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Lingue seconde e istituzioni

Un approccio storiografico

a cura di

**Alessandra Vicentini
Hugo E. Lombardini**



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[13]

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Alessandra Vicentini e Hugo E. Lombardini





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Women authors of ELT materials in Italy (1896-1918)

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RIASSUNTO: Questo articolo ha due obiettivi. In primo luogo, vengono presentati i risultati di una ricerca che è stata condotta con lo scopo di individuare le prime autrici dei materiali glottodidattici per l'insegnamento della lingua inglese (ELT) in Italia. Si è rilevato che, nel periodo tra il 1896 e il 1918, ventitré autrici hanno pubblicato almeno un manuale per l'insegnamento della lingua inglese. In secondo luogo, l'indagine si focalizza su due autrici il cui contributo nell'ambito dell'apprendimento e dell'insegnamento della lingua inglese nel periodo storico preso in considerazione fu di particolare rilievo. Attraverso l'analisi delle prefazioni ai tre manuali si cerca di dimostrare che le idee espresse da Pia Padovani (1904, 1906) e Anna Benedetti (1915) sugli obiettivi, priorità e metodologie dell'insegnamento delle lingue sono di particolare interesse storico, e, in quanto tali, ci permettono di colmare alcune lacune nella conoscenza della storia dell'insegnamento della lingua inglese all'inizio del XX secolo in Italia.

PAROLE CHIAVE: insegnamento della lingua inglese (ELT), materiali glottodidattici, autrici, pronuncia, XX secolo.

ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is twofold. Firstly, I present the findings of bibliographical research conducted in an attempt to identify first women authors of ELT materials in Italy. It appears that, in the period between 1896 and 1918, twenty-three different women authors produced at least one ELT publication each. Secondly, I focus on two women authors whose contribution to promoting the learning and teaching of English in that period was particularly significant. I argue that Pia Padovani's (1904, 1906) and Anna Benedetti's (1915) views on the goals, priorities and language teaching methodologies are of particular relevance and I analyse the prefaces to their textbooks in an attempt to amplify our knowledge of the history of English language teaching in the early 20th-century Italy.

KEYWORDS: ELT, 20th century, Italy, women authors, pronunciation.

0. Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to shed some new light on the history of the learning and teaching of English as a foreign language in the Italian context by analysing English language teaching (ELT) materials published by women authors in Italy in the first two decades of the 20th century. At this moment in time, with the exception of the period between 1923 and 1943 covered by Mandich (2002), no comprehensive inventory exists, which would contain bibliographical information on historical ELT materials available to Italian learners. Moreover, the relatively few studies that have so far dealt with the history of the learning and teaching of English in Italy¹ have not investigated the contribution made by women authors specifically. In this paper I focus on the period that starts in 1896, when the first English as a foreign language textbook by a woman author appears to have been published in Italy, and concludes in 1918, with the last ELT publication by a woman author in the first two decades of the 20th century. After presenting the findings of the bibliographical research I conducted in an attempt to identify women authors of ELT materials who were active in the early 20th century (section 1), I focus on two authors whose contribution to promoting the learning and teaching of English in Italy has been particularly innovative and significant (section 2).²

¹ This is indicative of the paucity of studies on the history of the learning and teaching of English as a foreign language in Italy (see Shvanyukova 2019: 154-157), especially when compared to the situation with other modern foreign languages. For French, for instance, comprehensive inventories of historical language-teaching materials have been produced by Minerva and Pellandra (1997), Minerva (2003) and Mandich (2002). Likewise, for Spanish there exist printed and online catalogues of historical textbooks (Lombardini and San Vicente 2015, San Vicente [Dir.]). The launch of a project at the University of Milan, announced in a recent paper by Nava and Pedrazzini (2019), whose objective is to create an archive (as both a physical repository and an online database) of ELT materials published in Italy in the 20th century, aims to (at least partially) remedy this deficiency.

² An insightful study by Lopriore and Vettorel (2013), which examined representations of women in textbooks published between the 1950s and the early 1980s, appears to be the only piece of research on the gendered history of ELT materials in Italy currently available.

Two printed bibliographical resources have proved to be indispensable for the research I conducted in order to identify women authors of ELT materials. They may not be fully accurate or comprehensive, but the two relevant supplementary volumes to *The General Italian Bibliographical Catalogue*, the first covering the period between 1847 and 1899 (Pagliaini 1964), the second the period between 1900 and 1920 (Pagliaini 1967),³ provided some valuable initial input. The inventory of book titles in these volumes is arranged into distinct categories according to the subject. In the first phase of my investigation, I retrieved the information on the authors of ELT materials for the first period, 1847-1899, and the second period, 1900-1920, by examining book titles in the category “Lingue: Linguistica - Lingua inglese” (“Languages: Linguistics – The English Language”, in Pagliaini [1964: 266-267] and in Pagliaini [1967: 633-635]). In these catalogues, the titles within the macro-category of ELT materials are assigned to individual sub-categories of language teaching materials. Table 1 summarises the information on the listings of ELT materials per period as recorded by the two bibliographers:

Sub-category	1847-1899	1900-1920
Uncategorised	4	8
Grammars	68	59
Works on morphology	2	12
Pronunciation treatises	8	4
Exercise books	5	10
Reading books	18	28
Dictionaries	18	30
Works on phraseology	7	11

³ These are 1) *Indice per materie G-P (Index of Subjects G-P, Pagliaini 1964)*, one of the volumes in the *Catalogo Generale della libreria italiana dall'anno 1847 a tutto il 1899 compilato dal Prof. Attilio Pagliaini (General Italian Bibliographical Catalogue, 1847 to 1899, compiled by Prof. Attilio Pagliaini)*, originally published in 1915, and 2) *Indice per materie E-L (Index of Subjects E-L, Pagliaini 1967)*, a volume in the *Catalogo Generale della libreria italiana dall'anno 1900 a tutto il 1920 compilato da Arrigo Plinio Pagliaini (General Italian Bibliographical Catalogue, 1900 to 1920, compiled by Arrigo Plinio Pagliaini)*, originally published in 1936.

Sub-category	1847-1899	1900-1920
Works on synonyms etc.	-	5
Conversation manuals	13	15
Letter-writing guides	11	14
Total	154	196

Table 1. Listings of ELT materials for the two periods, 1847-1899 (based on Pagliaini 1964) and 1900-1920 (based on Pagliaini 1967).

A systematic analysis of the listings of ELT materials with the view of identifying general trends in the production of English textbooks in Italy between 1847 and 1920 is beyond the scope of this essay.⁴ Here I am concerned specifically with the distribution of these titles according to their authors' gender, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

1. Women authors of ELT materials: 1896-1918

In the inventory of ELT materials for the first period (1847-1899), Pagliaini (1964: 266) includes a single textbook by a woman author, which is *Metodo facile per lo studio della Lingua Inglese, ecc.* by Rosa Ciabattari-Edwards (1896).⁵ In the second period, Pagliaini (1967: 633-635) has

⁴ Only some preliminary observations can be made on the basis of these raw numbers. Comparing the two periods, for instance, we can expect that reprints and new editions represented a significant number of ELT publications, especially in the sub-category of grammars. Interestingly, grammars and pronunciation treatises appear to be the only sub-categories which, according to these data, saw a decrease in the number of publications. All remaining categories have either experienced a slight increase (letter-writing guides and conversation manuals) or have seen a marked increase in the number of listings (e.g., exercise books). However, these observations are merely indicative at this stage, as the validity of the bibliographers' categorisations still needs to be verified. Moreover, dividing the first, much longer, period into specific decades would help provide a more nuanced overview of the trends in the second half of the nineteenth century.

⁵ The *Italian National Electronic Library Catalogue* (Opac Sbn, <<https://opac.sbn.it/opacsbn/opaclub>>) lists the author as "Edwards Ciabattari, Rosa". Her

listings of 34 ELT titles by 22 different women authors. In the same period (1900-1920), for 16 out of the total of 196 titles (see Table 1), I have been unable to establish the gender of these 16 authors, whose first names are provided as initials not only in Pagliaini's inventory, but in other electronic databases as well.⁶ As a result, the percentage of ELT works authored by women in Italy in the second period (1900-1920) may be estimated as oscillating between 17 and 19 percent, as the summary in Table 2 shows:

Sub-category	Men authors	Women authors	Unknown
Uncategorised	4	4	
Grammars	47	10	2
Works on morphology	8	4	
Pronunciation treatises	3		1
Exercise books	7	3	
Reading books	20	6	2
Dictionaries	21	4	5
Works on phraseology	9		2
Works on synonyms etc.	4	1	
Conversation manuals	10	2	3
Letter-writing guides	13		1
Total	146	34	16

Table 2. Gender distribution of authors per sub-category, 1900-1920
(based on Pagliaini 1967).

A closer scrutiny of the 34 titles provided by Pagliaini (1967: 633-635) reveals a number of inaccuracies and omissions. At least two listings, Alina Vannini's *Italian Primer* (1913) and the eighth edition of Emma Bertini's *An Italian Companion and Interpreter for the English Student and Tourist, etc.* (1914),⁷ have been catalogued under the heading of "Languages: Linguistics – The English language" erroneously. As the titles of these

1896 textbook possibly had a second title in English, *Method for Italians to Learn English*.

⁶ The main electronic catalogues I used were the *Italian National Electronic Library Catalogue* <<https://opac.sbn.it/opacsbn/opac/iccu/free.jsp>>, the *Electronic Database of Didactic Materials (Edisco)* <<http://www.edisco.unito.it/>>, and *GoogleBooks* <<https://books.google.it/>>.

