almost enough to foster growth and insight, once reading comprehension had been secured. The choice of the appropriate texts (or films) for a given topic and group of students was also my primary concern.

I would now be less radical in dividing between literature-as-reward and non-literature-as-toil and would propose a more structured approach to fiction in the classroom, aimed at bringing impressionistic knowledge to a higher level of awareness and refinement, with the help of reading response logs and activities “bridging the creative and the critical”, as proposed by Kooy and Wells (1996) and Woods (2001). In particular, I would be more daring in exploring student feelings about a text and more explicit in making them aware of their own beliefs and values, and of existing conflicts, for example integrating the approach described by Poyas (2001) with my own research on conflicting value systems in Italy (Caviglia, 2000).

### 4.5 Imitation (and Then Lies) Require Deep Understanding of Communication

The ability to imitate a behaviour consciously is an important and complex tool for human development (Maturana & Varela, 1987; Leland & Bateson, 2001), and has come of age mainly in the last decade as a productive approach to the teaching of writing (Geist, 1996; Couzijn & Rijlaarsdam, 1996; Ferraris, Caviglia & Degl’Innocenti, 1992); it is one that I myself have extensively proposed in the classroom right from the beginning. Lies and hoaxes are forgeries based on conscious imitation and carry the hallmark of ‘deep understanding’ (Berger, 2002: 103–104; also here, Section 3.6) of texts and situations; the liar is someone who pinpoints some vital features of an original model of communicative/co-operative behaviour and reproduces them in a different context under different constraints [an intriguing and controversial academic hoax is described in Sokal (2000)].

Lie producing can also be an effective way to understand lying, possibly even more productive than activities focused on lie detecting (G. Rijlaarsdam, personal communication).
5. Understanding and Producing Lies at School

A didactic of the lie cannot be implemented as a short-term course; it is only too easy to spot a lie if one has been warned in advance, and the activities with 'real lies' were therefore spread across the central months of the second school year, as well as to make lie detecting (and, with some risks, joking with hoaxes) become part of the culture of the learning community. I propose here a few units, each covering some aspect of coping with lies, that can be developed in one session (from one to four 45-min. periods, in some cases requiring homework). They are designed first to assess and then to help further the student’s mastery of the tools described in the previous section.

5.1 You Won ...: Exposing Techniques for Involvement

In the 1990s, in Italy, people could quite often find in their mail boxes letters starting with these or equivalent words. When I submitted one of them to the classroom, the students could immediately see that such letters were just trying to sell something. There is little point in asking the students if these texts are trustworthy (“we are not that stupid to believe advertising”, is their typical claim); it is more rewarding to let them expose the involvement techniques used by these letters, which are often sophisticated enough to convince a target that it has been selected as belonging to a community of, for example, “customers who value cutting edge technology” (see Section 2 above). Technology can help give the receiver the feeling of having being chosen out of many simply by letting his/her name pop up throughout the text. Imposing letterheads seek to lend trustworthiness to the firms sending them. Imitation and parody of these letters in the classroom, with use of mail-merge facilities linked to a small database of people and their occupations and interests (for example, connecting the students with their favourite football team and offering them the appropriate fan-club gadgets), can provide some insight in how easily the trick works.

This analysis of techniques can later develop into analysis of more refined advertising that does not contain blatant lies but implicitly appeals to the same ‘rhetoric of exclusiveness’, usually through visual associations of a given product with smart people and ambiances.

5.2 Debunking a Hoax

Once the students have become familiar – through analysis of fictional or historical lies – with the idea that people are vulnerable to being cheated in situations loaded with deep-seated fears or desires, it should be time for them to be put on trial and confronted with a ‘true hoax’. My favourite is a leaflet warning parents against evil people standing in front of schools giving away adhesive picture-cards that had LSD mixed with glue on the reverse side to be licked for sticking them on paper [this is now a certified hoax, see Emery (2001)].

I gave the students the leaflet and asked them an ambiguous question like “What do you think about it?”; after some expressed their outrage at all the evil in the world, we shifted our focus to a more clearly defined problem: whether it was our duty – as requested in the leaflet – to make copies and distribute them, in our case to other students in our school and to the elementary school on the other side of the road. In Italy leaf-lets must have their origin printed on them; in this case we would have had to write our school’s name and address, because there was no other indication on the leaflet, apart from a generic reference to the police as the source of the warning. Just facing the decision to become personally responsible for that piece of information made some students question if it was reliable; as the danger to students was so serious, some actually wanted to make copies right away, but a more reflective
group insisted on looking first for more evidence. As soon as the first suspicions began to surface, it became easy to spot that the text was anything but trustworthy: the source was unknown, the story rather incredible (why should anyone invent such a system?) and focused on a typical deep-seated parental fear. After half an hour’s discussion, even the hard-liners were in doubt and proposed (sensibly) to call the local police department first. By the end of the lesson, everybody was *almost sure* the leaflet was a hoax, and sure that it would have been irresponsible to distribute it without further checking. The same pattern was repeated in six other classes, with little variation and minimal intervention from the teacher. The only embarrassing note came once from a student who confessed, rather bewildered, that in his former school exactly the same leaflet had been distributed to everybody by the principal himself.

This little incident presented the opportunity to make clear the need to take into consideration the persons and media which forward a piece of information and not just the intent of the text (*intention operis* in Eco, 1990 and 1992) in its interplay with the reader, after the typical approach to texts at school. If a lie is received and forwarded in good faith, it remains a lie, while the person who forwards it should not be called a liar (for lack of intention), but becomes a victim and an unwilling accomplice at the same time. Once again, technology can help lend credibility to a lie simply because many people tend to respect printed or broadcast matters, or else because e-mail makes it easy – just a click – to forward whatsoever unchecked piece of information with the crucial added value of one’s signature. This is the reason why chain letters or hoaxes, like the one about free mobile phones, can quickly spread like viruses; no automated filter against junk mail will ever stop a message from someone who is among our usual correspondents.

At the conclusion of this crucial stage of our path, I wish to reiterate how the decisive prompt leading to understanding was having to take direct responsibility for a piece of information. The same basic mechanism – unwillingness to make a fool of himself in front of others – saved a colleague from becoming another victim of the free mobile phones hoax (he has been so kind as to confess the near miss after reading this paper).

### 5.3 A Modest Proposal: The Teacher as a Liar

A couple of months later, the same students were confronted with Jonathan Swift’s *Modest Proposal* (1729), a pamphlet suggesting poor Irish people should raise children as a food source in order to alleviate their plight and improve their country’s economy. This time the students had the text at their disposal for an hour (not much, given the length) and their task was to write an individual answer to the question as to whether Swift’s proposal was: a) reasonable; b) reasonable, but morally unacceptable; c) other (specify).

Most students in all 7 classes chose b), while only about 15% understood within the hour that Swift’s proposal was not to be taken at face value. In the next hour this latter group were to announce proudly that they had discovered that the text was “kind of a tall story”, and then the whole class went back to the text to discover the many clues to its paradoxical tone and the author’s moral outrage at the conditions of poor people in Ireland. The few answers that considered the proposal reasonable were considered a provocative joke, without further questioning. On more than one occasion I noticed that those who approved of the idea of raising children for food were not the worst readers or the students considered the most gullible by their peers, but those with most trust in the authority of the teacher; in one case a student was really shattered at realizing his potential acceptance of a crime.

When conducting classroom discussions about the high rate of non-detection, I mainly focused on the failure to recognize irony in written form and on excessive trust in the authority of the text. What I did not see so clearly at the time was that the liar was me, the teacher, and mine the authority, expressed by the task the students had to solve, that they had to chal-
The ones that understood the text rather quickly were not so much alerted by some places in the text where Swift gives way to his outrage at the English policy towards the Irish people (they found them only later), but by suspecting some connection between the enormity of the Modest Proposal and my hidden educational agenda.

I now think also that the emotional distance (Ginzburg, 1998) from a weird old text may have induced many students into a task-oriented strategy of minimal effort, that is taking the text at face value. I would now rephrase the task, referring the same questions in terms of today’s policy-making for some distant and poor country, after some minimal editing of Swift’s text.

5.4 Producing a Hoax

As already pointed out, imitation tasks can play a major role in developing an understanding of the different constraints in writing. Once the students have gained some practice in imitation and even parody, it becomes tempting, although not free of risks, to encourage them to develop hoaxes themselves, maybe for the canonical 1st of April. At this stage, the moral implications of hoaxes were discussed by asking the students to focus on their own reactions as victims of lies and to develop a code of conduct to prevent jokes from becoming too nasty. It may be safer, although slightly unfair to the students, to leak some information to colleagues about such activities going on.

5.5 More Risky Enterprises: Challenging ‘True’ Public Lies

The only real test to see if a class (including the teacher) has made progress in lie detecting is the challenge of a new public lie. That means sticking one’s neck out and claiming that a piece of information on TV and newspapers is likely to have been made up. It happens. Just two examples. In Italy, in 1997–1998, a certain doctor Di Bella received enormous media attention after claiming to have developed a cure for cancer; no evidence whatsoever was produced, but the Ministry of Public Health was forced by a media campaign using keywords like ‘freedom of information’, ‘freedom of treatment’ or ‘right to hope’ to start a testing program. In the meantime, however, some patients – often backed by politicians from different parties eager to jump on the publicity bandwagon – obtained court orders forcing public health institutions to pay the cost of treatment for the ‘Di Bella method’, even after the testing suggested, months later, that the cure was ineffective (Barrett, 2001, search for ‘Di Bella’).15

There now exist interesting analyses of the Di Bella affair [Rositi (1999), on mass media treatment of the story and Minerva (1998), more focused on political intervention; a review of Minerva in Lovisolo, 1998], but discussing in the classroom the different motives of the different actors right in the middle of the public debate could only have been educationally valuable at a moment when polls suggested that more than 50% of Italians were more inclined to

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15 There have still been court rulings in 2001 and a decision by the Lazio Regional Council in 2002 granting economical support to those who wish to be cured with the Di Bella treatment. ‘A right to hope’ seems the rationale behind the defence of public support for those who wish to be treated with the Di Bella method, according to Lazio Regional Council president Francesco Storace (retrieved from http://www.adnkronos.com/Politica/servizi/entit/regione_lazio/comunicati/29.htm on 5 May 2002), while ‘freedom of treatment’ is still invoked (via the newspaper of a political party) by Giuseppe Di Bella (2001), son of the controversial MD. A presentation of Professor Di Bella’s viewpoint can be found on his web site: http://www.luigidibella.it/ (retrieved on 5 May 2002). The site http://www.qlmEd.org/DiBella/index.html provides several analyses of the ‘Di Bella affair’ from the point of view of official science, conducted by MDs, sociologists and anthropologists.
support Di Bella than official science (Repubblica, 31.07.1998: 9 “Con Di Bella 2 italiani su 3”).

Again in Italy, a 17-year-old girl in the little town of Novi Ligure accused on the February 21 2001, “immigrants, probably from Albania” of breaking into her house to commit robbery, and subsequently killing her mother and brother and trying to kill her. With few important exceptions, most newspapers and TV news bulletins in the two following days reported the story to their public as the girl told it to the police – despite the fact that it seemed rather inconsistent from the start [e.g. Preve (2001), who actually keeps some distance by sparsely using reported speech]. Fuelled especially by the local TV station TeleNord and right-wing parties, outrage at immigrants and at the government’s policies toward immigration rose in the small town (Valli, 2001) and in Italy at large (Portanova, 2001). On the evening of February 23rd, a demonstration against immigrants was about to take place in Novi Ligure when it was revealed that it was the girl herself who had killed her family with the help of her boyfriend (Ponte, 2001); the demonstration was cancelled (Repubblica, 24 February 2002, “E la Lega annulla la fiaccolata”; Fontana, 2001). In the following days, many newspapers sent correspondents to describe the ambience of the crime scene. Journalist Luca Fontana (2001) wrote a brilliant report on the day of the funeral, mainly based on declarations by young people who knew the victims and perpetrators, but, in my view, gave excessive credit to the bizarre hypothesis that the triggering factor for the killing was the couple being surprised by the girl’s mother while making love; Fontana speaks of it as “probably reliable information” (‘informazione probabile’ in the original) and then refers to that unsupported speculation as “the fact that”. It is interesting how the rumour acquires some sort of credibility through a detail, namely the question as to whether it had been the mother or the younger brother who surprised the couple; if the uncertainty lies in who surprised them, this suggests that someone had indeed surprised them; and details count as ‘lie signals’ for Weinrich (2000) and as signals of involvement/literariness for Tannen (1989 and 1992). It came out later and was confirmed in court that the young couple had been planning the crime for months.

These cases may be different from the point of view of ethics; Dr Di Bella was possibly in good faith while the family killer obviously was not. In any event, most media were at the very least irresponsible in backing their claims, and Fontana at least inaccurate in the way he reported a rumour. From the point of view of the lie detector, however, all three lies were rather easy to suspect, as they were tailor-made for meeting the expectations of the target audience: people longing for hope against a dangerous disease, people fearing immigrants, or even a smaller group of liberated progressives with a strong prejudice against the influence on education of sexophobic Italian Catholicism (the family of the victims were known as regular churchgoers).

I discussed the stories of Di Bella and of the family killer in a ‘synchronous’ manner only with friends and colleagues, as I was no longer teaching at an Italian school at that point. During the experimentation with lie detecting, I had not spotted any examples of public lies that were suitable for use in the classroom, or maybe I was just not brave and self-confident enough. In one case we did discuss a somewhat inaccurate report by a local newspaper about our school; in another case we just contented ourselves with catastrophic announcements of computer viruses and chain letters on the Internet. As discussed in the next session, however, the habit of focusing on the interplay between the motivations of the writer and the reader’s expectations becomes extremely valuable in classroom activities involving the questioning of

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16 One document I found on a site devoted to school (http://www.altrascuola.org/ altrascuola1.htm) suggests that there has been some interest on the part of teachers. However, I have not been able to locate reports of classroom activities.

17 A notably exception was La Stampa, whose local correspondent was extremely cautious from the beginning, according to Fontana (2001).
other texts or statements on complex and fundamentally ideological issues, ones that would be inappropriate to consider merely in terms of lies and truth.

6. Discussion and Perspectives for Further Development

6.1 Is Lie Detecting Teachable? Can Related Skills Be Transferred across Domains?

As for the long-term effects of teaching lie detecting, I can only report one successful case of its application in real life: a student, whose parents owned a small business, asked to talk with me in private and showed me a letter in English – bearing the letterhead of a foreign bank – apparently from an employee asking for (well compensated) help to collect a sum from the account of a dead man by acting as his foreign partner;\textsuperscript{18} the parents of the student may have shown some interest, as the letter was addressed to them and they had done business with that country in the past, but the student was rather sure it was a hoax and asked for my confirmation. Of course, a single elementary case does not prove anything about transferability of lie-detecting skills and just shows that, once in a while, an issue dealt with at school has been perceived by a student as relevant to real life.

Looking more generally at the students’ response to the classroom activities, most striking was the direct connection between the assumption of responsibility for accepting and transmitting information and the emergence of an attitude to challenge and verify the validity of the source, as in the case of the LSD cards (Section 5.2 above). This confirms the tight link between motivation and the development of strategies of appropriation and resistance proposed by Wertsch (1998), and calls for the need to focus, whenever possible, on relevant themes and problems not too remote from the students’ potential sphere of influence and commitment. On a less positive note, I would expect, for the same reasons, that absurd and even dangerous misconceptions might easily be believed and encounter little resistance, as long as they do not seem to jeopardize any direct interest. This observation sums up and in a way confirms the theoretical criticism by an anonymous reviewer to a previous version of this paper:

[..] lies are performed in the different realms [...] according to their inherent laws, laws that not always (not necessarily) can be exported from one realm to the other without any reformulation. These laws depend on the linguistic features of the pertaining texts, of the characterisation of one type of consumer (individual or universal), on the discourse or on the logic to which each one of the vehicles (books newspapers, pamphlets, television, movies, papers) are subject. (reviewer n. 65, with minor editing)

I still believe that focusing on the motives and expectations of all the actors involved in public discourse (that is, the people addressing the media, the media themselves and their audience), and on the identities and roles they build through discourse, would help lie detecting (and, more generally, critical literacy) across different genres and topics. At the same time, however, specific (situated) factual knowledge about a given topic or genre and about a given person as sender or receiver of a statement is also of paramount importance in deciding the attitude toward a source.

If we go back once again to the hoax about free mobile phones, some of the people who contributed in spreading it are reputed professionals not easily fooled in their own field, but with a shallow understanding of economics and marketing, so they did not perceive at

\textsuperscript{18} Money transfer hoaxes are described, for example, at http://www.europe.f-secure.com/hoaxes/moneytr.shtml (retrieved on 5 May 2002).
once that something had to be wrong with the generous offer (they probably only activated their ‘frames’ for buying and thought there was nothing to lose). At the same time they would have discarded the offer – two of them told me later – if it had not been forwarded to them by close work associates, people they had good reason to trust.

Would they have spotted the hoax immediately if they had previously attended lessons on lie detecting? Possibly, but not for certain (personal trust can be to some extent a reason to override standard caution in evaluating information), and maybe not even so crucial in this specific case, as, after all, their blunder just inflicted a harmless blow to their self-esteem and did not damage anybody else. On the positive side, this small incident and the ensuing discussion helped establish a common language for speaking about more serious lies.

To summarize this section and attempt a brief answer to the question in its title, the mixture of general and specific knowledge required for lie detecting in real life should limit any excess of confidence in general purpose lie detecting skills. It still seems possible, however, to foster a better awareness of lies as a particular dimension in communication and to find a language for understanding them. Examples from fictional lies and the production of lies in a controlled environment have proved especially effective in establishing some shared knowledge on the topic.

6.2 Reconsidering Limits and the Scope of Lie Detecting

Public discourse that presents itself – usually via the mediation of technology – as a trusted piece of advice should in my view remain the focus of classroom activities centred on lies from the real world. However, to what extent it may be appropriate to use the word lie is a critical issue. The same reviewer mentioned above, while recognizing that states and other powers often lie and that “it would be desirable that citizens develop a critical awareness as regards these deceiving voices” cautioned that

[...] when truth is discussed in terms of historic – political events, the only valid sense of any analysis is to discuss the opposing ideological statements. Any consideration about the formal features of such lies should be, in fine, complementary or subsidiary to the previous one. Doing otherwise would end in banalizing the issue [...]. Doing otherwise risks [...] suggest[ing] to the students a positive vision of history, according to which there exists a truth immanent to facts, prior and unrelated to any interpretation of the discourse, alien to ideology that needs no justifying (the lecturer is in danger of being asked by students to produce such a truth). (reviewer n. 65)

The risk of oversimplifying a complex issue in terms of lie and truth is a serious one, even more dangerous because of the enlightening goals and aura of critical literacy. I also agree with the reviewer that the choice of topic to discuss is a crucial one.

The reviewer’s criticism also asks for a more explicit epistemological position about the possibility of knowing. I follow the empirical stand proposed among others by Umberto Eco and Carlo Ginzburg, of which I try to give here some basic tenets in extreme synthesis. Knowing in the human sciences cannot reach the same degree of certainty as in, say, physics, as long as such knowledge has to be meaningful (Ginzburg, 1992); besides, in the human sciences the object of knowledge is itself a subject, which brings another layer of complexity (Todorov, 1981, explaining Bakhtin). But by connecting pieces of evidence into a coherent discourse we can further our understanding (Ginzburg, 1999; for the role of language, Weinrich, 1976 and 2000). Truth is also a slippery concept and a claim that something is true

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19 Personal relationships have not suffered in the least from this small incident, which sparked a lively exchange that actually reinforced the personal bonds.
(even worse, ‘the only truth’) can also be seen as signals of a potential lie;\textsuperscript{20} there may be different adequate interpretations of human phenomena. However, there are also interpretations that are inadequate or wrong (Eco, 1990).

Back to the examples proposed in this paper, I still think that there is enough documentation to say that in 1938 Hitler lied in Munich about his lack of further territorial claims or that the Serbian-Bosnian media lied about Moslem-Bosnian plans to imprison Serbian women in harems, and that it may be fruitful to examine these lies also in the context of critical literacy, because these lies did work – for reasons that do also require a historical perspective – and had a momentous effect on the lives of many. But I also see more clearly now that the category \textit{lie} should only be applied in the classroom to cognitively manageable contexts, which is seldom the case with political-historical issues.

To avoid misunderstandings, I do think it relevant to discuss at school hot current issues and events, and to develop opinions. But, as suggested by the anonymous reviewer, analysis in this realm should first begin with examination of the conflicting ideological stances. For example, topics such as the Kosovo crisis in 2000 or the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (that is, situations that seem to have triggered a good deal of lying by the sides involved and their associates) do not lend themselves in the first place to explaining lies, but rather to showing how things can be complex and difficult to grasp, and maybe also to showing how distinguishing and developing better understanding is necessary and to some extent possible. Understanding can then also entail exposing a lie, but only as an activity which is subsidiary to a wider historical perspective.

In brief, the concept of lie needs to be used at school with extreme caution and with awareness of the shortcomings of ‘lie’ and ‘truth’ as binary categories for comprehending the world. However, while the idea of a ‘truth immanent to facts’ would be misleading, lies do manifest themselves as artefacts which can be manipulated through analysis and production activities. Deciding to what extent such manipulation is possible and fruitful in an educational setting, however, requires a clear definition of the limits of one’s knowledgibility. Doing otherwise would end up reinforcing the very practices (misinformation, propaganda, inaccurate journalism) that critical language education aims to oppose.

\textbf{6.3 A Caveat Against Making Classrooms into Tribunals and a Proposal}

Any reason is good for lying, as Castelfranchi and Poggi (1998) summarized in their extended analysis. There are even circumstances in which a lie can be defensible from the point of view of ethics. Bok (1978) presents a valuable selection of dilemmas, analysed with the tools of moral philosophy, which offer a good starting point for discussing the conflicting moral values about concrete issues.

However, when moving in classroom discussion from fiction to real life, I have experienced the considerable risk of forgetting the human misery and suffering emerging from true stories or, worse, enjoying the spectacle of this suffering as an element of the show. This attitude seems common for example in the crime news coverage by the Italian media, whose most compelling rationale seems to be keeping alive the attention of a large audience with morbid details, under the disguise of information (Caviglia, in preparation). The same sensationalist logic seems to drive the transmission of recorded excerpts from famous trials on eve-

\textsuperscript{20} In a documentary film by Orson Welles, \textit{F for Fake} (1975), forgeries of famous paintings are confiscated after the authorities receive an anonymous tip off (from the forger himself) about an art dealer trying to smuggle into the USA some valuable paintings by renown European artists; the receiver had therefore to pay a substantial sum to get back his paintings, but won the added value of a patent of authenticity issued by the State authority itself!
ning TV. Crime-based stories are a continuous source of lies: criminals lie on trial, of course, as do their affiliates, but victims also sometimes lie, as do witnesses and the police, while the media are often ambiguous accomplices of these lies. My suggestion, whenever such stories become the matter for classroom discussion, is to resist with all one’s strength the sensationalist attitude of a media-based trial in the classroom and to focus, in the first place, on the motives of the media and of its audience, that is us.

I cannot exclude, however, that the teacher and the class in their role of citizens might feel required to take a position. In 1983, the showman Enzo Tortora was arrested for allegedly associating with the mafia and later sentenced to 10 years in prison. While he was serving time, a newspaper campaigning for his innocence, *Il Manifesto*, decided to publish the complete findings by the judges who tried the case. In that specific case, just reading that text made it patently clear to everybody, and eventually to the judges in the retrial, that Tortora was in prison because a petty criminal had issued a false accusation which was swallowed by the first judges who, apparently in good faith, had then twisted any other element into appearing as evidence of Tortora’s guilt (for example, two newspaper articles he had once written against the mafia were considered as a way to secure himself an alibi). I was not yet a teacher at the time, but I remember myself posing the question as to whether I would dare examine the judges’ motivation in a classroom while Tortora was still in prison.

Also, to receive or give notification of similar situations, I am currently looking for support for an initiative to monitor a few publications and TV programmes for examples of good and bad practice. One thread of such an activity would be spotting questionable pieces of information and discussing with fellow teachers and media professionals, practically in real time, whether and how a given material could be appropriate for classroom activities on critical language education.

### 6.4 Enlarging the Perspective

The behaviour of lying has dimensions stretching well beyond those taken into consideration here. For example, throughout this paper I have been using a model focused on conscious lies, thus neglecting self-deceiving components that can play a major role in shaping memories and beliefs, and therefore the behaviour of lying (Weinrich, 2000: 82–83; an account of eyewitnesses’ memories in Loftus, 1997). Extending a *didactic of the lie* to include self-deceit and ‘assisted self-deceit’ seems a perspective worthy of further investigation.

Furthermore, this presentation has focused only on verbal language, while pictures, graphics, body language, and even actions can also deceive. In the educational context, a useful and viable addition both to our *didactic of the lie* and more generally to any intervention aimed at enhancing criticality should be some work on statistics and visual design, two tools that play a significant role in public discourse [see Tufte (1983) for cogent examples on visual design]. For example, the ability to decode information in the form of graphics or tables is already classified as a requirement for adult literacy (OECD, 2000; Gallina, 2000) but, as for the case of prose, adequate understanding should include, whenever possible, critical insight.

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21 The program, which is called *Un giorno in pretura* (‘one day in court’), began in the 1980s with exemplary cases of petty crime, but has since moved on to cover high-profile political trials (such as hearings in the ‘Clean Hands’ trials of the early 1990s) and more recently some appalling family crimes. I suppose that the defendants receive some compensation for permitting the TV-broadcasting, but I have been unable to substantiate this.

A manifest example of the sensationalist attitude was the coverage by the Italian media of the killing of a three-year-old boy in a small village in northern Italy in January 2002. Long before the mother was officially indicted for the crime, the media kept the public ‘informed’ about the investigations by mixing rumours from the village with leaks from the police, while the mother defended herself directly on a TV programme by obliquely accusing other people.
into the possible manipulations of the presented data. It would be useful to understand, for example, the meaningfulness of the result of an opinion poll based on X answers out of a population of Y, or to understand how the techniques for the visual presentation of data can give different messages according to, for example, the scale factor. Or how to understand statements about the *correlation* of two indexes.

As we are starting to see, language education can cover but a portion – albeit an important one – of a whole approach to lie detecting. Besides, in a wider perspective, criticality may require more than excellent skills in discourse analysis.

Today’s most dangerous lies are likely to be presented as scientific truth – a tactic used in the past for justifying discrimination and racist policies and now to support sometimes false allegations in trials (Scheck & Neufeld, 2001). While a sensitivity to potential lies might certainly help to develop antibodies against generic claims for scientificity, it would take a better and more widespread understanding of the subject matters involved to raise public awareness on issues that require some sophisticated pre-knowledge, for example in biology or statistics or computer science. On the positive side, the scientific method itself is an excellent tool for exposing lies.

As a conclusion and wish, I would imagine a full-fledged ‘didactic of the lie’ as a cross-curricular path over more than one school-year, organized in modules that co-ordinate different subject matters, such as physics and history (say, ‘Galileo’s method, his discoveries and the political problems he had to face’), biology and literature (‘the theory of evolution, the creationism/evolutionism contrast and the literal vs. metaphorical reading of texts’), history and biology (‘big lies in the twentieth century’, with special focus on those based on alleged biological evidence), math and social sciences (‘statistics and misleading visual presentations’). Only a multidisciplinary approach of this kind could, in my view, effectively respond to the need for critical information awareness that first language education has many possibilities to initiate and promote.

**Acknowledgments**

For their comments, suggestions and encouragement I am extremely grateful to Leonardo Cecchini, Seth Chaiklin, Jeff Earp, Tanja M. Janssen, Maria Ferraris, Annette & Ernst-Martin Füchtbauer, Richard Raskin, and two critical and helpful anonymous reviewers. A special thanks to those who introduced me to the world of Hogwarts: David, Winnie and Laila Füchtbauer, aged 12 to 18 and Elena Ferrillo, 12.

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Films

Blue Steel, by Kathrin Bigelow. USA, 1990.
Cape Fear, by Martin Scorsese. USA, 1991.
F for Fake, by Orson Welles. France/Iran/West Germany, 1975.
Monsieur Verdoux, by Charlie Chaplin. USA, 1947.
Scream, by Wes Craven. USA, 1996.
The sixth sense, by Bryan Singer. USA, 1999.
The usual suspects, by Bryan Singer. USA, 1995
**Paper B.**

| **Title**                  | Caviglia, F.  
|                           | Understanding public discourse about violence and crime: a challenge for critical discourse analysis at school |
|                           | Submitted as a contribution for a book-proposal to publisher John Benjamin; the editors of the proposal have accepted the contribution reproduced here, provided that I make a slightly shorter version. (I have preferred to keep the old version, since it has undergone a stage of “peer review”). |
| **Connected teaching activity** | Teaching of Italian (L1) in Italian secondary school (mainly age 14-16), years 1992-1998.  
|                           | A course “Values of Italian people” held at Aarhus University, Spring 2000, with some lessons on crime news.  
|                           | “Working with crime news at school”, a 4-hour module at a seminar for Italiensklærerforeningen [Italian teachers association], Spring 2001 |
|                           | (also, with web-appendix, at: http://www.hum.au.dk/romansk/tidsskrift/ and in Appendix to this dissertation.  
|                           | Webpage for Italiensklærerforeningen’s seminar:  
|                           | http://www.hum.au.dk/romansk/romfrc/cronaca/home.htm (also in appendix to this dissertation) |
| **Addenda & corrigenda**   | The potential for fiction and more generally writing to be a vehicle of understanding is envisaged here, as in Paper A., but in this latter case I have had too little experience with students in the role of writers, rather than of critics. |
| **Contribution to advanced literacy** | As implicitly suggested by Paper A., Paper B. puts ‘criticality’ at work on a specific topic and genre – discourse on crime and violence in newspapers –and on texts that are not blatant lies.  
|                           | The functional approach, which helps identify the rationale and agenda of different texts, is integrated in this paper with a special attention to the ‘dialogic principle’, that is an attitude to granting a voice or an active role to all the subjects involved in discourse.  
|                           | An effort of making sense of different world views by looking at their internal logic – as suggested by Lakoff – and a quest for cases of good discursive practice to present along with the bad examples are the strongest indications for educational intervention that emerge from this paper. |
UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC DISCOURSE ABOUT VIOLENCE AND CRIME: A CHALLENGE FOR CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AT SCHOOL

Abstract
Crime news offers a repository of source material for learning activities in language education and social sciences. This paper focuses on promoting critical literacy through a better understanding of different attitudes – typically ‘shoot the perpetrator’ vs. ‘put the blame on society’ – as reflected in and shaped through discourse on crime in the media.

