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Texts and ideas in the history of language learning and teaching

edited by
Giulia Nalesso, Alessandra Vicentini



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[17]

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1950s textbooks for EFL teaching and learning in Italy: A historiographical analysis

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ABSTRACT: This paper is a case study focusing on a corpus of textbooks of English for Italian learners published in 1952, retrieved from the online *Catalogo Nazionale OPAC SBN* (<https://opac.sbn.it>) and consulted at the archives of major Italian public libraries. The texts were examined on the basis of their structure, contents, purpose and teaching approach, with the aim of identifying distinctive generic features and proposing an initial classification. They represent variations of the same genre, catering to pedagogical purposes and encompassing different content derived from didactic materials that were employed both before and during the fascist era, as well as newly devised resources. The historiographical textual analysis provides some insights into post-fascist educational policies. Furthermore, it uncovers the texts' glottodidactic methods and approaches which originated from Britain and North America and triggered profound changes in the history of language teaching.

KEYWORDS: EFL teaching and learning, grammaticography, history of English language teaching, archival and catalogue research, 1950s Italy, post-Fascism.

RIASSUNTO: Questo articolo è un caso studio incentrato su un corpus di libri di testo di inglese per studenti italiani pubblicati nel 1952, estratti dal *Catalogo Nazionale OPAC SBN* online (<https://opac.sbn.it>) e consultati presso gli archivi di biblioteche pubbliche italiane. I testi sono stati esaminati in base alla loro struttura, ai contenuti, alle finalità e all'approccio didattico, con l'obiettivo di individuarne alcuni tratti generici distintivi e proporre una prima classificazione. Essi rappresentano variazioni dello stesso genere che risponde a scopi pedagogici, e includono contenuti diversi derivanti da materiali didattici utilizzati sia dopo, sia durante il periodo fascista, nonché risorse di nuova concezione. L'analisi storiografica del testo offre alcune riflessioni sulle politiche educative postfasciste e rivela tracce evidenti dei metodi e degli approcci glottodidattici in uso in

Gran Bretagna e nel Nord America che furono recepiti dal sistema educativo italiano, dando avvio a profondi cambiamenti nella storia dell'insegnamento delle lingue.

PAROLE CHIAVE: insegnare e imparare l'inglese come lingua straniera, grammaticografia, storia dell'insegnamento dell'inglese, ricerca d'archivio, Italia degli anni Cinquanta, postfascismo.

1. Background and aims

In the aftermath of World War II and Fascism, Italy embarked on a journey of social and economic transformation, aiming to become a global industrial power. During this period of reconstruction, the study of foreign languages, including English, gained new momentum due to novel educational reforms and policies implemented to increase, at least theoretically, Italians' knowledge of languages.

English as a foreign language taught in our country became progressively more widespread and prominent beginning at this time – the 1950s (Pellandra 2004; Balboni 2009; Nava 2021) –, although it was not able to oust French from first position until the 1970s. The period under investigation here also saw important developments in the linguistics and grammaticography of English (especially in the US, cf. Hudson and Walmsley 2005: § 3.1) as well as in its role as a means of international communication (see the many publications on *English as a Global Language* or *Lingua Franca*, among them: Crystal 2003; Christiansen 2015; Jenkins 2015; Mauranen and Vetchinnikova 2021), and is concurrent with what is often considered to be the beginning of so-called “Present-Day English” (Smitterberg 2005, cit. in Nava 2021: 45. See also McLelland and Smith 2018).

Scholarly literature argues that English and foreign language studies were reintroduced in Italian schools after a gap during the fascist regime (Balboni 2009; Rapisarda 2015; Balboni and Porcelli 2023). However, there is no evidence of a decline in or cessation of foreign language study or use during that period. On the contrary, recent research has shown that interest in learning and using foreign languages, especially English, almost never waned during Fascism. Pireddu (2023) demonstrated that

the magazine *Le lingue estere*, published in Italy from 1934 to 1950, consistently advertised language courses, including English. Rundle's work (2021) on translations during Fascism is also notable; surprisingly, despite expectations of a closed totalitarian system, fascist Italy led the world in translations (especially those from English) in the 1930s, closely followed by Germany and France.

In September 1945, an emergency decree by the National Unity Government reinstated three hours of foreign language instruction in middle schools and confirmed limited hours in high schools. Colonel Washburne, leading the Education Subcommittee of the Allied Military Government in the late 1940s, introduced John Dewey's teaching methods in the Italian education system, emphasising pleasure in learning and socialisation. This shift from traditional approaches was considered revolutionary and had a significant impact on the school development plan of the late 1950s and 1960s. In short, it stressed the limitations in the grammar-translation tradition, a shift towards oral language skills, and innovative methods like continuous language practice and the use of phonographic materials. To satisfy the new learning needs and a changed social-economic context, suitable didactic materials were needed.