⁷ Originally published in 1890.

works already make clear, the textbooks are addressed to English students of Italian, and not to Italian learners of English. Given that Emma Bertini also published *Italian-English Comparative Idioms, etc.* (1907), she is still included among the 22 women authors of ELT materials of this period, while Alina Vannini has to be excluded. An interesting case of an omission from the inventory is that of Amelia Civita's *Grammatica sintetica della lingua inglese* (1904). I was able to trace this work through the *Italian National Electronic Library Catalogue*, but it is not listed in Pagliani (1967: 633-635). It remains to be investigated whether the absence of Civita's ELT textbook represents a case of inadvertent or deliberate exclusion.⁸

Table 3 presents a list of women authors who published ELT materials in Italy in the period between 1896 and 1918. This list was compiled after cross-checking the names and titles given by Pagliani (1964) and Pagliani (1967) with information provided by some major electronic databases.⁹ Two works, by Vannini (1913) and Bertini (1914, see above) respectively, were excluded; Civita (1904) was added and the third edition of *The Royal Readers: Nuovo Libro di Letture Inglesi* (Padovani 1906), an adaptation of a popular reading book for the ELT book market in Italy, was substituted by its first edition, which appears to have come out in 1902.¹⁰ Table 3 provides a list of the names of the 23 women authors, accompanied by the title of their ELT publication. For those women authors who published

⁸ Amelia Civita-Allan was a high-school teacher of English at the Istituto Tecnico "Germano Sommeiller" in Turin (*Annuario del Ministero della pubblica istruzione*, 1915: 448). Because she was Jewish, Civita was first suspended and then definitively removed from her teaching position in 1938, after the imposition of anti-Semitic racial laws in Italy (Camera 2015, 15-16).

⁹ See fn. 6.

¹⁰ As a review of this work in *La Rassegna nazionale* (1902, Vol. 128, p. 334) would indicate, even if Pagliani only lists the third edition. Sadly, it appears that no physical copies of either the first or the second editions have survived. Likewise, Pagliani has no records for some other works Padovani may have published. For instance, in an insert in Padovani (1904) three more textbooks are advertised as "to be published soon", namely, *Antologia di brevi dettati (An Anthology of Short Dictations)*; *Scelta di lettere (A Selection of Letters)*; and *Esercizi sulle preposizioni (Exercises on Prepositions)*. The first of these, *Antologia di brevi dettati*, was indeed published, as is confirmed in *the 1906 Yearbook of Luigi Bocconi Commercial University*. I have not been able to trace the other two publications so far.

more than one ELT text, only one title is included.

Year of publication	Author	Short title
1896	Edwards Ciabattari, Rosa	<i>Metodo facile per lo studio della Lingua Inglese</i>
1900	Gotti Filopanti, Enrica	<i>Prolusioni al Corso di Lingua e letteratura Inglese</i>
1901	Howard, Mary Grace	<i>Alfa: esercizi pratici e nomenclatura inglese</i>
1902*	Padovani, Pia	<i>The Royal Readers : Nuovo libro di Lettura Inglese</i>
1904	Civita, Amelia	<i>Grammatica sintetica della lingua inglese</i>
1904	Cornish, Dorothy Helen	<i>A first spelling book</i>
1904	Solari, Leontina	<i>Speak English : Nomenclatura</i>
1907	Bertini, Emma	<i>English-Italian comparative idioms</i>
1907	Campani Bagnoli, Teresina G.	<i>Remarks on the teaching of English</i>
1908	Vitale, Zaira	<i>Dizionario pratico italiano-inglese</i>
1909	Calvert, Emma Lucy	<i>Grammatica moderna della Lingua Inglese</i>
1909	Dogliotti Frati, Gina	<i>In England : Letture inglesi</i>
1909	Gagiotti, Annetta	<i>Tesi di lingua inglese</i>
1910-11	Pulford, Jane	<i>New English-Italian and Italian-English pocket-dictionary</i>
1911	Achilli, Ambrosina	<i>English conversations and reading</i>
1911	Alliaud, Gemma	<i>Regole elementari di grammatica Inglese</i>
1911	Bicchierai, Olga	<i>Grammatica inglese per le scuole secondarie</i>
1913	Giussani, Sofia	<i>Sulla pretesa Riforma dell'ortografia Inglese</i>
1914	Bassi, Emilia	<i>La preposizione nella lingua inglese</i>
1915	Benedetti, Anna	<i>Nuova grammatica della Lingua Inglese</i>
1915	Blount-Gambrosier, Beatrice	<i>Nuova grammatica inglese-italiana</i>
1916	Zampini Salazar, Fanny	<i>Manuale di storia della Lingua Inglese</i>
1918	Pons, Amilda A.	<i>Peter's diary: first reading-book for boys</i>

Table 3. Women authors of ELT materials published in Italy, 1896-1918.¹¹

¹¹ I follow the two Pagliaini bibliographers here in that I am concerned with the activities and didactic production of these women authors as English language

The titles of ELT work published by women authors, in which terms such as grammar, dictionary, reading or spelling book are included, indicate that the majority of these textbooks have been correctly assigned by Pagliaini (1964) and Pagliaini (1967) to the macro-category of ELT materials. With more generic or ambiguous titles, such as, for instance, Gotti Filopanti's (1900) or Gagiotti's (1909) works, this categorisation would have to be verified. Likewise, in the case of Giussani (1913) and Zampini Salazar (1916), some doubts arise as to whether these texts indeed belong to the same macro-category. A more extensive investigation, in which the actual contents of these works would be examined, remains to be conducted.

