



Quaderni di ricerca

Texts and ideas in the history of language learning and teaching

edited by

Giulia Nalesso, Alessandra Vicentini



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Table of contents

<i>Alessandra Vicentini, Giulia Nalesso</i> , Exploring language learning and teaching through texts and ideas: A historiographical perspective	1
<i>Giulia Nalesso</i> , Obras lexicográficas para el aprendizaje del español y del italiano en el siglo XVI: el caso del <i>Vocabulario de las dos lenguas</i> de Las Casas (1570)	5
<i>Anna Polo</i> , La nomenclatura en la <i>Gramatica española</i> de J.F. Perles y Campos (1689)	27
<i>Victoriano Gaviño Rodríguez, María José García Folgado</i> , LinPePrensa. Ideas sobre la lengua y su enseñanza en la prensa histórica española (1800-1939)	51
<i>Natalia Peñín Fernández</i> , Los repertorios lexicográficos ¿menores? en la lexicografía italoespañola: aproximación a la nomenclatura de Francesco Marin	75
<i>Florencia Ferrante</i> , Una traducción en clase de español: algunas observaciones sobre la versión española de <i>De los deberes de los hombres</i> (1843) de Silvio Pellico, traducida y corregida con notas gramaticales por Manuel Galo de Cuendías	93
<i>Polina Shvanyukova</i> , Theory, practice or an impracticable combination of the two?	111
<i>Esteban Lidgett, María José García Folgado</i> , La enseñanza de la lengua en la prensa pedagógica argentina a comienzos del XX: un análisis las intervenciones en <i>El Monitor de la educación común</i> (1900-1922)	129
<i>Daria Zalesskaya</i> , Les manuels de russe langue étrangère pour francophones dans la période 1917-1960: influence des idées des linguistes-slavistes	153

<i>Alessandra Vicentini</i> , 1950s textbooks for EFL teaching and learning in Italy: A historiographical analysis	179
<i>Silvia Gilardoni</i> , Per una storia del metodo glottodidattico della grammatica valenziale.....	203
<i>Andrea Nava</i> , From knowledge telling to knowledge transforming. Towards a new view of writing in English language teaching in Italian universities in the last two decades of the 20th century....	225
<i>Félix San Vicente</i> , <i>Marco Mazzoleni</i> , <i>Carmen Castillo Peña</i> , <i>Ana Lourdes de Hériz</i> , <i>Hugo E. Lombardini</i> , <i>Juan Carlos Barbero Bernal</i> , LITIAS. Lo italiano en territorios hispanófonos	245

Exploring language learning and teaching through texts and ideas: A historiographical perspective

Alessandra Vicentini, Giulia Nalesso

This volume brings together peer-reviewed contributions that analyze an array of textual genres spanning diverse historical periods, countries and cultures, and encompassing various languages. The texts reflect the evolving landscape of ideas and socio-historical paradigms pivotal to language teaching and learning. Ranging from the 16th to the 20th century, these contributions employ diverse methodological perspectives, with a common denominator being the historiographical slant. The authors delve into questions such as: how – and why – were pedagogical texts compiled across diverse countries and periods? How can these texts be analyzed linguistically? How have other textual genres – general and specialized press, literary texts, travel books, etc. – contributed to enhancing the debate on foreign language teaching? How do these texts relate to the socio-political and historical context(s)?

Following a chronological order, **Giulia Nalesso** opens the collection with an article about Las Casas's *Vocabulario de las dos lenguas toscana y castellana* (1570). The goal is to examine the author's educational intent in creating the lexicon for learning Italian and Spanish as foreign languages. The text's content and structure are analyzed, emphasizing its pedagogical role and importance as the first printed Italian-Spanish dictionary.

Cristóbal de Las Casas's *Vocabulario* is also tackled in **Anna Polo**'s study, serving as a benchmark alongside Lorenzo Franciosini's *Vocabolario italiano e spagnolo* (1620) for a comparison with the interlinguistic equivalences presented in the bilingual *Gramatica española* by J.F. Perles y Campos (1689), whose nomenclature is thoroughly examined.

Moving into the 19th century, the *LinPePrensa* project, outlined in the contribution by **Victoriano Gaviño Rodríguez** and **María José García Folgado**, endeavors to explore the circulation and expression of ideas concerning language and its teaching in written press from the 19th century to the initial decades of the 20th century. This timeframe holds particular significance, aligning with the evolution of philology as a scholarly discipline and the press, which emerges as a social forum for opinions and public discourse. This research line mirrors recent academic approaches to non-traditional sources, aiming to unearth novel data and expressions that may enhance our understanding of the history of linguistic thought.

