

11 Italy



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11.1 A Mosaic of Languages

Historical, economic and geographical reasons have favoured the development of a plurilingual environment in Italy: linguistic diversity is a characteristic of this country and *minority languages* (Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Croatian, Slovene, French, French-Provençal, Friulan, Ladin, Occitan and Sardinian) have been officially recognized in law (no. 482 – art. 2 15/12/1999). Some of the minority groups speaking these languages have been developing various activities for years, but the new law has offered the opportunity to foster new policies focusing on bilingualism, even though implementation varies considerably. In some cases, regions and/or provinces enjoy a 'special status', being inhabited by large ethnic groups speaking languages other than Italian, and pursue a policy to promote bilingualism.

In *Friuli-Venezia Giulia* (Trieste, Gorizia) the language policy favours bilingualism (i.e. Italian and Slovene) and promotes the *Slovene* language for Slovene speakers by providing monolingual schools with the whole curriculum in Slovene. After approval of the above-mentioned law *Friulan* is also being offered in schools.

In the *Province of Bolzano* (Alto Adige – South Tyrol) there are three language groups: the largest ones are *German* and *Italian*; *Ladin*, the third one, is the mother tongue of groups living in two valleys. Each language group has organized its own schools, providing different models. Ladin is used as mother tongue in nursery schools, whereas in primary schools it is a vehicular language used to help pupils achieve mastery of both Italian and German. Secondary schools offer 'plurilingual education' since curricula are half in Italian and half in German, Ladin being used only to teach the Ladin language and culture. In the Italian schools in Bolzano, German is used for CLIL in some elementary schools: for instance in a private primary school some subjects in the logical-mathematical area are being taught through a second language, with good results. In a lower secondary school where Italian is the mainstream language, Geography is being taught through German as an experiment.

Bilingualism is promoted at nearly all school levels in *Valle d'Aosta*, where *French* was the only official language from the 16th to the 19th century and is still an official language along with Italian, according to a special statute of 1948. Most inhabitants have sufficient knowledge of French, as this language is taught starting from kindergarten,

but it is seldom used in everyday conversation. Actually most inhabitants speak patois (a Franco-Provençal language). Bilingualism is a very important target of the language policy of Valle d'Aosta. Bilingual education has been introduced in nursery and primary schools, where it is a common and basic component of the curriculum. In nursery schools French is being introduced by means of a specific method, with materials produced by a team from the University of Grenoble (the method is called *Valentine et les autres*). Results have been investigated and data collected. In primary schools some subjects have been taught for years through French. A team from the University of Geneva carried out research on the relationships between language, subjects and concept acquisition in the late nineties. In lower secondary schools bilingualism is implemented particularly by means of curricular and/or cross-curricular projects. Experts from the University of Neuchâtel and Ecole Normale Supérieure of Fontenay-St-Cloud carried out research on the relationships between subjects and language. Materials for teaching Mathematics, History and Art in French have been produced and they are widely used. A great number of teacher trainers were trained by IRRE (the regional institute for teacher training, research and experimentation) to support bilingualism in schools. In upper secondary schools there are only a few instances of bilingual education.

Finally, the *German Walser* language is protected in Valle d'Aosta. Article 40b of the special regional statute integrates the teaching of German into the primary school curriculum in the area of Gressoney, where German is not widely spoken, with a view to keep the Walser language alive.

11.2 School Experiences Favouring Bilingualism

The term 'bilingual education' is currently, even if not correctly, used in Italy whenever two foreign languages are taught in the same manner, that is, they are started at the same age level and the same number of lessons, the same programme, the same objectives and equal final examinations are undertaken. This model of language teaching has been introduced in a large number of lower secondary schools. It does not exist in primary schools.

The teaching of two foreign languages in upper secondary schools is quite different, since language teaching does not begin at the same age and the number of lessons per week varies considerably. At all school levels the only foreign languages taught are English, French, German and Spanish. Foreign language development in Italian schools has occurred mainly in upper secondary schools called '*Licei Linguistici*', usually non-state schools. Over the past fifteen years some state '*Licei*' and '*Istituti Magistrali*' have organized experimental language courses.

a *Liceo Linguistico Europeo*

'Liceo Linguistico Europeo' was set up in 1992/1993 as an experimental course based on a project organized by the Italian Ministry of Education – General Directorate of non-state schools. This project aims to provide students with good language competence and intercultural education. A native speaker assistant supports the foreign language teacher for one lesson a week in each class.

