

MATERIALS AND RESOURCES FOR TEACHING ITALIAN PRAGMATICS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics is defined as a set of rules for communicating in a target language (TL), which is necessary to accomplish a successful conversation (Usó-Juan, Martínez-Flor, 2008). It is a tacit agreement established between speakers of a determined language for relating to each other in their day-to-day situations. (Bardovi-Harlig, Bastos, 2011).

With the aim of helping students to acquire pragmatics, the methods used to teach them in foreign and second language (FL and SL respectively) contexts have been questioned. This is particularly true for students that are only exposed to them via class lessons. A considerable number of studies on Italian pragmatics has been carried out (see the state-of-the-art of Nuzzo, Santoro, 2017). What these studies have revealed is that there is a lack of materials dedicated to the teaching of Italian pragmatics (Del Bono, Nuzzo, 2016; Ferrari, Nuzzo, Zanoni, 2016). From existing literature, it appears that among all the materials used to teach pragmatics in the classroom, textbooks² play the leading role. (Nuzzo, 2013). Nevertheless, research revealed that coursebooks are not reliable tools for teaching pragmatics since their contents do not correspond entirely to natural discourse. Studies in the field have compared textbooks to TV series and films, highlighting how TV series and films seem to be the most valid option for implementing pragmatics instruction. In these media, dialogues are considered to be the closest representation of the actual use of language by Italian native speakers (NSs) (Nuzzo, 2013, 2015, 2016).

In 2012, an online platform and virtual repository called LIRA³ was created to help teachers address pragmatics in Italian FL/SL contexts. However, as it will be discussed later in this paper, one of the researchers' main concern should be on how teachers come to know about this tool and whether they receive appropriate instructions on how to use it.

In the literature review, a gap was found between teachers and researchers, regarding the materials and resources that educators could adopt to improve the teaching of pragmatics in the classroom. The study is a qualitative contribution to guiding teachers of Italian language in choosing appropriate materials for their lectures. For this purpose, an overview of the most used and recommended materials for teaching Italian pragmatics in SL/FL context is addressed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, arguments on pragmatics instruction from a number of studies are reviewed and analysed. The literature review on teaching pragmatics is then illustrated in

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² In this study textbooks are labelled as well coursebooks, manuals and books.

³ See section 2.2.

two different sections: firstly, *Research on Italian pragmatics instruction and acquisition* which will focus on previous literature on pragmatics instruction. Secondly, *Materials and resources for pragmatics instruction* presents what has been studied in this field, which resources have been used so far and the existing materials for teaching pragmatics.

2.1. *Research on Italian pragmatics instruction and acquisition*

Although with a delay in comparison to other languages, Italian pragmatics has started to be studied in the last few years with a particular interest in the different educational paths to follow (Del Bono, Nuzzo, 2016). However, it is complicated to identify an appropriate use of pragmatic forms even for teachers of Italian, especially if they are non-native Italian speakers (NNSs). Ferrari, Nuzzo and Zanoni (2016) provided an example of the varied uses of tenses in the *realis mood*⁴ in Italian. Every teacher should be able to explain the different uses of the verbs in *realis mood* but they might ignore how to teach students to perform a complaint or a compliment correctly. Speech acts have multiple versions according to the context. Correspondingly, it is difficult to provide a correct answer in case of a wrong use by language learners, and it is even more difficult to provide an explanation for such corrections. Teachers should therefore lead language learners to reflect on which particular linguistic feature would have positively influenced the speech act. Hence, pragmatics resulted in being fundamental for social purposes and as necessary as other linguistic aspects of languages (e.g. morphology, syntax, phonology).

A study conducted by Gauci, Ghia and Caruana (2016) investigated how much Italian pragmatics was taught to NNSs and whether they were able to teach it. Participants were students at specific courses for teaching Italian at the University of Malta. A sample of 15 students was examined by NSs through a discourse completion task (DCT) and role plays. Results demonstrated that proficiency was not directly proportionate to pragmatic competence. This study hence suggested that a specific preparation on pragmatics and the way to teach it is fundamental.

Spadotto and Santoro's study on requests (2016) demonstrated that the greater the distance between the interlocutors and the social position is, the greater the number of mitigators⁵ will be used. In other words, a request is more demanding if the interlocutors are not intimate and from the same social status, and mitigators are used as softeners of the request.

A later study by De Marco and Leone (2016) showed that in incrementing the formality of the communication, the choice of discourse markers gets more varied (e.g. *allora, va be', ecco, sì sì*). Moreover, the semantic aspects increase, for example words for expressing either agreement or disagreement (e.g. *sì però*), and elements of redefinition of the sentence (e.g. *non lo so, diciamo*). In addition, the state of the art by Nuzzo and Santoro (2017) provided an overview of all the studies regarding Italian pragmatics since the 2000s, with a particular attention to specific areas as speech acts and discourse markers. According to the researchers, the unclear correlation between pragmatic forms and the contextual factors may generate confusion to learners of Italian as a FL causing difficulties to acquire pragmatics features. In addition, in Nuzzo and Santoro's review, requests emerged being the most investigated speech act.

⁴ In Italian: modo indicativo.

⁵ Mitigators refer to adverbs that reduce the intensity of verbs considered too direct and extreme.

2.2. *Materials and resources for pragmatics instruction*

Despite the fact that research on pragmatics' development has increased in the last decades, resources regarding SL/FL Italian pragmatics are still limited, especially materials dedicated to pragmatics instruction and testing (Ferrari *et al.*, 2016). It is supposed that the reason is the gap between research and language practice. Research is not able to cope with the multiple issues regarding pragmatics instruction, thus, it is difficult to provide a solution for teaching pragmatics directly applicable in the classroom context. This section presents and describes the materials and resources that have emerged from previous research focusing on pragmatics: textbooks, recipes, videos, role plays, and the computer mediated technologies.

A study that aimed to emphasise cultural and pragmatic aspects of Italian was the one by Fortunati (2015), who conducted a research on the pragmatic features in the context of Italian recipes. Being the Italian cuisine a symbol of Italian culture all around the world, in Fortunati's study recipes were defined as a cultural object, a representation of Italian pragmatics. Hence, language learners can acquire pragmatic features from the conjunction of three elements: work, art, and communication. It is the first time that the linguistic aspect of recipes has been deeply investigated. Thus, recipes may be considered a resource for teaching pragmatics.