The proposed approach integrates Norman Fairclough’s emancipatory goal of fostering sensitivity to the hidden agenda of public discourse with an attempt to acknowledge, prior to any further analysis, the internal consistency of different value systems, after the model of George Lakoff’s analysis of liberal vs. conservative ideology in the USA.

While taking a stance between value systems is not a matter that can be settled with the tools of discourse analysis alone, I suggest that it is fruitful to refer to Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogical principle, also re-read in the light of the notion of ‘involvement in dialogue’ developed among others by Deborah Tannen, as a benchmark for distinguishing ‘dialogic’ texts from ‘monological’ (or ‘self-righteous’) ones: the former grant a certain role to the reader in meaning-making and grant a voice to the subject(s) they write about, the latter deny it. Examples are provided from the press coverage of a case of murder in Northern Italy.

The ideas reported in this paper originate from teaching courses on Italian society held in a Danish university, in Italian secondary school and in seminars for teachers.

Keywords: language education, social sciences education, critical literacy, critical language awareness, teaching for understanding.

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1. Defining the problem

A week after a 17-year old student killed his former girlfriend in a school in Northern Italy, a group of students from the same school sent a public letter to the President of Republic, with a clear request:

The tragedy of Monica [the victim] together with the attempt to provide an interpretation, neither deceptive nor falsely comforting, of the sad event, has raised among us many questions and the wish to be helped in understanding what meaning we should give to our attending school and to our life in general. We have realized that the school must not give up this educational role from which we should start to tackle the various subject matters [...]. We need teachers to have time, and not only on such dramatic occasions, to listen to us, discuss things with us, the young, to activate our freedom and our engagement with proposals relevant to life and reality. [...]

In these days we have discovered that, when we find out that we share the same questions about life, a true friendship and a true relationship of trust and respect has been established between students and teachers. We wish this might carry on. Mr. President; please make sure the Minister [of Education] does not content himself with providing us with some more psychologists, some more skills or some more abstract values. Please see that everyday practice at school helps us cope with the big questions of life, and make it possible for us to learn this from those who already today, at school, are testimonials to this positive engagement. (C. Pasolini, "Caro Presidente, ci aiuti a capire" [Dear President, please help us understand], Repubblica, 8th March 2001, my translation) 

This letter, whose whole text has been available for some months from the school’s web site, originates from the declaration of a representative of the students on the school board, and was later appropriated by other students and forwarded to the press. I have not been able to discover whether the letter has really been independently written by the students or at least reviewed by a teacher. At any rate, at least some of the students and teachers engaged in the internal debate about the tragedy must have felt this activity meaningful and rewarding. The original text:

La tragica vicenda di Monica [the victim] e il tentativo di dare una spiegazione non illusoria o falsamente consolatoria a questo triste evento ha risvegliato in noi molte domande ed il desiderio di essere aiutati a capire il significato da dare al nostro venire a scuola e alla nostra vita. Abbiamo capito che la scuola non deve rinunciare a questo compito educativo e che da questo si deve partire per affrontare i programmi delle varie discipline [...]. Abbiamo bisogno che gli insegnanti abbiano il tempo, e non solo in occasioni drammatiche come queste, di ascoltarsi, di confrontarsi con noi giovani, di sollecitare la nostra libertà ed il nostro interesse con delle ipotesi positive sulla vita e sulla realtà. [...]

In questi giorni abbiamo scoperto che, quando si riconosce di avere le stesse domande sulla vita, scatta fra studenti e professori una vera amicizia e un vero rapporto di fiducia e di rispetto. Desideriamo che questo continui.

Signor Presidente, faccia in modo che il Ministro non si limiti a darci qualche psicologo in più, qualche competenza in più o qualche astratto valore in più! Faccia in modo che la scuola ci aiuti ad affrontare, dentro l’impegno di ogni giorno, le grandi domande della vita e che ci sia data la possibilità di imparare tutto questo da coloro che già oggi, nella scuola, ci testimoniano questa positività.

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It can be inferred from this letter that after the tragedy the school has functioned as a community where students and teachers alike felt committed to furthering and sharing their understanding of a shocking event and to redefining their role. Teachers could probably provide more experience and knowledge about some facts of life, while some students could most likely provide an insider view of the people involved, of their personal story, motives and weaknesses. All in all, the different motives and perspectives of the discussants seem to have turned the school into an organisation that produces knowledge and learning (Bereiter, 2002).

Can a similar learning experience take place in a school, in a classroom that has not been involved directly in such a tragedy, but experiences violence and crime through sources like newspapers and TV?

Not easily, since furthering understanding is not always in the agenda of the media. Media researcher Carey proposes a distinction between the ‘transmission’ and ‘ritual’ dimensions present in communication, arguing that the latter is the most promising area of inquiry for media studies. Carey observes:

[a ritual view of communication] will, for example, view a newspaper less as sending or gaining information and more as attending a mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed. News reading, and writing, is a ritual act and moreover a dramatic one. What is arrayed before the reader is not a pure information but a portrayal of the contending forces of the world. (Carey, [1975] 1988: 20-21, my emphasis)

From an educational point of view, students and teachers will need to appropriate the tools of the researcher in order to learn something from the news. Otherwise, classroom discussion on issues taken from the news is likely simply to mirror and amplify a ritualistic function already performed elsewhere, which may even be necessary in an emergency, but will not promote advancement in understanding.

The point of this paper is that public discourse about violence and crime can provide appropriate material for learning activities aimed at raising the students' critical literacy. This may require, however, that teachers incorporate in their practice some conceptual tools that are not always part of their traditional curriculum.

1.1 Background assumptions on 'criticality', domain-specificity and CDA

Critical literacy – the ability to 'read between the lines' – can hardly be pursued as a content-independent issue: a balance of discourse-specific and topic-specific expertise is a prerequisite to criticality, as I have argued elsewhere, discussing lies and lie-detecting (Caviglia, submitted). Trying to bridge these two levels on the specific issue of discourse on violence and crime is my contribution to the research program in Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA), as defined for example by Fairclough and Wodak (1997). In particular, I

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2 I use understanding in the broad sense proposed by Bereiter (2002: 94-124), which encompasses adequate responses ranging from emotional involvement to deep understanding revealed by insightful analysis. A criticism of pointless discussion in the classroom opposed to activities focused on advancing knowledge in Bereiter (2002:266-271) and Tannen (1998:262sgg.). According to Bereiter, overemphasis on activity or self-expression plagues educational practice and theory, probably in contrast with equally problematic old days’ content-orientatedness; he proposes focusing instead on the ability to manipulate and augment knowledge, and on the tools to be learned in pursuing this aim (literacy and numeracy in the first place, topic-related conceptual tools and also epistemological awareness of the learning and knowledge building process). Tannen attacks instead the (Western) tenet of the adversarial approach as the best way to knowledge and suggests dialogue as more productive principle.
will adopt and try to develop the following aspects:

- CDA's explicit goal of being relevant for education (as envisaged for example in the educational goal of 'critical literacy' in Fairclough 1992);
- CDA's practice of connecting the micro level of discourse (words, sentences, grammatical features) with the macro level of context, which lends itself to application across different genre and media and is compatible with functional approaches to communication and to art, as advocated for example by Carey ([1975] 1988) and Raskin (1982);
- CDA's attitude to illustrate the internal consistence of ideologies and points of view, as Fairclough (1996) demonstrates when he answers a criticism by Widdowson (1995) of crossing the boundary between analysis and interpretation (and maybe even between criticism and indoctrination) by exposing how elements of Widdowson's discourse reflect his own more general views of society;
- an explicit search for models of good practice, for example on what it takes to have dialogue (Fairclough 2000).

As the focus of this collection of essays is analysis of communication more than educational intervention, this latter aspect will not be handled in depth from the point of view of educational theory. It is important to remember, however, that the main concern of this paper arises from the educational problem of balancing moments in which biases in texts are exposed with examples of good discursive practice. This problem has been present to me in text-analysis activities carried out initially in Italian secondary schools and then within courses in Italian culture and society for Danish university students and teachers (Caviglia 2000 and 2001).

1.2 Structure of this paper
A short survey of literature about the media and about crime (section § 2) will suggest that crime news and other forms of discourse about violence may fulfil different social functions. These functions, and the conflict between them, can in turn point out (section § 3) inexplicit assumptions about big questions like the place of the individual in a community, the function of laws and punishment, human nature and the reasons people act the way they do. These issues are often dodged – at school and in public debate and in the academic world – because they are inescapably associated with lurking or open conflicts in society. I suggest that only by acknowledging these conflicts and the internal consistence of different world views can development in understanding be triggered. In the following section (§ 4) the categories of dialogism vs. monovocality will be proposed as tentative criteria to distinguish between texts and discursive practice that are more or less apt to further understanding. All the categories discussed so far will then be applied to the analysis of different writings originated by the same event (§ 5). In the conclusions (§ 6), I will reconsider opportunities and risks of classroom practice, with special focus on what to do when awareness is gained that discourse analysis may account for the representations of violence and crime, but not for the phenomena themselves.

2. Crime news between self-defence, social criticism and entertainment
The social functions of public discourse on and representation of crime and violence can be multifold. I will focus in this paper on non-fiction and start by considering three options:

- crime news as a form of communal self-defence and reinforcement of current values;
- depiction of crime as a denouncement of social problems (and maybe as a call for a readjustment of values);
- crime news as genre of stories written to catch the interest of the reader/viewer.
These three functions, which are almost never explicitly stated, are often intertwined, although the first two are associated with markedly different world views.

Before proceeding with an outline of the three approaches, a warning is necessary. Crime depiction in the news seldom reflects the picture offered by official statistics; at the same time, even if crime news and the public perception of crime show a closer correlation, the public can to a certain degree resist trends proposed by the media by selecting for real attention only a subset of news, for example by choosing individual stories and ‘street crime’ as against more abstract ‘white collar’ crime (Graber 1980). Another study confronting police statistics with coverage by local TV and newspapers in New Orleans and with public perception of crime indicates a close relationship between newspapers and public opinion and a surprisingly low impact of television, which drew the authors to conclude that

[...] perhaps the public is more sophisticated in its analysis of media reports than is often assumed. At least with respect to local crime news, television may be viewed by the public as a summarizing and highlighting medium, while newspapers are seen as providing broader coverage. The mature viewer may understand that there is more to the crime picture than the few murders and robberies reported on television. If this is so, however, public sophistication seems to stop short of a healthy skepticism of newspapers as distorting crime news. (Sheley & Ashkins, 1981:504)

Other studies quoted by Graber and Sheley & Ashkins provide somewhat mixed findings that lead us to believe that crime depiction in the media does exert an influence on crime perception, but has no absolute power to steer the public.

This means in turn that observation of the product only – without considering its consumption, as I will be doing with examples from Italian newspapers – does not allow per se an unproblematic extrapolation of the views of the audience. On a more positive note, looking at different newspaper accounts of the same event should indeed reveal different sensibilities within public opinion itself, especially in a country like Italy, where many newspapers have a defined political collocation and are not only read, but often displayed by their readers as a mark of socio-cultural identity.

2.1 Crime news as modern gallows

Émile Durkheim (1933: 65-110) has been most influential in proposing the view that discourse on crime is a method societies employ to construct and reassert morality. In industrialized societies mass media have become the main means by which this process is carried out: crime and punishment are constructed into narratives and then disseminated, thus substituting rituals like public executions and torture (Foucault 1975; Schattenberg 1981).

In Durkheimian’s view, crime rituals construct and perpetuate morality by reasserting shared rules, promote cohesion against those who violate those rules, impose social control through rituals of punishment and, finally, define power relations.

This view seems to be confirmed by recent studies. For example, in a functionalist analysis of a sample of American news magazine programs with wide readership, Grabe (1999:158-9) formulated four hypotheses:

1. news stories will frame crime in terms of a struggle between good and evil and primarily assign police and criminals to these roles;
2. news stories will present criminals as villains who are personally responsible for violating society’s moral values;
3. news stories will prominently feature the crime does not pay myth;
4. news stories will present women as the victims of crime and African Americans as criminals.

All four hypotheses were confirmed by Grabe’s empirical research based on content analysis, thus implying that – at least in the USA – crime news in TV works as ‘ritual’ (as
suggested by Carey, [1975] 1988) functional to the defence of the community’s existing social order. I could not locate a comparable study about Italian crime news, which might well use the same hypotheses as a starting point (just substituting ‘African American’ with ‘immigrants’), but which might yield – I would expect – some differences between TV and newspapers and especially between different newspapers, as I will try to show through Italian examples below, § 4.

The defence of law and order is indeed not the only possible function for crime depiction.

2.2 Depiction of crime as social criticism

At least since the late ‘60s, on the wave of progressive movements in the USA and in Europe, the depiction of crime from a “law and order” perspective has been challenged. Pasolini, for example, an intellectual in the Gramscian tradition and with a keen attention for psychology, went to great efforts to enlighten the left-wing readership to more nuanced views. In response to a reader accusing him of defending the acts of criminals, Pasolini answered that even prisoners (thieves, robbers, killers etc.) can contribute to the birth of “new values” [...] not by virtue of their criminal acts, but by virtue of “something” that comes ahead of them, of which criminal acts are an aberrant effect that is however not enough to reduce this “something” into a brand, into a racist definition.

What is this “something”? It’s a trauma, an individual or social trauma (as far as such distinctions are possible). At the origin of a crime there is always a psychological devastation: there is a baby, a toddler or a young boy that suffered an incurable wound in his private or social life (it’s only matter of focusing more on one or the other term). (Pasolini 1969, my emphasis)

A few lines later, Pasolini went on to criticize the habit of dividing people into villains and victims in order to “get rid of the ‘monsters’ and refuse any responsibility”. Taking as an example the tragic deaths of a boy and an girl, as yet unsolved, Pasolini warned against the victim/monster dichotomy and proposed looking at those crimes as an expression of “a tragic encounter of two human beings” (‘tragico incontro di due creature’, ibid.). Pasolini saw at the same time the episodes of violence that he often commented on in the press as an expression of transformations in value systems and of failures by social institutions such as the family, school and the media. A relatively well known example of his approach is an article (Pasolini, 1975) reporting the story of a young policeman who, while transferring a prisoner, let himself be talked into leaving him alone with his lover for some brief moments; after the prisoner’s escape, the policeman took his life. Pasolini proposed taking this tragedy as a symbol of the anthropological transformation of the Italian people from the old values (honour, obedience) disrupted by the clash with modernity, symbolised by the consumerism-induced ‘right to have sex’ endorsed by a disoriented policeman in exchange for the ‘word’ of honour not to attempt escape.

Self-defence of the community and enlightenment of its member are different functions, but not mutually exclusive. Graber (1980: 129), for example, concludes her research arguing

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3 The original Italian text:
anche i carcerati (ladri, rapinatori, omicidi eccetera) potessero contribuire alla nascita di «nuovi valori», in virtù, egli interpretava, delle loro azioni delittuose. E io rispondevo: no, non in virtù delle loro azioni delittuose, ma per quel «qualcosa» che è a monte di esse, e di cui esse sono un effetto aberrante, ma non tale, tuttavia, da ridursi a marchio, a definizione razzistica. Cos’è questo «qualcosa»? E’ un trauma, individuale o sociale (nella misura, assai ristretta, in cui si possono fare simili distinzioni). Alle origini del delitto c’è sempre una catastrofe psicologica: c’è un bambino di pochi mesi, di pochi anni, oppure un ragazzino che va, alle elementari, che ha subito una ferita immedicabile, O nella sua vita privata o nella sua vita sociale (è solo questione di accentuare un po’ più l’una o l’altra parola).
that crime news might and should play an “educational” role by exposing the link between poverty and crime, thereby inducing the public to endorse social policy reforms.

Crime news can also be modern gallows for offenders and point at the same time to shortcomings in society and culture and, more specifically, in institutions that failed to prevent or mitigate deviant behaviour, such as in the case of recent school shootings at the Columbine High School of Littellon in the USA\(^4\) or at the Gutenberg Gymnasium of Erfurt in Germany\(^5\). In an Italian scenario, this double function of depiction of crime is visible in the analyses by sociologist Bettin (1992) and psychiatrist Andreoli (1997) of the notorious case of Piero Maso, who at the age of 19, with help from three friends, killed his parents in order to inherit their money. Both Bettin and Andreoli (as, in shorter form, some newspaper commented right after the crime) highlighted how Pietro Maso’s near obsession with showing off and with his lavish lifestyle was rooted in the reigning values of a now well-off community with a recent past of poverty and emigration.

Social critic discourse is the obvious candidate for being integrated in an educational setting. However, as I will argue below (§ 4), social criticism can be as self-righteous as the crime-news-as-gallows approach, and equally useless in terms of furthering shared understanding. But first I will consider another aspect of discourse on crime that I deem relevant to our concern: no function of self-defence or social criticism dimension explains crime news’ enormous success as narrative genre.

2.3 Crime news as (ambiguous) narrative genre

The success of crime news as a form of entertainment is somewhat disturbing, but undeniable. Back in the ‘70s in Italy, severe and politically aware newspapers such as La Repubblica or Il Manifesto did not consider crime news (or sport) worth much consideration; in the same newspapers crime news and sport now receive the attention of famous commentators, while, in the meantime, ‘true life crime’ has become a central item in the popular press and a specialized shelf in bookshops; even the once tranquillizing Italian TV now gives a central place to crime in the news and in specialized programs. This change in attitude may be a consequence of the audience’s lessened interest in politics or even, in the case of television, a conscious attempt to divert viewers from what happens in the political arena; but this does not answer the question of why the audience likes to read and hear about crime and violence.

The working hypothesis I would suggest is that crime news is first of all stories which permit exploration of a dimension that is hardly accessible in everyday life, but is perceived as a relevant part of human experience. Oatley, a psychologist who made an important contribution to the understanding of the function of feelings (Oatley & Jenkins, 1996), proposes a (neo-Aristotelian) view of literature as simulation, as a safe playground where the writer through mimesis and the reader through identification can both expand their experience of life (Oatley, 1999 and 2000). But writing fiction and writing crime news are performed with similar techniques and sometimes by the same professionals; accordingly, I expect that for the reader a narrated non-fictional event will too work as a kind of simulation in his or her mind, only with a higher truth value and probably a narrower space for autonomous elaboration of alternative developments.

One or more of the typical functions of narrative – vicarious satisfaction of desires and elaboration of fears (Freud 1908 and 1920), highlighting contradictions in society (Gramsci 1975, e.g. in Notebook 21), stimulating social or group cohesion (Anderson, 1991; Banti

\(^4\) A good example is the debate in Salon, online at <http://www.salon.com/directory/topics/columbine/>., seen 1.7.2002.

\(^5\) See articles in Der Spiegel, online at <http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/0,1518,k-2184,00.html>, seen 1.7.2002.
2000) – are usually at work in discourse on violence too, that which can also be seen in functional terms as a tool

... for gaining leverage over social and psychological problems, for meeting needs, for making possible a variety of pleasures and satisfactions, for patterning expectations, assumptions, values and behavioral norms. (Raskin, 1982:16; the quotation actually refers more generally to art).

Becoming aware that literary traits typically play a role in crime news and discourse about violence should also induce teachers and scholars in language and literature to apply to them conceptual tools that are likely to be part of their culture.

Finally, recognizing elements of literariness in non-fictional discourse on violence should make it possible, by contrast, to appreciate the greater freedom of fiction for 'digesting' crime and violence and using it for producing insight through emotion, as for example in the works by James Ellroy or Georges Simenon. I would also add – incidentally, as this is not the main focus of this paper – that producing fictional accounts inspired by crime news may be a rewarding activity also at school, giving the students a chance to unleash their often subdued narrative understanding (Bruner, 1986).

3. Different value systems and discourse on violent crime

The previous section has opposed a gallows-invoking to a blame-society attitude to violence and crime, without questioning the rationale behind the different attitudes. However, if constructive debate is our ultimate goal, exposing the ideology of a cultural artefact is only a first step. Especially in an educational context, some form of acknowledgment and understanding of the world view we perceive as being that of the Other (for example, the gallows-invoking attitude if we are non-violent liberals) is inescapable, lest we risk turning analysis into propaganda. My point in using discourse about crime for analysis and debate at school is to go beyond exposing the biases that different world views impose on stories: the different views should be given, whenever possible, a chance to be understood as consistent value systems, especially in research and educational settings.

This section will give examples of efforts to identify ‘deep rationales’ of conflicting value systems in the Italian political scene.

3.1 Strict-father vs. nurturant-parent morality (and other dichotomies)

In the attempt to explain today's cultural-ideological differences among Italians to Danish students in 1999, I chose as the main source of material crime news and letters to newspapers about crime, immigration, sex, morals and the family, since newspapers are usually more articulated on these matters than Italian TV (Calabrese, 1998), but they must at the same time reflect the attitude of their ‘model readers’ accurately enough not to lose them as customers.

Giving a name to the different attitudes was and is still an open issue. A few years after the upheaval of a political class in Italy (around 1992 all major parties split, changed name or even disappeared), the ideological scenario had changed and new alliances and divisions became possible. Umberto Eco, for example, initiated an open debate with Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini with the aim of establishing a platform of shared values for making productive debate possible between the religious and the agnostic (Eco & Martini, 1996). In a country like Italy, which had been ideologically split at least since the end of WW2, a language was needed for re-examining values, identities, similarities and differences.

Political scientist Norberto Bobbio had been arguing that a reappraisal of the good old concepts of left and right, with equality vs. difference as key values, could still explain different stances on modern issues (Bobbio [1994] 1999). Perry Anderson (1998) replied that the left/right dichotomy did explain past differences in policies, but no longer seemed adequate to explain current conflicts in the most developed countries; a quick test – asking
students and colleagues to identify along the right/left axis the political orientation of some reader letters to political newspapers – confirmed the difficulties in using this category today, since traditionally right- or left-wing traits seemed to pop up transversally across parties and movements (Caviglia 2000:19-24).

Marcello Veneziani, a political commentator with a right-wing background, did not feel his position represented in Bobbio's dichotomy and suggested instead liberal vs. communitarian as a better alternative for highlighting differences, but also values that could be easily shared within different attitudes (Veneziani 1999). In the definition of the terms proposed by Veneziani, the dichotomy seems to work, at least on some issues (Caviglia 2000:55-57); but a more general use of these words seems to me problematic, since quite different political entities in Italy have been trying for years to appropriate the stem liber-, while communitarian has remained a niche-term that cannot be used without a long explanation.

A promising alternative way to explore differences in value systems has been proposed by semio-linguist George Lakoff (1996) in trying to understand apparent apories in the attitudes of US-American liberals and conservatives: Why are conservatives usually pro-life in connection with the abortion debate and in favour of capital punishment? Why are liberals, despite their claim to protect the weak, usually pro-choice? Why do conservatives consider welfare immoral, while liberals consider it immoral to reduce it?

Lakoff set out to understand such contradictions by assuming that both systems are intrinsically coherent, but rooted in two radically different notions of a same Nation-as-Family or Community-as-Family metaphor. Building on his research about metaphors as a primary building block of cognition (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1987), Lakoff looked at the architecture of metaphors representing and constructing the value system of conservatives and liberals and identified two kinds of morality, which he named respectively strict-father and nurturant-parent. By observing a relatively small set of linked metaphors, Lakoff tracked a map of two value systems, which I have reproduced and juxtaposed in Table 1 with a certain degree of simplification, reporting some of the founding traits.

It is important to note that the two systems also share some important viewpoints, first of all, the assumption that the system of child-rearing will be reproduced in the child (Lakoff, 1996:110).

The whole model proposed by Lakoff is tailored to understanding the USA, where the two systems of values correspond to intellectual and political stances of conservatives and liberals. I am skeptical about using Lakoff’s model in order to understand the political system in countries with different traditions in culture and politics. However, the two poles of strict-father and nurturant-parent seem to me useful categories in Europe too for framing synchronic and diachronic cultural differences on specific issues, such as deviance and violence.
Strict father morality

model of family
Traditional nuclear family, with the father having primary responsibility for overall family policy. He supports and defends the family (the world is a dangerous place) teaches children right from wrong (event. enforcing rules through punishment) assures love, but does not coddle children, lest they become spoiled (otherwise, they would remain dependent and morally weak)
The mother has day-to-day responsibility for the care of house and children and upholds the father’s authority

Nurturant parent morality

model of family
preferably two parents, but perhaps only one
• if two, the parents share household responsibilities
• the primal experience is one of being cared for, living as happily as possible, deriving meaning from mutual interaction and care (but support and protection play a role, too)
• the goal of education is the development of one’s potential: a fulfilled person will become nurturant for others

Children must obey their parents because
• it is safer for them (as known, the world is a dangerous place)
• learning to obey builds character (that is, self-discipline)

Children
• develop best through their positive relationships to others
• become responsible, self disciplined and self-reliant through being cared for and respected, and through caring for others

Notion of the human nature and education
• by nature (that is, without education) people would simply tend to satisfy their desires
• reward and punishment serve to condition action towards well-doing and self-discipline
• character is the essence of a person; it is determined by past actions and will determine future ones – one must be strong to resist evil
• strength can be acquired through self-discipline and self-denial

Notion of the human nature and education
• man is by nature not bad; education should help nurture his best sides
• obedience should derive from love and respect (and not from the fear of punishment, which produces irresponsibility)
• two-way, mutually respectful communication is crucial; authority must be legitimated by explanation
• corporal punishment must be avoided (violence begets violence as well as neglect)

Morality = (in the first place) moral strength, authority

Morality = (in the first place) empathy

Table 1. A comparison of strict-father e nurturant-parent morality (from Lakoff 1996:65-66; 108-110)

In the case of the attitude to crime and crime-fighting, the different concepts about the nature of man and education in the two systems lead, beyond the common concern for self-defence, to quite different concepts, as I have summarised in Table 2.

Two different attitudes towards crime and deviance

Strict-father morality
• the perpetrator is the Other: either a ‘monster’ from outside (e.g. a stranger, a homosexual) or a ‘rotten apple’ (someone who repudiated the values of the community)
• in both cases, the perpetrator must be punished severely (as revenge and example for others) and gotten rid of (as self defence)
• character is determined by past actions and will determine future ones: it is almost impossible to change a person
• victim are pure and innocent; if not (as with homosexuals and prostitutes), they paid for their guilt with death (are also ‘redeemed’)

Nurturant-parent morality
• the perpetrator testifies to a failure in the social system (family, school, ...)
• the community should take responsibility for the failure and ‘cure’ the perpetrator towards resocialisation (even by taking a calculated risk)
• given the right environment and motivation, people can change
• discovering the truth and making it public is more important than punishing the perpetrator

Table 2. Strict-father vs. nurturant-parent attitude towards crime (from Lakoff, 1996: 200-209)
The gallows-invoking and blame-society attitudes we encountered before are re-framed here within internally consistent value systems, which should make it possible to understand and evaluate discourse on crime in a broader perspectives, asking questions like:

- Which values are conflicting? Who represents or opposes them? How is 'new' a value in respect to other traditions?
- How functional is a value system to the well-being of individuals and communities?
- How much is a value system corroborated by what we know, for example about the nature of man (whatever that means) and the possibility of individual and collective change?

It is worth noting that in the last chapter of his analysis Lakoff – a committed liberal – in fact abandons his equidistant attitude between the two poles he himself has constructed and writes a passionate defence of the nurturant-parent value systems with the motivation that it has a better correspondence to the (hotly debated) state of scientific knowledge about man's nature and the development of behaviour. But an issue like 'the origin of behaviour' would be outside the scope of discourse analysis, although it is obviously a central issue in understanding violence and crime as phenomena. I will return to this self-imposed limitation in the last section of this paper.

4. Evaluating contributions to debate

Although biased views, propaganda and lies may provide excellent material for fostering critical literacy, it is equally important to provide examples of good practice, that is of texts that help advance understanding of a problem. Bakhtin's dialogical principle, as I illustrate in the current and in the following sections, may provide some help in recognizing a text's attitude to dialogue.