The school schedule includes 21 lessons per week: 12 for compulsory subjects (Religion, Physical Education, Italian, Latin, Maths and Computer Science, two foreign languages) and 9 for optional subjects that characterize three different courses:

- modern language section where a third foreign language is taught;
- business studies section;
- art section.

During the final three years of the course (age 15–18) one or two subjects (any, except for Italian and foreign languages) can be learned through a vehicular language. CLIL teachers must be competent both in the foreign language and in the specific subject. The project proved so successful that by 2005 a hundred and twenty schools all over the country had opted for it.

b *Liceo Classico Europeo*

This experimental five-year course of studies has been running since 1992 in 17 Italian State Educational Institutes (*Liceo Classico*). It differs from that in other state schools since it offers a boarding school, where students experience community life.

One subject of the curriculum, organized in a modular structure, is taught/learned in a foreign language starting from the second year (age 15). Both the subject and the language can be changed the following year.

In 1998 an agreement between the Italian Ministry of Education and the French Embassy in Rome allowed some students to take an additional exam for an 'Attestation' (Certificate) of competence achieved by the student in the French language.

In the case of both *Liceo Linguistico Europeo* and *Liceo Classico Europeo* it has been difficult to find teachers qualified in both a foreign language as mother tongue and in a specific subject; therefore the choice of subject to be taught in another language has sometimes been random. Students that went through this experience can better master synthesis and specific vocabulary. Communication in the foreign language has proved more fluent and language acquisition is supported by the motivation of learning the subject-specific vocabulary.

c *International classes in some upper secondary schools (Licei)*

Limited to a small number of upper secondary schools (*Licei*), this form of education was started in 1992 at a state-run *Liceo* in Bologna, which was soon followed by other schools in Florence, Taranto and Rome. Although limited in terms of numbers and time, the experience could be considerably extended considering the new situation introduced by the law that guarantees autonomy to all school institutes, enabling any school to experiment with different programmes and teaching methods. The same model is being adopted by other institutes at Palermo, Cosenza, Naples and in other less widely known schools. At the beginning, the experimentation with bilingual classes involved only the French language, but in two of the above-mentioned schools experimental classes using Spanish and German have been organized. Changes have involved the number of lessons in the school schedule, and the presence of mother tongue teachers, programmes and teaching materials.

Nowadays, in the '*biennio*' (the first two years, age 15–16) of international classes the foreign language is taught for 5 lessons per week according to the traditional programmes of experimental *Licei Linguistici*, even in the case of beginners. In addition, there are two lessons per week of history-geography, taught in French (L2) by the Italian teacher with the support of a native speaker assistant. As the students' competence in the language is relatively poor at that level, especially developed materials are used. The focus is on the acquisition of specific vocabulary. In the '*triennio*' (the final three years) the foreign language is taught for 4 lessons per week in the first and second year, for 5 lessons in the third year; history is taught for two lessons per week, one in Italian and the other in the foreign language, together by the teacher and the native speaker assistant. Teaching materials are the same as used in French classes. The curriculum is the traditional state curriculum for L2. Officially approved by a state decree, this experiment is monitored by inspectors of the Ministry of Education. At the end of the course students receive a diploma (*Esame di Stato*), as in the other classes and schools.

d *Other experiences*

Since September 1998 some '*Istituti Magistrali*' have been experimenting with a new course called '*Liceo della Comunicazione*': during the final three years of the course (age 15–18) students can experience the learning of a subject through a foreign language.

Last but not least: in *Overseas Italian Schools in Africa and South America* some subjects are taught/learned using the language of the local country.

11.3 Laws and Regulations: an Age of Change

In 1999 a *School Autonomy Decree* (no. 275/1999) granted autonomy to schools, so that they can experiment with new programmes and teaching methodologies. "Schools are expression of a working autonomy and are responsible for defining and

implementing the educational offer.... School autonomy is a guarantee of the freedom of teaching and of the cultural offer and substantiates itself in the planning and realisation of educational, training and instructional acts, tending to develop human beings. These acts will be adequate to the different contexts, the requests of the families and the characteristics of the people involved, so that their educational success can be guaranteed, according to the aims and general objectives of the education system and to the need of improving the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process." (Capo I – Art I)

Key ideas of the School Autonomy Decree are: teaching autonomy, organization autonomy, autonomy in research, experimentation and development. The school plan is called *Piano dell'offerta formativa* (POF). With school autonomy, the role of schools as centres of professional development for all staff members (teachers and non-teaching staff) has been enhanced. Recruitment and the professional development of school heads have also changed.