This paper seeks to undertake a survey of such materials, specifically focusing on those designed for teaching and learning English in Italy during the 1950s. In so doing, it aims to shed light on a period that has received limited scholarly attention thus far. Indeed, only Vetorel and Lopriore (2014) and Nava (2019; 2021) have explored certain aspects of 1950s textbooks. Moreover, diachronic overviews of the Italian education system, particularly with a focus on English language teaching, often omit the 1945-1960 period (cf. Romagnuolo 2019).

What textual genres were available for the teaching of English after the twenty-year-long fascist autarchy? To what extent did the texts refer to glottodidactic methods and linguistic theories in their paratexts, and how were these reflected in their structure and content? Did they showcase any instances of innovation in this regard? Who were the authors/teachers contributing to the creation of these materials? Did the texts connect to the educational policies implemented by the Italian Min-

istry of Education during that time? These are some of the questions that will be addressed here from a historiographical standpoint.

2. Corpus collection and methods

For the purpose of the analysis, a corpus of texts was first collected through bibliographical research using the *Catalogo Nazionale OPAC SBN*, accessible at <https://opac.sbn.it>. Data were obtained that were thought to be useful in understanding the quantity and nature of the materials for teaching English by school university teachers or for self-study in educational institutions or private contexts in the ten years under examination.

The search¹ revealed that, in the 1950s, over 500 texts were published both for teaching institutions² and for a presumably wider general public, which used them for the self-study of English or, at least, on a personal basis. For 1952 alone, which was chosen as a sample year for this case study, the catalogue shows 34 texts compiled by 35 different authors and two anonymous ones (so probably 37 in all), issued by 26 different publishers. In order to answer the research questions outlined in paragraph 1, the texts were examined by focusing on their macrostructure, i.e. the paratextual apparatus, with specific reference to title-pages, tables of contents, prefaces, and introductions. Contents in the microstructure were only analysed cursorily to check whether or not the grammaticographers' claims and assumptions were justified. By adopting the perspective of historical

¹ The OPAC SBN online National Catalogue was initially searched for the following pre-selected keywords: "English language teaching" / "English language learning" / "English teaching" / "English learning" / "Corso" AND "English" / "Corso" AND "English Language" / "Grammatica inglese" / "Manuale" AND "Inglese" / "Metodo" AND "Inglese" / "Lezioni" AND "Inglese".

² For insights into language instruction in schools, refer to Pellandra's (2004) comprehensive study and Cordié's (1964) guide on preparing for state school exams. Morandi (2014: 148-149) presents a table detailing the school system during the First Republic (1945-2003). To explore the allocated hours for foreign language instruction across various schools, consult the tables included in the Ministry of Education's December 1, 1952 Decree, published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* on February 11, 1953, issue no. 34.

genre analysis (Berkenkotter 2007) and relying on recent studies on historical grammaticography (McLelland and Smith 2018; San Vicente 2019), a preliminary classification of the materials was proposed (see paragraph 3 below).

3. Findings

This paragraph starts off with a brief discussion of the authors and publishers of the texts, followed by an overview of the corpus itself, proposing an initial classification of the materials based on their purposes, intended audience, contents, and the context of use.

3.1. Authors and publishers

Table 1 comprises the texts' authors and publishers. The compilers were mostly school teachers, with a minority being university professors (e.g., Mario Hazon). In discussing publishing houses engaged in foreign language education, reference will be made to Bruna Ranzani's (2007) research on the history of foreign language publishing. Insights will also be drawn from Anna Mandich's (2007) examination of resources dedicated to the teaching of French during the twenty-year fascist period and Chiosso (2004) on publishing policies during Fascism and the Italian Republic. While significant attention has been devoted to the history of the educational system and school publishing during Fascism, along with the strong influence exerted on both by the regime (Ascenzi and Sani 2005; Galfré 2005), little, to the best of our knowledge, has been given to studies on the impact that the major historical and political changes in Italy between the post-unification period and liberation had on teaching and the production of school textbooks related to specific subjects, especially English language learning³.

³ Rapisarda (2015) provides only a general overview of foreign language teaching. For a brief yet relevant discussion on the topic, cf. Khalaf's (2019) essay on censorship and counter-censorship applied to language textbooks in Fascism and post-Fascism publishing.

Table 1. List of authors and publishers in alphabetical order.