To fill in the gap in teaching practice, researchers decided to focus on textbooks used in language courses (Nuzzo, 2013, 2015). Coursebooks make a significant contribution in language instruction, in particular in FL contexts, where they constitute the principal input learners are exposed to. Research has shown that Italian and English textbooks are unreliable representations of the different pragmatic features and they lack natural discourse patterns, and therefore avoid representing the real forms of language (Martinez-Flor, 2008; Nuzzo, 2013; Usó-Juan, 2007). There is a great necessity of textbooks with an implementation of a section dedicated to pragmatics for getting the foreign students nearer to the use of Italian speech acts (Spadotto, Santoro, 2016). The choice of the textbooks to use in a language course is thus decisive, especially in schools where teachers are obliged to follow a specific manual. Following this need, Nuzzo (2013) compared pragmatic elements present in textbooks and the speech of Italian television counting the number of modifiers in use of the thanking speech act. Modifiers were notably less present in textbooks, therefore, manuals resulted in being inadequate for providing an effective pragmatic input, in particular regarding thanking expressions. Thus, Italian teachers should rely on resources beyond textbooks, such as either their abilities as NSs or dialogues in films. In a successive study, Nuzzo (2015: 104) compared the speech acts of compliments and invitations in SL manuals to TV series, as a source for teaching pragmatics to SL learners of Italian. The study confirmed that:

SL books are unlikely to help learners develop pragmatic competence, and teachers and textbook writers should rely less on their NSs' intuitions and more on naturalistic data, or at least on TV material.

According to these results, Nuzzo (2016) investigated the realization of educational materials for Italian as a FL, in particular how compliments and thanking speech acts were performed in listening exercises of manuals for teaching Italian as a SL and the speech of some TV series and some natural conversations. 25 textbooks were thus compared to three popular TV series on national television⁶, and the number of modifiers were counted. The findings showed that modifiers were almost double in the TV series. As other studies have also proved, the spontaneous talks and excerpts from films or TV series

⁶ On the RAI channels.

are more similar to natural discourse than the audio from textbooks (Nuzzo, 2016; Santoro, 2016; Usó-Juan, 2007) due to the higher number of internal and external modifiers in the authentic audiovisual material. Hence, teachers should not only rely on the listening exercises in the coursebooks, but they should also make use of any possible authentic audiovisual resource for teaching Italian expressions (Tomassetti, 2016). By using videos, teachers can draw NNSs' attention to the paraverbal aspects⁷ of communication rather than the exercises that are in the textbooks. Therefore, videos might be more complete than textbooks since they show more information regarding how NSs express themselves (Dal Bono, Nuzzo, 2015). Another reason for their effectiveness is the possibility to see the speakers' gestures, since Italian NSs produce more spontaneous gestures than NSs in any other language (Sekine, Stam, Yoshioka, Tellier, Capirci, 2015).

In recent research on pragmatics, it has also been promoted to engage students as active participants in the classroom, in order to let students practice the metapragmatic explanations provided by the teachers. This practice is referred to as role play (Moreno-Guerrero, Rodríguez-Jiménez, Gómez-García, Navas-Parejo, 2020). It is an educational method in which language learners basically act and use the TL. Students pretend to be someone in a specific situation in which they need to interact in order to accomplish a specific objective (e.g. buying a ticket at the cinema, apologizing to a close friend, going to a restaurant, having a job interview, etc.) The possibilities are infinite since all situations can be recreated from everyday life. Hence, the first rule of role playing is to act as close as possible to reality. It is a technique that started in the 1970s, although role play has been promoted only recently as an effective tool to be used, due to the increasingly active role of students in the classroom (Moreno-Guerrero *et. al.*, 2020).

Similarly, research in Italian language has shown how role plays are essential in assessing pragmatics (e.g. Gauci *et al.*, 2016; Santoro, 2016). As in Gauci *et al.*, Santoro (2016) with Italian NSs and Brazilian NNSs whose proficiency of Italian was upper-intermediate, semi-open role plays were used for investigating the role of requests in action. This study showed how much the native language influenced SL performance, since Brazilian learners performed requests with Portuguese influence. In addition, the findings revealed that there were three stages used for requests: the manipulation in which the participants started the speech act, the action where the recipient decided which position to adopt, and the realisation, when participants acknowledged the answers of the interlocutor, of either an acceptance or a refusal.

Finally, the employment of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) started being used to facilitate pragmatics acquisition. The study by Cohen and Sykes (2013) presented two different e-learning platforms for the specific purpose of teaching socio-pragmatics. The first one is the website *Dancing with Words: Strategies for Learning Pragmatics in Spanish*⁸ that was created with the specific aim to teach Spanish pragmatics. Every module was dedicated to a different speech act (e.g. compliments, apologies, requests). Researchers also took into account the different dialects, such as Latin American Spanish and Peninsular Spanish. Additionally, language learners were able to assess their knowledge of speech acts with different activities such as multiple choice and listening activities. The second tool was an imaginary virtual world called *Croquelandia*⁹, which is a synthetic immersive environment (SIE) with an educational purpose. Users could practise Spanish pragmatics interacting with NSs' avatars in the virtual platform. On the one hand, Cohen and Syke's study (2013) demonstrated that the website was a perfect tool for delivering contents. On the other hand, *Croquelandia* was more successful for practising the

⁷ All the elements not verbally expressed in a language such as tone, intonation and gestures.

⁸ https://carla.umn.edu/speechacts/sp_pragmatics/home.html.

⁹ <https://sites.google.com/site/croquelandia/Home>.

appropriate use of the metapragmatic strategies, since they were pretending to be in a parallel reality.

Another example of CALL is *Words at work*, an interactive learning platform designed by Wain, Timpe-Laughlin and Oh (2019), which was created to help English language learners improve their pragmatic abilities at the workplace in the United States. Users initially received instructions on pragmatic forms in a video. Afterwards, they had the chance to practise what they had acquired in nine units, each one dedicated to either a different sociopragmatic aspect or speech act. Every unit represented a different aspect of workplace life, such as the job hunt and the job interview. The strength of this kind of tool is the possibility for language learners to practise pragmatic features without feeling any awkwardness or anxiety typical when talking with NSs. Blogs and virtual platforms bring languages closer to learners (Herraiz-Martínez, 2018). To date, no tools that teach Italian pragmatics have been developed, aside from the project LIRA.