Profound changes in school organization have occurred since the approval of this decree that has offered schools the opportunity to implement CLIL at all school levels, using different approaches.

Structural changes were introduced in 2003 by the *Education Reform Act* (no. 53/2003). This reformed the Italian education system and provided a blueprint for an educational and training system subdivided into *scuola dell'infanzia* (nursery school – 3 years) starting at 3 years of age, the first school cycle including primary school (5 years) and *scuola secondaria di primo grado* (lower secondary school – 3 years), and the second school cycle including the five-year *liceo* system (academic high schools) as well as the vocational education and training (VET) system. Implementation decrees relating to nursery school and the first school cycle were issued in 2004, and the law was first implemented starting from school year 2004/2005. Implementation decrees relating to the second school cycle were issued in October 2005, introducing a dual pathway with general education provision in the 8 *licei* system and in the VET and apprenticeship schemes.

In school year 2004/2005, the new system was implemented in nursery schools, primary schools and lower secondary schools. New rules for upper secondary schools may be enforced in school year 2007/2008, where major changes in favour of CLIL will occur, since:

- in '*Licei Linguistici*' from the third year up a non-linguistic subject of the compulsory timetable or of the compulsory timetable chosen by the students will be taught in English.
- In '*Licei Linguistici*' from the fourth year up a non-linguistic subject of the compulsory timetable or of the compulsory timetable chosen by the students will be taught in a second foreign language (CLIL).
- In all '*Licei*' in the fifth year a non-linguistic subject will be taught in English.

11.4 Main Characteristics of CLIL Provision

As mentioned above, CLIL provision as part of mainstream school education occurs in a very limited number of schools. More widespread development has occurred in the past ten years, when regions and schools have organized autonomous pilot projects based on a modular approach. In all regions (particularly Sicily, Puglia, Marche, Lazio, Emilia Romagna, Liguria, Piemonte, Lombardia, Veneto, and Friuli Venezia-Giulia) initiatives vary considerably:

- school-led development (e.g. pairing: an experienced school with a novice school; clustering: three, four or more schools working together; networking both at regional or international level) reflects a spontaneous interest in the CLIL approach.
- Wider scale regional development (e.g. pilot experiences, centres of good practice, dissemination of experiences, training courses) has evolved throughout different regions to reflect a high level of 'bottom-up' expertise.

Such experiences have been favoured by special funding from a national project, *Progetto Lingue 2000*, which developed from 1999 until 2003. Interesting pilot projects organized at regional or provincial level can be summarized as follows:

- *ALI-CLIL (Apprendimento Linguistico Integrato-CLIL)* organized by the Regional Education Authority in Lombardy since 2001.
- *Apprendo* in Lingua 2 organized by the Regional Education Authority in Veneto in cooperation with Ca' Foscari University from 2002 to 2004.
- *Lingua, Cultura e Scienze in lingua straniera* organized from 2001 to 2004 by IRRE Piemonte (Research institute) and the Regional Education Authority in Piedmont.
- *Tutor Europeo* CLIL training activities organized by IRRE Emilia Romagna since 2003.
- *RETE CLIC Udine* (a provincial school network in the region of Friuli Venezia-Giulia for training activities since 2001).

In 2002 the General Directorate of International Affairs of the Ministry of Education explored (through a questionnaire) voluntary CLIL experiences: about 100 schools (all levels of education: primary, lower and upper secondary) and 300 teachers (subject and language) declared that they were experiencing the teaching of a subject through English, French, German or Spanish. Subjects taught included Sciences, Geography, Biology, Art, History, Mathematics and Business Studies. The overall amount of time spent on these pilot projects varied between 10 and 20 hours a year. Most of these experiences involved a team-teaching approach (that is, subject teachers and language teachers planning and/or teaching together), because few teachers possess the necessary language competence and a good knowledge of the subject to be taught.