Authors	Publishers
Ballerini, Angelo	Andò (Palermo): 1
Besenal, Emma	Cappelli (Bologna): 1
Bianchi, Irene	Casanova (Turin): 2
Borgogno Dellacasa, Nimma F.	Conte D. (Naples): 1
Camilli, Amerindo	Corsarini (Pordenone): 1
Ceretti Borsini, Olga	Edisco (Turin): 1
Charles, Anne	Editrice Sarda (Cagliari): 1
Cox, Hilda	Ferri V. (Rome): 1
Deering, Samuel Richard	Garzanti, A. (Milan): 2
Elliott, A.V.	Krachmalnicoff (Milan): 1
Farina, Pietro	La Nuova Italia (Florence): 1
Fasoglio, Arturo	Lattes, S. e C. (Turin): 1
Franzinetti, Ada	Lef, Libreria ed. Fiorentina (Florence): 1
Fusco, Arturo	Le Monnier, F. (Florence): 2
Gallenga, Paolina	Manfredi, C. (Milan): 1
Gargiulo, W.	Mariani (Milan): 1
Gibb, Ferdinand C. T.	Paravia (Turin): 1
Giglioli, Lilia	Sansoni, G.C. (Florence): 1
Giordano Orsini, Gian Napoleone	Saturnia (Rome): 1
Grasso, Vincenzo	Signorelli, C. (Milan): 3
Hazon, Mario	Società Editrice Internazionale (Turin): 2
Mackey, William Francis	Stab. Tip. Piacentino (Piacenza): 2
Malgeri, Jole	The British School of Milan (Milan): 1
Mattu, Antonio	Unione Arti Grafiche (Città di Castello): 1
Michelotti, Albertina	Valmartina (Florence): 2
Motta, Giuseppe	Zanichelli (Bologna): 1
Noonan, James Aloysius	
Novi, Teresa	
Orlandi, Giuseppe	
Pecorini, Alberto	
Pellegrini, Giuliano	
Save, Luigi	
Vallese, Tarquinio	
Valpolini, Maria Luisa	
Ventura, Federico	

Out of the 37 authors 20 are male, 13 female, two anonymous and another two not fully identified as only initials are given for their first names (i.e., Elliott A.V. and Gargiulo W.). From the 1930s to the 1960s they are all very active in the writing of texts for teaching English, but also other languages. This is the case, for example, of Ferdinand Gibb,

who between 1931 and 1965 turned out 37 texts including handbooks of German for Italians, but also of Italian for English and German speakers. Then there is Federico Ventura, author of nine books for teaching English and numerous other co-authored texts, also for French and German, or Giuseppe Orlandi, compiler of an Italian-English / English-Italian dictionary and, with new editions and reprints, 28 texts for learning English. Further, Mario Hazon comes to mind, compiler / author of highly popular dictionaries and English grammars and texts, republished and reprinted from the first decades of the 20th and into the 21st century (on Hazon, see Nava 2019 and Vicentini 2019). Particularly successful were the two co-authors Paolina Galenga and Albertina Michelotti, who wrote four English texts for school and college (secondary school, vocational-technical school, and teacher training college) with as many as 19 new editions and reprints between 1943 and 1966⁴.

This concise sample analysis reveals that the authors of post-fascist texts were active in producing educational resources even during the fascist era. Moreover, a significant proportion of them engaged with multiple languages and diverse textual genres for the teaching of foreign languages at schools of different levels (primary and secondary), which attests to great versatility.

Publishers were predominantly to be found in the north of the country (15 out of 26 publishing houses, and 21 out of a total of 34 texts), the highest number in Milan with nine (i.e., Garzanti and Signorelli), followed by Turin with seven. This despite the fact, mentioned by Ranzani (2007: 26), that from the post-unification period onwards, publishing for language teaching moved to the centre of Italy (cf., for example, the publishing house Dante Alighieri, which closed down for good in Milan and set up its headquarters in Rome and Naples) (cf. also Mandich 2007 on publications for teaching French).

⁴ On Albertina Michelotti, Hilda Cox, and Novi Teresa, see also Ranzani (2007: 82).

3.2. The body of texts: A proposal for text classification: genres, purpose and teaching methods

While acknowledging the findings' provisional nature, the texts, consulted at the National Central Library of Florence and Bologna University Library archives, can be categorised into the listed main and sub-categories, encompassing both first and new editions (Table 2). Classification considers Barsi's (2018; 2023) categorisation for 1950s French grammar books used in both universities and schools, along with that by Nava (2018) for university English grammar books published in Italy from the 1950s to the 1980s. Both authors note that the target audience is frequently implicit, presumably due to the materials being designed for both school and university students, which emerges in this corpus as well.