LIRA (Learning Italian language/culture on the Web)¹⁰ is the first multimedia repository entirely dedicated to the recovery, diffusion and development of the pragmatic elements and Italian culture (Zanoni, 2014). It was born from a triennial project funded by the Basic Research Investment Fund (FIRB) and the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR), with the collaboration of four universities in Italy¹¹ in 2012. LIRA has been developed with the same features of social networks and virtual communities. The main areas covered are the use of personal pronouns¹², speech acts (requests, compliments, complaints, apologies, etc), starting conversations with strangers, and comprehension of humour. Every category is characterized by a different content linguistically pertinent (e.g. videos, pictures, introductory texts) and contains a different didactic itinerary to follow with exercises and activities (Dal Bono, Nuzzo, 2016). The most interesting resource of LIRA is the forum, where users can share impressions and experiences regarding Italian expressions, in order to raise awareness of pragmatic features; it has often been found that multiple feedback between users is the strength of this repository (Zanoni, 2016). The project aims to help language learners to develop the fundamentals of pragmatics and to aid Italian immigrants in maintaining their Italian proficiency while living in other countries (Zanoni, 2018). A tool like LIRA is essential for improving pragmatics skills since researchers and practitioners have highlighted the importance of a systematic tool to implement pragmatics teaching (Wain *et al.*, 2019).

To sum up, it has been proved in research that instruction is fundamental for developing pragmatic abilities in the TL and that noticing and practising pragmatic features is a potential educational process to follow. Nevertheless, there is a lack of materials and resources, especially in Italian. Videos and TV series appear to be the most appropriate resources for providing effective input in the classroom context. In particular, it has been found that Italian textbooks often lack the appropriate content to teach pragmatics compared to TV series (Nuzzo, 2013, 2015, 2016). Furthermore, role plays are an appropriate activity for producing and practising the TL. In addition, to our knowledge, LIRA represents the only tool created with the intention of exploring Italian pragmatics for its acquisition and preservation.

To fill the gaps identified in the literature review, this study aims to describe the materials related to pragmatics instruction that are used in classroom contexts by teachers of Italian as SL/FL, and to promote the LIRA project. Furthermore, it intends to offer guidelines to teach pragmatics in the classroom. Therefore, two research questions have guided this study:

¹⁰ Lingua/cultura Italiana in Rete per l'Apprendimento: <http://lira.unistrapg.it/?q=node/1006>.

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¹² In Italian linguistics they are defined “*allocuzioni*”.

- 1) What kind of materials do Italian SL/FL teachers use for teaching pragmatics?
- 2) What are the most prevalent techniques employed by Italian SL/FL teachers for pragmatics instruction?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. *Participants*

A total of 139 participants took part in the study. The study originally involved 151 people but it was necessary to remove those whose answers were incomplete. They were all Italian NSs who were either living in Italy or in other countries at the time of the data collection. Participants were recruited because they were members of the three main groups of Italian teachers on Facebook. Social networks are utilized for communication and social interactions, where members with the same interests can virtually meet, share opinions and experiences (Espinosa, 2015). The three groups were chosen due to their large number of members and their focus on Italian acquisition: *Italian teachers in Catalonia*, *Italian for foreigners* and *Italian teachers in the world*¹³. To be part of these groups, the minimum requirement was to be a language teacher and to mention either the institution or the company that you worked for; freelancers were also welcome (as specified at the moment of the registration). The platforms of these groups showed posts between teachers regarding mainly issues raised in their classrooms. In addition, one of the main objectives of these groups was to provide information about new teaching techniques since they were frequently mentioned in the teachers' posts. There were several posts which advertised webinars and talks that could be joined by the group members. As will be further discussed in the results section, the majority of the participants previously gave face-to-face classes, only a few of them gave synchronized online classes and the remaining teachers made use of both modalities. Most of them had been teaching Italian for more than three years.

3.2. *Instrument*

To elicit the materials and to collect the data a questionnaire was prepared (see in Appendix the original version in Italian). The questionnaire was quite short and contained nine questions. Teachers' details were not collected on purpose, since the main interest was in the materials and resources used for teaching pragmatics rather than the Italian teachers' personal details. Furthermore, due to the qualitative nature of this study, most of the questions were open-ended. The main objective was to discover all possible material currently in use for teaching Italian pragmatics. The questionnaire was written in Italian using Google form and posted on the main Facebook groups with a brief introduction regarding its content. Participants answered within a week. The questionnaire was titled *The materials of Italian pragmatics. A questionnaire addressed to teachers of Italian as SL and FL* (see Appendix). Although some teachers may not have realised immediately what the questionnaire was about, they knew they could likely contribute even if they did not know what Italian pragmatics was. The post containing the survey included a brief description stating the purpose of the research and it specified that the questionnaire lasted only a few minutes to be completed and that further explanation would have been provided in the case the content was not clear enough. Then, they were

¹³ Original groups' names: *Insegnanti di italiano in Catalogna*, *Italiano per stranieri*, *Insegnanti di italiano nel mondo*.

asked how long they had been teaching Italian and how they were teaching, through face-to-face lessons or online synchronized classes before the lockdown. Because of the exceptional period during which the study was conducted, it was necessary to make this distinction.

The central part of the questionnaire explained what pragmatics referred to, in the case that they had never heard about the pragmatics of Italian. A brief explanation introduced pragmatics as the ability to use the lexicon and grammar forms of a language appropriately according to the situation, the context, and the interlocutor. Speech acts were mentioned, such as compliments, requests, acknowledgments, complaints, refusals, and apologies. Finally, different Italian discourse markers were introduced such as *figurati*, *però*, *quindi*, *insomma*, etc. All this information was provided since as Ferrari *et al.* (2016) claims, most teachers tend to ignore what pragmatics is, even if they have been teaching these language forms for a long time. Following the pragmatics' definition provided, in the same question it was asked whether they had taught pragmatics' features to their students, and what kind of materials they used. The next question asked which teaching approaches they employed for teaching Italian pragmatics. It was a closed-ended question where they could choose more than one option, between lexicon exercises, grammar exercises, listening exercises, role plays, conversation classes, watching a video and discussing together, reading texts from books, and finally, none of these options, if they did not debate pragmatics in the classroom.

The answers were chosen based on the most common techniques used so far for teaching Italian pragmatics according to research and personal experience (Nuzzo *et al.*, 2017). Finally, it was asked whether a particular textbook was employed. This question was open-ended too and asked if any textbook helped in teaching pragmatics rather than another one. The answers to these three questions represent the main focus of this study. In the last part of the questionnaire, the LIRA project was introduced. The link to the webpage was provided to give the participants the possibility to have a look once their curiosity had been aroused.