So far, my investigation has focused on two early 20th-century women authors, Pia Padovani and Anna Benedetti. These two (forgotten) authors deserve special attention, first of all, on the account of their exceptionally active roles in promoting the learning and teaching of English as a foreign language in that period, a statement supported by the sheer number of ELT publications they authored (see Appendix 1). Secondly, Padovani's and Benedetti's views on the goals, priorities and language teaching methodologies are of particular relevance for the investigation aiming to amplify the sketchy history of English language teaching in the early 20th-century Italy. In the next section, I will focus on three textbooks (Padovani 1904, 1906, and Benedetti 1915), whose prefaces will be analysed in more detail.

2. Analysis of the prefaces in Padovani (1904; 1906), and Benedetti (1915)

Pia Padovani and Anna Benedetti are the two most prolific authors of ELT materials among the 23 women authors included in Table 3. In the state teacher registers for 1915 and 1925, Pia Padovani is listed as English

teachers, i.e., as separate from their activities either as translators, usually of literary texts, from English into Italian or as scholars of literature, which many of these women authors were. See, for instance, Saggini (2014) on Dorothy Helen Cornish's and Anna Benedetti's work on Robert Burns.

professor at the Luigi Bocconi Commercial University of Milan in 1915¹² and as a substitute English teacher at the technical high school “Carlo Cattaneo”, also in Milan, in 1925. According to the same source, in 1915, Anna Benedetti taught English in Palermo, at the Reale Educatorio Femminile “Maria Adelaide”. She was still teaching at this school in 1925, at the same time working as “libero docente” at the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature at the University of Palermo, a position she still held in 1935.¹³ Judging by their respective publication output, Padovani was primarily interested in the teaching of the English language, while Benedetti was more active as a literary scholar, translator and contributor to scientific journals.¹⁴

In this paper, I have chosen to analyse prefaces to two ELT textbooks (a grammar and a reading book) written/edited by Padovani (1904, 1906 [1902]) and one grammar authored by Benedetti. These particular textbooks were selected for three main reasons: firstly, English grammars and reading books represented the most popular categories of early 20th-century ELT materials; secondly, these textbooks contain reasonably long prefaces (of two to three pages), in which not only is the work itself presented to the prospective reader, but the authors’ views on goals,

¹² It appears that she was succeeded in that position by the renowned linguist Mario Hazon.

¹³ *Annuario del Ministero della pubblica istruzione*, 1915; *Annuario del Ministero della pubblica istruzione*, 1925; and *Annuario del Ministero dell’Educazione nazionale*, 1935. Biographical information on these women authors is scarce in the majority of the cases. The few notable exceptions of women authors for whom we have comprehensive, or at least partial biographical information, include Fanny Zampini Salazar <<http://www.enciclopediadelledonne.it/biografie/fanny-zampini-salazar/>>, Enrica Gotti Filopanti <<http://badigit.comune.bologna.it/mostre/filopanti/bacheca9.htm>>, Zaira Vitale <<https://www.aib.it/aib/editoria/dbbi20/vitalez.htm>> and Amelia Civita (Camera 2015). Amilda A. Pons was a prolific author of French language-teaching materials (Ranzani 2007: 33).

¹⁴ It seems that Padovani co-authored one book not dedicated to language teaching (Padovani, Emilio Gallo, 1900, *Illustrated Guide to the Valleys of the Biellese Region to the South of Monte Rosa*), while Benedetti’s numerous publications on English literature would have to be dealt with in a dedicated paper.

priorities and methodologies for teaching English to Italian learners are discussed as well; and, finally, the authors' divergent attitudes towards the importance of pronunciation teaching and the didactic solutions offered can be analysed in the light of the impact the Reform Movement (cf. Pedrazzini 2016) had had on teaching practice in the Italian context.

By applying the framework proposed by Rodríguez-Álvarez and Rodríguez-Gil (2013) and Domínguez-Rodríguez and Rodríguez-Álvarez (2015) in their work on prefaces to eighteenth-century English school grammars,¹⁵ I will examine the common topics in the prefaces in these three textbooks:

1. *The Newest Grammar for the Study of the English Language, to be used by Teachers and Students of Italian Schools, containing numerous illustrations, with the practical application of the phonograph to acquire correct pronunciation of all lexical items in the volume* (Padovani 1904).
2. *The Royal Readers, a new English reading book for the use at Italian schools, with translations, pronunciation and etymology annotations for the main lexical items; enriched with rules and observations concerning the same, as well as idioms, synonyms, derivatives, proverbs, etc.* (Padovani 1906 [1902]).
3. *A New Grammar of the English Language (Compliant with the official syllabus dated 28th September 1913), Containing graduated practical exercises for speaking, writing, and interpreting texts* (Benedetti 1915).