Table 2. Classification of the texts based on purpose, addressee and editions.

Genre and addressee		1st eds.	New eds.	Total eds.
Textbooks aimed at school students (middle school, high school / gymnasium, technical and vocational school ⁵)		7	12	19
Textbooks aimed at a wider / undifferentiated audience (designed to be used without a teacher)		2	/	2
Textbooks and materials for language practice aimed at school students	Phonetics and pronunciation handbooks	2	1	3
	Conversation handbooks	1	1	2
	Exercise and vocabulary handbooks	4	4	8
Total texts				34

⁵ The 'technical' or 'commercial' school (It.: *scuola di avviamento*) granting access to technical and vocational schools / institutions was distinct from middle school, which allowed access to high schools and gymnasiums. Establishment of the unified middle school in Italy, as commonly acknowledged, dates back to 1962. For an in-depth exploration of the history of school education in Italy, refer to Bonetta (1997), Genovesi (2006), Dal Passo and Laurenti (2017).

3.2.1. Textbooks aimed at school students

Table 3. Textbooks aimed at school students published in 1952.

Author(s)	Title	Publisher	Place
AnonA	<i>Up-to-date English: corso pratico di lingua inglese</i> (2 vols)	Tip. V. Ferri	Roma
Ballerini, Angelo	<i>The 20th Century King's English Grammar: contiene tutte le regole per formare la frase inglese</i> (2nd vols)	Stab. Tip. Piacentino	Piacenza
Borgogno Dellacasa N. F.	<i>Let's Speak English. Grammatica della lingua inglese: metodo diretto</i>	Zanichelli	Bologna
Cox H. and Novi T.	<i>Everyday English: A Practical Modern Grammar</i> (2nd revised ed.)	Felice Le Monnier	Firenze
Elliot A. V., Mackey W.F. and Noonan J. A.	<i>Listen and Speak: ascolta e parla. Nuovo corso di inglese per principianti</i> (5: Lezioni 101-125, Lezioni 126-150. Radiotrasmesse dalla voce di Londra, servizio italiano della BBC)	Valmartina	Firenze
Fasoglio A. and Besenval E.	<i>Corso di lingua inglese: teoria e pratica</i> (3rd ed.)	Soc. ed. Edisco	Torino
Fusco A.	<i>Grammatica inglese: fonetica, morfologia e sintassi in 70 Lezioni con numerosi esercizi, letture, nomenclatura su 25 argomenti ed oltre 400 espressioni idiomatiche</i> (2nd ed.)	D. Conte	Napoli
Gallenga P. and Michelotti A.	<i>A New English Grammar: fonetica, grammatica, esercizi, avviamento alla conversazione, letture, temi di conversione: conforme ai recenti programmi ministeriali</i> (6th ed.)	Società Editrice Internazionale	Torino
Gibb C.F.T.	<i>Living English: La lingua inglese viva. Parte II. Corso superiore con grammatica sistematica della lingua inglese,</i>	Sansoni	Firenze
Giordano Orsini G. N.	<i>Corso pratico di lingua inglese: ad uso delle scuole</i> (9th ed. newly revised and amended)	La nuova Italia	Firenze
Grasso V.	<i>Essentials of English Grammar. Nuova ed. riv. corretta ed accresciuta di nomenclatura e letture da Antonio Meo</i>	Casanova	Torino
Grasso V.	<i>Grammatica ragionata della lingua inglese</i> (new ed.)	Casanova	Torino
Hazon M.	<i>Corso di lingua inglese moderna</i> (19th revised ed.)	Garzanti	Milano

Hazon M.	<i>Elementi di lingua inglese</i> (19th entirely revised and amended ed.)	Garzanti	Milano
Motta G.	<i>Quick and Easy. Nuovissimo metodo per lo studio della lingua inglese: fonetica, grammatica, studio del vocabolario, avviamento alla conversazione...</i> (2nd revised and amended ed.)	Lattes	Torino
Orlandi G.	<i>Essentials of English: elementi di lingua inglese,</i>	C. Signorelli	Milano
Orlandi G.	<i>Grammatica della lingua inglese: per gli alunni delle scuole secondarie, classiche, tecniche, professionali e commerciali</i> (5th revised and updated ed.)	C. Signorelli	Milano
Valpolini M.L. and Bianchi I.	<i>Lezioni di lingua inglese: corso completo. Morfologia, sintassi, numerosi esercizi, nomenclatura, brani di versione, antologia di letture progressive</i> (5th ed.)	Mariani	Milano
Ventura F.	<i>Corso pratico di lingua Inglese per la scuola media inferiore</i>	S. Andò e Figli	Palermo