3.3. *Data Analysis*

The answers were analysed in two different ways. The results obtained by closed-ended questions were reported in graphs, in percentages. The answers to questions number six and eight regarding the kind of material and resources used were debated separately since they were open-ended questions; participants provided long and personal answers. Following Mackey and Gass (2015), the current study has adopted the grounded theory approach, due to the qualitative nature of the study. The grounded theory states that going through the same data guides the process of coding and analysis, from details to a larger context (Chaudron, 2000). This method has been chosen to avoid any bias on the data analysis to conduct. To our knowledge, this kind of study has never been conducted in relation to Italian pragmatics research, due to the lack of research in comparison with other languages like English and the absence of specific material related to Italian pragmatics, except the platform LIRA (Del Bono, 2016). Therefore, when a kind of material or resource was mentioned by a participant in their answer, it was transcribed in an Excel form and it was counted every time it was repeated by some other participant. Items that were considered a similar resource, were written next to each other. To sum up, all the information provided in question number six was transcribed and counted. For instance, a teacher answered: "Examples of daily life, conversations, audio and video files". In this case, *daily life*, *conversations*, *audio files*, *video files* were reported on the list. When another teacher repeated some of these items, for example: "Videos, worksheets, audios, reality-tasks" this was indicated as 'repeated' in the *videos* and *audio* list. Thus, it was

possible to conduct an inductive data analysis by following the grounded theory. A pattern was observed going through the teachers' answers since some items were either repeated or similar to each other. Five main categories were created for clustering the different kinds of materials: *printed material*, *audiovisual material*, *self-produced authentic material*, *students' oral production*, and *digital material*. Hence, the teachers' terminology, which was related to how teachers named the different materials in the questionnaire, allowed us to create and label the five categories of the most common materials and resources to teach pragmatics nowadays. Finally, the previous quoted literature review regarding Italian pragmatics was taken as a source for deciding how to regroup the categories (Nuzzo, 2016; Nuzzo *et al.* 2017; Del Bono, 2016; Santoro *et al.*, 2016).

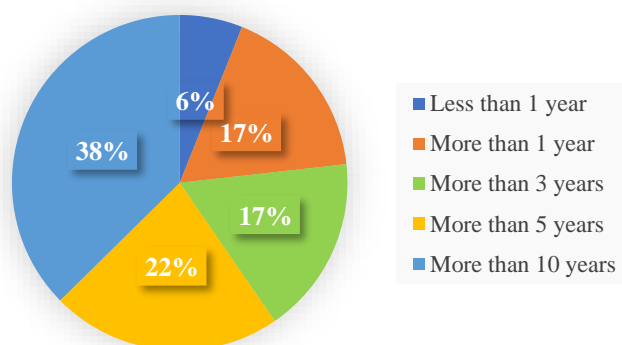
4. RESULTS

Results are presented in three different sections. First, section number 4.1. *Teachers and pragmatics*, contains the results regarding the participants' working experience and their use of pragmatics in the classroom. Second, section number 4.2. *The materials and the resources*, refers to the description of the materials and resources in order of acclaim; in other words, from the most to the least mentioned item in the questionnaire. Then, subsection 4.2.1. *Printed materials* includes the most used textbooks at the end. Finally, section number 4.3 illustrates the *teaching techniques* for pragmatics instruction.

4.1. *Teachers and pragmatics*

Outcomes of the questionnaire reported that 71 participants were living in Italy and 68 abroad at the moment of data collection, thus, we could deduce that 51% of the participants lived in Italy and taught Italian as a SL; 49% taught Italian as a FL and answered from all over the world. 54 participants, 37% of the total amount, were experienced teachers since they had been teaching Italian for more than 10 years, 22% for more than five years, 17% for more than three years, and 17% for more than one year. Only 9 participants, 6%, had been working as teachers for less than one year (see Figure 1).

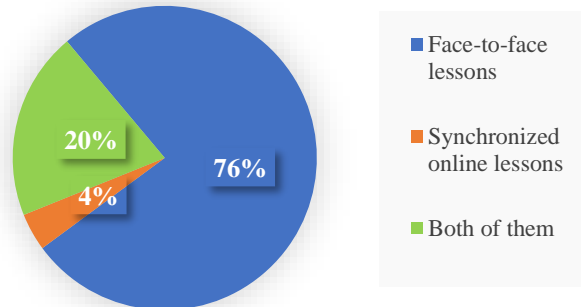
Figure 1. *Time of Italian instruction*



As previously mentioned in the participants section, most of them (76%) were teaching face-to-face before the lockdown and 20% of the sample worked in both face-to-face

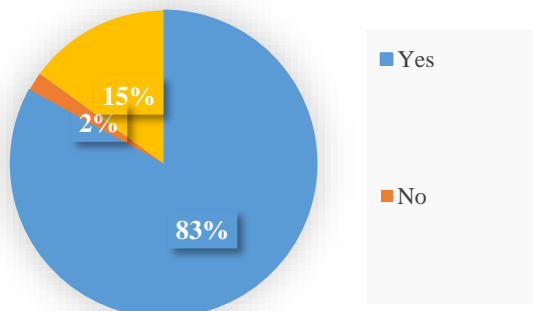
classes and in online synchronized classes; five teachers worked only online (4%; see Figure n. 2).

Figure 2. *Lessons typology*



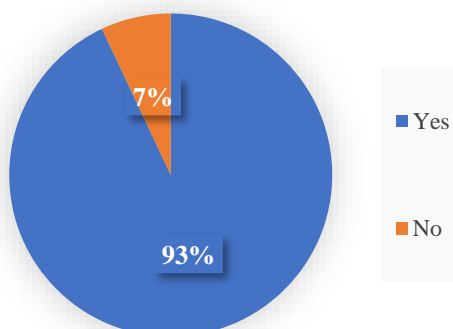
Regarding pragmatics, the majority knew what this discipline was (83%), 15% had heard about it but did not relate it to the term *pragmatics*, and 2% of the sample did not know what it was exactly (Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Knowledge about pragmatics*



However, 93% of the participants claimed having taught pragmatics in the classroom context and only 7% did not (Figure 4).