4.1 Monologism vs. dialogism

Coupled with the notion of intertextuality ("[...] all discourse is in dialogue with prior discourses on the same subject, as well as with discourses yet to come, whose reactions it foresees and anticipates". Todorov 1984:x), dialogue is in Bakhtin the principle for understanding in the human sciences:

All true understanding is active and represents the embryo of an answer.[...] All understanding is dialogical. (Voloshnikov with Bakhtin 1973:122-3, cited in Todorov 1984: 22)

The exact sciences are a monological form of knowledge: the intellect contemplates a thing and speaks of it. Here, there is only a subject, the subject that knows (contemplates) and speaks (utters). In front of him there is only a voiceless thing. But the subject as such cannot be perceived or studied as if it were a thing, since it cannot remain a subject if it is voiceless; consequently, there is no knowledge of the subject but dialogical. (Bakhtin 1986: 161)

The opposition of monologism and dialogism correspond to two attitudes to otherness and difference:

Ultimately, monologism denies that there exists outside of it another consciousness, with the same rights, and capable of responding on an equal footing, another and equal eye (thou). For a monologic outlook

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6 I have argued elsewhere (Caviglia 2000:14-15) that, in Italy 'strict-father' morality was dominant until about the '60s and only partially replaced by a consistent 'nurturant-parent' systems of values. Today, the two value systems seem to coexist in a strange blending. For example, a typical pattern in the Italian press and media is that the crime should be declaimed loudly but, once the offender is caught, he or she becomes the object of (often morbid) attention and spared neither outrage nor some kind of understanding of his/her motives, for example when mothers kill their children or when kidnappers are illiterates from underdeveloped regions.
(in its extreme or pure form), the other remains entirely and only an object of consciousness, and cannot constitute another consciousness. No response capable of altering everything in the world of my consciousness is expected of this other. The monologue is accomplished and deaf to the other’s response; it does not await it and does not grant it any decisive force. Monologue makes do without the other; that is why to some extent it objectivizes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the last word. (Bakhtin, 1984: 318)

In positive terms, the root of dialogism is the attitude to represent, “a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights, each with its own world, combining the unity of an event but nonetheless without fusing” (Bakhtin, 1984: 6-7), as Bakhtin sees represented in an exemplary manner in Dostoevsky’s novels.

Actually, all discourse has at least a dialogical trait, because of its intertextual nature (Todorov 1984:x): but, according to the more pluralistic (and committed) definition of dialogism proposed above, different discourses can be placed in different positions along the monological-dialogical axis.

In order to substantiate my claim that a text is more or less dialogical, I will first of all keep in mind Bakhtin’s views, and especially his distinction between authoritative and internally persuasive discourses (Bakhtin, 1981: 342-4), but I will also seek help from an approach offering insight into smaller units of analysis, as the notion of involvement in discourse as elaborated especially by Chafe (1985) and by Tannen (1989, 1997).

4.2 Dialogue and involvement in discourse

A theoretical framework for understanding politeness, reformulated by Brown & Lewinson (1987, cited in Tannen, 1992: 44) on the base of Goffman's (1956) notion of deference, identifies in positive and negative face the two concurring needs governing conversation: to have one’s wants approved by others and not to impose them or, in other words, to show affection or cooperativeness and to keep independence. This is the presupposition of the concept of involvement as the driving force of discourse, whose multiple sources are reviewed by Tannen (1989: 9-14). Chafe (1985:116) in particular has identified three different layers of involvement: self-involvement of the speaker, interpersonal involvement between speaker and hearer, and involvement of the speaker with what is talked about (not casually, these categories have some correspondence with the idea of discourse constructing identity, relation and representation as proposed by Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Elaborating further on the notion of involvement, Tannen has developed her research in two main directions: first, how the conflicting needs may hamper communication and jeopardize relationships (Tannen 1986 and 1990); second, how conversation and literary discourse have more in common than usually believed, as they share many strategies for constructing “patterns of sound and sense” devised to create involvement in the speaker or reader (Tannen 1989 and 1992).

After meeting Bakhtin in a later phase, Tannen observed:

My notion of involvement is analogous to Bakhtin's notion of dialogue; it grows out of a view of language as fundamentally interactive and grounded in context; of meaning as the result of interplay between novelty and fixity; and of meaning as created by listeners as well as speakers in response to prior text. (Tannen, 1997:141, my emphasis)

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7 The resources analyzed by Tannen include rhythmic synchrony, repetition and variation of phonological, morphological and lexical elements and sentence structures, indirectness/ellipsis/silence, constructed dialogue, details (Tannen, 1989:14-29).

8 As happened to Todorov, who after the book on Bakhtin wrote an utterly ‘polyphonic’ account of the first meeting of Spaniards and Americans (Todorov, 1982), Tannen too seems to have been influenced by dialogism in her book proposing a new culture of debate (Tannen, 1998), although Bakhtin is not quoted explicitly.
In the same Bakhtinian paper, Tannen adds a remark about the connection between involvement and understanding that is relevant to the educational concerns of this paper:

People understand information better – perhaps only – if they have discovered it for themselves rather than being told it. Listeners and readers not only understand information better but care more about it – understand it because they care about it – if they have worked to make its meaning. (Tannen, 1997:141, emphasis in original).

In the attempt to provide a more analytical account of how different texts are intrinsically more or less dialogical, the next section will have a special focus on the way they construct and reflect involvement with their readers and with their subject.

5. A case study: Tragedy in the province

This section is devised to see the categories proposed so far at work in the analysis of excerpts from the press coverage of an event that remained for about a month on the front pages of most Italian newspapers and in the opening titles of TV news bulletins.

The fact (1) In February 2001 in Novi Ligure, a small provincial town in Northern Italy, a woman and her son of 13 were killed in their house. The elder daughter, Erika, 17 years old, told the police that the victims and herself had been assaulted at home by thieves of Slavic or Albanian origin.

5.1 The mark of dialogism

I propose here to look for 'marks of dialogism' in a newspaper text rich in conversational/literary features and to consider, at the end of the analysis, the possible impact of these marks on understanding.

The text comes from a short collective note\(^9\), published a left-wing newspaper *Il manifesto* one day after the tragedy, when the perpetrators were still unknown and the right wing press was raging against immigrants and the left-wing government's allegedly 'soft' policy towards immigration:

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1. In un giornale si è abituati a tutto, a qualsiasi notizia, e dopo molti anni si impara a reagire con freddezza, con una specie di cinismo professionale, specialmente in materia di cronaca nera. Ma il crimine a Novi Ligure, quella donna accoltellata, quel bambino nella vasca, quella bambina fuggita per miracolo, quel padre che ritrova insanguinata la sua casa e distrutta la sua famiglia, questo scenario ci ha atterrito.

2. Non c'è una spiegazione, non si conoscono i colpevoli, non si capisce il perché di questa ferocia. Ma il mistero in questo caso non ha nessun fascino, non è un furto con omicidio, non è un male banale, e la repugnanza prevale senza lasciar spazio a nessun ragionamento. Che cos'è questa roba, da dove nasce, come può esserci?

3. Violenta è la società in cui viviamo, la morte è continuamente esibita, il mondo si riassume in statistiche sanguinose. Vale per ogni società, la

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\(^9\) Although the note is collective, the style and the slightly archaic form 'repugnanza' instead of the more common 'ripugnanza' make me think that it has been written by former director Luigi Pintor.
nostra e le altre, quelle progredite e quelle arretrate. Ma quando questa violenza si concentra in un punto, in un episodio, in una casa, nel destino macabro di una donna e di un bambino, risulta intollerabile.

4 Quando i colpevoli verranno identificati saranno linciati dall’animo pubblico. Sarà un male di più. Ci sono molti immigrati in quel territorio, cresciuti nella devastazione e tenuti lì in malo modo, e il sospetto si appunta fatalmente su di loro. Forse risulterà fondato riverberandosi non su due ma su tutti e persisterà anche se non sarà fondato. Un altro male in più, che le elezioni ingigantiranno.

5 Questo non ci distrae dalla pietà per quelle vittime e tutto il resto ci appare secondario. Oggi non abbiamo parlato d’altro in redazione. Questo mestiere che facciamo ci pare, in frangenti di cronaca come questo, necroforo. Forse abbiamo i nervi scossi, forse siamo dei cattivi professionisti, ci confessiamo sopraffatti dai messaggi che il mondo ci manda. (“Un male in più”, Il Manifesto, February 23rd, 2001 – my numbering)

Several voices are represented, or answered to: the usual 'corporate voice' of the journal; the collective writer facing the present tragedy; the other media, especially TV; the reader. I would also suggest considering as a mute but central presence on the scene the victims, the survivors (Erika and her father) and also, in the background, the immigrants, collectively accused of the crime.

Dialogue/involvement with the reader and with the subject(s) Il Manifesto is by all means politically aware of its role as a voice of the liberal pole in the public debate that was breaking out on that day. However, without in the least renouncing that role, the note also makes clear how the journalists share the same horror for the crime and pity for the victims as felt by public opinion at large.

Consistent with the policy of a journal that often laments how one death in West Europe or the USA counts more in the media than a thousand deaths in the Third World, this notes too reminds us that “violent is the society we live in, death is exhibited all the time [...] This is true for any society, ours and the others’, the developed and the backward”. But the text proceeds, immediately thereafter, with: “But when this violence focuses on one single point, one event, one house, on the gruesome destiny of a woman and child, that becomes unbearable”. The "patterns of sense and sound" (Tannen, 1989 and 1997) of the paragraph, built on the old-new axis, give through repetition of the indefinite article 'a/one' a stronger emphasis to the 'unbearability' of the crime, making clear thereby that, this time, Il Manifesto – without giving up the usual criticism of the existing social order – admits it is facing something that requires more than the usual explanatory frames. It is however the reader's responsibility to draw this conclusion: the writer simply shares with the reader his own feelings, thoughts and doubts.

The writer also makes clear his/her opposition to the gallows-invoking attitude, and is keenly aware that the story was being misused for political reasons. The tone of this note, however, rises above petty politics by using a grave register, made up of short sentences giving emphasis to the keyword evil, repeated twice. Instead of an open attack on the media that were using the tragedy for their political goals, Il Manifesto uses a different tone, relying on its readers to notice the difference.
The fact (2) Three days after the crime, the police arrested Erika for killing her mother and brother with the help of her boyfriend, Mauro; the two confessed shortly thereafter.

5.2 Gallows-invoking, monological (but maybe polyphonal) reactions

When the girl was arrested and later confessed to the crime, the popular rage turned against her: someone wrote “death penalty” on the walls of the prison Erika was locked in, while three mothers went to the civil register of the small town to change their daughter's name, as it was the same as the young killer's.

These two spontaneous popular actions are emblematic of the need for self-defense by getting rid of the monster; strict-father morality accounts well for the rationale behind this attitude. A less spontaneous example of the same attitude to portray the perpetrators as different-from-us' (in spite of the lack of evidence) comes from the newspaper published by the Italian political party Lega Nord, which of all the political groupings is the most vocal against immigrants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[...] Gli investigatori sono convinti che Erika e Mauro hanno agito da soli. Stanno ancora lavorando all’individuazione del movente, per il quale viene privilegiata l’ipotesi di una esasperata conflittualità che si sarebbe creata tra Erika e la madre, Susy Cassini, che rimproverava alla figlia “amicizie discutibili”. Anche il padre a un amico di famiglia ha detto di sentirsi responsabile per non aver impedito alla figlia di frequentare strana gente, stranieri e tossici. (La Padania, 25.2.2001, my emphasis)</th>
<th>[...] The detectives believe that Erika and Mauro acted alone. They are still working on the motives of the crime; the current hypothesis is about an exasperated conflict between Erika and her mother, Susy Cassini, who reproached her daughter for her “bad company”. The father too has told a friend that he felt responsible for not preventing his daughter from hanging around with strange people, foreigners and junkies. (La Padania, 25.2.2001, my emphasis)</th>
</tr>
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</table>

The theory sustained by the police, and later confirmed in the trial, about the motive for the crime is reported with detachment, in an outspokenly 'written' style, with impersonal verbal forms (“viene privilegiata l’ipotesi”, “esasperata conflittualità che si sarebbe creata”) and two long nominalizations (“individuazione” and “conflittualità”); this style seems literally to echo the language of an official statement from the police. The only concept that gives a possibility for shifting the focus from inside to outside the family is “amicizie discutibili” (“questionable friendships”, “bad companys”), which may or may not have come from the police statement. At any rate, the concept of bad companys is exploited in the following sentence, whose source is so indirect and vague as to raise doubts in a non-cooperative reader, but whose direct and 'spoken' style seems designed to create a stronger involvement. The words “frequentare strana gente, stranieri e tossici” belong to a spoken register both in lexicon and syntax: “strana gente” (=odd, strange people) is a quite common expression in spoken language, but not in written. “Strana gente, stranieri e tossici” (odd people, foreigners and junkies) builds a rather odd syntactic pattern: the two latter elements could be more specific instances of the first broad one, or the three elements together could represent all the negative stereotypes in addition to foreigners and junkies. Standard written Italian would have required “come” (such as) to explain the hyperonym/hyponym relationship in the first hypothesis, or more explicitness in the second hypothesis. In spoken language the sentence has instead the right degree of vagueness to enable the reader to fill in his own image of “odd people”; the assonance “strana”/”stranieri” may even offer further help. In conclusion, the whole passage is effective in suggesting to the model reader of La Padania to juxtapose to the abstract 'written' language of the official version, pointing to

10 The name 'Erika' (with 'k') seeks a slightly exotic sound for Italian standards and is a possible clue to the parents' adhesion to media-induced 'smart' cultural stereotypes.
11 Only one occurrence in a text corpus of 8 million words (Internazionale su CD-ROM), plus two occurrences for “gente strana” in direct speech. Also “tossici”, junkies, is a slang form for “tossicodipendenti”, but is quite commonly used by newspapers too and therefore not meaningful in this context.
internal conflicts in the family, a no-nonsense 'spoken' explanation from an allegedly very authoritative source, the father himself of the perpetrator, highlighting that bad company external to the community was to blame (actually: that he, the victim, had to blame himself because he could not avoid the influence of bad company). The text is designed to induce the reader to feel more involved with this second voice, which is constructed through an example of what Tannen, rejecting the standard definition of “reported speech”, calls “constructed dialogue” as a resource that

creates rhythm and musical cadence as well as setting up a drama-like scene in which characters interact with each other and engage in culturally recognizable activities. (Tannen, 1997: 141)

The gallows-invoking discourse, whatever its form, has no ambition to foster understanding of the origins of deviance, but rather to point to the menace it represents. To be fair (maybe too fair) towards this attitude, we should even accept that it may be a correct way to understand the problem, if we agree with Bereiter's (2002: 101-115) definition of understanding as intelligent action; the point is then if the gallows does solve the problem and if we accept this kind of solution, and this is outside the scope of this paper (but not of classroom discussion, hopefully). At any rate, the main aim of gallows-invoking texts is to collect forces within the community for a more incisive fight against criminals and against those who show 'weakness' towards deviance. Different voices, as in the quoted passage, are at the service of a monological discourse which can even be regarded, in functional terms, as a necessary ingredient for the gallows-invoking attitude.

5.3 Monological social criticism?

Self-righteousness is not a monopoly of the gallows-invoking attitude.

Luca Fontana (2001), a journalist from moderately left-wing weekly magazine Diario, went to Novi Ligure to attend the funerals of the victims, visited the small town and the crime scene and wrote a lengthy report, which also figured prominently in the magazine's web edition. It is a gripping text, full of details, letting people, things and places almost speak for themselves, until the last two pages. Coming near to his conclusions, Fontana shifts gear and explicitly states his aim to rise above the level of the nationwide debate about the tragedy. He starts remarking that family killings are – in his view – a typical phenomenon from a peasant culture whose vestiges occasionally pop up in a country, like Italy, which has lived through a hasty and unbalanced economic development not accompanied by an equivalent progress in mentality (a position maybe oversimplified, but in my view defensible). After a disclaimer, stating that he does not have a definite theory about the killing, but just 'suspicions', he nonetheless makes clear his ambition to offer an authoritative explanation by explaining to the reader that

crime too, like any other human act, like eating or even walking, is permeated by culture. Each human action shows itself in the forms, codes and languages of a given culture.

In the following lines, Fontana goes back to previously quoted rumours heard at the funeral – reporting them this time as “probably reliable news”, una notizia probabile – that Erika's mother had surprised the young couple while they were making love and had been killed in the argument that followed. On this unsupported claim, combined with the fact that Erika's

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12 This approach is well represented by the newspaper La Padania, editorial voice of the Lega Nord party (roughly similar to Danish Dansk Folkeparti, but far less 'enlightened'). For example, a search on its web site for 'albanese' and 'ladro' (= 'Albanian' and 'thief') or 'albanesi' and 'ladri' (the plural form) (f. ex. “site:www.lapadania.com albanesi ladri” with Google search engine) will return more than 90 examples in newspaper articles and readers' letters from 1998 to 2002, all lamenting the menace represented by Albanian thieves. It is worth noting that in several articles on burglary or robberies the identity of the perpetrators is not certain, but assumed to be Albanian.
mother was a regular churchgoer and Erika attended a private religious school, Fontana builds a strong hypothesis that the tragedy had its cause in the sex-phobic Catholic education of a typical Italian family: after a brief comparison between family life in Italy and in other European countries, Fontana accuses the Italian family model and values of producing conflict and lack of affective support, and then jumps to the conclusion – mitigated a few lines below by being defined as “just a research hypothesis” – that “The awful story of poor Erika [...] is one of the many everyday triumphs of Catholic moral.”

There is first of all a problem with sources, in Fontana's theory: among other rumours heard at the funeral and reported in the first part of the article, he chooses to believe one that is highly implausible (I would consider it a naive attempt to rationalize the unthinkable) but fits with the writer’s expectations; thereafter Fontana connects the tragic event with a larger context (Catholicism's role in Italy) using a quite weak chain of causality relations. But there are other reasons I would criticize Fontana for, by taking into account the relation he constructs with the reader and with the subject.

Dialogue with the reader First of all, Fontana seems to preach to the faithful, that is to readers (those of Diario) who are supposed to share his views and to wish to see them confirmed; this corresponds more to the ritual function of communication "in which nothing new is learnt" than to Fontana's explicit goal of enlightening the audience (actually, to the honour of the journal and its audience, several readers sharply rebuked Fontana for his presumption to know the origin of the murder, with only a few voices supporting him enthusiastically). Moreover, I disagree about the way Fontana's text speaks to potential readers who might not share his cultural and political background. If we accept, with Tannen (1998), that conversation (and more generally dialogue) should give both partners a chance to save face, then Fontana does not offer any chance to a reader with a background different from his own, for example an 'enlightened' Catholic or someone with a more conservative but not sex-phobic view of sexuality: but these too should be considered as potential "model readers" (Eco, 1979), unless we content ourselves with self-referential discourse. This is not in the least to say that sharp criticism and polemic should be banned; only, effective criticism as a contribution to shared understanding should not prevent a collaborative attitude, in the Gricean sense, by readers from a different background.13

Dialogue/involvement with the subject(s) There is no doubt that Fontana is able to construct emotional involvement with the story. The first part of his report is full of details – a way to show and construct involvement, according to Tannen (1989:134-165, 1992). Fontana starts by describing the town, reports interesting conversations he had with people attending the funeral and then moves on to describe the middle-class quarter, without venues for cultural and social activity, where the crime scene is located: an anonymous house, from which a neighbour could hear frequent quarrels. As I already noted above, people, things and places almost come to life in Fontana's pages. However, the nearer we get to the end of the article, the more we miss the voices of both victims and perpetrators. Erika becomes “poor Erika” in the last pages, Fontana's heart “suffers” for her, “raised with a bulimic diet of communions, confessions, prayers and pilgrimages”. Less sympathy (and equally no voice) is afforded to her mother, whom we can only guess at as being the embodiment of Catholic-plus-small-bourgeois obscurantism: all we know of her is that she “was strict in the matter of sexual morals” and disapproved of her daughter's boyfriend, who belonged to a family on a lower

13 Several points made by Fontana (2001) about the Italian family and its problems are all but unfounded (see Ginsborg, 1998: 132-160). I too am a left-wing reader of Diario della settimana and welcome a critical discourse about the influence of Catholicism on Italian culture; I just lament that Fontana's criticism, this time at least, is ill-supported and is not formulated in a way that can produce a more mature critical awareness in Italian society, as in the tradition of Pier Paolo Pasolini or, today, Umberto Eco or Michele Serra.
rung of the social ladder. We learn nothing at all about the brother. I will not in the least deny that there must have been – mildly speaking – relational problems in Erika's family, or that class and religion may have played a role in this tragedy. My objection is that what Fontana describes is not a “tragic encounter of human beings” with their conflicting motives, values, “individual or social wounds”, as Pasolini would have suggested (see above, § 3.2), but only the mechanically probable outcome of a monstrous system, 'Italian Catholicism', of which Erika is a victim and her mother a willing accomplice. This way of portraying people and agency is the exact opposite of Bakhtin's 'exotopy' (vnenakhodimost, 'finding oneself outside') as "encompassing the other as an elsewhere beyond integration or reduction" (as explained and translated by Todorov/Godzich, [1981] 1984:99).

5.4 Dialogical social criticism

Another report from the funerals in Novi Ligure presents a quite different form of criticism. The journalist, Enrico Deaglio, is chief editor of the weekly magazine which published Fontana's report, but the article we discuss was written for the local newspaper of a region in Northern Italy, that is, for a quite varied audience.

Deaglio's focus is on the racism which broke out in the few days before Erika's arrest, but he never assumes the attitude of teaching the readers what to think: he just devotes a large part of his writing to reporting an encounter he makes in Novi Ligure with a middle-aged immigrant, obviously well integrated in the community, whom Deaglio meets as the man is on his way to the local mosque with his children. Deaglio's quite strong adversary message is suggested by a simile occurring in the title (Novi Ligure, Alabama) and in two passages:

| “Mi è anche venuto in mente che tutta quella frenesia organizzata, quei deputati che sembravano così sicuri, quella Lega [the Lega Nord party] che preparava fiammelle, la sua telezione che martellava [Tele Nord, a TV-channel near to the Lega Nord party], odoravano un po’ di Alabama. E che lo sceriffo di Novi Ligure, se Novi Ligure fosse in Alabama, avrebbe creduto a Erika, perché era bianca e di buona famiglia. Avrebbe cercato un nero, lo avrebbe messo in galera, poi la giustizia lo avrebbe ammazzato e infine Hollywood ci avrebbe fatto un film.” |
| “I have also been thinking that all that organized frenzy, those deputies looking so sure, that the Lega [the Lega Nord party] organizing torches, its hammering television [Tele Nord, a TV channel near Lega Nord], were somehow smelling of Alabama. And then the sheriff of Novi Ligure, if Novi Ligure were in Alabama, would have believed Erika because she was white and from a respected family. He would have looked for a black man, put him in jail, then the justice system would have killed him and finally Hollywood would have made a film out of it.” |

Finally I have been thinking that, if such fear continues to be instilled into people day after day, if we have reached the point that a young girl is well aware of whom she has to report and accuse, if we have reached the point that a sixteen years old girl knows very well how to persuade millions of people, then, well, maybe we are already in Alabama. But these were short term sensations. And I am grateful to that man with his two sons I met by chance at Novi Ligure [a middle-aged and well-integrated immigrant] who with just one smile and a quiet pace made me realize that we are still in Italy, after all. I have also been thinking that all that organized frenzy, those deputies looking so sure, that the Lega [the Lega Nord party] organizing torches, its hammering television [Tele Nord, a TV channel near Lega Nord], were somehow smelling of Alabama. And then the sheriff of Novi Ligure, if Novi Ligure were in Alabama, would have believed Erika because she was white and from a respected family. He would have looked for a black man, put him in jail, then the justice system would have killed him and finally Hollywood would have made a film out of it.

Deaglio creates a scenario that his readership is familiar with from films like To Kill a Mockingbird (1962) or In the Heat of the Night (1967), which have often been broadcast over the years on Italian television. By asking his readers to recollect these films, Deaglio establishes a common background, based on a story with clear-cut good and bad guys; I imagine that most voters and even militants of the anti-immigrant party Lega Nord must have been more sympathetic with the good guys when they first saw the film, probably at a time
when racism in Italy was almost 'only' practised between North and South Italy. Deaglio does not accuse anybody directly, it is the reader who is induced to give a name to the bad guys, to associate local Italian faces with the sheriff, politician and rednecks that populate films portraying the Deep South of the USA. There are two 'heroes' in Deaglio's article, again characters from those films: the honest judges who found the killers and the "signore con due bambini" ('a gentleman with two children'), who happen to be the Other and who in those films is the victim of unjust accusations and prosecution.

I wish to underline that Deaglio is by no means mild in expressing his criticism; I believe, on the contrary, that he is both hard and extremely effective: only, he establishes a common background and then prompts readers to do their part in making meaning, as suggested by the dialogical principle as reformulated by Tannen (1997:141; s. above, § 4.2).

6. Conclusions: Two directions for future work, plus a warning

The main difficulty I had to face in discussing violent crime, first in Italian secondary school and more recently with Danish university students, is how to find a balance between challenging the public discourse and recognizing one's limits and even impotence to say anything about the phenomenon.

The conceptual tools proposed so far should add some insight into the discourse about crime and about the rationale behind different attitudes to crime, but have no pretension to speak of the phenomenon itself: how does a person end up killing or harming another?

I believe it important to keep the distinction between the phenomenon (crime, in general or in a particular instance) and its representation/construction through various cultural artefacts (crime news, commentaries, docu-fiction). Although this distinction is quite obvious to professionals, this is seldom the case for laypeople, who tend to focus on the story level, usually without questioning the source of information (hence the need for teaching critical literacy). Making the learner aware that a newspaper article represents the product of several layers of mediation, and not the fact itself, is a first important and not easy step towards establishing some understanding of media discourse. However, recognizing that a classroom is a good place for analysing a text, while the phenomenon seems to move away from sight, may be frustrating for learners who are hungering for answers to the "big questions of life". My position on the subject has been, until now, that being frustrated by the awareness of one's limits is better than being deceived by unsupported assumptions. But the frustration remains.

The big question about the origin of violent behaviour, and more generally of behaviour, is outside the scope of the discipline of discourse analysis. This makes sense, of course, although this self-limitation – and more generally the lack of acknowledgment that the way behaviour develops is an open issue – risks in my view leaving the phenomena in the exclusive hands of those, for example psychologists, who do consider the momentous weight of discursive elements in shaping behaviour and include them in their analysis, but also have a say on the whole phenomenon (for example, Ugazio 1998). This condition may have the unfortunate consequence that the culture of literacy may end up being perceived as irrelevant to real life. It is not just a matter of the struggle for cultural hegemony: in a culture that tends towards over-specialisation, the words for talking about real life (feelings, choices, relationships) risk being confined to a group of professionals, psychologists or sociologists, or else remain in the reign of undisciplined small-talk. The teaching of language and literature should in my view help bridge this gap, but this would require a rethink of school curricula in order to include some advances and open questions from other fields of the human sciences, such as psychology, anthropology and sociology. At the same time, the human/social sciences in general would benefit from a more thorough contribution from discourse analysis:
emblematically, the author of one intriguing current theory about the development of violent behaviour (Athens, 1997) saw his requests for grants refused for years because his approach was too narrative for the reigning paradigms in criminology, and could never receive support by the American National Endowment for the Humanities, as his work “resembled science more than art” (Rhodes, 1999: 107).

Another limitation in the approach I am proposing regards the need for more specificity: I still find unsatisfactory the level of detail I achieve in the analysis of the texts. The notion of involvement elaborated especially by Chafe and Tannen does help in explaining the kind of dialogue a writer offers to his readers, but some elements, for example syntax, remain outside of the picture. The theory of linguistic polyphony as developed by Henning Nølke (1999) addresses precisely this issue, and his notion of "discourse entities" (êtres discursifs) as actors "designated as sources of points of view" seems promising in accounting for the different voices constructed and reflected by a text. However, I have not been able yet to assimilate and integrate their approach.

Finally, I wish to add a cautionary note. People who develop a habit of critical analysis of discourse on crime and become proficient at it may easily develop a cynical attitude, forgetful of the misery and suffering that is entrenched in this theme. I believe that the following question by Arundhati Roy should be raised whenever this risk is lurking in the learning community:

at what point does a scholar stop being a scholar and become a parasite who feeds off despair and dispossession?

Arundhati Roy, "Shall we leave it to the experts?", The Nation, 18.2.2002
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### Paper C.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Connected teaching activity</strong></td>
<td>A course “Representation of political violence in Italy in the ’70s” held with Leonardo Cecchini at Aarhus University, Spring 2002.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other connected material</strong></td>
<td>In the appendix, video-files with the two scenes described in the papers.</td>
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<td><strong>Addenda &amp; corrigenda</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Contribution to advanced literacy</strong></td>
<td>The paper continues the exploration of discourse on crime and violence begun in the previous paper, focuses on a specific instance of political violence and highlights how fiction is especially suited – by requiring an active role of the reader or viewer in meaning-making – to offering a multi-voiced and ‘dialogic’ contribution to the understanding of a real-life problem.</td>
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A QUEST FOR DIALOGISM:  
LOOKING BACK AT ITALIAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE '70s

Abstract
The wave of political violence in the late '70s in Italy is still today an area of divided and conflicting memories. The public opinion is divided between the temptation to forget and the obligation to remember the victim, and between vengeance and forgiveness. Several former terrorists are still serving time in prison, while others are rather vocal on the public scene, often to the outrage of the relatives of their victims.

A massive body of material, especially on left-wing terrorism, is available from different sources (former terrorists, judges, journalists, intellectuals and researchers from different traditions) and across several genres and media, from literary and cinematographic fiction to interviews, memories and reports.

This paper proposes a selection of fictional and non-fictional documents to highlight the construction of the old choice to commit acts of violence and the construction of a new image of the former terrorists today, in a different historical and existential context.

We demonstrate in particular how fiction can provide effective – and sometimes dangerous – frames for understanding: choices and actions, for example, are often represented as “inevitable” according to metaphors and narratives that explain their rationale.

As for the possibility of establishing some shared understanding of the period of left-wing terrorism in Italy, we take mono- vs. multi-voicedness as a tentative criterion to differentiate between the documents we consider. We try at the same time – using Lakoff and Todorov as models – to highlight the ethical systems embedded in the different attitudes emerging in the documents.