Similarly to what has been observed for Late Modern English grammars (Watts 1995, cited in Rodríguez-Álvarez and Rodríguez-Gil 2013: 203), prefaces in early 20th-century English textbooks aimed at Italian learners constitute a common paratextual element. Together with other paratextual elements, such as title pages, dedicatory epistles, appendices, tables or illustrations, prefaces “serve to reinforce and support a piece of written work” (Domínguez-Rodríguez and Rodríguez-

¹⁵ More recently, paratextual elements in eighteenth-century English grammars have been discussed by Yáñez-Bouza and Rodríguez-Gil (2016) and Yáñez-Bouza (2017).

Álvarez 2015: 89). The summary below presents the findings in Rodríguez-Álvarez and Rodríguez-Gil's (2013) study of the common topics in prefaces to eighteenth-century English grammar books. The four major recurrent themes have been arranged according to the frequency of the most repeated arguments put forward by the authors of grammar books in Rodríguez-Álvarez and Rodríguez-Gil's (2013: 206-220) corpus:¹⁶

1. Justifying the writing of the grammar: In order to explain the motivations behind producing a new grammar, English grammar writers most frequently either cited the importance of learning English grammar/English language, or referred to earlier English grammars/grammarians, often criticising or emphasising the presumed weaknesses of the textbooks already on the market;
2. Making the scope of the book clear: This goal was realised by presenting the book's contents/design, its purpose and intended readership;
3. The category of methodological issues comprises, for instance, comments on the most appropriate language teaching methodology or instructing the reader on how the grammar should be used;
4. By introducing the category of persuasive strategies, Rodríguez-Álvarez and Rodríguez-Gil (2013: 217-220) draw our attention to the frequent inclusion of value judgements, which can be directed at the author, the audience or the textbook itself.

In the three English textbooks for Italian learners under investigation, the authors appear to deal with similar concerns. More specifically, the authors also attempt to provide answers to questions such as “why this new grammar was published [...]; to whom it was addressed and what it was about [...]; and how it should be used [...]” (Rodríguez-Álvarez and Rodríguez-Gil 2013: 217). In the following sub-sections I focus on three macro-topics discussed in the prefaces to Padovani (1904), Padovani (1906 [1902]) and Benedetti (1915): justifying the book (section 2.1),

¹⁶ More specifically, this was a corpus of 19 grammars retrieved from the *Eighteenth-Century English Grammars database* (ECEG) in Rodríguez-Álvarez and Rodríguez-Gil (2013) and 15 grammars in Domínguez-Rodríguez and Rodríguez-Álvarez (2015).

introducing the readership of the book (section 2.2), and discussing the book's scope, contents, design and methodological issues (section 2.3).

2.1. Justifying the book

Whereas eighteenth-century grammarians were keen on emphasising the importance of learning English grammar, in the preface to her version of a popular English reading book adapted for the Italian learners of English, Padovani (1906 [1902]) advocates the importance of learning foreign languages: "Today, with the rapidly shifting boundaries, which propel our society into universal interconnectivity, knowledge of foreign languages has become an urgent necessity, no less than that of our native language" (Padovani 1906 [1902]: iii).¹⁷ More specifically, Padovani places an emphasis on the acquisition of a practical knowledge of the foreign language, asserting that everyday vocabulary and correct pronunciation represent the two main requisites for successful communication. She then explains that, with this publication, she aims to furnish Italian learners of English with a reading book "written in a simple style, inspired by mundane occasions of everyday life" (Padovani 1906: iii). Such a textbook, she claims, is an absolute novelty on the Italian ELT book market.

In Padovani's second textbook (1904), in which the preface is written by the publisher/editor and not the author herself,¹⁸ the justification for the publication, combined with the presentation of its contents, is relegated to the second part of the preface. Here the editor explains that Padovani's textbook

is not a plain and simple grammar: if that were the case, another work of this kind would not be necessary, as many similar theoretical works are already available. But this Author, with her *Newest Grammar*, offers a treasure trove of exercises that present, in a clear and straightforward manner, easy and comprehensible rules. These rules are made plain with

¹⁷ The three prefaces are written in Italian. All translations into English are provided by the author.

¹⁸ Ranzani (2007) reminds us that the role of the publisher/editor of didactic materials in that period is not to be neglected. In Padovani's case, her textbooks were published by two major publishing houses based in Turin, namely Paravia and Petrini, whose reputation cannot be underestimated (Ranzani 2007: 52-62).

the help of the most effective examples and appropriate illustrations, whose purpose is to make the different theoretical notions intuitive. (Padovani 1904: preface)

The editor further stresses the “eminently practical” nature of Padovani’s grammar, describing it as a textbook that privileges the “living language” over the “dryness and boredom” of theoretical discussions and grammar rule drills. In a different passage, the reader’s attention is drawn to the fact that English is “a language spoken by more than 116 million people, a number that has never been reached by any modern foreign language before” (Padovani 1904: preface). This fact is clearly used to promote the learning of English as such and, at the same time, to add another valid justification for the publication of Padovani’s work.¹⁹