Figure 4. *Pragmatics instruction*

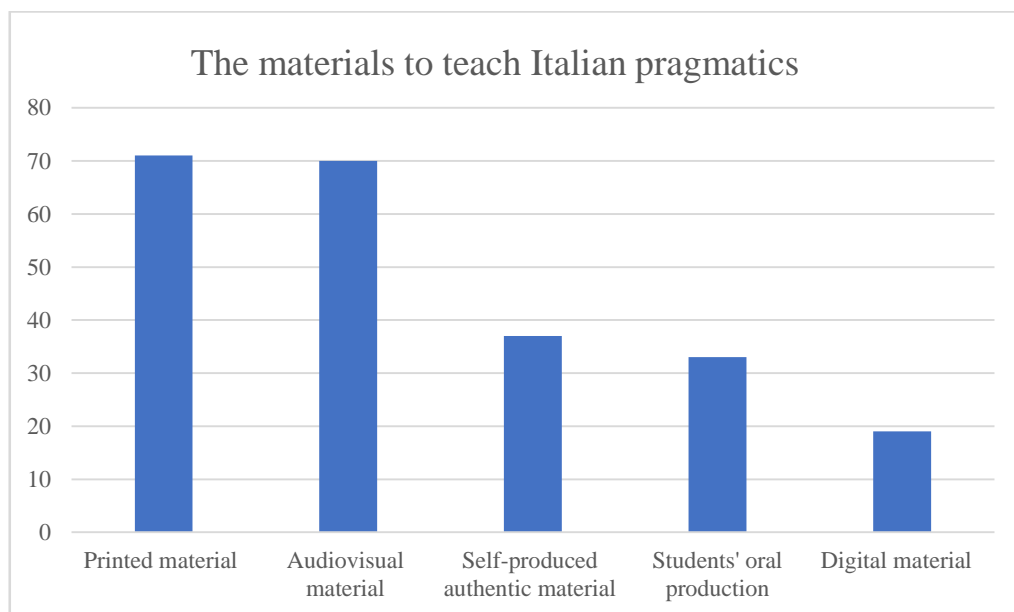


Those who provided an explanation regarding not teaching pragmatics, explained that they had omitted it due to their students being too young or not proficient enough.

4.2. *The material and the resources*

To answer the first research question, the most popular materials to teach pragmatics were: *printed material*, mentioned 71 times, followed by *audiovisual material* with 70 references, after *self-produced authentic material* (36 times), *students' oral production* (34) and finally *digital material* (19). The total of all mentions was 230 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. *The materials mentioned by the teachers*



Due to the complexity of the materials, every kind of material is presented in a different subsection. It is specified how many times each material was mentioned by participants.

4.2.1. *Printed material*

In this section, *textbooks*, *articles*, *magazines*, *comics*, and *fiction books* were included. Textbooks seemed to be the main resource for teachers. They were mentioned 58 times out of the 71 total mentions regarding printed materials. This can be exemplified by excerpt 1, which showed what the teacher's perspective towards textbooks was.

Excerpt 1

(Teacher number 34) T34: “the new text-books with communicative approach give space to the development of pragmatic competences”¹⁴.

The textbook *Nuovo Espresso*, published by *Alma Edizioni*, was considered the most popular textbook by participants of this study. Communication plays a key role in this textbook since the majority of the exercises are speaking tasks. In addition, pragmatics

¹⁴ Every excerpt was translated from Italian.

instruction plays a central role, whereas grammar is presented as a support for acquiring the different speech acts. As reported by excerpt 2, another teacher wrote:

Excerpt 2

T77: In the textbooks, there are often units on these elements; I mostly use *Alma Edizioni*.

Excerpt 3

T133: In several Italian coursebooks there are activities with regard to this aspect – *pragmatics* – for example in the manuals *Magari*, *Nuovo Contatto* and *Nuovo Espresso*. Furthermore, these are aspects that arise either reading a text or listening to an informal conversation.

As announced in excerpt 3, *Magari* is a coursebook published by *Alma Edizioni* with the specific purpose to help the upper-intermediate and advanced students to improve their Italian. The coursebook focuses on the cultural aspects of the country. Another book called *Ricette per parlare*, published by *Alma Edizioni* was also mentioned by two participants (see excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4

T131: I use textbooks like *Nuovo Espresso* and *Ricette per parlare* (*Alma Edizioni*).

Ricette per parlare is another textbook published by *Alma Edizioni*, which is entirely dedicated to teaching how to orally communicate, providing suggestions to teachers on how to divide students in pairs or groups and several tips for preparing interactive speaking activities. Besides, it contains a section with the most popular Italian recipes. Recipes have a relevant cluster of communicative elements and represent an important cultural aspect of the Italian language. The teacher n. 126 wrote:

Excerpt 5

T126: If the coursebook debates it - *pragmatics* – for example, with listening exercises, I make them do it, if we “meet” randomly anything, in a text, in a video, etc. I make them notice it. If this raises any questions, I explain pragmatics to them.

Excerpt 5 underlines the importance of manuals in a language course, since if pragmatics was not mentioned, the teacher would not even have dealt with it in the classroom. Nevertheless, in some cases the coursebooks represent a starting point for the teachers for developing their material, which will be explained in the section of *self-produced authentic material*. As reported in Excerpt 6:

Excerpt 6

T109: “In *Espresso e Contatto* there are some clues, I start from those for producing my own new material”.

Contatto is a textbook published by *Loescher Editore* and was named by three teachers, and, later on, by nine people in question number nine related to the manuals. On the *Loescher* website, *Contatto* is described as a textbook that integrates a pragmatic-communicative approach with the systematic study of grammar. This publishing house provides not only textbooks but also audiovisual and digital material, as will be described in the section 4.2.5. Another textbook called *Al dente*, published by *Casa delle lingue* was mentioned by 10 teachers in this study. It is an innovative textbook in which students play

an active role in the learning process and the approach is strongly lexical oriented. As delineated by excerpt 7, teacher n. 9 wrote:

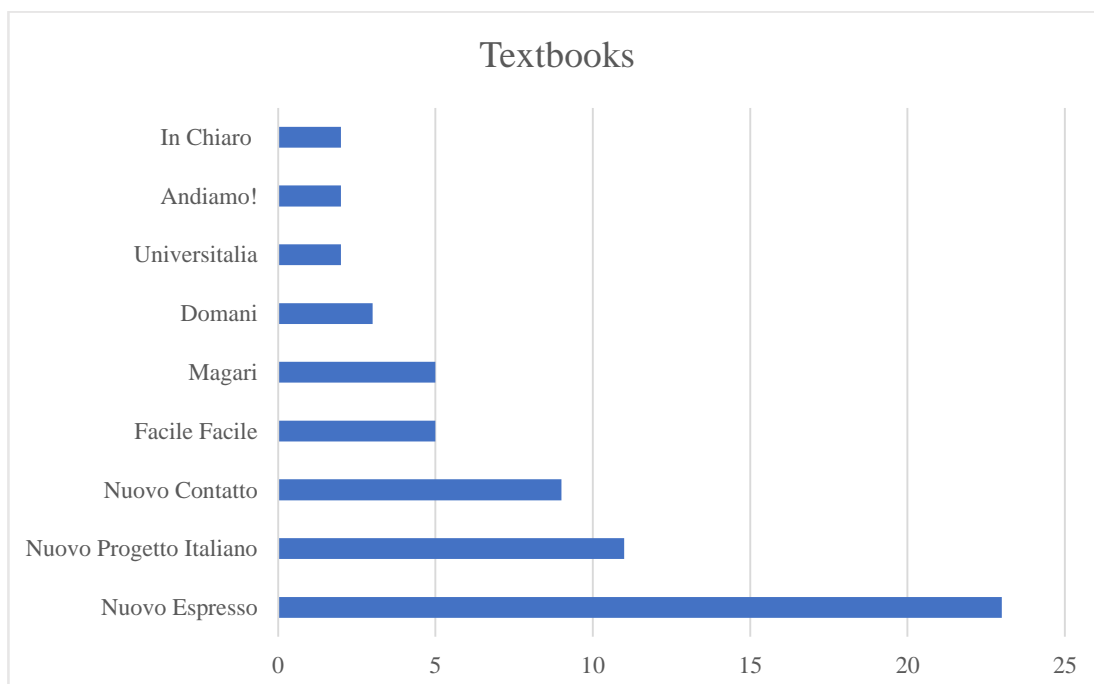
Excerpt 7

T9: Authentic adapted resources and texts that refer to this aspect of the language (for example *Al dente* with the topic of discourse markers).

This answer was counted as one point for authentic material and one for textbook. Going through the rest of the printed material, *articles* were mentioned four times (with one reference to *scientific articles*), *fiction books* were named four times, *comics* three times, and *magazines* twice. In total, printed materials were nominated 71 times.

The eighth question asked which textbook they referred to, if they used a particular one (not correlated to pragmatics instruction). As previously mentioned *Nuovo Espresso* resulted to be the most popular, 23 teachers said to have used it (see Figure 6); thus, it resulted in being the most used in comparison to how often the other manuals were mentioned in this study. The second most mentioned textbook was *Nuovo Progetto Italiano* published by *Edilingua* (11 participants), followed by *Nuovo Contatto* published by *Loescher Editore*, as mentioned before (nine). *Alma Edizioni* confirmed to be the publishing house of reference at this moment since it was mentioned six times followed by *Loescher Editore* (twice). The remaining coursebooks mentioned more than once were *Facile Facile* (five times, published by *Nina Edizioni*), *Magari* (by five participants), *Domani* (by three), and *Universitalia* (by two) published by *AlmaEdizioni*, *Andiamo!* (two times, published by *Loescher Editore*), and finally *In Chiaro* (by two teachers, published by *Mondadori Scuola*).

Figure 6. *Textbooks used*



4.2.2. *Audiovisual material*

Audiovisual material was the second most mentioned material, with a total of 70 times out of the total 230. In this section *videos* (that were named 42 times), *movies* eight times,

advertisements three times were included. Furthermore, *Audio files* were mentioned 12 times. *Radio interviews* were counted four times and *songs* only once.

In the questionnaire, videos have been described as an effective resource for teaching pragmatics. As mentioned in excerpt 8, teacher number 106 wrote:

Excerpt 8

T106: Looking for videos or conversations to compare the different uses of the language and to understand together when to use a certain form depending on the context.

According to teacher number 106, videos and conversations were used to create comparisons between different forms and speech acts. Hence videos can be used as a tool for raising awareness among students about the several uses of the words, according to context and the interlocutor. The role of the teacher is to help the student to notice the different uses of language and the forms that are supposed to be learned. Teacher number 106 assisted in identifying the most relevant aspects emerging from the video and understanding them. In addition, teacher number 126 referred to videos as a resource for arousing interest and questions between students in excerpt 5 in the section 4.2.1. Participant number 9 said:

Excerpt 9

T9: Especially excerpts from radio interviews or recordings of *unread* conversations, authentic communicative contexts from which to draw and observe these elements.

Teacher number nine raised an interesting point regarding the importance of including authentic audios in the classroom for teaching pragmatics. Audios also represent a resource of authentic input in FL instruction. Besides, the inclusion of a script can be a distraction from focusing on oral aspects like the cadence and the intonation.

4.2.3. *Self-produced authentic material*

Several teachers mentioned producing their own material to make up for the lack of specific resources for teaching pragmatics. This may be a specific necessity of Italian teaching rather than other languages where there is a wide selection of authentic material to draw on. It is assumed that since participants were Italian NSs, they were aware of the pragmatic elements to be shared with their students, and they were able to create material *ad hoc*. Unfortunately, nobody gave precise information about how they prepared their material, but as shown in excerpt 6 in the textbooks section, the books provided tips to start from. For instance, as reported by excerpt 10, teacher number 131 said:

Excerpt 10

T131: I normally make my didactic material for explaining the different aspects of pragmatics.

Therefore, the self-produced authentic material was nominated 27 times. In the same section the item *reality* was included, which appeared eight times. Since a teacher answered to have used *didactic outings* for teaching pragmatics in the classroom, it can be assumed that this is what the label *reality* referred to. This section hence contained in total 36 mentions by the teachers out of the total of 230.

Excerpt 11

T14: I have not used materials, except the reality that my students live in. I asked them to analyse why some sentences are used...

As teacher number 14 wrote by excerpt 11, in the case of SL teaching, teachers made use of the *reality* outside the classroom. According to teachers, the environment was full of stimuli for learning the pragmatics of a language.

4.2.4. *Students' oral production*

18 teachers of this study claimed to have used *role plays* for teaching pragmatics and 10 to have used *dialogues* during their lessons. This category was labelled *students' oral production* due to the main focus on conversation practice between the students rather than actual material used by teachers. By using role plays, students practise the target language to learn the actual use of different speech acts and discourse markers; especially in the case of FL Italian learners, who live in a context with another dominant language other than Italian (see excerpts 12 and 13).

Excerpt 12

T49: Simulating situational dialogues in which context-related actions can be taken (for example refusing, accepting, giving information, etc). Using connective, discursive and widely used markers.

Excerpt 13

T29: Mainly reading and performing either dialogues, or situations, or role plays. I have emphasized the importance of some speech acts (nevertheless by not calling them in this way), especially in their locutory effectiveness, with the purpose to provoke the reaction of wrong or missing speech act.

Hence, oral production was fundamental for learning through making mistakes and for understanding the learners' main problems when using pragmatics. Teacher number 123 declared to have asked students to speak in public places when they travel to Italy, by excerpt 14.

Excerpt 14

T123: Clues from the textbook, authentic material like for example electric bill, several subscriptions (newspaper, magazines, etc), really often role plays and when I hang out with my students (when we go to Italy) I ask them to talk, to order at the restaurant and the bar, to pay at the supermarket, etc.

According to T123, teachers should assume the role of guides for students in order for them to benefit from the surrounding reality while they are in Italy, especially in the case of SL instruction. Finally, in this section *fun-educational activities* were named four times. *Peer education* once (in other words the feedback provided by other peers in the classes) and *games* once as well.