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See also two scenes from La seconda volta in the Appendix on CD-ROM.

1. Introduction
The wave of political violence in the '70s is still an open question in recent Italian history. No public Commission for Truth and Reconciliation has been established by the political system, but there exists a huge number of memoirs, interviews and fictional works with political violence as the central theme. However, public discourse on terrorism, present or past, is in Italy plagued by monovocality, or rather by a plurality of voices without dialogue.

The almost unconscious ambition we had at the beginning of our research was to find evidence for suggesting that truth and reconciliation was possible and that maybe dialogue was already firmly established and only needed to be made more visible, for example in school textbooks. Coming from a background in literary and cultural studies and with the example of
fiction about the Vietnam war or German terrorism in mind, we also proposed a working hypothesis that fiction might often prove more polyphonic and dialogical – in the Bakhtinian sense – than not-fiction, and therefore prove effective for historical understanding and as a contribution to debate. On the basis of these premises we set out to look for polyphonic, dialogic contributions both in fiction and in non-fiction, across different genres and media. We did find some examples, although these were far fewer than we had expected. Our attention shifted then towards understanding what made these examples especially effective – in our eyes – for promoting dialogic discursive practice.

This paper will start by describing the historical background of this search and the condition of split memory and monologism that afflicts public discourse. In the second part, after a brief outline of the concept of dialogism, we will present and analyse the discursive practice reflected and constructed by two examples – an interview and a fictional film – that we believe make valid contributions to understanding and overcoming terrorism.

2. The background: political violence in Italy in the ‘70s

Between 1969 and the late ‘80s Italy was afflicted by a wave of terrorist attacks inspired by both left-wing and right-wing ideologies; these were far more extensive than in other European countries and resulted in a high death toll.

Right-wing terrorism, which claimed the largest number of victims, was a “classic” form of terrorism that aimed to spread terror by planting bombs in crowded places without claiming responsibility. This terrorism received backing from members of key institutions (including the police, the judiciary and especially the intelligence services) and from “invisible powers” (such as the P2 Masonic lodge and other secret and illegal organisations); the aim was to block the democratic redistribution of power and shift the political system towards the right (the so-called strategia della tensione, see for example De Lutis, 1996).

By contrast, left-wing terrorism had its roots in the ‘68 protest movement, which saw social and political struggle for the democratisation and modernisation of Italian society. At the beginning of the ‘70s, a few extreme left-wing groups carried out illegal but initially bloodless propaganda acts, which they called lotta armata, or “armed struggle”. Initially, these actions encountered some complicity and sympathy in a minority within the working class and the student movement, but this support was later to evaporate when the Red Brigades kidnapped and murdered the Christian Democrat politician Aldo Moro in 1978, and, more generally, when the lotta armata turned into a sequence of assassinations whose victims were politicians, policemen, judges, industrialists and journalists.

By the mid ‘80s, left-wing terrorism was defeated, and the defeat was recognised in public declarations by the terrorists themselves. But the wave of terrorism in the ‘70s remains an open wound in Italian society. Establishing a kind of shared memory is difficult not only because of the sorrow and high toll of human lives, but also because of the complexity of the political and social clashes in those years. In Italy in the ‘70s two opposing form of terrorism were present, each with its own political agenda: right-wing terrorism had a conspirative character and enjoyed the complicity of members of the political establishment while left-wing terrorism was characterised by a blend of ideological fanaticism, revolutionary mythology but also aspirations to overcome the stalemate in the political system (aspirations which were shared by many Italians and which left-wing terrorism was also responsible for thwarting).

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1 The number of left-wing terrorists in the period 1969-89 is estimated at about ten thousand (with an area of about one hundred thousand sympathisers), but about one million persons may have been involved in some form of left-wing subversion in the same period.
3. Looking back in anger: split memory, conflicting discourses

After the fall of the Berlin wall, the collapse of Italy’s Christian Democrat dominated political system, and the dawn of a new era in Italian public life following the realisation that the “state of emergency” (as the period 1969-89 is usually called in Italy) was over, some attempts have been made to move towards a form of “reconciliation”. The debate was slow to take off in the ‘90s but gradually gained momentum, with many concurring and conflicting voices in the public arena, but also with some official steps taken by institutions of the State. More recently, however, the assassinations of two trade union consultants carried out in 1999 and in March 2002 by the so-called “new” Red Brigades, and also the 11th September 2001 attack have effectively put the lid on all these attempts.

Still, there is a need to move on, to start healing the traumas and lacerations of those years when democracy itself was in danger in Italy. But dialogue, which is a precondition for any future, more circumstantially historical reconstruction of the period, is not flourishing. Different demands (psychological, political, ethical and so on) are mixed together in Italian public opinion about the political violence of the recent past: sorrow and feelings of vendetta; the need to forgive, but also fear that forgiving will mean forgetting; the need to forget the past and get a long awaited “sign of pacification”; the difficulty of doing that; acknowledgement that the judicial rulings on the “state of emergency” do not of themselves bring about equity. It hardly comes as a surprise that all these positions are usually in sharp contrast with each other; the real problem, however, is that these discourses tend to be monological and insensitive to the reasons of the Other.

The most hegemonic discourse in public opinion is the so-called “judiciary discourse”, which represents the opinion of the majority of the people. It looks at terrorists as criminals and totally disregard terrorism’s political and social motivations; “lock them up and throw away the key” as a character of film La seconda volta (1996, The second time) puts it. But also at the judicial level things are not straightforward. The judicial system had a crucial role in defeating terrorism without compromising democracy (many Italians at that time called for court martials and the death penalty) thanks to the so-called legge sui pentiti (‘law on repentant offenders’, an interestingly religious terminology for the equivalent of ‘crown witnesses’, or supergrass as they’re known in Ireland), which still rewards collaboration with substantial reductions in prison terms. But the price to pay was often injustice, such as the setting free of terrorists responsible for many murders, while simple militants with little of importance to reveal have been given long jail sentences. It was not easy for the relatives of the victims to see their father’s, son’s, husband’s murderers go free because they were pentiti.

The judiciary discourse has determined the categories used for classifying the present-day position of former terrorists: the “repentants”, that is those who gave evidence for the state; the dissociati (dissociated), those who “only” distanced themselves from terrorism; and those who did neither and were classified as irriducibili, “unrepentent”. This distinction is laid down in criminal records and in media reports, but may be in blatant contradiction with the actual position that the accused hold about terrorism: for example irriducibile Nadia Ponti always refused to undertake any public act that might grant lighten her sentence, but from jail wrote a quite radical criticism of her experience in the lotta armata (Ponti, 1997), while as a free man dissociato Corrado Alunni wrote in quite apologetic and even nostalgic terms about his group, one with the highest number of victims (Alunni, 2001).

On the political scene a few voices have acknowledged that the new historical situation calls for reconciliation and that Italy is now ready to close the book on terrorism. According to Francesco Cossiga, Home Minister at the time of the Moro kidnapping and former President

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2 On July 29, 1997 the Judiciary Committee of the Italian Parliament began discussing a law that would reduce the punishment of terrorists imprisoned for crimes committed up to 1989. In the same year, President of the Republic Oscar Luigi Scalfaro issued a pardon to six terrorists who had been long imprisoned and who had never actually killed or shot anyone.
of the Republic, the period 1969-89 was a kind of civil war in which the State played dirty too with secret conspiracies; we shall let bygones be bygones and move on, he said. Cossiga publicly recognized that left-wing terrorism was socially and politically motivated, acknowledged the status of former terrorists as “political prisoners” and then proposed a collective amnesty for them, possibly – according to his critics – to prevent possible inquiries into the role of State institutions and invisible powers in this war. Cossiga’s position is not widely shared. Victims of terrorism and/or their relatives in particular already feel abandoned by the State and are not ready to accept a “forgive and forget” policy.

On the other hand, some victims accepted to meet those who had injured them or who had murdered their beloved, and personally forgave them, but they have also publicly declared that pardon is an individual act which concerns the individual conscience of each victim; accordingly, they would not approve of an amnesty (a collective pardon) from the State, but possibly only “grazia”, that is a pardon granted exclusively by the President of the Republic to single terrorists with due respect to the individual profile of each single offender. As a form of compromise, in an attempt to acknowledge terrorism’s political and social motivations (Cossiga’s “civil war” aspect) without erasing the juridical responsibility of the acts committed by each single terrorist, the possibility has been discussed of a “indulto”, a particular form of pardon which only reduces the prisoner’s remaining imprisonment (during “the state of emergency”, laws were introduced that increased punishment for crimes of terrorism).

There is similar diversity in the positions of former terrorists. Many, after a public repudiation of political violence, only want to forget and be forgotten, and after they have served their time they want to live as normal a life as possible. Others (especially some former leaders who have published books about their experience as terrorists) try to justify their past in many ways. For example, the former leader of Red Brigates, Renato Curcio, when asked who gave him the right to kill, dodged the question by comparing his responsibility with that of the “generations of our fathers and grandfathers”, which produced many more casualties than terrorists, and concluded: “the generosity that a part of my generation has shown in the political-ideological struggle represents a positive value which one day will have to be recognized”.

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As we see, the different positions actively contradict each other most of the time, and all this in a society which is already split on many issues. It is no wonder that a monologic tonality is prevailing among all these discourses. Many of the people involved in debate have a big personal stake in terms of freedom, identity, votes they suppose to get or lose by sustaining a given position. As a consequence, the few voices trying to establish dialogue have often been

4. **Dialogue as a precondition for understanding: a note on method**

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4 Adolfo Bachelet publicly forgave Anna Laura Braghetti of the Red Brigades who was responsible for murdering his brother Vittorio (see Braghetti’s account in her *Il prigioniero*, 1998). Architect Sergio Lenci met in prison Giulia Borelli who shot him in 1980. He still has the bullet in his head and his account (*Colpo alla nuca*, 1988) inspired Mimmo Calopresti’s film *La seconda volta*.

5 A number of them are still in prison but benefit from the so called Gozzini law, which under given conditions grants long-term convicts permission to work outside of prison.

6 La generosità con cui una fetta della mia generazione si è gettata nella rischiosa avventura politico-ideologica rappresenta un valore positivo che, a un certo punto, dovrà esserci riconosciuto.
submerged by the prevailing tones of the debate, with the result that there is no shared understanding of terrorism in the ‘70s. Although this is difficult to prove, the recent resurgence of left-wing terrorism might not be extraneous to this lack of collective elaboration, which has made it possible for marginal fringes to consider former terrorists as heroes to imitate.

In looking for discourses which might foster a better understanding, we have taken dialogue as the only possible way to achieve knowledge of a (human) subject, as defined by Bakhtin (1986: 161) and further explained by Todorov (1981). In particular, we have recognized the higher or lower dialogism of the different texts and discourses on the basis of two elements: the representation of the Other and the relation established with the partner in communication. We include with the first term Bakhtin’s polyphony (“a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights, each with its own world, combining the unity of an event but nonetheless without fusing”; Bakhtin 1984: 6), as well as vnenakhodimost or ‘exotopy’ (‘finding oneself outside’, as explained and translated by Todorov 1984: 99) as the act – performed in this passage within the realm of artistic creativity – of encompassing the other as “an elsewhere beyond integration or reduction”:

No fusion with the other but the preservation of his [the writer's] exotopic position and of his excess of vision and comprehension, that is its correlative. But the question arises as to how Dostoevsky uses this surplus. Not for objectivation or completion. The most important moment of this surplus is love (one cannot love oneself, it is a coordinated relation); then, confession, forgiveness (the conversation between Stavrogin and Tikhon), finally an active understanding (that does not reduplicate), watchful listening (quotation from Todorov, 1984: 106, original italics, our underline; the whole essay in Bakhtin, 1984, Appendix II).

This attitude does not mean accepting all positions as equally valid:

Our point of view is not at all tantamount to asserting a kind of passivity on the part of the author, who could confine himself to making a montage of the viewpoints of others, of the truths of others, and would surrender altogether his own viewpoint, his truth. That is not at all the case; rather, it is a case of an entirely new and specific interrelation between his truth and the truth of someone else. The author is profoundly active, but his action takes on a specific dialogic character [...] Dostoevsky frequently interrupts the other's voice, but he does not cover it up, he never finishes it from the “self”, that is from an alien consciousness (his own) (id., p. 106).

A model of this attitude outside literature is Todorov’s watchful listening to different points of view and value systems from the discovery and conquest of America, from the siege of the Warsaw ghetto or from occupied France (Todorov, 1982, 1991, 1995). As for the relationship established between the partners in dialogue, we wish to incorporate into Bakhtin’s dialogical principle the notion of strategies of involvement in discourse of the listener or reader as the driving element of discourse, as developed especially by Chafe (1985:116) and Tannen (1984, 1989, 1992, 1997).7

The next two sections will show these concepts at work in two examples: an interview with a former terrorist and a fictional film about the encounter between a victim of terrorism and the woman who had shot him ten years before.

5. Dialogue at work: an interview with former terrorist Silveria Russo
Curcio in his book-interview seems fundamentally unable to recognize the reasons of the Other: his style of argument has a rather stringent logic in examining different options, but he has obvious difficulties in considering points of view that are radically different from his own. A quite different attitude is revealed in an interview with another former terrorist, Silveria Russo: here a polyphonic discourse reveals an attempt to understand and make the other understand. The interview was part of a TV program, La notte della Repubblica (The Night of

7 [if applies] See also in this volume Caviglia, Crime news at school: a challenge for critical literacy.
the Republic), by journalist Sergio Zavoli and broadcast by the Italian state broadcaster, RAI, in the early ‘90s, in our view the best TV program so far produced about the so-called “anni di piombo” and still a model for the documentary genre in Italy.

At the time of the interview, Silveria Russo, who was involved in planning and carrying out at least two murders, had been in jail for almost 10 years. In prison distanced herself from terrorism, confessed the crimes she had committed, but did not turn in other comrades. Today she is free, has two sons and works for an organisation for the care of aged people. Our analysis is based on a written transcription of her interview (in Zavoli, 1992: 373-85).

Silveria Russo has reflected on her experience and undergone a transformation. This development is revealed in a discontinuity in language, where the ideological discourse of her former self is still reflected in her account of her life as a terrorist and set against her current beliefs. Some examples: In her “yesterday voice” the terrorist group is an “armed organisation” (organizzazione armata), the group’s members are “comrades” (compagni), the activity of attacking and killing people is called "armed actions" (azioni armate), "direct action on a man" (azione diretta su un uomo) and seen as "normal operative activity" (normale attività operativa). In this voice the reasons for an “action” and for "armed struggle" in general are expressed in a language that encapsulates would-be revolutionary practice into the worst tradition of vagueness in Italian political discourse: becoming a terrorist means "carrying on a discourse of armed struggle" (portare avanti un discorso di lotta armata) and killing a female prison officer “was part of the discourse we were carrying on in that moment” (faceva parte del discorso che stavamo portando avanti in quell momento).

Even more abstract and abstruse is the language Silveria Russo uses to explain the reason why she and her group decided to kill democratic and left-wing judge Guido Galli (Zavoli, 1992: 383-84); this language is blatantly contradicted by her new voice expressed with the most simple words, when she explains what she recognized later: Judge Galli era un uomo buono (“was a good, decent man”). Silveria Russo’s present-day voice acknowledges that the “actions” were terrorism (she speaks of "wave of terrorism", ondata terroristica) and "murder" (l’omicidio Lorusso) and admits that an action (killing a bartender who had recognized some terrorists and called the police) was simply a vendetta, a word that could not be more extraneous to the language of political struggle. The distance Silveria Russo perceives from the past emerges as well in utterances such as "the work – let's call it that way – of the terrorist" (il lavoro, chiamiamolo pure così, del terrorista).

The schizophrenia between the two languages is possibly the best clue to understanding an unsettling concept: that resorting to political violence "was in the order of things" (era nell’ordine delle cose) for a small but significant fragment of the Italian left-wing movement in the '70s. This concept is clearly present in many of the different points of view on terrorism seen in the Section 3, but is often proposed either as a good excuse for having become a terrorist ("we had the courage to do what others only talked about", a position held for example by Curcio) or else seen as a proof of the intrinsically Stalinist character of the Italian left-wing in general.

Silveria Russo and interviewer Sergio Zavoli manage instead to reveal that an otherwise normal person who cares for her loved ones (a husband, a dog) can at the same time be a killer, and that the same person can see later the absurdity of her choice and even demystify an explanation of terrorism in purely political terms. She acknowledges the blinding role of ideo-

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8 This is another common way to designate in Italy the period 1969-98 and it comes from the Italian title of Margarethe Von Trotta’s film Die bleierne Zeit (“The Leaden years”, 1981, known as The German sisters or Marianne and Julienne). Bleierne Zeit actually refers in von Trotta’s film to the ‘50s in Germany, but in Italy the title was appropriated – through association with the lead of the bullets – to describe the late ‘70s.

9 A selection of interviews from the TV-program has recently been published on videotape, but Silveria Russo’s interview was not included in the choice. It seems that the editors were more interested in interviews with former terrorist leaders (it is also possible that some of the persons interviewed were no longer willing, ten years later, to return to the public arena; but we have no information about the editorial history of the video edition).
logical discourse in the decision process of killing ("people were symbols, not human beings"), but speaks at the same time of even less noble "protagonism within the group" and competition between groups as a significant cause of actions.

In his Bakhtinian watchful listening, Sergio Zavoli deserves our big credit for the result of this interview. He is neither a judge nor an accomplice, but is not by any means indifferent. As we understand it, Zavoli had two main items on his agenda: to show that former terrorists are human beings and not monsters, as largely held by public opinion at the end of the '80s, and to expose how their actions did great harm to other human beings who did not deserve it. But it is the viewer's responsibility to draw this conclusion, Zavoli never lectures anybody. Which does not mean he accepts everything. For example, the only time he interrupts Silvia Russo is while she is describing an "action" in which her group ambushed a squad of policemen; in the shoot-out a passer-by was also killed. As Silvia Russo merely hints at this victim as an unwanted casualty, Zavoli reminds her that "that person – pardon me – was a 13 year old boy" (quella persona, mi scusi, era un ragazzo di 13 anni). It's a shame we cannot hear Sergio Zavoli's tone of voice, which probably – together with "pardon me" – helped soften the painful remark. We would translate his meta-message as "I know I am saying something painful for you and I'm sorry, but this victim too deserves to be mentioned and mourned by me, by you and by the viewers". Silvia Russo at least seems to understand the remark in these terms, as the dialogue and even trust which has been built up between the two is not disrupted, and the interview proceeds.

In summary, dialogism in this interview involves all the actors in the scene: Silvia Russo, who manages to give voice to her previous and present selves; Sergio Zavoli, with his attitude of listening and steering conversation only when necessary; the viewer, who is required, and is trusted, to be able to make sense of the whole.

6. Another dialogic option: La seconda volta by Mimmo Calopresti

Confrontation with the past is represented in a different way in Mimmo Calopresti’s film La seconda volta (1996). The title is an explicit reference to the theme of the film: a latter-day encounter between victim and victimiser.\(^\text{10}\)

One of the two main characters in the film, the university lecturer Alberto Sajevo (played by actor and director Nanni Moretti), had been shot by left wing terrorists ten years before, at a time when he was responsible for job lay-offs at Fiat, and he still has a (in some ways symbolic) bullet in the head. His life stopped at that moment: his marriage broke down and his private life is now a wreck, with his younger sister as his only social contact. Lisa Venturi, the other main character in the film, is the terrorist who shot him. After spending 10 years in jail, she has now started work outside on day release, returning to prison at night (according to a program for the rehabilitation of convicts). Alberto meets her by chance; she fails to recognize him\(^\text{11}\) and he starts to follow her obsessively (ironically, in the same way left wing terrorists stalked their victims before the attack).

Disguised behind a romantic interest (he sends her flowers), Alberto’s obsessive involvement with Lisa is aimed at obtaining some kind of retribution. To his sister who asks him why he didn’t immediately reveal who he was, he answers: “I couldn’t. The first time I talked to her she didn’t even recognize me. Do you understand what that means? It means I haven’t existed

\(^{10}\) Our analysis is also based on the unpublished script of La seconda volta, provided by courtesy of script-writer Francesco Bruni.

\(^{11}\) According to former Red Brigade member Alberto Franceschini, not recognizing one's victim is quite unlikely (Franceschini, 1995); but according to other terrorists’ memoirs this is a commonly feared possibility (Braghetti & Mambro, 1995: 162).
for all these years. Cancelled. Removed.”

Half way through the film he reveals his real identity to her and confronts her with her past actions, but Lisa runs away from him without saying anything and refuses to talk to him later, when he tries to visit her in prison. For a period she even refuses the privilege of working outside.

It is only at the very end of the film that Lisa, instead of going back to prison after work, decides to visit Alberto and confront his questions. As we will see, this final encounter does not end up with a formal reconciliation, but makes it possible for both of them to advance their understanding of the other’s condition.

Alberto has an absolutely monological voice as ‘victim’ and, understandably enough, has no sympathy with any argument for a reconciliation with former terrorists. He is vociferously annoyed by outspoken former terrorists publishing books and giving interviews, as in the scene where he reads aloud the same passage from Curcio’s memoirs which we mentioned above. He is still traumatized and has never consented to the removal of the bullet from his head, which makes him the emblem of Italian society unable to liberate itself from the wounds of terrorism (O’Leary, 2002:37).

Lisa, on the other hand, looks like a quite normal person who is leading a calm and solitary life: working out, sleeping in prison and with few dedicated friendships. She too is in a kind of limbo, a state of suspension that originates from the desire to forget and be forgotten, as experienced by many former terrorists. She says to her cellmate in prison: "I would like to sleep my whole life long" (*vorrei dormire tutta una vita*).

A large part of the film is devoted to showing Alberto and Lisa in their everyday lives; the viewer becomes acquainted with them and their condition. They are not especially likeable, in particular Alberto, but it is evident that they are still suffering for something that for most of us is a faint memory. The film’s slow tempo encourages the viewer to compare his/her own last ten years of life with the non-life of the two main characters.

We will focus now on the last encounter of Lisa and Alberto at the end of the film.

This happens months after the first casual meeting with Lisa, at that moment in which Alberto has decided to undergo surgery in a clinic abroad to have the bullet removed from his head. He had also decided to move to another apartment (this second decision is symbolic too, since Alberto, after his divorce, has continued living in the same apartment where he had been shot). Lisa rings at his door the day before Alberto is due to leave for the operation. The first minutes of the encounter are devoted to formal courtesy, small-talk and preparing coffee. In the original script, at this point Alberto asks Lisa to tell him how she shot him. She repeats, rather quietly, the same details she gave at the trial, with Alberto in an attitude of watchful listening. The whole confession was dropped from the final version of the film, adding further ellipsis to the scene and requiring the viewer to figure out the most intimate part of the dialogue. The director cuts instead to Alberto’s sister talking worriedly with her partner about the effect the encounter may have on Alberto, and then to the parole judge receiving notice that Lisa did not come back to prison after work and that she has become, technically speaking, a fugitive.

When the camera returns to Alberto and Lisa they are outside, walking together. Lisa’s voice is more relaxed, now. Involvement between them is mediated by the details she gives him as a sort of gift, and dialogue seems possible, as in the following scene (parts of the script omitted in the film are in square brackets):

---

12 “Non ci sono riuscito. Quando le ho parlato per la prima volta non mi ha neanche riconosciuto. Sai che cosa significa? Che in tutti questi anni io per lei non mi sono esistito. Cancellato, rimosso”. (La seconda volta, screenplay, Scene 64).

13 See also the strongly symbolic scene where Alberto is rowing slowly in an indoor pool mumbling the Red Brigades’s slogan “Colpirne uno per educarne cento” (hit one and educate a hundred). Alberto is making movement without actually making any progress; that is, he is still prisoner of the events of the past.
**Scene 88.** Lisa and Alberto are walking side by side on a boulevard along the river.

Lisa and Alberto are walking side by side on a boulevard along the river.

Lisa: [...]ero a casa, un appartamento che dividevo con altre due ragazze. Mi ricordo che pioveva a dirotto. [Semiologia.] Era anche andato bene. È passato questo ragazzo, Gianni, di Milano. L'avevo conosciuto quel giorno stesso in una manifestazione. Aveva una pistola e mi ha chiesto se gliela potessi tenere a casa mia.

Alberto: E lei accettò.

Lisa: Sì. Mi sembrava naturale. In quella manifestazione la polizia aveva ucciso uno studente. Lo guarda, prima di proseguire:

Una settimana dopo Gianni mi telefonò e voleva che gli portassi la pistola in una casa fuori città, che usava come base. Io ci andai, e ci rimasi. Una mattina la polizia fece una perquisizione: noi non c'eravamo, ma trovarono i miei documenti. Da quel giorno mi ritrovai in clandestinità.

Alberto: Insomma, successe tutto per caso.

Lisa: No. Immagino che prima o poi lo avrei fatto comunque.

Alberto is struck by the contrast between Lisa's idea that becoming a terrorist was "in the order of things" and the harmless appearance of the young woman he is talking to. There is another cut in the sequence and then political discourse breaks in and disrupts the dialogue:

**Scene 90.** A bar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alberto</th>
<th>Lisa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alberto: E allora, perché avete scelto proprio me?</td>
<td>Lisa: Lo sa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberto: Lo so? Non mi conoscevate, non sapevate nemmeno che faccia avessi. Mi odiavate così tanto da volermi uccidere. Perché? La guardia per invitarti a parlare, ma Lisa è chiusa nel suo mutismo. “Colpirne uno per educarne cento.” Dove sono i cento che avete educato colpendo me?</td>
<td>Lisa: Sono parole che non hanno più senso. È questo che vuole sentirsi dire? Che ho rovinato la mia vita per una cosa che non ha più senso?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa: You know why. Alberto: Do I? You didn't know me, you didn't even know what I looked like. And yet, you hated me so much you wanted to kill me. He looks at her, but she remains silent. “Hit one and educate 100”. Where are the hundred you have educated by hitting me?</td>
<td>Lisa: You know why. Alberto: You know why. Alberto: Do I? You didn’t know me, you didn’t even know what I looked like. And yet, you hated me so much you wanted to kill me. He looks at her, but she remains silent. “Hit one and educate 100”. Where are the hundred you have educated by hitting me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberto: Your life and mine, for something that has never made sense. Lisa: Nobody can judge that. Alberto: I do. Want to know why? Because the things you wanted to change carried on as before, maybe even got worse. And it was partly your fault.</td>
<td>Alberto: So why was it me you chose?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa: What are you saying? There were many who were asking us to do what we did. And you know that well.</td>
<td>Lisa: You know why. Alberto: Do I? You didn’t know me, you didn’t even know what I looked like. And yet, you hated me so much you wanted to kill me. He looks at her, but she remains silent. “Hit one and educate 100”. Where are the hundred you have educated by hitting me?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this exchange, Alberto makes a crude (and quite reasonable) political analysis of terrorism. Lisa does not want to talk about it, but feeling cornered she falls back to identitarian discourse, using the same arguments adopted in books written by former terrorists such as Curcio. Maybe she suspects that Alberto is right, or maybe not: it is up to the viewer to translate her silence. At any rate, when Lisa and Alberto’s conversation melts into public political debate there is no room for dialogue: talking becomes a waste of time.

But there is one last scene in their encounter. Alberto accompanies Lisa outside, waiting for the taxi. The atmosphere between them now is colder after the last exchange, but dialogue will be resumed on a different plane (our notes are in bold italics, within square brackets).

**Scene 90. Outside, night. [waiting for the taxi]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALBERTO: Va a Bologna?</th>
<th>Are you going to Bologna?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Alberto remembers that Lisa’s parents live in Bologna and believes she is on weekend leave from prison]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa esita un momento:</td>
<td>Lisa hesitates for a moment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LISA: Sì.</td>
<td>LISA: Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[she is lying, she should be back in prison now; she will be punished for not returning]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dopo una pausa, chiede:</td>
<td>After a pause, she asks:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LISA: Anche lei è in partenza?</td>
<td>LISA: Are you leaving, too?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALBERTO: Si. Vado... in Germania. Devo tenere un ciclo di lezioni in alcune università.</td>
<td>ALBERTO: Yes, I’m going... to Germany. I’m going on a lecture tour there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[he is lying, too; he is about to undergo surgery to have the bullet removed from his head]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LISA: Starà via a lungo?</td>
<td>LISA: Are you staying away for long?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALBERTO: Un mese.</td>
<td>ALBERTO: One month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dopo una pausa: Suo padre cosa fa?</td>
<td>After a pause: What does your father do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LISA: E’ insegnante. Perché?</td>
<td>LISA: He’s a teacher. Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALBERTO: Così. Abbozza un sorriso. Poi le alza il cappuccio della giacca: Si copra, si sta bagnando tutta.</td>
<td>ALBERTO: No reason. He attempts a smile. Then he raises the hood of Lisa’s coat: Cover your head. It’s raining.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LISA: Grazie. Lìsa è in imbarazzo.</td>
<td>LISA: Thank you. LISA is embarrassed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALBERTO: Però forse lo faccio solo per educazione. Lei non mi è simpatica.</td>
<td>ALBERTO: Maybe I just did it out of good manners. I don’t really like you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LISA: Pazzienza. Arriva il taxi.</td>
<td>LISA: Well, doesn’t matter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALBERTO: Anche a lei. Li sa esita ancora un istante.</td>
<td>ALBERTO: The same to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LISA: Vuole un passaggio?</td>
<td>LISA hesitates again:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALBERTO: No. grazie.</td>
<td>LISA: Would you like a lift?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lisa gets in. Alberto watches the taxi drive away. He walks off in the rain.**

Like in the sequence when Lisa rings the bell at Alberto’s apartment, the two resort to small-talk. This too is a form of involvement, since both show some interest in the other. But, as we have just seen, this final dialogue takes in the eyes of the viewer a decisive turn when Lisa...
and Alberto both lie about their real destinations – hospital and prison – to avoid embarrassing the other, to save the other’s face.