Benedetti (1915) attempts to justify the publication of her grammar by highlighting what she considers to be the distinguishing features of her work. She frames her personal approach to the teaching of English in the second paragraph of the preface. More specifically, here she presents her ideas on the use of translation in language teaching and learning, stating that translation (into the native language) must only be introduced at a later stage of language learning. According to Benedetti, in the earliest stages the teacher should aim at getting students to think in English without having to resort to translation. The design of her textbook, with its graduated exercises, focuses the students’ attention on the target language, whereas Italian is relegated to the role of an auxiliary medium, only found in the explanation of grammatical rules or glosses to single words (Benedetti 1915: iii-iv). Even more importantly, the cultural aspect of language teaching is brought to the fore consistently in the preface. For

¹⁹ Arguably, the editor’s brief presentation does not do full justice to Padovani’s grammar, which is a textbook with truly encyclopedic ambitions. For reasons of space, I can only comment briefly on the variety of materials included here: individual lessons start with a discussion of a grammar rule, accompanied by an exhaustive list of example sentences (translated into Italian), in which this particular rule is applied; then follow thematically-organised vocabulary lists; illustrated reading excerpts in which vocabulary is drilled; and, finally, reading passages dedicated to cultural contents (e.g., the geography of the United Kingdom, the routine of English dinner-parties, public transport, etc.), again accompanied by numerous illustrations (including maps, drawings, photographs, and reproductions of documents).

instance, commenting on the importance of getting the students to use a dictionary regularly, Benedetti says that: “This method has become even more necessary now that, with the establishment of modern high schools, we aim to lay the foundations for a more comprehensive linguistic culture, one that will privilege familiarity with the masterpieces of foreign literatures and scientific works” (Benedetti 1915: v).

The main marketing strategy employed in these prefaces to justify the publication of the textbooks is to showcase what are perceived to be the unique selling points of the book. With the two textbooks by Padovani, the unique selling point appears to be their focus on the practical knowledge of the foreign language, while in Benedetti’s case, the cultural aspect is given more prominence. These differences possibly hint at different intended readerships for these textbooks.

2.2. Introducing the readership of the book

The titles of all three textbooks contain a reference to “the use at Italian schools”. Yet, in the body of the preface, Padovani (1904) contradicts this information: only autodidacts, i.e., those who cannot attend “regular theoretical and practical classes”, are explicitly mentioned in the preface. In another passage, the readership is extended to include “anyone interested in broadening their cultural horizons”, a goal that will be easily achieved – as the author herself promises – with the help of Padovani’s textbook.

Padovani (1906), on the other hand, concludes the preface by addressing her teacher colleagues. Soliciting their feedback on the textbook can be interpreted as a strategy to “recognize the presence of readers and invite them to decide on the real utility of the book as its potential end-users” (Domínguez-Rodríguez and Rodríguez-Álvarez 2015: 100).

Benedetti (1915) instead confirms the information provided about the target readership in the title. In the body of the preface, she reiterates that the grammar is fully adapted to the official syllabus of modern high schools. Such schools are clearly identified as the primary educational contexts in which the textbook is to be used. This clear identification of the target readership is again confirmed in passages dedicated to the teaching of pronunciation (see 3.3), where Benedetti insists on having the support of a native speaker or a teacher.

2.3. Scope, contents, design of the book. Methodological issues

Describing the design of the book, Benedetti (1915) mentions the following components: grammar rules and orthography; short exercises (that can be used as dictations); exercises focusing on vocabulary; letters; dialogues; idiomatic phrases and proverbs; common expressions; and, finally, translation exercises, introduced only at a more advanced stage of learning. She explains why a regular use of the dictionary should become part of the student's learning routine: "those who, when studying a foreign language, find everything they need in the textbook, become dependent on it, and are unable to work on their own, i.e., to identify the different meanings and the nuances of the meaning, as well as the different ways of using words" (Benedetti 1915: v). Speaking about teaching pronunciation, Benedetti uses the preface to criticise the practice of "representing, in writing, those sounds that cannot be rendered accurately with the help of accents or diphthongs, that is those that can only become familiar to our Latin ear if we listen to the speech of the native speaker or the teacher." (Benedetti 1915: iv) She motivates her rejection of phonetic transcription by drawing on her classroom experience:²⁰

Those students who become accustomed to represent, in any way, the pronunciation of the words, are always the ones who learn the slowest;

²⁰ Referring to one's classroom experience was a popular strategy of establishing one's credentials as an authoritative writer of didactic materials (Rodríguez-Álvarez and Rodríguez-Gil 2013). Another way of boosting one's credentials is found in one-page advertising insert in Padovani (1904), in which detailed information is provided on "Organized Courses of Instruction in Modern English Grammar and Pronunciation (including English composition, reading aloud, and conversation), English Literature, and English History" taking place at Norham Hall in Oxford and managed by Mrs. Burch. The reader can deduce that Padovani, who is introduced in the first paragraph of the preface as having just returned from Oxford after completing her studies there, was one of the many – over two thousand – foreign women students who attended Mrs. Burch's course (Brittain 1960: 259) in order "to increase their proficiency as teachers in their own land" (Padovani 1904: ad). The insert indicates Padovani's address, together with that of Mrs. Burch's, as a point of contact for obtaining further information. Undoubtedly, in addition to promoting Mrs. Burch's course, this information also aimed to offer evidence for Padovani's excellent credentials as a teacher.