Many of the materials included in the first category of the sample (Table 3) feature the term ‘grammar’ in their title, even though they are texts of a more hybrid form, lying somewhere between a coursebook for teaching English and a grammar in the modern sense of the term. Nevertheless, a recurrent core approach is clearly evident from the contents page, extending across various new editions, which begins with pronunciation using the alphabet and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) or other methods / symbols of phonetic transcription. Reading serves as the initial step in learning the phonographic system. Subsequent to this, there are several numbered chapters, referred to as ‘lessons,’ addressing parts of speech and emphasising aspects related to morphosyntax and language use. Each lesson opens with a list of words and their pronunciation, mostly drawn from the lexis of professional life (e.g., commerce, accountancy, industry, correspondence, law, etc.), along with short phrases. Following this, each chapter presents the grammatical rule or language item, concluding with exercises, usually translation from and into English, gap-fills, questions to be answered, and images to prompt an oral or written indication of the referent term. The final section in-

cludes practical reference materials such as models of commercial letters, short reading texts, and a brief lexicon / glossary.

This segmentation of the text into multiple lessons, each focusing on specific topics, the incorporation of real-life objects (*realia*) to enhance the teacher's explanations, and the inclusion of cultural aspects all align with an approach that seeks not only grammatical proficiency but also, and importantly, communicative learning⁶. Language acquisition primarily occurs through structural exercises (pattern drills), which are repetitively practiced to stimulate learners to utilise words and phrases through techniques like substitution, expansion, and transformation.

Some authors explicitly declare their reliance on a broadly 'practical' or, more precisely, 'direct' method. This is exemplified by Borgogno Dellacasa's grammar book entitled *Let's Speak English. Grammatica della lingua inglese: metodo diretto*, whose introduction elucidates the key elements of the direct method. This approach wielded considerable influence on teachers and grammarians throughout the entire first half of the 20th century⁷. An example is the use of L2 to describe language features ("it is assumed throughout that the teacher speaks English"), a learning strategy that does not concentrate at once on the grammatical feature, which is supposed to emerge by induction, but attempts to recreate the same process by which the mother tongue is acquired ("this book has been planned so that the pupil must learn by *doing*, by *listening* and by *thinking* in English" – original italics). This is achieved through exposure to the environment where English is spoken or by engaging in classroom conversations with the teacher, although recourse to translation into L1 remains significant:

Every lesson should be read by the teacher first, translated by the pupils themselves and explained by one or two pupils in Italian. Then the tea-

⁶ For more on this, cf. "L'insegnamento delle lingue e la linguistica" in De Mauro (1977: 27-34) and Richards and Rodgers (2014).

⁷ There is an extensive bibliography on the direct method, primarily highlighting its significance as the pioneering approach in language teaching. It captured the attention of educators and specialists, offering a methodology that propelled the didactics of foreign languages into a new era, specifically the era of methods (cf. Richards and Rodgers 2014).

cher will explain that again in English: it is very important that the learner should listen to the teacher's pronunciation. (All the instances are excerpted from Borgogno Dellacasa 1952: IV)

Interestingly, examples such as these highlight how the learners' L1 was viewed as an asset rather than an obstacle in the textbooks analysed. Italian (i.e., L1) appears to have been frequently employed as a 'mediation tool' for communication purposes, despite the growing encouragement for students to immerse themselves in the second language (L2). This was in line with the apparent prevalence of the 'monolingual' approach, contrasting with the 'multilingual' approach (cf. Cook 2010), in English applied linguistics and language teaching in Kachru's (2006) inner circle contexts over the same time period. In fact, L1 was often used for scaffolding purposes, particularly in providing directions for practice exercises (cf. Nava 2022 on this).

Returning to the structure of the texts, the observation about the recurrence of a similar fundamental organisation of content, complemented by diverse materials and exercises tailored to the target audience, aligns with the insights presented by Ranzani (2007). Unlike primary school, characterised by a strong sense of uniformity preventively imposed by the adoption of a state text in 1929, secondary education followed a number of different paths. This is evident from the variety of the titles of the texts under scrutiny here, which now focus not only on content but also on the type of school and the class year. The publishing market had gone through several changes during the 19th and 20th centuries, experiencing a substantial and continuous increase in book production, particularly in the sector of language teaching textbooks. Among these, in addition to the more simply structured ones referred to as 'language grammars', many were composite collections featuring variations that rendered them more adaptable to different and evolving situations in schools, diverse educational categories and levels, as well as varying requirements.