Their sacrifice, which goes unnoticed by the other, means however for Lisa an apology and for Alberto at least the seeds of reluctant forgiveness. Alberto embraces now the possibility of overcoming his trauma, although the surgical operation does entail a risk. Lisa has broken the rules of her program of rehabilitation and will lose the right to work outside, but now she has come out of her limbo by acting as a free and responsible person. When the quite humane parole judge asks her “Was it worth it, at least?”, Lisa’s answer is “I don’t know”. The answer is forwarded to the viewer, who did not get the ellipsis explained, but is expected to make sense of her dialogue with Alberto and draw her/his conclusions.

7. Conclusions

Both the interview with Silveria Russo and the final scenes of La seconda volta show dialogue at work. The actors involved in the talk listen, try to understand and to help the other understand; they are not concerned with themselves only. And in both cases the viewer is not told what he or she is supposed to think. The interviewer and the film director act neither as prosecutors, nor as defence lawyers; this does not mean indifference, but rather a clear choice for internally persuasive against authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981: 342-4).

However, these two examples are the exception more than the rule. It is possible to find other examples of polyphonal and dialogical discourse about political violence in the ‘70s in Italy, but monological accounts – both fictional or non fictional – are prevalent. Former terrorists’ memoirs and fictional autobiographical narratives in particular often have a self-defensive element which tends to become self-referential. But what surprised us was the meagre fictional material available about Italian terrorism and political violence in the ‘70s: a few films, a few short stories, no notable novels or plays. Not even in fiction Italy seems ready to confront the traumas of its recent past and help a large audience to make sense of what happened.

If we look at the non-fictional front, the scene has been dominated by the media’s somewhat morbid interest in former terrorists’ accounts and memoirs (while for example accounts from the victims are scarce) or by monological statements at the service of one or another position in the political debate.

As to our initial hypothesis, that fiction is in itself more polyphonal and dialogical than non-fiction, we can say that this holds in the case of La Seconda Volta, which manages to give a non-reductive voice to a victim and to an ex-perpetrator, while at the same showing the limitations of leaving the problem of overcoming the past to the judiciary system alone. Here fiction does show its advantage: the freedom to create possible words (Bruner, 1986) and to demand that the reader or viewer interpret them by creating new meaning from the text (Eco, 1979).

What’s more, by incorporating ellipsis and silence in a plot – that is by refraining from saying things directly and leaving instead the reader or viewer “to do the work” – fiction can offer a privileged path to understanding. In Keith Oatley’s words, fiction is “twice as true as facts” because it works as a kind of cognitive and emotional simulation, which allows us to explore our feelings and understandings about a given set of reality (Oatley, 1999).

Nevertheless, we did find dialogue and trust in the reader or viewer’s intelligence and sensibility also in Sergio Zavoli’s TV program La notte della Repubblica, based on public interviews. We wish to stress, however, that Zavoli’s attitude of watchful listening without complicity or hostility has to be considered an exception: refusing to lecture the public and refusing to hurt an opponent is at odds with genre constraints and conventions of public debate in Italy and elsewhere (Calabrese, 1998; Tannen, 1998).

Of course, dialogue does not occur in a vacuum and texts and TV programs alone, be they fictional or documentary, cannot by their sheer power subvert the constraints of hegemonic public discourse. Besides, as noted by Fairclough (2000), dialogue in the public sphere presup-
poses that participants be able to take action, for example by implementing or influencing policies, as within a 'commission for truth and reconciliation'; but such a hypothesis seems even less viable after the 11th September 2001.

However, the need is still there to understand and overcome a dark period in our recent past, and is possibly more urgent today than ever before, faced with the multiple threats to peace and democracy posed by terrorism and also by the war against it. In March 2002 the Red Brigades, or whoever hides behind this name, killed the economist Marco Biagi, who was cooperating with the right-wing Italian government on labour reform. In a moment when commenting on the crime was embarrassing for all the political forces\textsuperscript{14}, one of the first public responses to the killing was the prime-time broadcasting of \textit{La Seconda Volta} on the most popular TV channel. We believe this was a good choice: although fiction can not create dialogue where there is none, a good model is a precious resource.

\textit{References}


\textsuperscript{14} The right-wing government had failed to protect him, while the left-wing was campaigning against the labour reforms that Marco Biagi was contributing to shape and defend publicly.


**Paper D.**

| **Title**            | Caviglia, F. (2003)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Salvare il padre. <em>Il Gorgo</em> di Beppe Fenoglio.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connected teaching activity</strong></td>
<td>Courses on “The identity of the Italian people”, “Italian history and society” and “Text analysis” held at Aarhus University respectively in Spring 1999, Autumn 2000 and Autumn 2002.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other connected publications</strong></td>
<td>See in appendix to the paper the original Italian text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Addenda &amp; corrigenda</strong></td>
<td>In my paper the different reactions by Fenoglio and Mazzantini to the events of summer ’43 are ascribed first of all to a different culture and maturity. I still believe this is a reasonable, but somehow weak conclusion. I should maybe have stressed more how Fenoglio sees the ’suicide of the father’ as an event that still can be prevented, while for Mazzantini everything is lost. Furthermore, an analysis – based on Oatley (1992) and Oatley and Jenkins (1996) – of the emotions displayed by the son-characters in Fenoglio and Mazzantini might highlight more of the overt and also not-fully-conscious intentions behind their characters’ actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contribution to advanced literacy</strong></td>
<td>The ambition behind this paper is to show how fiction and action can be intertwined, and how narrative can organize experience and promote or justify individual and collective choice. The functional approach is in this case integrated with the cognitive approach to metaphor and narrative as proposed by Lakoff and Turner. I have used the texts examined in this paper both in courses on Italian history – to explain the civil war 1943-45 and its memory – and in courses of text analysis, as an example of how narratives can matter.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

Il gorgo (1952) is a short story by writer and ex-partisan Beppe Fenoglio about the father of a poor peasant family in Italy during the 30’s, who decides to take his life, but is rescued by his 10 year old son, the only human being who understands the father’s decision and dares to stop him.

After highlighting some aspects of the literariness of the short story, I observe the symmetry between the literary motive of taking responsibility for ‘saving the father’ and the engagement of the author and of part of his generation in the civil war that took place in Italy following the armistice with the Allies on the 8th September 1943.

The father’s weakness and desperation in the short story bears a striking resemblance to representations of father figures at the time of the civil war described by Fenoglio and by former fascist combatant Carlo Mazzantini in their largely autobiographic novels.

Should Il gorgo then be read as an allegory of civil war?

Probably not, since the text does not explicitly invite to allegorical reading.

However, “thou shall save thy father” is a categorical imperative written in the value-system of both Fenoglio and Mazzantini and eliciting somehow similar narratives in fiction and in real life. The catastrophic events of the summer ’43 have been most probably interpreted by both Fenoglio and Mazzantini as (danger of) a ‘suicide of the father’ and prompted the need for a reaction: protecting the father, in the case of Fenoglio, a mixture of vengeance and expiation in the case of Mazzantini.

In questo intervento vorrei mettere in evidenza alcune caratteristiche dell’impianto letterario del breve racconto Il gorgo e riflettere quindi sulla simmetria tra il tema del salvataggio del padre e l’impegno di Fenoglio e di parte della sua generazione nella guerra civile successiva all’8 settembre 1943.

Qualche nota su temi, lingua e struttura

L’ambientazione nello spazio e nel tempo della vicenda descritta nel Gorgo non potrebbe essere più (neo)realistica: mondo contadino, figli in guerra (d’Abissinia), malattia, miseria, disperazione. L’elenco delle sventure che si abbattono sulla famiglia ha un’ecco biblica. Biblico (l’ubriachezza di Noè, Gen. 9,23) è certamente il riferimento “non mi sentivo di alzargli gli occhi in faccia, per la vergogna di vederlo come nudo”, pronunciato nel momento più drammatico, con il padre che minaccia il figlio con il forcone per costringerlo a andarsene, in modo da essere libero di suicidarsi. Il gorgo è poi un luogo importante in quanto, simbolicamente e concretamente, “una delle scelte incombenti sul personaggio fenogliano”2, già teatro del suicidio di Eugenio Tarulla (L’acqua verde) e poi, nel racconto omonimo, di Superino, figlio segreto del prete e della maestra che non reggerà alla rivelazione delle sue origini.

La lingua è estremamente levigata e costruita su un impasto di termini e locuzioni del parlato quotidiano, ma senza la minima ridondanza (che sarebbe invece una caratteristica

2 Luca Bufano, Beppe Fenoglio e il racconto breve, Ravenna: Longo, 1999, p.130 (Bufano fa riferimento in particolare ai personaggi dei racconti del paese).
classica dell’oralità\(^3\) e con diverse immagini che evocano una dimensione dolorosa quotidiana e mitica al tempo stesso: il lamento dell’agnella, il medico che “non ne capisce il male”, la malattia “al di sopra della scienza”, la malata che “durava” ancora, le battaglie coi mori. Esempio di questa dimensione mi sembra in particolare il terribile incipit di frase “Fra quello che soffriva e le spese” , che prelude all’ordine della madre di pregare il Signore perché “portasse via” la figlia malata. Fenoglio appare qui (Il gorgo è uscito per la prima volta nel 1954, poco dopo la non entusiastica accoglienza per La malora) in uno dei migliori risultati ottenuti nella ricerca spasmodica di quello che Beccaria ha chiamato ‘grande stile’, “unità e totalità di stile monotonale ad alta tensione”\(^4\).

Le Langhe di Fenoglio si stanno caricando in modo sempre più evidente di uno spessore universale, mitico, e anche questo breve racconto ha come oggetto “grandi temi” come la vita, la morte e l’amore (filiale, in questo caso), su uno sfondo di difficoltà materiali come povertà e guerra. Nel dibattito culturale è il momento della riflessione sul mito\(^5\) ed è probabile che Fenoglio risentisse di questo clima, indipendentemente dal fatto fosse o meno in competizione con Pavese, che aveva allora da pochi anni compiuto la sua parabola ed era certo più noto a critica e pubblico.

Quanto alla struttura, vediamo che il racconto, estremamente compatto, costruisce un climax di tensione quasi insopportabile che si scioglie nelle ultime righe.

Riassumendo, nel Gorgo Fenoglio invia tutti i segnali necessari per far capire al lettore che sta leggendo un testo di grande spessore letterario – e quindi morale-civile, in quegli anni – ambientato nella terra che costituisce l’orizzonte di tutta la sua produzione.

La solitudine del protagonista e l’assunzione di responsabilità

Un tema del racconto che vorrei mettere in particolare evidenza è la solitudine del protagonista, unico a rendersi conto di quello che sta accadendo e poi ad assumersi la responsabilità della situazione:

in tutta la nostra grossa famiglia soltanto io lo capii, che avevo nove anni ed ero l’ultimo

Non so come, ma io capii a volo che andava a finirsi nell’acqua, e mi atterrò, guardando in giro, vedere che nessun altro aveva avuto la mia ispirazione: nemmeno nostra madre fece il più piccolo gesto, seguitò a pulire il paiolo, e sì che conosceva il suo uomo come se fosse il primo dei suoi figli.

Eppure non diedi l’allarme, come se sapessi che lo avrei salvato solo se facessi tutto da me.

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Ma adesso ero più sicuro che ce l’avrei fatta ad impedirglielo, e mi venne da urlare verso casa, ma ne eravamo già troppo lontani. Avessi visto un uomo li intorno, mi sarei lasciato andare a pregarlo: «Voi, per carità, parlate a mio padre. Dicegli qualcosa», ma non vedevo una testa d’uomo, in tutta la conca.


Un racconto-metafora?

La simmetria tra la vicenda raccontata nel Gorgo e la Resistenza, come è stata vissuta e raccontata altrove da Fenoglio, colpisce e offre una tentazione di lettura metaforica.

Philip Cooke, che gentilmente ha letto la prima bozza di questo intervento, ha accolto il parallelo tra il rapporto padre figlio nel Gorgo e nel Partigiano Johnny, mentre si è detto perplexo sull’ipotesi di leggere il racconto come una riflessione sulla guerra civile: “My own feeling is that the story has its own historical and geographical specificity: it looks like it’s about peasant life in the Langhe and IS.”

Nel seguito dell’intervento cercherò di precisare ulteriormente i contorni di questa simmetria, e quindi di discutere se e in che termini una lettura metaforica sia giustificata e eventualmente compatibile con la specificità “langarola” del racconto sostenuta da Cooke.

Utserò in particolare “metafora” come meccanismo cognitivo prima che come artificio retorico, sulla linea di indirizzi di ricerca che vedono la costruzione/individuazione di metafora come un processo che seleziona tratti semantici da ambiti concettuali diversi e li proietta in uno “spazio comune”, quello appunto della metafora, che evidenzi relazioni significative tra gli elementi. In quest’ottica, “parabola” o “narrazione esemplare” sono termini che indicano una particolare forma di metafora costruita attraverso la narrazione: chi comprende una “storia esemplare” sa isolare quegli elementi che consentono di comprendere di più il mondo reale, come il sultano “educato” dai racconti di Sherazade.


Nel caso del *Gorgo*, dei tradizionali tratti semanticci del padre, figura di riferimento che di norma rappresenta autorità, protezione, guida, resta nel racconto solo un forte vincolo affettivo, quasi rafforzato nel figlio dalla percezione di un’estrema debolezza e incapacità di far presa sugli eventi da parte del padre stesso (la sua “voce di scarso comando”), dell’intera famiglia (il Rosario recitato “con la testa tra le mani”), dell’autorità (i medici che non sanno “trovare il male” alla piccola).

Che il vincolo padre-figlio sia inteso da Fenoglio in termini di affetto, di impegno e di responsabilità rispetto al “libro mastro della vita”, è testimoniato in particolare in due bei passi del *Partigiano Johnny*:

Vide distintamente, a grande distanza, suo padre salire alla villetta, ancora sull’asfalto suburbano, colpì Johnny la stanchezza, la non-joy del suo cammino. Lo seguì per tutto il tratto scoperto, il cuore liquefacentegliasi per l’amore e la pietà del vecchio... «È terribile ora avere dei figli della vostra età». Ogni suo passo parlava di angoscia e di abnegazione, ed il figlio alto e lontano sentiva che non avrebbe mai potuto ripagarlo, nemmeno in maniera centesimale, nemmeno col conservarsi vivo. L’unica maniera di ripagarlo, pensava ora, sarebbe stata d’amare suo figlio come il padre aveva amato lui: a lui non ne verrà niente, ma il conto sarà pareggiato nel libro mastro della vita. (*Il partigiano Johnny*, p. 8, ediz.1970, p. 397 ed. crit.)


Questo padre che, a differenza di quello del *Gorgo*, ha per Fenoglio un diretto riferimento autobiografico, presenta anch’egli, pur in forma attenuata, tratti di angoscia e impotenza di fronte agli eventi.

Ma la ragione che più mi ha tentato a vedere in questo racconto una metafora dell’assunzione di responsabilità da parte di una generazione è stato ritrovare il tema del crollo del padre, della sua impotenza e disperazione, nei ricordi di un autore che all’epoca si era schierato sul fronte opposto. Carlo Mazzantini, ex combattente di Salò, in un libro-intervista che lo mette a confronto con l’ex partigiano Rosario Bentivegna, ricorda il 25 luglio ’43 in un capitolo dal titolo *il suicidio del padre*:

<la radio ha annunciato le dimissioni di Mussolini e la folla, in strada, festeggia, tra l’incredulità e la costernazione della famiglia Mazzantini> Guardavo mio padre che, appoggiato al davanzale, si sporgeva nel buio della stanza e aspettavo da lui un gesto. Il gesto. Quello che avrebbe fatto tornare indietro il tempo, cancellato quel brutto sogno e ristabilito la realtà. Ma mio padre, gli omeri aguzzi che sporgevano dalla canottiera, si stringeva nelle spalle, si mordeva le labbra, scuoteva il capo e non faceva nulla.


Guardai mio padre: le sue guance erano rigate di lacrime come quando ascoltava la canzone del Piave alla radio, ed era scosso da singhiozzi che a fatica riusciva a trattenere. Fu allora che avvertii qualcosa rompersi dentro di me, una sensazione dolorosissima, come una dolorosissima nascita. E sentii sorgere dentro di me un impulso di rivolta, di rabbia contro tutti, e contro tutto. 

(C’eravamo..., pp. 48-49)

Più avanti, raccontando “la vergogna dell’8 settembre” (p. 53), Mazzantini ripropone lo stesso tema dello sconcerto e della rivolta di fronte alla disperazione impotente del padre:

[...] tornai a casa dove trovai mio padre e mia madre, muti, gli occhi bassi, incapaci di reazione, seduti uno accanto all’altra, in preda al più grande sgomento: due figli sotto le armi, chissà dove, e quel terzo li <il narratore, Carlo Mazzantini> con quegli occhi da uccello ferito. Dovevo fare qualcosa, un gesto, con cui manifestare i confusi sentimenti di pena di rabbia di abbandono che mi attanagliavano. Andai alla parete dove era appeso il quadro del Re, lo staccai e senza una parola lo deposi a terra. Mio padre non ebbe la forza di un gesto, di una parola. (ibidem, p. 54)

Lungi da me proporre un’equivalenza, già suggerita da troppi, tra le parti che da lì a poco si sarebbero combattute nella guerra civile. Diversi sono anche, naturalmente, l’atteggiamento precedente al ’43 da parte di Fenoglio e del più giovane Mazzantini rispetto al fascismo e alla sua retorica: Mazzantini aveva assorbito attraverso famiglia e scuola quella retorica che lo porterà poi alla ricerca della bella morte, mentre Fenoglio, visceralmente ostile al fascismo, lo combatterà con pari impegno come partigiano e come scrittore. Diverso anche l’atteggiamento dei due verso il padre, con Mazzantini sorpreso e deluso dall’impotenza del genitore di fronte agli eventi, mentre in Fenoglio vibra soprattutto la corda della pietas filiale. Eppure analoga mi sembra la solitudine di entrambi di fronte al crollo del mondo che li circonda, e quindi la decisione di assumerli la responsabilità di agire.

La figura del padre disperato e rassegnato è percepita quindi dai due autori, rispetto al contesto storico della guerra civile, come omologa alla debolezza dell’Italia intera?

Nel caso di Mazzantini direi si possa rispondere di sì senza esitazioni: cresciuto nel mito di un’Italia che già il Risorgimento aveva costruito retoricamente in termini di vincoli familiari, egli interseca nel ricordo il piano della famiglia e quello della nazione e non a caso ricorda le parole di una donna che associa il re in fuga a un padre che abbandona i figli (“anche il padre ci ha abbandonati”, ibidem, p. 55).

Nel caso di Fenoglio il discorso mi sembra più sfumato, ma ugualmente valido. Johnny sente il padre minacciato dal gorgo storico esattamente come il suo fratello minore del racconto sentiva la minaccia di un gorgo reale. Più in generale, “padre” e “patria” (quest’ultima rappresentata sia come Italia che come Langa) sono emblemi contigui degli affetti e dell’appartenenza (ad es. “Johnny amava il fiume, che l’aveva cresciuto, con le colline”, p.4). Infine, l’idea della famiglia e della sua gerarchia come metafora della comunità è così radicata nella nostra cultura che credo fino a prova contraria sia possibile postularla come presente e viva, anche se non necessariamente consapevole, nell’orizzonte di Fenoglio.

A questo punto, però, le strade di Fenoglio e Mazzantini tornano a separarsi. Prendendo in prestito categorie proposte da Tzvetan Todorov, credo si possa dire che Mazzantini si fa guidare in primo luogo da un’etica dell’eroismo alla ricerca della bella morte, mentre Fenoglio/Johnny, come il piccolo protagonista del Gorgo, è un eroe solitario, ma prima di tutto è

12 Lakoff, cit.
un *soccorritore* mosso da un’*etica della responsabilità*; tuttavia sia Fenoglio che Mazzantini e i loro personaggi di fiction sono partecipi di entrambe le dimensioni\(^{14}\).

* Bastano questi paralleli per sostenere che *Il gorgo* rappresenti un’allegoria della Resistenza? No, almeno non nel senso che Fenoglio abbia voluto esplicitamente scrivere con *Il gorgo* un’allegoria politica, un genere che in quegli anni fioriva (vedi ad esempio il primo Calvino), ma che Fenoglio non ha mai praticato. Mancano tra l’altro nel *Gorgo* quei “segnali”, quelle strizzate d’occhio al lettore che da Dante a Eco servono per richiamare a una lettura polisemica\(^ {15}\).

Eppure mi sembra che le simmetrie tra il *Gorgo* e le scelte di impegno civile di Johnny/Fenoglio esistano e che siano troppo importanti per essere casuali. Come possiamo leggerle?

Vale la pena ricordare che Fenoglio voleva *eternarsi* per mezzo della scrittura\(^ {16}\), e che la letteratura, quindi il racconto e la metafora, sono stati il suo linguaggio e anche il suo principio conoscitivo del mondo reale. Al tempo stesso, il mondo che Fenoglio ha via via costruito con le sue opere ha, come ribadisce Philip Cooke, un concretissimo radicamento storico-geografico, ed è anche questa concretezza ad assicurare alle sue opere lo spessore e la credibilità che ancora le fa vibrare.

La mia proposta è di vedere la fiction del *Gorgo* e del *Partigiano Johnny* e la realtà dell’impegno di Fenoglio nella Resistenza come appartenenti a uno stesso sistema di valori organizzato e riflesso in metafore, racconti e azioni tra loro coerenti\(^ {17}\). Questo sistema di valori prevede l’obbligo, se il padre (reale o simbolico) si trova in difficoltà, di prendere in mano la situazione e salvarlo\(^ {18}\). In questo senso *Il gorgo* non simbolizza esplicitamente la scelta di combattere nella Resistenza, ma è espressione dello stesso sistema di valori che aveva portato a quella scelta nel mondo reale.

Tali valori non erano l’esclusiva di una persona o di una parte, e il disastro della seconda guerra mondiale e dell’8 settembre ha richiamato una parte dei giovani a assumersi, in forme e su fronti diversi, responsabilità che fino a quel momento erano state appannaggio di un’altra generazione e soprattutto di una classe dirigente autoritaria che era sembrata dissolversi dall’oggi al domani.

Fenoglio e Mazzantini hanno vissuto entrambi la tragedia dell’8 settembre. Fenoglio, più maturo anagraficamente e politicamente, “è riuscito a salvare il padre dal gorgo. La reazione di Mazzantini, invece, ha alcuni tratti di quella di Superino, che espia nel suicidio una vergogna di cui non ha colpa.

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\(^{14}\) Lo stesso Mazzantini, che si rallegra oggi della vittoria degli Alleati, della propria scelta di allora di schierarsi dalla parte sbagliata sente ancora di rivendicare il fatto di aver assunto la responsabilità storica verso una tradizione (il fascismo, l’Impero) che vedeva abbandonata da tutti: “ci doveva pur essere qualcuno che storicamente si facesse rispettosa di quanto era accaduto” (*C’eravamo...*, cit., p. 265 e seguenti). V. anche Carlo Pavone, *cit.*, per un confronto tra il sistema di valori dei due schieramenti.

\(^{15}\) Nel *Nome della rosa*, ad esempio, il ritratto fisico di Fra Dolcino modellato sul fondatore delle Brigate Rosse Renato Curcio, o l’indicazione di Trento come origine dei movimenti.

\(^{16}\) Lo conferma, se non bastasse la sua produzione, la sorella Marisa, che racconta come Fenoglio opponesse la prospettiva “Di me resterà qualcosa” ai rimproveri della madre per le notti passate a fumare e a scrivere (in *Marisa Fenoglio, Casa Fenoglio*, Palermo: Sellerio, 1995).

\(^{17}\) Più in generale, la coerenza del sistema di valori sembra ritrovarsi nei due ambienti in cui si è collocata la vita e l’opera di Fenoglio, cioè il paese e la guerra civile, per riprendere una suddivisione tematica presente nelle opere. Ma un esame più a fondo dei due ambiti esulerebbe dallo scopo di questo intervento.

\(^{18}\) E’ poco più di una curiosità, ma vale forse la pena di ricordare che il primo atto di resistenza attiva dei giovani di Alba sia stata la liberazione dei padri presi in ostaggio perché i figli si arruolassero nella Repubblica Sociale.
Appendice: Il gorgo (pubblicato in origine sul «Caffè», dicembre 1954)

Nostro padre si decise per il gorgo, e in tutta la nostra grossa famiglia soltanto io lo capii, che avevo nove anni ed ero l'ultimo.

In quel tempo stavamo ancora tutti insieme, salvo Eugenio che era via a far la guerra d'Abissinia. Quando nostra sorella penultima si ammala. Mandammo per il medico di Niella e alla seconda visita disse che non ce ne capiva niente: chiamammo il medico di Murazzano ed anche lui non le conosceva il male; venne quello di Feisoglio e tut'tre dissero che la malattia era al di sopra della loro scienza. Deperivamo anche noi -accanto a lei, e la sua febbre ci scaldava come un braciere, quando ci chiamavamo su di lei per cercar di capire a che punto era. Fra quello che soffriva e le spese, nostra madre arrivò a comandarci di pregare il Signore che ce la portasse via; ma lei durava, solo più grossa un dito e lamentandosi sempre come un'agnella. Come se non bastasse, si aggiunse il batticuore per Eugenio, dal quale non ricevavamo più posta. Tutte le mattine correvo in canonica a farmi dire dal parroco cosa c'era sulla prima pagina del giornale, e tornavo a casa a raccontare che erano in corso coi mori le più grandi battaglie. Cominciammo a recitare il rosario anche per lui, tutte le sere, con la testa tra le mani.

Uno di quei giorni, nostro padre si leva da tavola e dice con la sua voce ordinaria: «Scendo fino al Belbo, a voltare quelle fascine che m'hanno preso la pioggia».

Non so come, ma io capii a volo che andava a finirsi nell'acqua, e mi atterrò, guardando in giro, vedere che nessun altro aveva avuto la mia ispirazione: nemmeno nostra madre fece il più piccolo gesto, seguitò a pulire il paiolo, e si che conosceva il suo uomo come se fosse il primo dei suoi figli.

Eppure non diedi l'allarme, come se sapessi che lo avrei salvato solo se facessi tutto da me.

Gli uscii dietro che lui, pigliato il forcone, cominciava a scender dall'aia. Mi misi per il suo sentiero, ma mi staccava a solo camminare, e così dovetti buttarmi a una mezza corsa. Mi sentì, mi riconobbe dal peso del passo, ma non si voltò e mi disse di tornarmene a casa, con una voce rauca ma di scarso comando. Non gli ubbidii. Allora, venti passi più sotto, mi ripeté di tornarmene su, ma stavolta con la voce che metteva coi miei fratelli più grandi, quando si azzardavano a contraddirlo in qualcosa.

Mi spaventò, ma non mi fermai. Lui si lasciò raggiungere e quando mi sentì al suo fianco con una mano mi fece girare come una trottola e poi mi sparò un calcio dietro che mi sbatté tre passi su. Mi rialzai e di nuovo dietro. Ma adesso ero più sicuro che ce l'avrei fatta ad impedirglielo, e mi venne da urlare verso casa, ma ne eravamo già troppo lontani. Avessi visto un uomo lì intorno, mi sarei lasciato andare a pregarlo: «Voi, per carità, parlate a mio padre. Ditegli qualcosa», ma non vedevo una testa d'uomo, in tutta la conca.

Eravamo quasi in piano, dove si sentiva già chiara l'acqua di Belbo correre tra le canne. A questo punto lui si voltò, si scese il forcone dalla spalla e cominciò a mostrarmelo come si fa con le bestie feroci. Non posso dire che faccia avesse, perché guardavo solo i denti del forcone che mi batté tre passi su. Mi rialzai e di nuovo dietro. Non la sentovò di dire che faccia avesse, perché guardavo solo i denti del forcone che mi ballavano a tre dita dal petto, e soprattutto perché, non mi sentivo di alzargli gli occhi in faccia, per la vergogna di vederlo come nudo.

Ma arrivammo insieme alle nostre fascine. E gorgo era subito lì, dietro un fitto di felci, ed alla sua acqua ferma sembrava la pelle d'un serpente. Mio padre, la sua testa era protesa i suoi occhi puntati al gorgo ed allora allargai il petto per urlare. In quell'attimo lui ficcò il forcone nella prima fascina. E le voltò tutte, ma con una lentezza infinita, come se sognasse. E quando l'ebbe volte tutte, tirò un sospiro tale che si allungò d'un palmo. Poi si girò. Stavolta lo guardai, e gli vidi la faccia che aveva tutte le volte che rincasava da una festa con una sbronza fina.