4.2.5. *Digital material*

Any material named that was available online except for *videos* and *audio files* (that were included in the audiovisual section) was included in the digital material category. In this

category, the following labels appeared: *web*, nominated seven times, *corpora* three times, *digital material* mentioned twice, *social media* twice, *chat screenshots* once, and *online pictures* once. Another resource mentioned once in this section was the printable material available on the website of the previously mentioned publishing house *Loescher*, as specified in excerpt 15.

Excerpt 15

T11: Authentic material, videos, advertisements, textbooks, printable material published by Loescher, for instance.

In the section *multimedia contents* dedicated to teaching Italian as a FL on the *Loescher* webpage, it is possible to find several interactive games to print (for instance, flashcards) to develop the use of determined speech acts, grammar forms, vocabulary and discourse markers. Whenever the interest is typed in the search bar, it will appear in pdf format.

Finally, only two participants nominated the repository online LIRA, that is, to our knowledge, the only online specific platform for learning Italian pragmatics. 87.4% of the sample did not know what LIRA was, compared to 12.6 % that knew it. Regarding LIRA participant number 110 commented (by excerpt 16):

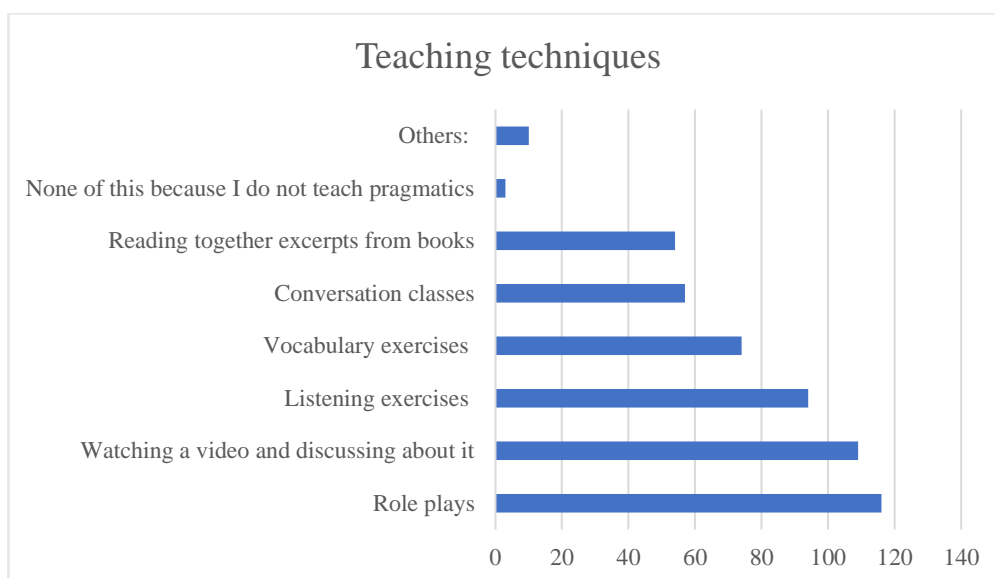
Excerpt 16

T110: The syllabus does not always provide enough activities for empowering pragmatics; hence I use extra material *ad hoc* and videos. LIRA also exists, but, since I am in China, the internet has a lot of limitations for using this resource (not only the censure for YouTube, Facebook, etc).

Unfortunately, the videos uploaded as an example on LIRA are not available abroad, due to the accessibility restrictions in every country. On the other hand, the platform is rich in written content that can be read everywhere, for instance, the online discussion site.

4.3. *Teaching techniques*

Figure 7. *Various teaching techniques*



To answer research question number two, regarding the most prevalent techniques employed by Italian SL/FL teachers to teach pragmatics, participants answered predominantly *role plays* (selected 116 times) and *watching a video and discussing about it* (109). In addition to that, *listening exercises* (94), *vocabulary exercises* (74); *conversation classes* (57) got similar results to *reading together excerpts from books* (54) (see Figure 7). *None of this because I do not teach pragmatics* was selected three times and *Others* 10 times. Participants could select more than one option.

Out of the 10 teachers that selected *Others*, three of them wrote similar comments that referred to all the situations listed above in this section. Three others explained with their own words that they did not address this topic in the classroom. Finally, four teachers wrote:

Excerpt 17

T58: Pronunciation exercises and intonation.

Excerpt 18

T99: Reading statements with or without context.

Excerpt 19

T119: I generally expose them to an authentic input, we identify the phenomena and their function, we often refer to their own native language and we use them again.

Excerpt 20

T20: DCT.

Thus, pronunciation and intonation exercises played an important role for learning pragmatics, according to the T58. T99 specified that reading a statement did not necessarily need a context, as an activity for learning pragmatics. T119 referred to exposing students to authentic input, comparing it to their native language. Finally, T20 mentioned DCT as an activity for teaching pragmatics.

5. DISCUSSION

The present study provides a description of the materials, resources and teaching methods used frequently by teachers in Italian pragmatics instruction. Findings in the current study pointed out the interest of Italian teachers towards pragmatics. They acknowledged the importance of the choice of words in different speech acts and where and how to use pragmatic features. Incorporating pragmatics in everyday lessons was considered to be the crucial part in teaching Italian as a FL in the classroom. This goes in line with previous research in the field. It has been claimed that the pragmatic component of language is as important as grammar and vocabulary, and consequently, teachers should pay as much attention towards including pragmatics in their lessons for a well-structured curriculum (Kasper, 2001; Taguchi, 2011). While this aspect of language learning is still limited by the scarce amount of teaching materials, pragmatics teaching has the potential to involve language learners in the real use of Italian.

Despite this, the present study confirmed the lack of appropriate materials directed to Italian pragmatics instruction (Ferrari *et al.*, 2016). To answer the first research question (“what kind of materials and resources were used for Italian pragmatics instruction?”), we examined the teachers’ answers from the online questionnaire and findings lead to the conclusion that the resources used were mainly textbooks, in the printed materials

category, and videos, from the audiovisual material category. While audiovisual materials are known as a tool for pragmatics instruction in ESL/ EFL research and in Italian as a SL/FL research for representing authentic dialogues (Alcón-Soler, 2005, 2007; Nuzzo's studies), results regarding textbooks as a main resource for teaching pragmatics were unexpected. So far, previous literature has looked into the use of Italian textbooks as the primary source for pragmatics teaching in traditional language classrooms. As claimed in the literature review, the dialogues in these textbooks in comparison to the dialogues in TV series, however, do not fully convey the essence of day-to-day communications among NSs and are limited by various reasons; namely the lack of modifiers in acknowledgments (Nuzzo, 2013), in compliments and invitations (Nuzzo, 2015). The dialogues in TV series contained the same number of modifiers in the communication among NSs. According to participants' answers, on the one hand, coursebooks were a fundamental resource for teaching Italian since they were the only guidelines provided. On the other hand, textbooks did not offer any activities to enforce the knowledge of pragmatics. In some excerpts, if manuals did not introduce pragmatic features, teachers did not force the subject. In addition, textbooks were used by teachers to develop ideas for their own materials, to implement instructions. According to the results of the present study, self-produced authentic material was the third most used kind of resource to teach pragmatics. Due to the lack of specific resources, teachers had to develop their own activities and materials to cover the gaps left from the textbooks.