When delving into the corpus of texts reported in Table 3, one can observe that they were recurrently reissued and reprinted to meet new and diverse purposes. Thus they were commonly referred to as 'handbook-containers' or 'covers' (Ranzani 2007). For example, this is evident in Vincenzo Grasso's grammar book (1952), where the additional con-

tent is explicitly indicated in the title: “nuova [...] corretta ed accresciuta di nomenclatura e letture [...]” / “new [...] amended and added nomenclature and reading passages [...],” or in that of Giuseppe Orlandi (1952: title-page), which manifestly refers to the intended users (“gli alunni delle scuole secondarie, classiche, tecniche, professionali e commerciali” / “for pupils in upper secondary school studying Classics, technical, vocational or commercial subjects”). On the one hand, this degree of overlap reveals a diverse range of competencies while, on the other, it is aimed at producing an apparently new product. Nevertheless, it helped to increase the commercial value of the school handbook, proving to be lucrative for several publishers in the first half of the last century, despite potentially being of mediocre quality and frequently subject to institutional influence. This type of text category encompasses not only textbooks for lower and upper secondary schools including ‘grammar schools’, and for gymnasiums and lyceums (which were referred to in our corpus as ‘scuole classiche’ / ‘schools for Classics’), but also technical and vocational schools. Sometimes the same text could be adopted by various kinds of school contemporaneously (cf. Orlandi’s *Grammatica della lingua inglese*, 1952). Lastly, though not included in this study, it is interesting to note that the archival investigation brought to light a substantial number of anthologies, true bestsellers used in the teaching of humanities, in particular English literature.

3.2.2. Textbooks aimed at a wider / undifferentiated audience

Table 4. Corpus of texts for a wider readership published in 1952.

Author(s)	Title	Publisher	Place
Farina P.	<i>L'Inglese in 16 lezioni senza maestro, per gli italiani in Australia</i>	Tip. Unione Arti Grafiche	Città di Castello
Save L.	<i>Nuovissima grammatica della lingua inglese con nozioni sulla lingua americana: ogni vocabolo con la rispettiva perfetta pronuncia</i>	F.lli Corsarini	Pordenone

The textbooks intended for a wider readership comprising self-taught adult students or those who could do without any help from a teacher

were categorised separately (see Table 4). The text *Nuovissima grammatica della lingua inglese con nozioni sulla lingua americana: ogni vocabolo con la rispettiva perfetta pronuncia* by Luigi Save (1952) gives some space to American English and adopts the same approach as textbooks for schools. The author maintains that

[...] l'autodidatta, dopo avere studiato l'intero volume [...], avrà solo bisogno di curare qualche lieve sfumatura di pronuncia [...], dopodiché potrà ben vantarsi di avere studiato l'inglese da solo, il che non è dir poco.⁸ (p. 8)

The work *L'Inglese in 16 lezioni senza maestro, per gli italiani in Australia* by Farina (1952) openly states in the title that a teacher is not needed and that it is meant for the Italian immigrant community in Australia. This testifies to the availability of materials addressing the demands of learners of English from the expanding circle in Kachru's (2006) model who sought to engage with and work in inner circle countries where English is spoken as a native and first language.

3.2.3. Textbooks and materials for language practice aimed at school students

Table 5. Corpus of textbooks and materials for language practice aimed at school students published in 1952.

Phonology and pronunciation handbooks			
Author(s)	Title	Publisher	Place
Camilli A. and Pellegrini G.	<i>Elementi di fonetica inglese</i>	Valmartina,	Firenze
Deering S. R.	<i>Un manuale per la pronuncia della lingua inglese secondo il metodo chiamato Resonator Scale con l'aiuto del Sistema Internazionale di simboli fonetici</i>	The British School of Milan	Milano
Mattu A.	<i>Fonologia inglese: brevi note di fonetica propedeutiche allo studio della lingua inglese</i> (2nd ed.)	Editrice Sarda	Cagliari

⁸ Eng. transl.: “[...] after reading through the entire book, self-taught students will only need to perfect some slight aspects of pronunciation, at which point they can truly pride themselves on having studied English by themselves, which is quite something”.