Tornammo su, con lui che si sforzava di salire adagio per non perderm i un passo, e mi teneva sulla spalla la mano libera dal forcone ed ogni tanto mi trattava col pollice, ma leggero come una formica, tra i due nervi che abbiamo dietro il collo.
### Paper D.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Publishing status</strong></td>
<td><em>P.O.V. - A Danish Journal of Film Studies</em>, no. 14 (December 2002), pp. 41-52</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Connected teaching activities</strong></td>
<td>I have not being using this film directly in my teaching, but I came across it while preparing for Autumn 2002 a course on “text analysis” and looking for ways to explain intertextuality and its function in the construction of identity.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Addenda &amp; corrigenda</strong></td>
<td>I have left implicit in this paper, since it was not the focus of the series of articles, most of the theoretical references; on the theme of intertextuality as element of the author-viewer dialogue I have been strongly inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin and Deborah Tannen (see § 3 in the <em>Introduction</em> and papers A. and B.)</td>
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<td><strong>Contribution to advanced literacy</strong></td>
<td>This paper applies a functional approach on a single phenomenon, quotations and self-quotations in a fictional film, and illustrates how they are a means to construct a relationship of complicity between the viewer and an author who also in this film is making some strong political and artistic statements, perfectly consistent with former and more overt ones. More generally, like in the previous papers, my interest is to explore how fiction can be a powerful resource for understanding and explaining aspects of real life.</td>
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What is Rick Doing in the Balkans? 
Quotes from Casablanca 
In Kusturica’s Black Cat, White Cat (1998)

Abstract

Emir Kusturica’s Black Cat, White Cat (1998) has been dismissed by part of the critic as an apolitical minor work. I suggest instead that the film expresses – within the constraints of a different genre – the same kind of politically and artistically engaged views of his previous Underground (1995). The numerous quotes and paraphrases are not “irrelevant diversions”, but rather a strategy for constructing the viewer’s complicity and involvement in making meaning. 

Casablanca, with its load of powerful associations and nostalgia, plays a special role in defining the moral status of one main character (Uncle Grga) and in commenting on the present state of Yugoslavia through ironical reversal of the theme of the “beautiful friendship”.

Moreover, the ‘original-cheap copy’ scheme that – according to Goran Gocić – Kusturica consistently employs in translating into the Balkans some icons of the rich Western culture, applies to Casablanca and Black Cat, White Cat too, but with a special affection for the Balkan-heroic characters of the two old crooks with a sense of art and love are, who are ailing or maybe already dead.

Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship

The “beautiful friendship” that begins between Rick and Renault in the last scene of Casablanca, accompanied by the notes of La Marseillaise, is both personal and political: during the production of the film it was an exhortation to military intervention against Germany at a time when the U.S. government seemed to hesitate,\(^1\) while by the time the film reached Europe the friendship may have been perceived by viewers in connection with D-Day or even with the Marshall plan.

What does this scene mean today to a Balkan filmmaker and to his audience? The sentence uttered by Bogart after Renault drops a bottle of Vichy water into the trash can returns three times – twice with images from Casablanca visible on the screen – in Emir Kusturica’s Crna macka, beli macor / Black Cat, White Cat (1998). I suggest in the following that these quotes have a crucial function in shaping the viewer’s feelings, expectations and understanding of this film, which may not deserve to be dismissed - as it has been by at least one major critic - as an apolitical minor work cluttered with "irrelevant diversions."\(^2\)

Black Cat, White Cat – Apolitical?

John Wrathall is one of the authoritative voices – including Kusturica himself – that claims that Black Cat, White Cat is fundamentally apolitical:

At one point the gangster Dadan is jokingly referred to as a war criminal. 
But beyond the implication that Serbia is now run by men like him, 
there’s nothing else in Black Cat White Cat to suggest the turmoil of Yugoslavia’s recent history. This was clearly Kusturica's intention.

Moreover, after praising several formal aspects of the film, Wrathall concludes his review by writing:


However, the film’s most memorable images all seem to be either irrelevant diversions (like the pig eating a car) or reruns of previous greatest hits [...] The final scene, meanwhile, in which the lovers Zare and Ida float off down the Danube, recalls Underground, with its suggestion that escape is the only happy ending possible in Yugoslavia.3

The final scene and the figure of Dadan are indeed the most overt references to the present condition of what remains of Yugoslavia. In my view, however, Wrathall overlooks the ways in which quotes, self-quotes and digressions function in Kusturica’s work as a privileged means of involving the viewer in the creation of meaning and thereby serves in many cases as between-the-lines comments.

It was Kusturica himself who contributed – through interviews and amusing pictures such as the one shown in figure 1 – to what I consider as a partial misunderstanding. In fact, after being virulently accused of having made pro-Serbian propaganda with Underground (1995),4 Kusturica seemed glad to support apolitical readings of his new film.

![Fig. 1. Emir Kusturica. In a recent book this picture was captioned as “Shortly after quitting film-making, Kusturica released his apolitical Black Cat, White Cat.”](image)

History (with a capital H) actually does not play the same central role in this film as in Underground; however, Black Cat, White Cat is rooted in the same deep commitment to his people – those who grew up in former Yugoslavia – and in contempt of those responsible for

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3 Wrathall, op. cit.
4 Dina Iordanova, in Cinema of flames. Balkan film, culture and the media (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 2001), devotes one chapter to the violent controversy (pp. 111-135) and does not entirely acquit Kusturica from the accusation. On the other hand, Goran Gocić, in Notes from the Underground: the cinema of Emir Kusturica (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2001), ends the debate by saying that “the arguments used against Underground were simply unsustainable, often ridiculous and occasionally plain stupid” (p. 41). At any rate, Kusturica deeply resented the criticism.
5 Iordanova, op. cit., p. 128. A few pages below, Iordanova again defines the film as “intentionally apolitical” and dismisses it as a minor work, in accordance with the opinion of “serious critics” (p. 131).
their misery. Both attitudes are expressed with the same strength and just as unmistakably as in *Underground*. Only this time the framework for sharing these feelings with his audience remains a comedy most of the time, instead of turning into tragedy as do Kusturica’s previous features.⁶

For example, the apparently “irrelevant” pig is eating a Trabant,⁷ a car that became a symbol for Eastern Europe’s backwardness with respect to the West at the end of the ’80s. Viewers may differ as to the specific villains and victims they read into the pig and the car, but the reference to the fall and spoliation of post-Communist countries is quite clear. Moreover, the first of the pig’s three appearances is placed right after a confrontation in which the young protagonist Zare shouts at his father, “I will never forgive you” (figs. 2-3), and is followed by another “digression”: a luxurious tourist boat gliding on the Danube to the melody of *An der schönen blauen Donau*, underlining the East-West dichotomy, with the latter seeming far and unreachable at this stage of the film. In the last scene, however, the same boat will take the young heroes away from the misery of their land forever. As Goran Gocić puts it, in his insightful monograph on Kusturica:

> Resting in a quite discreet sub-context and underplayed by the guiltless vulgarity of *Black Cat, White Cat*’s humour, this level [the ‘political’ one] is nevertheless present.⁸

Before proceeding further, a brief overview of the plot in *Black Cat, White Cat* may help those who have not seen the film.

Young Zare (Florijan Ajdini) lives on the banks of the Danube within a (mainly) Gypsy community with his father, Matko (Bajram Severdzam), a small-time, inept crook. Matko would like to enter big business and asks an old powerful and sick Gypsy godfather, Uncle Grga (Sabri Sulejman), for a loan in the name of the old friendship between Grga and Matko’s deceased father. This is a lie (the one that his son Zare “will never forgive’), because Matko’s father, Zarije (Zabit Memedov), Zare’s beloved grandfather, is still alive, although old and ailing in hospital. Matko uses the money to organize the hijacking of a train together with the gangster Dadan (Srdjan Todorovich), who cheats Matko by making the coup alone and by pretending that it failed; in addition, Dadan blames Matko for the failure and asks, as retribution, that Matko’s son Zare marry Dadan’s midget sister, Afrodita (Salija Ibraimova). Neither Zare, in love with beautiful Ida (Branka Katic), nor Afrodita, who is waiting for the very tall man of her dreams, want to marry, but they are literally forced by the much feared Dadan. Zare’s grandfather tries to save his grandson by dying on the day of the wedding, which should postpone the ceremony for the 40 days of mourning; but Dadan obliges Matko to hide his father away until the end of the feast. It is Afrodita, in theory the weakest link (as Ida remarks with bitter irony), who first has the guts to defy Dadan and escapes from the wedding banquet. Zare gains courage too:

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⁶ From an interview with Kusturica, reported as an indirect quote in Gocić, op. cit., p. 12.
⁷ That the old car is a Trabant has been noted by Gocić, op. cit., p. 75, and surely by many viewers.
⁸ Gocić, op. cit., p. 59.
he decides to escape with Ida and take revenge on Dadan. The happy ending is in sight, but the story still reserves surprises, with the two old gypsies as *dei ex machina* coming back from death to give their blessing to the young couple. In the last scenes, the old men look at the young couple sailing toward a better future, and then toward Dadan, who just fell into a cesspit (Zare’s revenge) and is helped out by Matko, the only one who does not desert him; their comment in the scene is: “I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”

**The attributes of the main characters**

As in all of his other features films with the exception of *Underground*, the heroes are young and, especially Zare, basically innocent – to the extent that ‘innocence’ is possible in Kusturica’s world. Their faces reveal just about everything we need to know (figs. 4-5).

Their opponents are the adults who have power: especially Matko, because he is Zare’s father, and Dadan, because he has power over Matko and, until the final scenes, over everyone else in the small community.

Matko enters the scene playing cards with himself and then snatching his son’s breakfast. Dadan, the true villain, has as his attributes weapons, cocaine (which he sniffs out of a crucifix), bodyguards, disco music and two groupies following him around (figs. 6-7). He is a killer, as we both see and are told: Matko speaks of him to his son as “a war criminal,” while praising him in public as “a patriot and businessman.” But Dadan has neither the brains of *Underground*’s Marko, nor the strength of ‘Blaky’ Peter Popanov, although he does share with them a certain vitality, and with Marko the habit of manipulating others.

The young heroes receive decisive help fulfilling their dreams from two sick and dying old characters who manage to use what remains of their power to help those they feel close to.

Zarije’s hallmark is the music resurrecting him from a bed in hospital (figs. 8-9), which is enough to make him sympathetic from the start; music will later accompany his voluntary death, while an accordion (full of money, by the way) will be his final gift to his grandson Zare.
Figs. 8-9. Zarije revived and ‘rescued’ from hospital by the music of a gypsy band brought there by his grandson Zare.

In order to better appreciate the impact of Zarije’s first appearance, it should be added that the actor performing his part had played a very similar role and had been linked to the same tune in *Time of Gypsies* (1989); also Matko, his inept son, is quite similar to the character of Merdzan in the same film (an example of the way Kusturica constructs and maintains complicity with his aficionados, inviting them to perceive each film as an ongoing dialogue).

Zarije’s long-time friend Uncle Grga (played by a non-professional actor, a retired shoeshiner in everyday life)⁹, is indeed a new face, and not one that is easy to forget (figs. 10-13).

Figs. 10-11. Uncle Grga (the Great) in his first appearance, enjoying life.


Uncle Grga is the only one among the main characters whose moral status is not already decided from his first appearance. He lives in a fortress protected by television cameras and armed thugs (as we will understand later, Grga was once Dadan’s boss, and possibly a model). Uncle Grga is a gypsy Godfather who possesses heaps of money, and everybody pays their respects to him as he moves around in a baroque, motorized wheelchair, brandishing a golden revolver.

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He gives the impression of a ruthless old gangster with a code; he decides to entrust Matko with a considerable sum to honour his friendship with Matko’s allegedly deceased father. At any rate, the viewer probably associates Uncle Grga above all with power, Mafia-type criminality and maybe with eccentricity, until the second encounter presents the character in a different light.

**The old crook and *Casablanca***

The second time we meet Uncle Grga he is lying in bed and talking business with his son and associates (the enterprise actually seems more harmless than the fortress-like house would suggest: making ‘artificial’ whiskey). His face is as cold and emotionless as in the first encounter, until it is transfigured while he is watching, visibly moved, the final scenes of *Casablanca* (figs. 14-16).

![Fig. 14-15-16. Uncle Grga watching the last scenes of *Casablanca* and then rewinding the tape.](image)

![Fig. 17. Uncle Grga looking at the portrait of his only true love.](image)

The farewell between Rick and Ilsa at the airport evokes for him – as he tells his son with a dreamy tone – the one great love of his life, a ‘vertically-challenged’ beauty that he recalls as ‘my little dove’ (fig. 17). From that very moment we (viewers) realize that Uncle Grga will stand by the heroes and fight the villains. And, with Bogart on his side, he is likely to succeed.

But Uncle Grga is now old and almost blind, and does not have much time left. The third time he appears, he is lying in a hospital bed, again watching *Casablanca*, and repeating along with Rick the famous line: “Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”

**The beginning of a beautiful friendship revisited**

Goran Gocić has observed how Kusturica consistently uses quotes and paraphrases according to a ‘core-periphery’ or ‘original-cheap copy’ scheme, with his characters translating popular Western myths into a marginal (Eastern/gypsy/psychotic) dimension. Evoking the ‘beautiful friendship’ as a comment on the new alliance between Matko and Dadan (figs. 16-17) corresponds precisely to this ‘original-cheap copy’ scheme.

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10 Gocić, op. cit., p. 145.
The same scheme seems to apply more generally, with *Casablanca* being appropriated by the marginals of the marginals – sick old Gypsies in Eastern Europe.

I would argue, however, that here the scheme takes on a different function and a wider resonance than, say, in *Do You Remember Dolly Bell* (1981), where young people from Sarajevo long for Western kitsch, like Hollywood’s ‘baby doll’ somehow transformed in the Balkans, via Rome, into the stage name of a stripper.

But in *Black Cat, White Cat* the friendship between Uncle Grga and Zarije that we see on the screen (fig. 17) is indeed as beautiful and heroic as the one between Rick and Renault. And the original, *Casablanca*, is cherished in about the same way by Uncle Grga and Kusturica’s audience. In this respect, Uncle Grga and Zarije are not a ‘cheap copy’ (although they may look like it), but rather the truest heirs of the disenchanted but heroic attitude to life portrayed by Bogey. Their friendship – two old crooks with a sense of art and love – incorporates the best virtues of the Balkan soul, never presented before by Kusturica in such a positive light. But the two men are old, maybe already dead; their last deed is to help their young heirs to run away from the stupid and ferocious criminals who are now in charge. And young Zare actually does succeed in carrying out the legacy of the two old men: Uncle Grga’s courage in love and war – Zare finally takes revenge on Dadan and kidnaps the officer of the civil wedding in order to get married in time to catch the boat to the West – and Grandfather Zarije’s feel for art. “Remember the accordion. Inside, you’ll find what you need to live happily,” are Zarije’s words in response to his grandson’s decision to go away. The fact that the accordion also contains Zarije’s money just adds a touch of irony to a moving statement about art and its place in life.
Part Two:

Tools for writing and for raising language awareness
### Paper F.

| **Title** | Ferraris M., Caviglia F., Degl'Innocenti R. (1992).  
|           | WordProf: a writing environment on computer. |
| **Other connected material** | In the appendix on CD-ROM, a copy of WordProf. |
| **Connected teaching activity** | Teaching of Italian (L1) in Italian secondary school (age 14-16), years 1992-1998.  
|          | Teacher training in Italy 1990-1997.  
|          | Some of the material in WordProf has been reused for the teaching of L2 Italian at Aarhus University. |
| **Addenda & corrigenda** | See § 4 of the Introduction for a perspective and evaluation of the *WordProf* project. |
| **Contribution to advanced literacy** | As discussed in § 4 of the Introduction, the approach to writing proposed in this paper (and in the following F. and G.) cannot be considered ‘advanced’ literacy. Despite our efforts, educational intervention based on *WordProf* is more likely to have an impact on the product than on the process: therefore I would now consider our proposal as a support to develop and strengthen ‘basic’ literacy.  
|          | The variety of the proposed text types and the central focus on the function and constraints of texts was however an improvement of the then current practice in the Italian secondary school. |
WORDPROF: A WRITING ENVIRONMENT ON COMPUTER

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Abstract
This paper focuses on the use of computer programs, in particular word processors, in the teaching and learning of advanced skills in text composition. After examining some trends in computer-assisted teaching of writing skills, the paper will describe theoretical assumptions and features of WordProf, a courseware aimed at supporting the development of text production competence within a writing curriculum. WordProf, which is currently being tested, is a normal word processor provided with some educational functions devised to support, assist and train a learning writer in composing a text.

Introduction
"A major breakthrough in the teaching of writing has been made possible by the convergence of two recent developments in science and technology...". These is the beginning of an insightful 1980 paper which introduced the idea of a computer based system bringing together text handling technology and theoretical knowledge on the cognitive processes of writing, a "Writing Land" capable of training a student on specific aspects of the writing activity, as well as of assisting her/him in the actual writing process. (Collins and Gentner, 1980). Since then the idea of a computer support to the teaching of writing has gained in audience and credibility. In the last few years a number of experiences has been carried out, mostly on the use of WP in text composition; the results, however difficult to quantify, all suggest a positive role the computer may play in enhancing communication skills and reflection on one's own writing strategies.

The first meeting between computer and writing is likely to develop today to an intriguing marriage, for several reasons. The two advantages pointed out by Collins and Gentner are far more "real" now than they were in 1980: on the one hand, today WPs provide the writer with more and more flexible, powerful and easy to use text handling capabilities; on the other hand, much work in the field of Artificial Intelligence has promoted a deeper and better formalized knowledge of the cognitive processes involved in communication.

If we look at its diffusion, computer is today a very pervasive instrument, due to its manifold use as a medium in information technology (think, for example, of E-mail, desktop publishing, or group coordination systems). Its pervasiveness has two consequences: first, having good communication competences is gaining a renewed importance at social level, second, the use of computers for writing, reading and communicating is likely to induce into the cognitive processes and the products of these activities some changes, whose characteristics and significance are not clear yet. Particularly interesting in this respect are the statements of authors such as Garcia Marquez, Primo Levi, Umberto Eco, about how the use of the WP affects their style and production.

As for writing itself, two more suggestions from studies in language and cognition contribute to grant particular significance to writing instruction: first, writing is not only a communication tool, but also a means to organize knowledge and to improve the quality of thinking; second, writing is a problem solving activity that requires very complex cognitive processes and strategies to tackle at the same time content, style and language constraints (see, for example Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1985; Gregg and Steinberg, 1980).
Teachers, on their side, are recognizing communicative competences as a key to those "learning to learn" skills, whose acquisition is a major objective of the educational system in the information society, and whose lack is judged as a main cause of school failure. Hence the greater attention paid by the school to fostering reading and writing skills (the case of Italy is significant: only in the last few years the teaching of composition and comprehension is being taken into account, albeit seldom practiced, in the secondary level curriculum).

In summary, we are facing two trends: the computer endorses new writing technologies and determines a new need for communicative skills; cognitive and instructional sciences point toward the development of strategies and tools in order to support the teaching of writing and to reduce the cognitive load of the learner.

But how is it possible to develop a "writing land" for learning writers as suggested by Collins and Gentner? Attempts in this direction have already been made and will be discussed shortly. This paper describes one of them, WordProf, a courseware based on a WP with integrated educational functions and a set of activities devised for a learning writer. Before describing WordProf and discussing its theoretical assumptions, we will briefly explore today's main trends in the use of the computer in the teaching of composition.

**Trends in teaching text production with the computer**

Studies and experiences in computer-assisted teaching of composition tend to overcome the traditional CAI approach (the computer as a patient and monotonous trainer in low-level language skills) and refer instead to the use of Office Automation tools, e.g. WPs, or to the development of software environments where the student is stimulated to carry out communicative experiences or to reflect on her/his own writing strategies.

Research and tests on field seem to follow three main guidelines:

- the computer as a tool, i.e. the use of commercial WPs in teaching to write at various school levels;
- the computer as an expert, that implies a software with language and text competences.
- the computer as a teaching environment, that implies a software with educational features to assist the student in the various phases of text production;

These trends are not strict separated, but it is useful to consider them one by one.

**a) the computer as a tool (i.e the word processor)**

WPs offer manifold educational suggestions:

- the editing tools foster a view of the text as a plastic material to be easily shaped through successive refinements, while reviewing and revising result seamlessly integrated in the writing process;
- the writer's detachment from the (type-, not hand-written) text on the screen should promote a more objective assessment of the work, as the writer alternates in the roles of the author and of the critical reader;
- the text written on the screen and then printed out on paper is intrinsically public-domain, thus promoting an experience of cooperative writing (writing with) and a better perception of the communicative function of a written text (writing for).

But are these advantages real ones? In other words, does something really change when a WP is introduced in teaching to write? And how can we fully exploit the possibilities offered by this tool? And which WP is necessary, with which features? These are the main issues faced by this approach.

Several researches point toward some common results: "low-level" errors decrease (mainly spelling); the text is more often revised (but there is no agreement on what kind of revision is actually performed); the length of the written text increases; most students show a positive attitude towards writing (for an analysis of the results, see Potter, 1987 and Calvani, 1989).
On the other side, it is more difficult to evaluate and explain qualitative differences of the produced texts, as well as to measure modifications in the student's awareness about her/his production strategies. Even though the obtained results are not always so easy to decode, it is commonly agreed that the use of the WP often increases the quality of writing. It is more difficult to ascertain to what extent such improvements are due to the WP itself or to other factors. As Potter suggests, the introduction of a new tool tends to modify the teaching approach. In the case of teaching to write, the WP implicitly leads to a re-drafting approach and therefore "... any observable improvement in the children's writing could be due to the re-drafting approach rather than the word processor" (Potter 1989).

Other studies leave out the question of measuring the possible advantages of the WP and simply take these advantages for granted: in this approach the focus is rather on "how should the WP be used?". In this case a re-viewing and re-thinking process of the writing curriculum in face of WPs may lead to new activities (cooperative writing organized across local and remote networks, text production for real world purposes, production based on pre-written texts) or to a different organization of old ones (taking into account many-hand many-hand writing and revising).

Another point of view focuses on defining the features of a WP for use in an educational context. In some cases, these studies have led to the development of new WPs specifically designed for school use (a major example is WordWise Plus {1}). In our experience with students of different school level, the most significant features have proved to be exactly the same as for good commercial software: easy of use and power (i.e., no awkward keyboard sequences to perform standard editing, WYSIWYG, speed, text-graphic integration) (see Degl'Innocenti and Ferraris, 1988).

b) the computer as an "expert"

The attempts to provide a computer with language and text competences have brought about software tools that are able to operate, in a more or less intelligent way, on language data: some of these tools (spell-checker, on-line thesaurus, hyphenation...) are already available in many word processors; others still belong to AI research about natural language "understanding" (for a list of the available software, see Lancashire, McCarty, 1988). Of particular interest for this approach are some systems meant to act as critical revisors.

For example, Writers WorkBench (Cherry, 1980) and Epistle (Heidorn et al., 1982) are able to spot some syntax errors and style inadequacies (mainly for business letters, in Epistle), and to suggest some solution, through a system of dictionaries, morpho-syntactic parsers and rules. Another text revisor worth attention is the last version of Grammatik III, which has the advantage of running on personal computers {2}. Grammatik III, a product that embodies some AI techniques, submits texts written on different WPs to a critical analysis, searching for low-level errors (capital letters, repetitions, repeated punctuation), style errors (on the basis of a dictionary of overworked, trite or hackneyed phrases), syntax errors (subject-verb disagreement, incomplete sentences, improper use of articles, possessive). Grammatik III claims itself "the easiest way to improve your writing", pointing out that, even though not designed for school purposes, the learning writer could be one of its possible users.

It is questionable, however, if the error-based approach, alone, may help a student develop composition skills that in this case are more a prerequisite. Text analysis tool could rather gain in educational meaning where integrated in a (non necessarily computerized) environment designed to assist the whole process of text production.

c) the computer as a "teaching environment"

The idea of assisting a student during the various text production phases has led to the development of specific-purpose educational software.

The new release of Writer's Helper, a software first published in 1980 and recently updated, could be seen as a first translation, albeit limited, of that idea of a "Writing Land" mentioned...
at the beginning of this paper: Writer's Helper assists the student, through various strategies, in the pre- and post-writing phases, providing him/her suggestions to explore and organize ideas, as well as tools for revising the text (word frequency, detection of inadequate forms and terms,...).[3]

Writer's Helper assumes, in the software implementation, a clear cut between pre- and post-writing and does not envisage any intervention during the actual writing, while a more recent trend points toward computer environments capable of dynamically assisting the learning writer during the composition, and actually some new tools in WPs, such as "outline" or "revision marks", can be very suitable for this purpose.

The proposal for a "writing assistant" advanced by Sharples and O'Malley gives a major contribution for this approach (Sharples and O'Malley, 1988). It outlines the features of a software environment which "... should offer to the writer three separate but mutually consistent views of the emerging text, in the form of an ideas structure, a stream of text and a layout. The writer should be able to move between them at will and, in altering one view, know that the others will remain in step. Given one view, the system should be able to generate approximations to the other two:....". Beside the different views on the text, the proposed system should automatically take on low-level tasks (formatting, manipulating word and sentence syntax, ...) in order to reduce the writer's cognitive load. The purpose mentioned by the authors is helping the student develop control and reflective skills, i.e. the meta-cognitive skills to cope with the writing task in regard of goal, content and language constraints.

Bryson and Scardamalia's Muse likewise aims at developing meta-cognitive skills, but its instructional strategy implies a more explicit teaching role. Muse is a writing environment "designed to teach students strategies for sustaining independent reflective inquiry during the composition of argument type compositions". Muse does not teach the student the structure of a good argumentation, but rather stimulates the use of heuristic strategies by explicitly showing the procedures an expert writer follows in structuring argumentations: through activities such as Challenge Assumptions, Identify Confusion, Planning, New Ideas, etc., Muse aims at inducing awareness and developing skills on these strategies. Muse is numbered by its authors among those "computer supported intentional learning environments" that "foster rather than presuppose the ability of students to exert intentional control over their own learning" (see Bryson and Scardamalia, 1988).

**A computerized writing environment: WordProf**

*WordProf*, a joint project between CNR and IBM Italy, can be located across two of the above described approaches: the WP is a tool and the computer as a writing environment. The aim of *WordProf* is devising a courseware capable of supporting and stimulating who is learning to write while she/he is writing. A single environment should therefore incorporate both the functions of a standard WP and some tools and functions dedicated to the learning writer.

But which tools and which functions should be added to a WP in order to turn it into an educational environment?

To answer this question we have started analyzing written text from different viewpoints: as a product, as a process and as a source of educational problems. The result has been a hierarchy, or rather a network, of the activities involved in written composition, including those allowing a control over the whole process.
The network/hierarchy, a fragment of which is shown in fig. 1, has been used as a general reference framework for developing a courseware that will eventually cover all nodes of the network by means both of tools for performing certain activities, and of advice or training on those nodes regarded as the most critical for the learning writer. This process has led to add to the standard WP functions the specific menus illustrated in fig. 2.

The student using WordProf works with a word processor which, beside the standard File, Edit, Find, Format functions, includes additional menus specifically designed for educational purposes. The whole could be regarded as a writing "atelier" and the added components as special "rooms" of this atelier: a lab (organized into tools and view menus) furnished with a
kit of statistics tools and text-viewing/revising facilities; a library, where the student can access a database of pre-written texts, a style dictionary and a general handbook; the assistant's room, that provides - to a limited extent - ideas and suggestions for the various writing phases; and finally a gym to train some basic skills.

The software also includes a simple authoring system allowing the teacher and the students to enrich and modify both the set of gym exercises and part of the contents associated with the items listed in fig. 1. One teacher- and one student-guide will come with the software, conveying theoretical analysis and practical suggestions about composition strategies. The whole WordProf package is therefore structured as in fig. 3.

Let's briefly examine the educational rooms of WordProf. (for more details on the various items, see Caviglia, Degl'Innocenti and Ferraris, 1989).

The lab contains tools and workbenches ("Tools" and "View" menu, respectively) to act on the text as a physical entity. The "Tools" include: markers, to underline particular words (connectives, gerunds, etc.), spot repetitions, highlight beginning/end of each paragraph; counters, to measure the sentence and paragraph length and to build a frequency index for all words in the text or for pre-defined (possibly user-defined) word sets. The workbenches ("View" menu) are devised to allow different views and working modes on the text as a whole: through write comments a revisor can attach to a critical spot notes and suggestions without modifying the original text; read comments is useful for viewing someone else's comments while modifying a copy of the original text; two windows, with a quick-transfer facility, is devised mainly for note-taking; finally, the planner is an outline facility for working on the text at different detail levels.

The library contains a database of texts that the student can consult as information sources or copy into the WP for her/his own purposes. The student can find: reference works such as a dictionary of synonyms and a grammar/style handbook with access both a table of contents and through a list of "problems"; scripts made of words and phrases organized for semantic fields; a supply of texts which can be accessed by kind (letter, report, etc) or by style features
or even according to different communicative goals (in the booklets some activities are strongly suggested that lead the student to adapt these models for different needs and situations); files of facts on different topics, in order to foster the habit to a documented writing.

The third room belongs to a not too brilliant but helpful assistant, whose task is providing, on request, ideas and helps on various activities that can be carried out during the writing process: summarizing or expanding a text, sketching an outline, writing individual paragraphs, revising a paragraph, an outline or a whole text. In some cases the assistant starts a dialogue with the student in order to put forward, on the basis of her/his answers, suggestions on the most adequate text form, style and speech structure; or it can provide dynamic examples of how a certain activity can be performed, or even it can suggest some guided activities or the student to the “Tools” or "Library" menus, if they are deemed useful to the solution of her/his problem. The assistant also includes a pedantic revisor which, if activated, can interrupt on its own authority the writing to point out some kind of inadequacies (too long paragraphs, lacking punctuation, overuse of some linguistic forms, repetitions): hence its name voice of conscience.

In the gym room the student can train - in some cases freely, in others under the control of a trainer - with games aimed at developing basic writing skills: syntax and vocabulary adaptability (close, slalom, without a key, take out word, furnishing) and text comprehension (fishing means taking notes, domino refers to text or outline re-ordering). Some of the games deliberately break some writing conventions the student adheres to, forcing her/him to develop new ones: e.g., take out word eliminates invariable speech parts from the student's text (suppose, the connective "and") and prevents her/him from using such word on rearranging the text; slalom "shoots" random chosen connectives into the WP text, forcing the student to use them while writing on a given subject.