this is because, to the key difficulty of the English language, namely, the different representation of spoken and written language, these students add another element of confusion, another way of representing the language that does not facilitate, but, on the contrary, obstructs their progress. (Benedetti 1915: ivi)

This criticism of other teachers' methodologies – which is implicit, in that Benedetti apparently directs her criticism at the students adopting the wrong method, rather than holding their teachers responsible for their students' failure – represents a clear expression of Benedetti's authorial stance (Domínguez-Rodríguez and Rodríguez-Álvarez 2015). This is a way for Benedetti to make her contribution to the contemporary debate on the different methodologies for the teaching of pronunciation, in an attempt to “produce some sort of implicit dialogue and exchange of information, thus triggering an active sociocultural relation (cf. Domínguez-Rodríguez and Rodríguez-Álvarez 2015: 96). Benedetti's personal solution when it comes to the teaching of pronunciation is to provide an overview of the main pronunciation rules, as a way of introducing the students to the topic. However, the only method of acquiring correct pronunciation, according to Benedetti, is that of relying on a native speaker or a teacher to guide the students.

That Padovani's (1904) approach to the topic of pronunciation teaching is more innovative compared to that of Benedetti, is made clear both in the title and on the title page of her grammar. The reference to “the practical application of the phonograph” is accompanied by a drawing of the talking machine on the title page. In the preface, the editor informs the readers that Padovani has been the first teacher in Italy to introduce the phonograph in language teaching, specifically with the aim of facilitating the acquisition of correct pronunciation: “[thanks to the application of the phonograph] her numerous pupils, learning the correct, distinctive accents, together with the exact pronunciation of words, are able to better train their ears” (Padovani 1904: preface).²¹ It is then explained how Padovani conducted her experimental practice in the classroom, where her students were able to benefit greatly from listening

²¹ See Cottini (2018: 104-105) on the general dynamics of the evolution of sound recording and transmitting technologies in the Italian context.

to recordings on wax cylinders, a practice which the editor recommends also for self-studying pupils.²² Padovani's strong interest in the potential of technology for the teaching of pronunciation was evident already in her first ELT publication, *The Royal Readers* (1906 [1902]). Commenting on the difficulty – “insurmountable” as she calls it – of representing pronunciation in writing, Padovani expresses her hopes that, once talking machines become accessible to all learners, this difficulty will be finally overcome:

I know for a fact how advantageous the use of the phonograph is, as a way of making my pupils listen, in addition to my English, to the English spoken by other native speakers, of training their ears to recognising the different regional pronunciations of English. (Padovani 1906 [1902]: iv)

Padovani's views echo an opinion expressed by a famous contemporary, Wilhelm Doegen, who wrote, in 1909, that “learning a modern foreign language is only possible if one hears the word spoken or read aloud, again and again in the same way, that is, at a uniform volume, for only thus can the dialectal peculiarities of the foreign language imprint themselves on human hearing” (quoted in Tkaczyk 2019: 71). Moreover, Padovani's attention to the dialectal peculiarities of English is an indication of a change in attitude towards the model of correct pronunciation, as was expressed, for instance, by John Millhouse, one of Padovani's most popular nineteenth-century predecessors in the Italian context. Author of a best-selling *Graduated and Complete English Course, etc.*,²³ Millhouse made the following remarks in a preface to one of his textbooks:

The frontispiece of [*Il passo all'inglese, ecc.*] reads: “A textbook which will teach you English pronunciation without a teacher.” Is this not a tall order

²² An insert in *The Royal Readers* (1906), advertising Padovani's 1904 grammar, provides information on the cost of the cylinders and on the shop where they could be bought: the grammar cost 4.5 lire; a pack containing the phonograph, the grammar and 30 cylinders (recorded by an English professor) cost 75 lire; cylinders could also be sold separately at 2 lire each, while the phonograph cost 30, all available at Anglo-Italian Commerce Co. (via Dante 6, Milano). Here Padovani's method is advertised as having been adopted, among others, at the Luigi Bocconi Commercial University of Milan, the Sommeiller technical institute in Turin.