 Conversation handbooks

Giglioli L.	<i>Manuale di conversazione inglese corredato di note grammaticali per il personale di albergo e pubblici esercizi in uso nei Corsi e nei centri di addestramento turistico alberghiero dell'E.N.A.L.C.</i>	Saturnia	Roma
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Vallese T. and Gargiulo W.	<i>A Conversation-Book for Students of English (4th ed.)</i>	Cappelli	Bologna
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 Exercise books, phrase books and reading books

AnonB	<i>Un po' d'inglese: manuale pratico di nomenclatura e di fraseologia con pronuncia figurata</i>	Krachmalnicoff	Milano
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Ballerini A.	<i>Esercizi di spelling, di lettura, di versione e riversione: The 20th century King's English grammar</i>	Stab. Tip. Piacentino	Piacenza
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Ceretti Borsini O.	<i>Yes: sillabario italiano-inglese / testo di O.C.B. Illustrazioni di Ivan Ketoff</i>	C. Manfredi	Milano
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Charles A.	<i>Passi scelti per versione in Inglese</i>	Lef, Libreria ed. Fiorentina	Firenze
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Cox H. and Novi T.	<i>Pleasant Hours, an English Reading Book (new and enlarged edition)</i>	Felice Le Monnier,	Firenze
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Franzinetti A. and Malgeri J.	<i>Can I help you to Learn English? Esercizi e letture per il primo anno di studio</i>	G. B. Paravia e C.	Torino
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Gallenga P. and Michelotti A.	<i>Brevi letture inglesi illustrate e argomenti per la conversazione (5th ed.)</i>	Società Editrice Internazionale	Torino
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Orlandi G.	<i>Raccolta di passi per esercizi di versione inglese (3rd ed.)</i>	C. Signorelli	Milano
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The textbooks and materials for the study and practice of phonetics and pronunciation (Table 5) are a reflection of the great attention paid to the oral side of languages in this period. Clearly evident in some of the texts analysed are the principles of the oral method and the so-called 'situational teaching of a foreign language', with a structuralist imprint, which surpass the direct method as they rest on a theoretical and practical basis in applied linguistics. According to such approaches, the teaching of a foreign language starts with speaking and the material is first presented orally by the teacher and then in written form. This is also reflected in other texts from previous categories (see paragraphs 3.2.1

and 3.2.2 “Textbooks aimed at school students” and “Textbooks aimed at a wider / undifferentiated audience”); for example, Save’s grammar book has a written description of pronunciation in American English, “indispensabile a quanti abbiano rapporti commerciali, culturali, ecc., con gli Stati Uniti d’America” / “indispensable for those who have commercial, cultural, etc., connections with the United States of America” (1952: 9), with examples of Americanisms that are described and commented on through comparison with their British variants⁹. Some authors recommend that students listen to radio broadcasts to hear the accent of native speakers, a method that enables them to learn the language on their own. It is thus not by chance that two texts were sponsored by the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) (Elliot, Mackey, and Noonan 1952) and the British School of Milan (Deering 1952), two organisations that were active in promoting English language and culture worldwide by means of education, information and entertainment. The former, in particular, had in 1943 begun to experiment with teaching English using written, audio, and video materials as a way to strengthen ties with areas of Europe occupied during the war. These texts are from the period immediately before the ‘Linguaphone’ and ‘Phonoglotta’ conversation courses associated with the use of gramophones and radio-gramophones in schools. Balboni (2009: 61) notes that they were first acquired by schools in 1931 and then shelved under Fascism since “la volontà politica di autarchia [prevalse e finì] per escludere le lingue straniere dalla scuola italiana” / “the policy of autarchy came to predominate and foreign languages were excluded from Italian schools”. Much attention was paid to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), though in the corpus of works analysed there are also authors who judge it to be ‘approximative’ and so suggest other systems of phonetic transcription (cf. Motta’s textbook *Quick and Easy. Nuovissimo metodo per lo studio della*

⁹ See also *Grammatica ragionata della lingua inglese* by Vincenzo Grasso, 5th ed. (1952), where a seminal study by Harold Palmer, titled *The Oral Method of Teaching Languages*, from 1921, is mentioned. In this essay, the exercises are described as “a true gold mine of real phrases from everyday life, worth being learnt by heart, *sentence by sentence* [...]”. This underlines the approach advocated by proponents of oral methods, which became the benchmark for teaching the English language in the 1950s (cf. Richards and Rodgers 2014).