Even if the features added to the standard WP perform - as seen - very different functions, many of them are linked to each other by means of a twofold connection, internal and external to the software. Internally, some menu items automatically use other ones (e.g. by touching any word of the frequency list all occurrences of that word in the text can be retrieved; or else, the assistant can provide "check-up" of the text by automatically using the functions of the "tools" menu). As for the external connections, we recall how the various items, functions and working modes have all been derived from a global analysis of the "text production" process (the network on fig. 1) and only afterwards organized according to functional affinities: that network is on the basis of the instructional activities, requiring a combined use of several tools and features, proposed in the accompanying booklets.

WordProf background assumptions

Any tool, let alone a software package, assumes a more or less explicit model of the work it is devised to perform. For example, a word processor can be said to embody a dynamic logic of written composition, while an educational software like Writer's Helper seems to assume a stage-model of writing.

Which are, in this respect, the assumptions underlying WordProf?

At the basis of the project are some considerations and choices on writing models, on instructional approaches to composition, on the role to be assigned to the computer. A first choice links any instructional support to writing with the act of writing itself, seen as the complex of activities leading from an idea or a communicative need to a text. A second remark concerns the dynamics of the writing process: numerous studies show how the various writing stages do not follow a linear sequence, but occur with interruptions, iterations or recursions within a highly dynamic process (see, for example, Hayes and Flower, 1980). It is therefore possible and maybe even useful to train a student to operate in stages
(pre-writing, writing, post-writing), but the educational writing environment where she/he works must not bind her/him to this single strategy.

The WP is an ideal tool to put this dynamism into practice, since it integrates all text production functions into a single tool: through it the writer starts designing the text, outlines it, writes and refines it, edits it, always in the same working environment.

The WP however embodies no educational competence; learning to write, on its side, is so complex an activity that it would be ingenuous envisaging it as a learning-by-discovery process, and it would be at least unfair not to explicitly provide the student with those contents (rules, euristic strategies) which can somehow help her/him cope with the cognitive difficulties involved in writing.

These remarks underlie one of the basic choices of WordProf: a writing environment whose bulk is a WP, integrated with a set of educational functions acting inside the WP and not at its borders, so that the student can freely move, while writing, between the typical tools of a WP and the added educational ones.

Another fundamental choice has been keeping the whole courseware flexible, in order to make it usable for different learning paths, chosen either by the teacher in accordance with her/his goals, or by the student in accordance with her/his communicative needs and personal writing strategies, just as the same WP suits different texts and writers.

These two choices requires the integration of the instructional components into the computer, without fixing one exclusive strategy of use, because there are actually more than just one writing strategy. This is not a trivial goal and has probably been attained only partially in WordProf. Whereas the tools, the views or the texts in the library assume an instructional theory but don't directly privilege a strategy more than another, for the assistant and for some games under control the instructional design is unavoidably explicit and can prove conditioning. To minimize this effect the most directive rooms of the system are "open", that is can be expanded and modified by the user; furthermore, the explicit teaching of different writing strategies is mainly reported in the teacher and student booklets associated with the software.

As for the teaching approach, we most try to encourage: writing for "real" purposes (real world situations and text models); multi-hand writing/revising processes; imitation of "good" text models, rather than stress on detecting errors and inadequacies (though spot-the-error exercises can be easily implemented with the authoring system).

WordProf: project development state and problems

The WordProf prototype, which is presently being experimented, runs on IBM/MS-DOS systems as a Microsoft Windows application written in the Actor language of “The Whitewater Group”.

The completion of the testing with Secondary School and University students is expected by the end of 1990; both the software and the written material will be successively refined and expanded.

Different problems have been faced up to now in realizing the project. As for hardware and software choices, we must stick with the currently available/affordable technology, since our purpose is not the product in itself but its use; at the same time we must also face the obsolescence risk, if we fail to correctly foresee the evolution of computers in the next few years. Hence, for example, the decision not to bind this software to any current commercial WP, but to program a very simple one and to develop the additional features in such a way that in the future they could be integrated into more powerful WPs.

Another set of problems concerns educational issues and results from the difficulty to clearly express and systematize (not to mention transferring it on a computer) a kind of knowledge about strategies and processes which are not sufficiently known yet and contain many ele-
Conclusions: which role for the computer?

The contact points between computer and writing teaching that we listed at the beginning of this paper find can all be encountered in the stimulating idea of a cooperative writing between a human author and an artificial mind, as suggested by the Italian psycholinguist Parisi a few years ago. Parisi devises an "expert in the screen" capable of intervening, after and during the writing process, to correct errors or to detect inadequacies as well as to suggest modifications, but capable also, from a language and textual knowledge base, of interacting with the author "already in the initial phases, even before the text itself, or a part of it, is laid down" (Parisi, 1987).

This is an intriguing perspective, which, taken to its extremes, might even eliminate the need to learn how to write texts. Such an expert might allow for automatic text production starting from some contextual indications (purposes, contents, addressee, etc.). This perspective is quite remote and therefore hardly useful for educational purposes, in view of the difficulties - theoretically unbeatable, according to some - to develop systems able to dialogue in natural language (actually in this case much more would be at stake, since the competences required to cooperate in producing a text go well beyond mastering the language).

The concept of a "cooperative writing", however, is the best description of the possible role of the computer in teaching to write. It embodies the ideas of "environment", "tool" and "expert", and to some extent does away with the need to distinguish between them; at the same time, it requires understanding the terms of this cooperation, i.e. defining how each part contributes to the whole process. At the moment, as regards writing and learning to write, we think that the computer can perform very well some useful and "non intelligent" tasks (ones that do not actually affect either text semantics or teaching strategies and not require real competences). This involves some consequences. First, the computer should be used in a learning context capable of providing those portions of linguistic and instructional "intelligence" which the computer does not have: therefore, while developing and using educational software, as well as word processors, electronic dictionaries or text revisors, much attention should be paid to devising global learning paths, in which the computer is to be inserted too. Secondly, new software should not only reproduce on the computer strategies and tools born independently from electronic writing: the peculiarities of the computer as a tool must be taken into account, trying to devise how possible changes in the writing process could affect learning and teaching to write.

Bibliography


**Quoted software**


## Paper G.

| **Title** | Caviglia F. (1992)  
WordProf: an atelier for the apprentice writer. |
<table>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Publishing status</strong></td>
<td>Proceedings of European Conference about Information Technology in Education: a Critical Insight, Barcelona, 3-6 November, 1992</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Connected teaching activity** | Teaching of Italian (L1) in Italian secondary school (age 14-16), years 1992-1998.  
Teacher training in Italy 1990-1997.  
Some of the material in WordProf has been reused for the teaching of L2 Italian at Aarhus University. |
| **Other connected publications** | As for Paper F.:  
| **Addenda & corrigenda** | See § 4 of the Introduction for a perspective and evaluation of the WordProf project. |
| **Contribution to advanced literacy** | This paper adds to paper E. a more detailed description of the WordProf software, with special focus on the student-computer interaction.  
The ability to ask questions is then highlighted as crucial to the writing process: a good writer is someone who can ask good questions, more than one who gives good answers. Although the ability to ask questions is at the core of literacy (and more generally of understanding), the approach we have incorporated into WordProf – asking questions in the hope that the student will eventually learn how to formulate questions autonomously – may not foster a process which is self-reflexive enough to be considered ‘advanced’. |
WORDPROF: AN ATELIER FOR THE APPRENTICE WRITER*

Abstract

WordProf is a courseware for the development of text-production strategies in writers who already master basic writing skills (age 12-18). This paper briefly outlines the educational assumptions behind WordProf: these assumptions lead to enhance a standard word processor with features designed for teaching use, without restricting the flexibility of the writing tool. Three educational facilities illustrate the outcome of this approach: a Library of texts to imitate, an Assistant that guides the student to perform some writing activities, a Gym to train the student into some reading and writing skills. In conclusion some educational and technical assumptions of WordProf are put into consideration again, face to the new trends in the development of commercial word processors.

Keywords: courseware, text production, word processing

Background

A word processor is generally helpful to any writer and an apprentice writer is no exception. "As it is", a word processor is also a powerful educational tool in so far as its ease of use and adaptability matches the writer’s requirement for continuous reviewing, editing and re-writing; for the same reason, writers with different working habits feel comforted by its non-directiveness.

However, a word processor does not encompass any knowledge of the text or of the writing process. A word processor expressly designed for educational use should therefore make some pieces of this knowledge available to the student, without restraining the flexibility of the tool. (To tell the truth, some of the newest WPs for office automation do contain some features that can be easily regarded as educational: we will briefly discuss this topic in the last section of this paper.)

This paper describes the educational features of WordProf, that is a courseware aimed at supporting apprentice writers, who already master basic writing skills, in the development of more advanced text-production strategies (age 12-18).

Regarding the national context of WordProf, in Italy only in the last few years the teaching of composition and comprehension is being taking into account in the secondary level curriculum. This is the reason many educational functions of WordProf explicitly support examples of good practice: some of the proposed activities are seldom practiced in a classroom, either with or without a computer.

Educational assumptions

The 'natural' learning of a language operates mainly by learning by doing, imitation and interrogative behaviour [Weinrich 1983]. To apply these approaches to the teaching of writing, we decided

- to offer a wide set of possibly appealing and intriguing writing situations;

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*WordProf* is a CNR/ITD project: the work team is Maria Ferraris (project leader), Francesco Caviglia and Riccardo Degl'Innocenti.

WordProf is part of the “School and Research” project; this project is co-ordinated by Donatella Persico (CNR/ITD) and is developed in co-operation by IBM Italia, the Ministry for Education and CNR/ITD; the other prototypes developed within “School and Research” concern logic and physics.
• to provide good writing models and examples of writing situations, rather than insisting on the quest for errors and inadequacies;
• to stress how a major part in a writing task consists of asking the right questions (hence the structure of the ASSISTANT environment of WordProf).

Beyond these very general purposes, we still had to face the problem of defining in detail the intervention areas where an educational word processor could be of help. The approach followed to answer this question was analyzing the text from different points of view, as a product, as a process, as a source of teaching problems. From this analysis we drew a hierarchy -- or rather a network -- of the activities set in motion in written composition, including those allowing the control over the whole process.

![Figure 1. A fragment of the hierarchy.](image)

We used this hierarchy network, a fragment of which appears in figure 1, as a general reference framework, with the hypothesis that the equipment to provide the apprentice writer with should somehow cover all points of the network, by providing both useful tools to perform some activities and advice and training on those points of the network that seem more critical for the apprentice.

How should these tools and activities be related to traditional WP functions? Writing is a highly reflexive and interactive process [Collins - Gentner, 1980] that finds in a word processor a helpful and flexible tool. That is why we think that any educational add-on should at no price undermine this flexibility, e.g. by constraining the writer into a pre-defined path of actions sequentially leading from the idea to the text. All educational functions should therefore be built right into the WP and be available (e.g., as items of a menu) at any stage of the writing process.

The obtained results led to add some special environments to ordinary WP functions (see fig. 2).

![Figure 2. WordProf top-level menu.](image)
For a survey of different approaches to the topic "writing and teaching to write with a computer," see [Ferraris 1992].

An overview of the educational menus

Below we will have a survey of the educational menus. For each section we will examine only some items in detail.

This **Biblio** (= Library) menu provides a library that the student can consult while writing. The student can then easily copy and paste the texts into his/her own working space. The texts of the library, that are best suited for imitation activities, show examples of different constraints in communications, such as type, communicative purposes, style.

**Repertorio intenti** (=purpose index) This menu item illustrates different communicative purposes through a collection of short texts related to a given theme or situation. The student can visualize the texts starting from a list of situations or from a list of communicative purposes.

In the first case, once chosen the theme or situation, the student shall indicate the communicative purpose he/she is interested in. In the second one, once chosen the purpose, the student shall decide the theme or situation he/she intends to refer that purpose to. For each purpose the student can optionally see an explanation (see figure 3).

![Figure 3. The index of communication purposes.](image-url)
The **Text index** menu offers a set of pre-determined texts organized according to their *types* (letters, curricula, reports, etc.). The student has two choice levels (for example, he/she may be required to indicate the professional status of the addressee, or the social status of the writer, etc.). The features envisaged for each text type change; each choice leads to a specific situation representing a reference model for the student. For each kind of text a brief explanation provides hints about structure and style (see figure 4).

![Figure 4. The Index of texts.](image)

The items of this **Assistente** (= Assistant) menu assist the writer (through dialogues, examples, hints) in some phases of the writing process: summarizing a text, expanding a text or an idea, writing down a paragraph of a given type, planning the structure of the contents on a given subject, reviewing a text. The dialogues between computer and students are the most important feature of this environment: these dialogues are partly adaptive, regarding the student’s answers, and produce, as result, an outline of the given answers in the form of a text that he/she can paste into the WP (see table 1-2)
Qual è la differenza principale quando si usa il word processor rispetto a quando si usa la macchina per scrivere?

Il testo scritto con la tastiera finisce sullo schermo del computer anziché sul foglio di carta. Inoltre il word processor consente di memorizzare il testo su memorie magnetiche, ma soprattutto permette di modificare il testo, subito mentre si scrive o in tempi successivi, aggiungendo, togliendo o spostando parole e frasi. Cose queste che non è possibile fare con la macchina per scrivere.

Dal confronto alla definizione

La macchina per scrivere consente di scrivere con la tastiera un testo e ottenerne una copia stampata su carta. Usando la macchina per scrivere non è tuttavia possibile né memorizzare il testo su memorie magnetiche né tantomeno modificare il testo, subito mentre si scrive o in tempi successivi, aggiungendo, togliendo o spostando parole e frasi. Funzionalità queste che sono invece disponibili se si usa un altro strumento, il word processor, cioè un programma per computer che serve a scrivere testi.
Progettare testi

In Planning the student selects a task according to content and addressee constraints. A dialogue shows then the student the question his/her text should possibly give an answer. Eventually the dialogue uses the student's answers to draw a first outline of the text.

Revisionare

This environment highlights to the students the various stages of text reviewing. At each stage the student can perform an appropriate command (e.g., highlighting the connectives or doing some statistics): these commands are also available to the students as items in the Strumenti (=tools) menu (see figure 6).
Grillo pedante

(=voice of conscience)

It is an on-line teaser that prompts the writer whenever a questionable event occurs, e.g.:

- too many words without a full-stop;
- use of “suspect” words.

In this Gym environment the student can perform, in the form of a game, a series of exercises aimed at training him/her in some reading and writing skills.

The exercises concern text comprehension (domino, fishing, some example of cloze); cooperative writing (furnishing, slalom: the “companion” is the computer); bound writing (without one key).

Each game is provided with an easy-to-use authoring system: we strongly encourage the students to take on the role of the author.

Cloze

This typical exercise requests the student to reconstruct the missing words from a text (see figure 7).

Pesca

(=fishing)

In the Fishing environment the student’s task is taking notes from a text, according to specific purposes, or to search determined categories of words or phrases.

Domino

The Domino submits the student scrambled texts to reorder (see figure 8).

![Figure 7. A Cloze exercise and its text in the authoring system.](image-url)
Slalom

The Slalom suggests the student to write a text on a subject freely chosen within a given series; during the composition different connectives (transitions) -- randomly chosen in a possibility repertoire -- will pop up on the writing sheet. The student shall take them into account to go on with the text.

Several sets of connectives are pre-defined, while it is very easy to add new ones through the authoring system.

Arredamento

(=furnishing)

As a companion game to the Slalom, the Furnishing game "shoots" in the student's writing meaningful words and sentences, instead of connectives. The authoring system provides an option for shooting the words at random or sequentially.

Some considerations on the further development of Wordprof

WordProf is a Microsoft Windows application (on MS-DOS systems) written in the Actor language of The Whitewater Group. A commercial version should be published at the end of this year.

A WordProf prototype is currently used on an experimental basis in more than 30 Italian schools. At this moment we are collecting comments from teachers and students who have been using the system for some time. Assessing the educational value of our courseware is not easy: WordProf is not a course in written composition, but a tool that a teacher can use in developing a writing curriculum. As an open learning environment, WordProf needs therefore to be assessed inside an educational contest that may or may not benefit from its use. For this reason our efforts in revising WordProf software and printed materials have two aims: first, to meet more closely the needs of some established educational paths; second, to further refine and promote some approaches of our courseware seen as intriguing and promising by the teachers (and, sometimes, by the students too).

As for the software, the weakest point of the current version of WordProf is the lack of formatting features in the editor. We are planning to ameliorate this part in the next future, but in the long run we are also considering a quite different approach: to transform WordProf into an add-on product for a commercial word processor under Windows.
We stated at the beginning of this paper that a word processor does not encompass any knowledge of the text or of the writing process; this does not hold true any longer. The newest word processors (e.g., the release 2.0 of Word for Windows) do contain several features of educational interest: spell checking, thesaurus, syntax and style checking; extension of the old style sheet (an index of the graphical styles in a text) into templates, pre-defined models that can hold both structure and graphic design of a text; very easy mix of text and graphic, to the point that the teaching of writing should probably encompass some elements of graphics design.

For this reason we wish to produce now a low-cost educational word processor, with medium-low hardware requirements. At the same time, the multitasking architecture of Windows and System 7 operating systems strongly encourages the development of small narrow-focused tools (possibly with high adding-value contents) built on the top of powerful general-purpose applications.

**Bibliography**


### Paper H.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Caviglia F., Earp J., Ferraris M. (1996). From Italian (L1) to English (L2) WordProf: an instructional software for teaching writing.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Connected teaching activity</strong></td>
<td>Teacher training in Italy 1994-1997. Some of the material and ideas in <em>English WordProf</em> has been adapted for the teaching of L2 Italian at Aarhus University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other connected publications</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Addenda &amp; corrigenda</strong></td>
<td>See § 4 of the Introduction for a perspective and evaluation of the whole <em>WordProf</em> project and especially the section “From L1 to L2 writing: for a coordinated L1/L2 curriculum in language awareness” for the part specific to <em>English WordProf</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contribution to advanced literacy</strong></td>
<td>L2 is added as a dimension of literacy that can be in part addressed with tools and approaches first explored while learning to write in L1. As with <em>WordProf</em>, <em>English WordProf</em> advances the expectations about the quality of the text an intermediate student can produce. However, I would not speak of ‘advanced literacy’, since the educational intervention based on these products is more likely to have an impact on the product than on the process.</td>
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FROM ITALIAN (L1) TO ENGLISH (L2) WORDPROF: AN INSTRUCTIONAL SOFTWARE FOR TEACHING WRITING

Authors: Francesco Caviglia, Jeff Earp, Maria Ferraris
Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche - Istituto per le Tecnologie Didattiche, Genova

Abstract
WordProf is a teaching/learning environment, i.e. a software that assists the writer in the various phases of text production and promotes the student’s reflection on her/his own writing strategies.

Italian WordProf, published 1993, integrates the standard functions of a very simple WP with additional instructional menus: a Library, where the student can access a database of pre-written texts; an Assistant’s room, that provides, to a limited extent, ideas, suggestions and collaborative help for different writing activities (summarising, expanding, writing a paragraph, etc.); and a Gym, to exercise some basic writing and text comprehension skills. A simple authoring system allows teachers and students to enrich and modify the contents of Gym, Library and Assistant.

After three years of practice with Italian students (age 14-17), an English (L2) WordProf has been developed: the background assumptions are still the same, but some features are different.

The use on field has revealed both success and shortcomings of our approach.
A full-featured demo-edition of English WordProf comes with this paper.

What is WordProf
WordProf is a courseware aimed at supporting students in the development of text production strategies.

Italian WordProf, published 1992, was designed for learners age 14-16 of Italian as a first language. With more than 500 site licenses (and many un-official copies), WordProf is widely used in schools employing IT in the Humanities.

In April 1996 the beta-release of English WordProf was delivered to a group of teachers for testing on the field. This later courseware, conceived after observation and teachers’ feedback on the Italian version, has been designed for 15-18 years old (or ‘intermediate’) learners of English as a second language.

A brief history of the project
When we 1987 started a project of educational technology about the development of educational software, the field of writing instruction looked promising under several points of view:

- from the side of technology, word processors’ increasing text-handling power and ease of use let envisage the role of the computer as an all-pervasive instrument in the field of written communication;
- cognitive psychology, on the other side, was providing insights into writing as a very complex and dynamic process, that could be well incorporated in the ‘dynamic’ nature of a word processor;

...
the crucial role of writing in education was becoming evident, together with the shortcomings of some of the teaching practice (in particular, Italy has not a widespread tradition in teaching reading and writing beyond the first stages of literacy). Already in the late ’80 several projects strongly indicated computers and word processors as tools that can support the individual writing and change (improve?) teaching strategies in the classroom situation (i.e., through group writing activities).

Ten years later some ideas from cognitive psychology and instructional science have been adopted in school books, while classroom practice is more and more often based on ‘writing labs’ with computers. A growing percentage of students uses computers even at home for their homework.

As an educational problem, however, writing still remains a major issue for several reasons:

- teaching to write is difficult;
- there is a strong social need for teaching to write at all levels, university and professional training included;
- writing is recognised as a major means of organising knowledge and is therefore tightly associated with teaching (and evaluating) reading.

Hence the need for strategies and tools to support the teaching and to reduce the cognitive load of the learner.

As for writing in a second language in Italian classrooms, in spite of the high quality of many textbooks, there is still room and need for supporting tools. In fact, for many years grammar was the main subject in L2 teaching (the model was Latin teaching); than focus was shifted to (mainly oral) communication. Now L2 communication-oriented writing has a definite place in curricula and in school books, but makes life difficult to both students and teachers.

**Teaching strategies and approaches**

In designing WordProf we looked at two different views of text, as a product and as a process, using as a reference a set of educational problems and a network of the activities and skills involved in writing; a fragment of the hierarchy appears in figure 1.

![Figure 1. A fragment of the hierarchy.](image-url)
On the side of the teaching strategies and approaches, we took into consideration the ideas that seemed more successful in ‘paper based’ writing instruction and that could be adapted to a computer supported environment, that is:

- imitation of examples of good practice (to develop a kind of textual competence);
- creative writing under constraints, e.g. building a text out of a list of words and phrases, rewrite texts from different points of view, etc. (to develop syntax skills and win the ‘horror face to white page’);
- co-operative writing between the writer and an assistant that could prompt him or provide advice.

In addition, much attention has been paid to enforcing motivation for the learner and to encouraging reflection about language (both about text structures and the reading/writing process).

The courseware was also made out of a simple word processor provided with a set of instructional menus: a Resources Library, where the student can access a database of pre-written texts; an Assistant’s room, that provides, to a limited extent, ideas, suggestions and collaborative help for different writing activities (expanding an idea, writing a paragraph, etc.); and a Gym, to exercise some basic writing and text comprehension skills. A simple authoring system allows teachers and students to enrich and modify the contents of Gym, Library and Assistant.

The system is not a complete stand-alone courseware for writing: it has been designed as a tool for supporting the teacher in running a ‘writing lab’ in a classroom situation. The whole environment is very open and leaves to the teacher (or to the mature learner) to determine the sequence of activities and to provide all the instructional, world and language knowledge that we have not been able to put into the software.

From the L1 to the L2 WordProf version the design of the software has undergone little changes: only some less-used activities have been dropped, while the scope of others has been enlarged.

The text material and the teacher guide, on the other hand, have been completely rewritten. Many texts from the Italian version were modelled after Quenau’s “Exercises in style,” that is much space was devoted to playing with words. The L2 version had to focus more on communication and standard text types, attempting to transfer fun into situations.

As for the L2 (on-line) teacher’s guide, the experience with L1 WordProf made us more confident about our instructional approach: the guide provides a list of goal-based writing tasks and learning path through the different environments of English WordProf, along with explicit considerations about the teaching strategies.

Figure 2 shows a model of the path a learner could follow from reading/imitation activities, to ‘assisted’ writing, to ‘prompted’ writing, to open and autonomous writing tasks (the darkness of the ellipses marks the degree of control on the side of the computer).
A brief tour inside WordProf

In this section we will briefly see some examples from WordProf environment, following as a guideline the topic of the Communication Forms “excuses” and “ask/refuse permission”

reading (and imitating)

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<td>- I'm sorry;</td>
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<td>- I'm terribly sorry;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- I'm awfully sorry;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I'm afraid ...;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I really am dreadfully sorry;</td>
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<td><strong>MAKING EXCUSES</strong></td>
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<td>- I meant to ...., but unfortunately ;</td>
</tr>
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<td>- I didn't intend to ... but</td>
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<td>- I thought ...;</td>
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<td>- Nobody told me that ...;</td>
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<td>- How am I to know ...?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WELCOME HOME</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Lisa,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome back. I hope you had an enjoyable holiday in Mexico. Thanks for letting me stay in your flat while you were away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By the way, there are one or two things I have to tell you about. I'm terribly sorry but all the data in your computer have been erased. I didn't realise that my floppy disks were infected with a virus. I'm afraid your plants have all died, too. I meant to water them but I was really busy and didn't have time to. I'm sorry about that but don't worry because I've bought you some nice plastic plants to replace the old ones - you'll never have to water these.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm awfully sorry about your cat Jasper but nobody told me to keep him inside. I thought he would enjoy some time in the garden. Cheer up, I'm sure he'll come back soon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lastly, I really am dreadfully sorry about the mess. I meant to clean up the whole flat before you got back but you see we had your coming home party last night (how were we to know you were taking a later flight?) and there wasn't time to clean up this morning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See you soon,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love Barbara.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS There were so many people at your party that we had to open some of your wine. We didn't intend to finish it all but you see it was such a great party! What a pity you missed it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“assisted” writing (1st example)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From: Assistant - Expanding - Writing paragraphs - Description - male profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In this dialogue, the first person criticises the second person, who tries to defend himself/herself. The situation involves a student who hasn't done his homework. Other possible situations include a new or incompetent worker who is responsible for a disaster, a politician criticised by an opponent or journalist, an unsuccessful football coach attacked by supporters. The expressions used in the dialogue include:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apologising, making excuses, giving opinions, giving advice, promising.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you want to see some examples of these, go to the RESOURCES menu, select COMMUNICATION FORMS and choose the appropriate menu item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORDPROF ASSISTANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Okay, let's try to describe this person. First of all, what impression does he</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give you? For example does he look intelligent, dangerous, kind, stupid etc.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What word would you use to describe him?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-What is his face like? e.g. long, round, oval etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-What about the length of his hair? Is it short, long etc.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-And what type of hair has he got? Straight? Curly? Dark? Grey?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-How would you describe his eyes? Perhaps they're large or blue or dark. What</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>would you say?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-It's hard to guess someone's exact age. Let's try to approximate. Is he, say,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in his mid twenties or middle-aged? Maybe he's a teenager or sixtyish or over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fifty. What do you think?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Can you imagine what he does for a living? What's his profession? Does he</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>look like a plumber or an office worker? Perhaps you think he's unemployed or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retired. (include a/an if required)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Think of another possibility. If he's not &lt;profession1&gt;, maybe he's a builder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or a teacher, say. What do you think? (include a/an if required)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Imagine you see this person in a television advertisement. What type of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>product could he be promoting? Biscuits, insurance, video recorders?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Output of the dialogue is the following "rough text" that students should revise and print. The words in brackets are automatically replaced by the students' answers

I would say he has a <general impression> look about him. His face is <face type>, and he has <hair length>, <hair type> hair and <eye type> eyes. It's hard to tell his exact age but my impression is that he's <age group>. If you ask me he looks like <profession1>, or maybe even <profession2>. An advertising agency could use someone like him to advertise <product type>.

“assisted” writing (2nd example)

From: Assistant - Expanding - Dialogue schemes - a piece of my mind

In this dialogue, the first person criticises the second person, who tries to defend himself/herself. The situation involves a student who hasn't done his homework. Other possible situations include a new or incompetent worker who is responsible for a disaster, a politician criticised by an opponent or journalist, an unsuccessful football coach attacked by supporters. The expressions used in the dialogue include:
apologising, making excuses, giving opinions, giving advice, promising.
If you want to see some examples of these, go to the RESOURCES menu, select COMMUNICATION FORMS and choose the appropriate menu item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORDPROF ASSISTANT</th>
<th>STUDENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Before we start, let's name the two people in this dialogue. Let's call the</td>
<td>(ex: Mr. Higgins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first person...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-and the second person...</td>
<td>(ex: Carlo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Now let's begin the dialogue. To start, &lt;first person&gt; must MAKE A CRITICISM</td>
<td>(ex: Carlo, this is the third time this week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OF &lt;defender&gt;</td>
<td>you haven't done your Italian homework)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defendant: APOLOGISE and MAKE AN EXCUSE</td>
<td>(ex: I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Higgins. I meant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to do it but you see we have I guest from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italy staying at our place at the moment and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I'm the only one at home who speaks Italian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So unfortunately I've been too busy acting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>as an interpreter to do my homework.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Prosecution: REJECT <defendant>’s EXCUSE
(ex: Nice try, Carlo. That’s a good story. In fact, it’s probably the best of all the many stories you’ve invented this year.)

### Defendant: EXPLAIN EXCUSE or MAKE AN ALTERNATIVE EXCUSE
(ex: But it’s true, Mr. Higgins. His name’s Paolo Corleone and he’s a sort of relative of mine from Sicily. I’m not supposed to tell anyone he’s here because it’s a big secret.)

### Prosecution: REJECT <defendant>’s EXPLANATION or ALTERNATIVE EXCUSE. GIVE OPINION ON CAUSE FOR INITIAL CRITICISM
(ex: That’s quite enough, thank you Carlo. In your opinion, you spent last night watching The Godfather 1, 2 and 3 on TV instead of doing your homework.)