²³ See Shvanyukova (2018: 128-130) on Millhouse and his contribution to the spread of the learning and teaching of English in nineteenth-century Italy.

to realise? It is very much so; and yet, after having printed two thousand copies in two years, we may deduce that it is not excessively so, and the fact that quite a few of my acquaintances (and maybe some of yours) have successfully managed to do so is another proof of that. I will not say that their pronunciation is as refined as that of a damsel from London; or as polished as that of an Oxford graduate; but I will say that their pronunciation is generally better than that of most Scots, Irish and Americans, and better also than that of the majority of the English teachers on the continent. Even if their pronunciation is not refined, it is not difficult [to understand]; and it is so clear that no Englishman would find it difficult to understand every single word they read or say. (Millhouse 1851: preface to the second edition)

Quite unlike Millhouse's commitment to teaching his students "better pronunciation" than that of most Scots, Irish and American, Padovani's openness towards different pronunciation models underpin her efforts to teach English as a living language, as a language used to communicate with others. For Benedetti, instead, it's the cultural aspect, embodied in the primacy of literary and other texts that can be studied and interpreted with the help of a dictionary, to prevail over the communicative aspect. The different attitudes of these two teachers can be said to exemplify at least two trends in the practice of teaching English in early 20th-century Italy.

3. Concluding remarks

This paper aimed to make a contribution to the understanding of the role played by women authors in the promotion of learning and teaching of English as a foreign language in early 20th-century Italy. The well-documented process of the feminisation of the Italian teaching profession in the post-Unification period²⁴ appears to have opened up new opportunities for (some) women teachers, who became authors of ELT didactic materials. My investigation has shown that women authored a

²⁴ "In 1863, women constituted 46% of instructors in both private and public schools, in 1881, around 55%, and in 1901, 68%" (Giovanni Vigo, "Appendice statistica nel secolo XIX", quoted in Pak 2012: 96). On the feminisation of the Italian teaching profession see Ghizzoni and Polenghi (2008), Soldani (1989; 2010), Covato (2012), Carbone (2018).

wide range of textbooks aimed at Italian learners of English in the first two decades of the 20th century. In an increasingly competitive book marketplace for ELT didactic materials, textbooks by prolific and successful women authors such as Pia Padovani and Anna Benedetti were published and enjoyed a certain longevity.

Discussing French language teachers active in the same period, Galazzi reminds us that “[c]omme c’est souvent le cas aujourd’hui encore, les renouvellements méthodologiques sont dus à l’initiative personnelle des collègues” (2002: 10). What she terms as the ‘archeological work’ of recovering individual teachers’ stories, may well be the only way to learn more about the ways in which new methodologies were introduced. In order to more systematically assess what, on the one hand, influences Padovani and Benedetti were subjected to in developing their teaching pedagogy, and what, on the other hand, their influence on contemporary English learning and teaching practice was in Italy, more extensive ‘archeological work’ is needed. By presenting these two case-studies I hope I have shown that these forgotten women pioneers of English studies in Italy deserve more attention.

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Appendix

An overview of Pia Padovani's and Anna Benedetti's ELT works

Author	Short titles
Padovani, Pia	<i>The Royal Readers : Nuovo libro di Lettura Inglese (1902)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>Novissima grammatica per lo studio della lingua inglese (1904)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>Antologia di brevi dettati, tratta dalle opere di Ch. Dickens (1906)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>The Royal Readers : Nuovo libro di Lettura Inglese, 3 ed. (1906)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>Appendice al vol. 3. dei Royal Readers (1908)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>Novissima grammatica per lo studio della lingua inglese, 2 ed. (1908)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>Numerosi esempi sull'uso dei vocaboli (1908)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>Novissima grammatica per lo studio della Lingua Inglese: Spiegazione del metodo (1910)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>Piccola raccolta di aneddoti inglesi, ad uso degli alunni delle scuole italiane (1911)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>Novissima grammatica per lo studio della lingua inglese, 5 ed. (1914)</i>
Benedetti, Anna	<i>Nuova grammatica della Lingua Inglese (1915)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>The Royal Readers: Nuovo libro di Lettura Inglese (1916)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>Novissima grammatica per lo studio della lingua inglese, 6 ed. (1918)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>Reading book: 100 brani (1920)</i>

Author	Short titles
Benedetti, Anna	<i>Civiltà e storia dei popoli anglo-sassoni: letture, esercizi di versione ad uso delle scuole medie (1925)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>Reading book: 100 brani (1925)</i>
Benedetti, Anna (with G.M. Rangozzi)	<i>Antologia inglese: pagine scelte di scrittori inglesi e americani, 2 ed. (1928)</i>
Benedetti, Anna	<i>La grammatica che vive: lingua Inglese (1929)</i>
Benedetti, Anna	<i>La grammatica che vive: Lingua Inglese. Volume primo per il I biennio (1930)</i>
Benedetti, Anna	<i>La grammatica che vive: lingua Inglese (1931)</i>
Benedetti, Anna (with G.M. Rangozzi)	<i>Antologia inglese: pagine scelte di scrittori inglesi e americani, 3 ed. (1932)</i>
Benedetti, Anna (with G.M. Rangozzi)	<i>Antologia inglese: pagine scelte di scrittori inglesi e americani, 4 ed. (1937)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>Esercizi sulle preposizioni con illustrazioni ed esempi (n/a)</i>
Padovani, Pia	<i>Scelta di lettere di stile familiare e pratico (n/a)</i>