11.5 Focus on Teacher Training

In Italy no initial teacher training for CLIL is available and no certified qualification is required for CLIL-type provision. Education authorities are aware of the importance of defining formal requirements, yet solutions do not seem to be at hand. As mentioned

above, recent years have seen significant advances in the development of CLIL in Italy thanks to initiatives that have favoured inter-disciplinary dialogue and the opportunity for a fresh look at attitudes and practice in classes. New forms of in-service training have developed and more and more communities of practice are sharing information, materials and tools.

A good example is offered by the in-service programme organized by the Local Education Authority in Lombardy, which, after experiencing face-to-face courses, in 2001 opted to organize a web-based in-service training course, *ALI-CLILonline (Appendimento Linguistico Integrato-CLIL)*, for both language teachers and subject teachers. A team of experts and trainers designed and organized a precise programme. The purpose of the learning platform was to accustom course participants to use data communication services autonomously, and to enable teachers to create CLIL didactic modules as a team, encouraging them to work in small online groups. The main course objectives were to focus on the preparation of didactic modules for use by teachers in their classes, use of the Internet in locating material useful for creating CLIL modules, and preparation of a wide range of CLIL modules for all school levels, to be tried out in class. At the end of this first year teachers had studied theoretical materials, carried out tasks, looked for materials on-line, prepared a teaching module, and received feedback from Italian experts.

The experience proved so positive that the same teachers requested a second-level course, *ALI-CLILonline Level 2*. This was aimed at use of the teaching modules in classes, looking for new materials on-line in order to prepare new modules, and deepening of theoretical knowledge. The objectives here were to create productive dynamics in class for the development of language and subject learning, and to transmit/teach cooperative and collaborative learning techniques in class.

The next step was *ALI-CLILonline Level 3*, which was mainly geared towards promoting the European dimension in CLIL teaching, creating an on-line virtual Resource Centre, and improving the teaching in CLIL classes. The objectives were to open the virtual community to experts from other countries, to test the *ALI-CLIL* modules with subject teachers, to compare materials and curricula with foreign teachers, and to create a database of CLIL materials and documents. At the end of this third year teachers had received feedback from foreign experts, tested modules with teachers from other countries, and analysed materials and curricula trans-nationally.

These three courses involved about 350 teachers from 2001 to 2006, and they have become CLIL practitioners. The real richness of this training project is the number of modules that teachers have produced in these years: about 50 for all school levels, from primary to secondary, in four languages (English, French, German and Spanish), covering a wide variety of subjects (Arts, Business Studies, Natural and Human Sciences, Mathematics, etc.).

The organization of courses over these years has created a qualified team of trainers, tutors and experts who find pleasure in working together: it is a real practice community where teachers can find support and guidance. The production and piloting of modules have activated constructive dialogue and exchange of information and knowledge not only within the region of Lombardy, but also with other regions and countries. Some of these modules are now offered as an example of 'best practice' on *INDIRE PUNTOEDU*, the training platform that the Italian Ministry of Education has organized for more than 150 000 primary teachers, and important publishing houses have published some of them.

Some schools have become 'centres of excellence' because of their good practice and are also offering their expertise to other schools. One of these schools has become a Cambridge International Centre for IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education), with exams in Accounting, Business Studies, Economics, Biology, Combined Science, History and Mathematics. Some teachers have moved into CLIL drama: one of our trainers and a theatre company have recently produced a play, *Sunny Walks*, a 'scientific comedy' that deals with environmental problems and it has been performed in Milan's theatres.

Team-work and interactive approaches have created productive dynamics in schools, developing good practice of 'integrated' teaching and learning: students are really enjoying their CLIL classes and some of them have been able to describe their positive experiences either during debates and conferences or when interviewed by important newspapers and radio or TV stations.

The challenge now facing Italian teachers and trainers is to ensure that these advances can be used to guarantee a high level of quality as CLIL both consolidates and expands. Expansion is expected not only because of Italian-speaking students learning foreign languages, but also because there is an increasing number of foreign students that require special content-based language teaching. Issues of provision and access, syllabus and certification, quality assurance, and training of trainers are core items for CLIL implementation at national and regional levels. Educational Authorities will need to define clear pathways for initial and in-service training of CLIL teachers.