### Defendant: REJECT <prosecution>’s OPINION and GIVE REASON
(ex: What gave you that idea, Mr. Higgins? Our TV doesn’t work anymore because Signor Corleone threw it out the window while he was watching the World Cup.)

### Prosecution: CONTEST REASON and GIVE ADVICE
(ex: Carlo, I’m tired of your excuses and crazy stories. If I were you, I’d ask this Signor Corleone to speak with the examinations committee because that’s the only way you’ll pass Italian this year.)

### Defendant: ACCEPT <prosecution>’s ADVICE and PROMISE ACTION or REFUSE <prosecution>’s ADVICE and EXPLAIN WHY
(ex: Thank you very much for your kind suggestion Mr. Higgins, but you see my Uncle Giorgio is the head of the committee anyway.)

-Okay, that’s the end of the dialogue. Just to finish, let’s add a setting (where and when the dialogue took place: e.g. #1’s house, Thursday evening; or Wednesday night at the pub; or at the bus-stop on Tuesday morning).

Output of this dialogue is a kind of script that students should revise and than play in front of their class-mates

---

### From: Games - Slalom - file APOLOGY1

Your flatmate gave you permission to hold a party in your new flat (see ASKING1.SLM). He/she does not like parties and did not come. Some unfortunate things happened at the party and now you have to write a note to apologise to your flatmate (easier than apologising face to face).

The following connectives will be shot into the student text on clicking the “Shoot” button: the student will have to make sensible sentences out of them

- I'm sorry
- I didn't intend to
- I'm terribly sorry
- I thought
- I'm awfully sorry
- Nobody told me that
- I'm afraid
- I really am dreadfully sorry
- I didn't realize that
- I meant to
- How was I to know
(2nd example)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>From: Games Flashes file EXCUSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Click the “shoot!” button and you'll get a description of a difficult situation. Try to use all your imagination and creativity to invent stories and excuses that will avoid any problems. Remember that the other person/people might not accept the most obvious explanation. When you want to stop, don't forget to save the file with your answer(s).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On clicking the button the student is shown one of the following tasks, randomly chosen

You are a school student who has gone to town instead of attending classes. While you are walking down the main street you encounter your teacher and the class on an excursion. Invent a convincing excuse.

At the exit of a supermarket a staff member asks to inspect your bag. There is a bottle of whisky inside. Explain the circumstances.

A bus ticket inspector asks to see your ticket. You haven't got one. Make up a good story.

Your car is double parked and a policeman is writing a fine. Give him a good reason to avoid the fine.

You have invited a group of people to dinner for a very important occasion and your guests are about to arrive. The special meal you have prepared is a total disaster but you don't want to admit it. What can you do?

An automatic speed control machine has photographed your car travelling at 30 kilometres per hour over the speed limit. After receiving a letter of notification you go to the central police station to try to convince them that you had a legitimate reason for speeding.

You borrowed a book from your friend and while you were reading it in the bath it fell in the water. Now you have to give it back and explain why it's in such a terrible condition, without admitting that it was your fault.

Your partner has seen you walking hand in hand down the street with another person of the opposite sex. How do you explain it?

A person you don't particularly like asked you to go to the cinema that evening but you refused, saying that you had too much work to do. Now you're in a bar with friends the same evening and that person walks in the door. What can you say?

open writing tasks

from file Z_TASK22

Many famous people have made mistakes in their lives; some are famous BECAUSE of the errors they've committed. Check the list in RESOURCES/WORDS ABOUT.../FAMOUS PEOPLE and choose someone who might have something on his/her conscience. Those who are still alive can write their apologies and excuses in their autobiographies; those who are deceased can address a letter to St Peter, Mohammed or humanity.
reflection about language

A simple authoring system enables the student to add texts and games to the all the educational menus of WordProf. The learners usually start by developing exercises for their classmates in the reading-based games Dominos (reordering of a scrambled text), Fishing (finding information in a text) and Fill the Gaps. Later on they add their text models in the Resource environment. The most advanced students can help teachers develop new Assistant dialogues. We strongly encourage the teachers to guide learners in the use of the authoring system as a way to gain insight in text structure and foster writing autonomy.

WordProf: a provisional evaluation

The following considerations are based on the feedback from teachers and students and on direct observation on L1 classes. Comments on the L2 version are not yet numerous, but encouraging; odd enough, most comments come from students that had previously used Italian WordProf and are now exploiting the English version for their homework (maybe without letting their teachers know!)

What seems to work

Writing labs conducted using WordProf, in particular with imitation and “assisted writing” activities, seem to some extent successful in reducing the cognitive load associated with writing: the students often write more than before and usually develop a positive (or less-negative) attitude toward writing. In second language the advantage seems really significant to the learner self. Of course, we are aware of the danger that once reached a certain level WordProf becomes a limit to the writer’s self-sufficiency more than a resource.

There is also some clue that activities based on WordProf’s Assistant and Resources can help fostering a sense for text structure at different levels: sentence/paragraph (e.g. building paragraphs in Assistant and Slalom), contents (exploring an idea, debating an issue) and whole text (text models, planning text).

The authoring system seem, mainly used in classroom to develop texts for the Resources environment and new games, seems to provide an active tool for exploring, through a learning by doing approach, some text and language constraints.

The student feedback on both environment points clearly to the need for more cooperation between first and second language teachers and possibly a common subset in the curriculum for L1 and L2 (which is not very common in Italian school practice). This remains true, of course, regardless of any use of educational software; but the use of a common tool has made this need very obvious.

What doesn’t work well with WordProf (and directions on future work)

In building the English version we have excluded from the Assistant all the dialogues that helped the learner summarising a text. While for writing paragraphs, exploring ideas and planning texts WordProf was often considered helpful, most teacher and students found it useless as a tool for writing summaries. This result was not totally unexpected, in spite of the efforts that we put into this environment. After all, we thought, writing is a good means of organising knowledge, a summary is a good test for evaluating reading comprehension, but the core difficulty of reading comprehension is reading through the lines and making inferences; these skills could not be fostered through a general purpose set of questions about a subject we don’t know a priori; besides, group work was not well suited for reading activities.
It took us a while to realize that not being able to help the student in this task was a serious shortcoming, as one of the first aims of our project was fostering writing as a means of organising knowledge.

In reconsidering the whole project from this point of view we must admit that, with reference to the Bereiter & Scardamalia [1987] model of writing by knowledge telling or knowledge transforming, WordProf gives much more support to the first than to the second activity. As knowledge telling is anyway a part of the ‘higher’ knowledge transforming process, WordProf gives at least some lower-level help to the student and is not, in so far, useless.

Anyway, we are currently considering shifting the focus of our activity from language learning to language and learning.

Bibliography


Appendix

A few examples of WordProf use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>kind of activity</th>
<th>WordProf menu (see also the educational help)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>reading / imitate</td>
<td>Resources: Communication forms, Texts, (Words about)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assisted writing</td>
<td>Assistant: Writing paragraphs - description, arguing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expanding - dialogues schemes, telephone call schemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning text: film, activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prompted writing</td>
<td>Games:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slalom: APOLOGY1, CONJUNx,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASKING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flashes: EXCUSES, SIMILES, PERSONAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open tasks</td>
<td>File: open WordProf text Z_TASK2, -3, -4, -22 (see Resources - words about, too)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>games under control</td>
<td>Games:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domino: AGREE, EXCLAMS, PAIRS, bistro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fishing: ADVERT, ERRORS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fill the gaps: SIMILES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Paper I.

| **Title** | Caviglia, F. (2000)  
| A text corpus as a companion to the strategic second language writer. |
| **Publishing story/status** | *(Pré)pub* no. 179 (November 2000).  
| Paper presented at the conference and accepted for inclusion in the proceedings of the 2000 European Writing Conferences. - EARLI Special Interest Group Writing, Verona 6-7 September, 2000.  
| The publication is strongly delayed. |
| **Connected teaching activity** | Since Autumn 1999, I have been using text corpora in writing courses in L2 Italian at Aarhus University.  
A short introduction to text corpora has become part of the module on ICT and language learning of a course “Language learning and teaching” (Danish: *fællesromansk formidlingskurs*) at Aarhus University.  
Teacher training in Denmark and Italy. |
| **Addenda & corrigenda** | As suggested in the § 4 of the introduction, students of Italian at Aarhus University are currently using text corpora more than they did two years ago, especially since electronic text corpora became allowed, in Spring 2002, as tools for writing at exams in written Italian.  
As envisaged by the paper, I am now introducing text corpora with examples from a text corpus in Danish which has become available in 2001. |
| **Contribution to advanced literacy** | Using text corpora implies being able to formalize questions on language and to understand the answer by recognizing patterns of form and meaning within ‘raw’, unprepared data.  
The ‘language awareness’ and ‘strategic competence’ required for using text corpora as writing tools are also typical for ‘advanced literacy’. |
A TEXT CORPUS AS A COMPANION TO THE STRATEGIC SECOND LANGUAGE WRITER

Abstract

The paper describes the use of a text corpus as a source of syntactical and lexical information in a computer-based writing environment. The research is based on the author’s experience in teaching a course in writing in Italian as a second language to thirty Danish students preparing their degree-level examination. All the students had at their disposal a six-million-word corpus of written Italian drawn from a weekly magazine. The corpus, with its search-and-retrieval engine, was introduced to the students as a tool suitable for solving language problems typically faced by advanced second-language writers.

At the same time, eliciting knowledge from a raw body of language was promoted as a valuable activity for fostering strategic language processing and language learning skills. Each lesson, the students had to solve some writing problems, and were given assistance in using the text corpus to perform their tasks; this effort was meant to lead them to adopt the corpus approach in their own daily writing practice. The students were monitored while in the writing lab, and at the end were interviewed about the effectiveness of the text corpus as a tool for writing. Stark differences came to light both in the style of use and in satisfaction with the tool. It was eventually adopted by a few students for further use as a general resource for language learning, while dismissed by others as unwieldy.

The paper presents and discusses some examples of use of the text corpus in the areas of syntax (e.g. prepositions and use of conjunctive) and vocabulary (e.g. understanding the meaning of a word from the context, finding the verb that goes with a certain noun, retrieving the words associated with a theme, choosing between near-synonyms).

The differences in the students’ response to this activity is then discussed. Not surprisingly, the text corpus was appreciated most by students who already displayed advanced strategic competence in second language learning. For many others, the cognitive load seemed to outweigh the tool’s benefits.

The shared assumption that text corpora can be powerful learning tools seems to be confirmed by this experience. At the same time, the scarce success with several students suggests that in the future the meta-linguistic and strategic skills required to use a text corpus need to be addressed even more explicitly and effectively, possibly in a setting for integrated L1-L2 language education.

Keywords: writing and technology; writing in second language; text corpora

Background: text corpora and language learning

The use of text corpora as tools for language learning dates back more than a decade (e.g. Johns, 1988; see Stevens, 1995 for a brief history). Very good concordancing programs and guidelines for teachers are available (e.g. Barlow 1997; Tribble and Jones 1990, 2nd ed. 1997), and a Teaching and Language Corpora Conference (TALC) has been held every two years since 1994. Nevertheless, using corpora in language learning, especially outside the English speaking community, is still far from being common practice.

At the same time, the use of text corpora for exploring vocabulary and syntax, with its focus on students acting as language researchers, does seem very well suited to fulfill the requirements for strategic language learning and teaching (on language corpora in teaching see Johns 1991a and 1991b, Aston 1995 and 1997, Stevens 1995, Leech 1996; for a review paper, Murison-Bowie 1996; on strategic language learning and teaching see Færch & Kasper 1983 and Oostdam & Rijlaardsam, 1995).
This paper describes and analyses an experience with a text corpus used as a supporting tool for second language writing. The target language in this case is Italian, but the same experience might easily be replicated at least with any European language.

**The instructional problem: L2 writing at advanced level**

The learners were about 30 Danish students preparing their degree-level examination in writing Italian as a foreign language. The exam involved writing a 600-word essay in response to a short text, usually on an issue about society and culture; the only support the students were allowed was a monolingual dictionary. The writing is expected to be of fairly high quality, roughly equivalent to Cambridge Proficiency level (the students can actually pass the examination with low grades, but would later find it difficult to win posts as teachers in secondary schools). The course is usually followed for two semesters, involving three hours in class a week plus homework.

While most of the students are very proficient in learning to speak and understand oral language, when it comes to writing there is wide variation in performance and learning strategies. This is a typical situation with advanced learners, who thus gain most from one-to-one tuition (Wilson 1994), which was indeed my general teaching approach in this course.

As to more specific methods, I drew on L2 activities such as search and imitation of good models, creative writing under constraint, and co-operative writing, all of which yielded satisfactory results in previous experiences (Ferraris, Caviglia & Degl'Innocenti 1992; Caviglia, Earp & Ferraris 1996; on imitation, Geist 1996). Anyway, a survey of student writings from previous examinations clearly showed that grammar mistakes were the main cause of failures, closely followed by poor, unsuitable vocabulary. On the one hand, this confirms the universally acknowledged importance of lexical competence in language learning (inter alia, Haarstrup 1994), but at the same time underlines how grammar is a most critical area to advanced adult writers (Celce-Murcia, 1993).

Interviews and tests in the first phase of the course revealed that quite often the students did expect a single word or sentence in their essay to be wrong, but were unable to devise a solution that they were happier with.

Luppescu & Day (1995) suggest – in the context of L2 reading – that dictionaries do play an important role in language learning, provided the students are taught good look-up strategies. Some training with monolingual dictionaries has been given in this course, with satisfactory results. But dictionaries do not answer many of the questions an L2 writer may face (Sinclair 1991 and Murison-Bowie 1996); moreover, no Italian dictionary has yet been designed with L2 learners as the main target.

Therefore I proposed using a six-million-word Italian corpus as a reference tool for consideration while looking for solutions to writing problems in vocabulary and grammar (for the use of comparable corpora, albeit more in a context of reading and exploring language, see Aston 1997, Dodd 1997 and Minugh 1997; for text corpora as reference tools some considerations appear in Murison-Bowie 1996).

In addition, the corpus-based approach was promising from at least two points of view, namely:

- **language learning and teaching** - a rich literature suggested that teaching with text corpora should promote both language processing and language learning strategies;
- **writing and technology** - it was interesting to see if a text corpus could really provide enough help to advanced learners in dealing with grammar and vocabulary problems.

The following section will describe how this proposal was implemented.
An Italian text corpus as a tool for writing

Interazionale su CD-ROM. The text corpus in question is based on a three-year compendium (1994-96) of Internazionale, a weekly magazine that publishes “the best of the international press” translated into Italian, with articles about society, politics, economics, science and culture. The vocabulary and style match exactly the kind of language the students are required to produce. The fact that the texts are translations is not really a weak point: first of all, they are of high quality, and secondly, a translation tends to be slightly closer to ‘standard language’ than an original text. The topics covered and the language used make also Internazionale a suitable model; indeed, the students used the database of about 3,000 articles also as a source of text models and of documentation about contents (an analogous, ‘extensive’ use of text corpora is suggested by Aston 1997: pp 57-60).

The search engine bundled with the database (Folio Vip 3.0) is a general purpose information retrieval program. All the words in the database are indexed and can be looked up quickly, with the possibility of using wildcards in the query. The outcome of a search is a list of occurrences in a “keyword in context” format.

Internazionale su CD-ROM was sold commercially for less than 8 Euros per issue, occupied 40Mb of disk space and ran directly from the hard disk: we could therefore afford to get it installed on all the computers in the writing lab and on the students’ home PCs.

Introducing the corpus as a tool. Introducing a new tool is often a delicate task: in the field of writing, only word processors and perhaps spell-checkers have really made it as tools adopted in daily practice. As for text corpora, Aston (1997: pp 60-63) gives several warnings and suggestions on how to reduce the cognitive load on the learner undertaking language exploring tasks, cutting down for example the ‘unexpectedness-factor’ by using small, homogeneous corpora. Since we wanted to use the corpus as a reference tool for advanced learners, we found that limiting the size – e.g. to only one year of the magazine – would have jeopardized lexical diversity, as some words an advanced learner should know and be able to use do occur rather seldom. On the other hand, Internazionale is rather homogeneous, in part because all texts it contains are articles, in part because they have been translated by a small team. Anyway, a substantial effort was made to teach the students how to use the tool in writing activities.

Each lesson, the students had to solve some writing problems, taken in part from their own homework. Whenever it was deemed that the text corpus could be a powerful support for finding a solution, the students were advised to use it; if the query was in some way tricky to formulate, the appropriate wording was provided. In discussing the solutions that the students proposed, strong emphasis was placed on the strategy used to find it and on the degree of certainty attained through interpreting the occurrences.

In another part of the lesson the teacher monitored the students while they were writing and assisted them when doubts arose.

The following sections report some examples where the corpus was used for solving vocabulary and syntax problems.

Inferring the meaning of a word. Krantz (1991) suggests, with caution, that inferring the meaning of a word from context can be a better practice, for long term retention, than looking it up in a dictionary. Haarstrup (1991 and 1994) strongly and convincingly advocates inferring and negotiating meaning from context as a cognitively sound and effective practice. Conversely, Luppescu & Day (1993) found, to their own surprise, that students using dictionaries (provided they had some experience in doing so) learned more vocabulary than those inferring

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1 The April 2000 version of Internazionale su CD-ROM is based on all the 1993-1998 issues (10 million words), is equipped with Folio Views 4.2 as a search engine and still sells for 8 Euros.
meaning from context, even when it came to long term retention of word meaning. Anyway, at a closer look, Haarstrup and Luppescu & Day both suggest some kind of strategic, well-defined practice in teaching how to deal with word meaning. I would expect therefore that training in looking up words in a dictionary leads to better results than untrained inferential guessing of meaning, while a well-organized session on inferring meaning from context can well be a very strategic activity for developing general language learning skills. I would also follow Goodfellow 1995, who stresses the need for teaching how to use the tools at disposal for word learning, from dictionaries to thesauri to concordancers, with the general aim to “weaning learners away from superficial approaches”.

A typical use for a text corpus is to exploit the large number of examples it can provide for teaching students to infer or define better the meaning of a word from a set of contexts (see Tribble & Jones 1990, Jean du Mai 1995, Dodd 1997). For the needs of L2, understanding a word’s exact meaning and context of use is even more compelling in writing than in reading. At the same time, L2 writing seldom requires looking up the meaning of a completely new word, but L2 writers do need to check if a word is appropriate in a given context and to find which word is likely to be used by native speakers in the same context. In our case too the students mainly looked up – in the corpus or in a dictionary – words they could roughly understand but felt unsure about using. The corpus approach seemed to fulfil the above L2 writing requirements rather successfully. For example, whenever the students faced a difficult choice between two words, the Italian corpus provided good evidence for differences in meaning and possibly frequency of use. As an example, Figure 1 reports the occurrences that explained to one of the students the difference between “sdegnato” (= outrage) and “sdegnoso” (= disdainful).

Checking if two words are frequently used together is even simpler. With Internazionale’s search engine, the student can check if two words occur within a given distance: simply by typing the query the user will see, for example, that “affrontare” and “problema” (= to face and problem) occur 71 times at a maximum three-word distance (see figure 2). This represents a clear advantage over traditional dictionaries, which provide a more limited number of ex-
amples and usually lack the possibility of ‘proximity search’ (not surprisingly, this function exists in COBUILD’s E-Dict [1998], a product clearly influenced by corpus technology).

Figure 2 – Looking for "affrontare il/un/questo problema".

If on the other hand the aim of a search is to define the range of contexts in which a given word can be suitably used, the workload and degree of interpretation required is much greater. While a dictionary provides an organized list of explanations with examples, in this case a corpus merely offers a list of unsorted occurrences. Extracting insight from this list is in itself a valuable activity, but one that poses a high cognitive load on the student: it is a powerful procedure in an educational setting or in a session dedicated specifically to vocabulary, but may be too long and complex for a writer who must maintain focus and momentum when writing.

**Finding associated words**  
An even more frequent need for L2 writers is to find words associated with another word or idea. Most importantly, student need to know what a native speaker would write in a given context. There are *production dictionaries* explicitly designed for this purpose (for example, Longman’s *Language Activator*), but none have yet been produced for the Italian language, or at least not with an L2 user model: of course, expert, strategic use of currently available Italian dictionaries would provide some information on vocabulary. However, scanning the contexts of a keyword in a text corpus may be a more viable way to look for words that we cannot figure out in L2, but we know are likely to occur in conjunction with others (see Sinclair 1997 about the difficulty in defining and reproducing native speakers’ word-retrieving strategies and the power of the corpus-based approach in language description; see also, *inter alia*, Stubbs 1995 and Murison-Bowie 1996: pp 186-9 and 192 for notes on collocations and their use in teaching).

For example, the search for “assegno” (= *bank cheque*) returns 35 occurrences, whose contexts, as showed in part in figure 3, contain much of the specifically connected vocabulary (“cambiare”, “riscuotere”, “emettere”, “non trasferibile” = *to change, to cash, to issue, not transferable*), together with more general ones such as “mandare” and “ricevere” (= *to send/receive*), plus metaphorical expressions such as “assegno in bianco” (= *blank check*).
This kind of query proved especially useful when looking for substitutes for Italian "power" verbs (e.g. fare=do, make) normally used in written and cultivated oral production. This is most common and standardized in newspapers, which usually attach "commettere" (= commit) to "un crimine" (= a crime) or "avanzare" (= advance) to "una proposta" (= a proposal), while such expressions seldom occur in spoken language or literature. Standard newspaper language may not be the ideal model to adhere to, but it provides a fairly coherent base to start from. A slightly more complex search can return, as shown in figure 4, a list of verbs used in conjunction with "problema" (= problem).
Chains of searches of the kind just described have been widely used, during pre-writing activities, to activate vocabulary pertaining to a content area. Searching for “immigrazione” leads to some articles on this topic containing other keywords such as “diversità culturale”, “tolleranza”, “multiculturalismo”, (= immigration, cultural diversity, tolerance, multiculturalism) that in turn can be searched for to obtain the related verbs. This practice has produced some small but useful production glossaries that will be used and integrated by future students.

Losing problems with syntax The same technique used with lexical problems can be equally applied to syntax. For example, prepositions are a learner’s nightmare in several European languages, as testified by the abundance of exercises on this topic in textbooks. A text corpus can almost always provide a solution to problems with prepositions. Many intermediate Danish students have doubts such as: “diverso da” or *“diverso di” (= different from)? Looking for “divers?” in the text corpus returned a quick and clear answer. More interesting was how to find the Italian equivalent of “as a young boy”. Looking for ragazzo (= young boy) gave no useful results, but a smart student proposed searching for adulto (= adult), which yielded 6 (out of 40) occurrences of “da adulto”; the correct form “da ragazzo” was then a fairly safe guess. The conjunctive form is another excruciating dilemma for L2 writers (and some L1 speakers) in Italian. Although only a middle-sized corpus, Internazionale su CD-ROM always contained a construction equal or equivalent to the one suspected of requiring a conjunctive.

Initially, some students perceived the corpus-approach as a sort of cheating, as a way to avoid studying grammar; at a closer look, however, formulating the query and discussing its results turned out to be a rather complex and productive activity, reinforcing the grammar skills of those more eager to explore (on exploring grammar with text corpora, see Jones 1991b and Murison-Bowie, 1996: 185-188).

The students’ response

I had expected all of the students signing up for the course to be capable of writing on a computer. In fact, some students turned out to be novice computer users, who thus dedicated much of their initial effort to getting to grips with the software. A small number of these abandoned the writing lab on computer after a few lessons and continued the course with paper-based writing, while the rest eventually caught up with their more experienced classmates.

The students were monitored while in the writing lab and interviewed at the end of the course about the effectiveness of the text corpus as a tool for writing. Significant differences in use and appreciation of the text corpus emerged. From the outset, some students demonstrated great creativity and suggested clever queries and approaches for coping with different kinds of problems. These same students eventually adopted the corpus as a learning tool for writing and for grammar analysis. As to their profile, they varied in initial language proficiency, but all seemed to be very strategic language learners, especially as concerns written language. They were all proficient L2 readers and L1 writers, and were also fairly confident with computers.

All of the students who went through the entire course were capable of using the text corpus when required to do so and gained sufficient expertise to formulate sensible queries; however, about half of them only turned to the tool when tackling tasks that explicitly required its use. This large ‘neither-enthusiastic-nor-hostile’ group acknowledged that the text corpus was an interesting and even useful tool: they appreciated its help in solving specific problems, and blamed either time pressure or their own laziness for not using it as a reference in daily use.
After further questioning, most of them confirmed the impression I got while monitoring, namely that they found going through the occurrences a slow, tiresome and not always rewarding process. All in all, the students did not consider the corpus approach a waste of time: using it raised their awareness of constraints in word choice and they did become more attentive in their use of dictionaries. It should be noted that some of the students in this large group were as proficient in language learning as the ‘enthusiasts’. Confidence with computers may of course play a role in determining different attitudes to new computer-based tools: it is no surprise that several computer novices cum good language learners fall into the agnostic category. Even some of the experienced word processor users were slightly ill at ease with the corpus as a reference tool, often finding ‘answers’ overwhelming.

These results seems to confirm Stevens’s (1997) claim that “student appreciation of concordancers is limited to the more inductively inclined, the more tolerant of ambiguity, and those best able to cut through a bramble of extraneous data to find the berries in the bush”.

In the conclusions I will seek to elaborate this point.

Conclusions

It can be safely claimed that this experience confirms one of our background assumptions, namely that using a text corpus can promote strategic language processing skills. Advanced students found in their hands a tool previously reserved to dictionary editors, and made a quantum leap in their awareness of the complexity of language. They may have felt overwhelmed, and may have decided eventually to resort to more traditional tools, but systematic exposure to corpus-based activities was, with few exceptions, a valuable experience for all, albeit to various degrees. As an interesting side-effect of corpus-based activities, a clear shift was observed in power relations between students and teacher: second language learners gain access through this tool to more language patterns than even a cultivated native speaker can find out by relying on his memory only. The corpus often becomes the most authoritative resource in the classroom, the one that can prove wrong any rule or proposed explanation.

As for the other start-up question, whether a middle-sized text corpus can be a primary reference tool for writing, there is no easy answer. Full analytic comparison of the effectiveness of our text corpus vs. a dictionary is beyond the scope of this article, and will be limited to a few remarks.

First of all, I had misgivings about the small size of our corpus when compared with the ‘standard’ ones, made up of more than 50 million words; in practice, only on one occasion did the Internazionale return a blank when queried for an absolutely appropriated word. On the contrary, the search for syntactical structures almost always yielded an overly large amount of occurrences: for this type of use, we found a reduced version of the corpus containing about two million words more than enough. Of course, had the writing tasks involved different kinds of text, different text corpora would have been required; these are fairly easy to build – except for spoken corpora – by plundering Internet sites.

While our text corpus may well contain enough data, this does not mean that the process of eliciting knowledge is by any means straightforward. It is true that we were able to find more information than a dictionary user would probably dream of (on choosing the right preposition, for example), but it is also true that, as reference works, dictionaries and grammar books may well offer a better starting point for exploring many items, which may possibly be further analysed by searching the corpus. Examples from the COBUILD catalogue seem to suggest integration of dictionary, grammar book and text corpus as a future trend.

A second issue regards the interface to the corpus. As stated earlier, we were using the built-in text-retrieval system of Internazionale on CD-ROM, but the better we grew at exploring the language, the more we missed a ‘true’ concordancer and its ability to sort the results of a search so as to reveal patterns and collocations more clearly. Some attempts with the ‘enthusi-
A third important question emerged from this experience, namely whether a text corpus is only a tool for the elite in advanced L2 learning, or if it should be proposed to a wider audience.

To discuss this issue briefly we should consider the skills required by the corpus approach. Aston (1997: pp 60-63) stresses how defining patterns and searching through multiple occurrences is different from and less familiar than looking up a single item in a dictionary or grammar book, and suggests a gradual path to ‘learning to look for regularities’. Murison-Bowie (1996: pp 191) refers to Aston’s suggestion as a proposal for fostering a ‘distinct skill’. I am not sure that searching a text corpus differs from searching a dictionary to the point that it can be regarded as a different skill; I would rather suggest considering different degrees of task complexity. As already stated, evolution in dictionaries is likely to bring with it some form of convergence; besides, searching a dictionary, a grammar book or an encyclopaedia is by no means a trivial task (see Mangenot & Moulin, in press, who see the different tools for vocabulary acquisition as disposed along a continuum, from dictionary to Internet). Anyway, even when the same skill is applied to more complex tasks special help may well be required to foster development.

First of all, it is important to decide whether this skill really matters, whether it is productive for other activities, that is, whether it can be defined as ‘strategic’. If we think how this skill resembles that required to locate information in large databases or loosely structured hypertexts such as the Internet, the answer can only be positive. Such a skill is already important now and might be a crucial element of literacy in today’s information society.

Another matter is whether this skill is best introduced and taught through L2 language learning, a typical case where the learner faces different and partially unrelated difficulties at the same time. Looking through a list of unrelated sentences to pick up lexical or syntactic clues is difficult enough, doing so for the first time on L2 texts may lead to little more than aggravation. It can be done, of course, with learners that are already ‘strategic’, but this may mean that others find themselves with a tool that is too complex to be used fruitfully, as indeed was the case with several students in our experience.

Nevertheless, it may still be useful to propose the corpus approach in different courses of the same advanced-level L2 curriculum, in particular as a support to the investigation of grammar. However, the experience described in this paper highlights, above all, the need for integrated L1 and L2 language education designed to encompass the use of tools that are still somewhat alien to the mainstream culture of the arts, despite their potential for the development of upgraded ‘literacy’.

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