Despite the lack of authentic dialogues and relevant contents, language teachers have nowhere else to turn to for pragmatics resources other than the obsolete textbooks. Nevertheless, two publishing houses showed concerns on how to help teachers to develop activities on pragmatics in the classroom: *Alma Edizioni* and *Loescher Editore*. The textbooks of these publishers are focused on pragmatics as much as on grammar, providing several activities and tips for guiding teachers. These books provide several references about the correct performance of speech acts according to the context and the interlocutor, while focusing on students' production.

Students' oral practice indeed appeared as a frequent resource for teaching pragmatics, confirming previous research (Moreno-Guerrero *et al.*, 2020). Students' oral production has been defined as a useful method for learning by means of errors and trials, in the present study. For instance, when students make a mistake while performing a speech act, the other interlocutor will react in a determined way that will help language learners to remember to not make the same mistake again. Teachers said they guide students to take advantage of the external environment and to appropriately communicate in the case of a SL context, for instance by educational outings.

Digital material resulted being the fifth and last category of tools teachers rely on for pragmatic instruction. *Alma Edizioni* and *Loescher Editore* provide a lot of digital contents in addition to printed material on their webpages. Students and teachers can find a large quantity of audiovisual content, exercises, interactive activities and in particular on *Loescher's* website there are many games related to pragmatics and grammar in pdf format to be printed. To our knowledge, LIRA is the only online platform exclusively dedicated to the acquisition and preservation of Italian pragmatics (Zanoni, 2014, 2016, 2018). Despite the readily available content in digital form, this channel is not of popularity among teachers according to the outcomes of the present study. Teachers working abroad encountered difficulties in accessing the multimedia repository of LIRA due to national restrictions and they were unable to watch videos. Nevertheless, the online community included on the platform is accessible everywhere and it allows Italian NSs to discuss specific languages features with SL and FL learners.

Regarding the second research question (“what techniques were employed by Italian SL/FL teachers for pragmatics instruction?”), role plays resulted in being the preferred teaching technique for pragmatic instruction, as also found in previous studies (Gauci *et al.*, 2016; Moreno Guerrero *et al.*, 2020; Santoro, 2016). Therefore, this may confirm the claim that role plays are reliable activities to elicit spontaneous data for assessing their level of pragmatics (Felix-Brasdefer, 2018). In addition, watching a video and listening exercises were also other used techniques by the teachers.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to provide a detailed and exhaustive description of the materials and resources addressed to the instruction of current Italian pragmatics, and to suggest ways to improve the role of pragmatics in classroom syllabi. Printed material resulted in being the main resource for teaching pragmatics, especially textbooks. Audiovisual material resulted in being used almost as much as printed materials. The following categories in order of use were: self-produced authentic material, students’ production, and digital material. Role plays remain the main teaching technique employed in the classroom.

However, this study is not without limitations. Due to its descriptive nature, the key questions in the questionnaire regarding material employed were open-ended. Thus, any statistical analysis was not possible; consequently, no generalisations can be drawn from this study. Another limitation was that participants were not obliged to answer all questions; thus, some results were incomplete and had to be excluded from the present study. In future research, it could be interesting to conduct a similar study but with a quantitative objective, in order to search for correlations between the materials employed and the teachers’ place of residence. Teachers living in Italy may choose different materials since students live in the context where the language is spoken. On the other hand, teachers of Italian abroad may need to provide a stronger input, influencing their materials’ choices.

Pedagogically, we can conclude that since textbooks were considered the main resource for Italian teachers, they should be implemented with guidelines and specific tasks directed to the instruction of pragmatics. Resources such as LIRA should also be promoted. In the future, the collaboration between material developers and teachers is needed to ensure the quality of the teaching content. In addition, gaps between instruction and research should be filled and material developers should also collaborate with researchers. Improving teachers’ material and resources would increase their work’s quality and would allow the preservation and acquisition of the Italian language.

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APPENDIX

I materiali della pragmatica in italiano

Questionario rivolto agli insegnanti di Italiano L2/LS

- Dove vivi?
- Da quanto tempo insegni italiano (L2/LS)?

- Da meno di un anno
 - Da più di un anno
 - Da più di tre anni
 - Da più di cinque anni
 - Da più di dieci anni
- Prima della quarantena come insegnavi Italiano?
 - Lezioni presenziali
 - Lezioni online sincrone
 - In entrambi i modi
 - Hai mai sentito parlare della pragmatica del linguaggio? Si riferisce all'abilità di usare correttamente il lessico e le forme grammaticali di una lingua appropriatamente a seconda della situazione, del contesto e dell'interlocutore. Fanno parte di questa categoria gli atti linguistici come ad esempio i complimenti, le richieste, i ringraziamenti, le proteste, le disdette e le scuse; quando dare del Lei o del tu; i diversi segnali discorsivi come “figurati”, “però”, “quindi”, “insomma”, ecc.
 - Sì
 - No
 - Sì, ma non sapevo che venisse chiamata “pragmatica”
 - Hai mai insegnato questi diversi aspetti dell'italiano ai tuoi alunni?
 - Sì
 - No
 - Se sì, quale materiale hai utilizzato e a quali risorse hai attinto? Se hai risposto di no alla precedente domanda, giustifica la tua risposta.
 - Quali tecniche di insegnamento usi per spiegare gli aspetti pragmatici dell'italiano? Puoi scegliere più di un'opzione.
 - Esercizi di lessico
 - Esercizi di grammatica
 - Esercizi di ascolto
 - Role play
 - Classi di conversazione
 - Guardare un video e discuterne assieme
 - Leggere insieme dei testi estratti dai libri
 - Niente di tutto ciò perché non affronto la pragmatica
 - Altro
 - Utilizzi un libro di testo in particolare per le tue classi? Se sì quale.
 - Conosci il progetto LIRA? (<http://lira.unistrapg.it/?q=node/1006>)
 - Sì
 - No