lingua inglese: fonetica, grammatica, studio del vocabolario, avviamento alla conversazione..., 1952). The texts *Elementi di fonetica inglese* by Camilli and Pellegrini (1952) and *Fonologia inglese: brevi note di fonetica propedeutiche allo studio della lingua inglese* by Mattu (1952) consist of elements of phonetics / phonology or preliminary notes for studying the English language. Deserving of particular attention is the small handbook *Un manuale per la pronuncia della lingua inglese secondo il metodo chiamato Resonator Scale con l'aiuto del Sistema Internazionale di simboli fonetici* by Deering (1952), which proposes an experimental method under the name of 'Resonator Scale'. The author says that it arose out of his experience as a teacher. The IPA phonetic symbols are shown and there is some practical advice on the phonation and articulation of English vowels and consonants from an angle of comparison with Italian ones. The text comes with "records" so that the student can listen to a mother tongue speaker for practice; for those who can read music, pentagrams with notes are added. This aspect also reflects the methodology and strategies of that period in which audio-oral and audio-lingual methods (cf. Barsi and Rizzardi 2019), which are able to make use of sound supports, proffered oral instructions as a way to achieve competence in speaking while putting to one side the study of grammar or literature as the main objectives in studying a foreign language.

The conversation handbooks follow an established practice deriving from pedagogical grammar books, in which the functional aspect is predominant. They are texts containing words and phrases deemed as being useful for conversational purposes. In the body of texts analysed, Vallese's handbook *A Conversation Book for Students of English* is for students, while Giglioli's *Manuale di conversazione inglese corredato di note grammaticali per il personale di albergo e pubblici esercizi in uso nei Corsi e nei centri di addestramento turistico alberghiero dell'E.N.A.L.C.* (1952) is intended for "personale di albergo e pubblici esercizi in uso nei corsi e nei centri di addestramento turistico alberghiero [...]" / "hospitality and public establishments personnel and use in tourism-hospitality courses and training centres [...]". The latter contains material with examples from real working contexts, thus covering specialised jobs, for example composing letters and advertisements in

hospitality, etc. The author's intention to adopt the practical-direct method is already expressed in the title.

The books with exercises are connected with learning programmes. They were probably adopted so that students would do the exercises by themselves for homework or during the holidays. These texts were collections of passages for translation into English (e.g., Charles; Orlandi) or practical handbooks containing vocabulary, phrases (e.g., AnonB), reading passages (e.g., Cox and Novi; Gallenga and Michelotti), or a mixture (e.g., Ballerini; Franzinetti and Malgeri). The book by Ceretti Borsini is aimed at children with targeted illustrations (Table 3). All were published in 1952.

3.2.4. Concluding remarks, limits and future developments

To conclude, it can be asserted that an analysis of the texts used for language teaching, particularly English, in Italy during a period that remains relatively unexplored compared to the entire second half of the 20th century (defined here as post-1960s) – a time when the study of foreign languages began to expand after the end of fascist autarchy – allows us to assess how the methods originating in Britain and North America permeated and were embraced by the Italian education system. This integration led to significant changes, as evidenced by research spanning two decades¹⁰.

This study also accounts for some aspects of ministerial policies in the education sector (one example will suffice – the fact that there were two different ways to access higher education: middle school and technical / commercial school) and in publishing that are certainly of interest to the historian of languages, and not only.

It is generally known that the Allied Military Government's Education Subcommittee restored conditions that were comparable to those prior to the fascist period without bringing about any paradigm-shifting reforms in the educational system. The study of foreign languages, which had been eliminated from middle, 'commercial', and elementary schools in 1940, was, however, reintroduced in 1945 into the second and

¹⁰ See the activities led by HoLLT (<https://www.hollt.net/>) and CIRSIL (<https://cirsil.it/>) research networks for the history of language learning and teaching.

third grades of middle school, thanks to an emergency law decree by Justice and Education Minister Arangio-Ruiz (Balboni 2009: 60 and 75-77, cit. in Barsi 2023). Therefore, in view of this linguistic gap or autarchy, it appears to be appropriate to investigate the textbooks issued between 1950 and 1959 and to focus on a series of publications that were renewed over time. In this respect, an area which needs to be examined is the widely varying and open approaches that are applied in some experimental texts (for example, those for teaching pronunciation in the body of texts scrutinised), which would seem to reflect an even more variegated landscape of independent and alternative voices.

Finally, though still at an early stage, this quantitative exploration of archival catalogues shows the marked presence of English in the Italian school system and the success of some textbooks as opposed to others. Nonetheless, there is a need to investigate this phenomenon further and above all in terms of comparison with other languages taught in the decade in question (French, of course, being the main one) (cf. San Vicente 2019; Vicentini and Lombardini 2019).

So far, this research is necessarily incomplete since the online catalogue does not contain all the texts published in the period in question. In addition, some of the works found through the OPAC website search engine have not been catalogued with an exact date and are therefore not included in the body of texts referred to here, despite the decade 1950-59 being used as one of the filter criteria. Consequently, continuation of this research project in the future envisages consulting other online and paper archives and comparing the texts unearthed to other teaching materials.

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