Natalia Peñín Fernández delves into one of the so-called ‘minor lexicographical repertoires’ within didactic works – such as grammars or specialized manuals as well as literary or informative works (travel books, etc.). Her scrutiny centers on the nomenclature *Raccolta dei nomi sostantivi più necessarij a sapersi* included in Francesco Marin’s grammar published in Rome in 1833. The analysis dissects certain orthographic and accentuation elements, drawing comparisons with the *Diccionario de la Academia* published in 1817.

The focus of **Florencia Ferrante**’s study lies at the intersection between the history of language teaching and learning and translation history. It concentrates on the work *De los deberes de los hombres, discurso dirigido a un jóven* (Toulouse, 1836) by Spanish liberal Manuel Cuendías, who translated into Spanish Silvio Pellico’s renowned moral treatise *Dei doveri degli uomini. Discorso ad un giovane* (1834). The text includes a number of grammatical annotations of a contrastive nature between Spanish and French, as Cuendías utilizes it in his Spanish language courses at the Royal College of Toulouse. The essay’s aim is to highlight the political and educational context against which this unusual translation from Pellico’s text was published and examine the translator’s comments within the framework of his linguistic and didactic ideas.

Polina Shvanyukova’s paper takes us to post-Unification Italy, investigating English language teaching to assess the impact of its institutionalization on both content and teaching methodologies within the emerging national education system. The study meticulously examines

two official syllabi for teaching English as a foreign language in higher-rank state technical schools (*istituti tecnici*), which were issued in 1876 and 1886. The objective is to identify overarching concepts, continuities and changes in the strategies for teaching modern foreign languages as endorsed in official governmental documents.

Now well into the 20th century and moving to South America, **Esteban Lidgett** and **María José García Folgado**'s contribution analyzes the articles on language teaching methods published in *El Monitor de la educación común*, a pivotal periodical devoted to pedagogical issues in early-20th-century Argentina. In particular, the paper explores the period spanning from the education reform (1900) to the establishment of the *Instituto de Filología* (1922), which was marked by a prolific language debate and notable shifts in pedagogical approaches. The gradual professionalization of linguistic knowledge played a key role in shaping the definition of school contents for language teaching.

Daria Zalesskaya leads us back to Europe through France and Russia, by exploring textbooks of Russian as a foreign language compiled and published in French-speaking countries for French-speaking students. The analysis encompasses the portrayal of the Russian language and culture, as well as its speakers, the teaching methods employed, and the influence of linguistic ideas during the first half of the 20th century.

Dealing with post-fascist Italy and English language teaching and learning is **Alessandra Vicentini**'s paper. It presents a case study centered on a corpus of textbooks of English for Italian learners from the 1950s, sourced from the online *Catalogo Nazionale OPAC SBN* (<https://opac.sbn.it>). The article scrutinizes the structure, contents, purposes and teaching approaches of the textbooks, proposing a preliminary classification. The historiographical analysis uncovers some of the educational policies and teaching methods adopted by the Italian education minister, influenced by practices from across the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean.

The origins of the valency grammar model proposed by Lucien Tesnière in France in the 20th century is the subject of **Silvia Gilardoni**'s paper. Its pedagogic application and contribution to the history of language teaching are addressed. Beginning with Tesnière's own reflections and methodological suggestions, the analysis extends to scholars who

have disseminated the valency theory from the perspective of language teaching. The work outlines the reasons behind the model's effectiveness as both a tool and a method for metalinguistic reflection and the development of linguistic-communicative skills.

Andrea Nava leads us to Italy in the second half of the 20th century, a period marked by the beginning of experimentation in the teaching of the English language rather than its literature in Italian universities. These mainly engaged academics from non-linguistic faculties (Politics, Economics and Commerce, etc.). By scrutinizing a corpus of ESP materials designed for Italian university students, the paper investigates the increasing emphasis placed on writing (as opposed to reading) in the Italian university context during the period analyzed.

Félix San Vicente, Marco Mazzoleni, Carmen Castillo Peña, Ana Lourdes de Hériz, Hugo E. Lombardini, Juan Carlos Barbero Bernal, finally, close this volume, by presenting the LITIAS PRIN Project, now in its final phase. Its goal is to create a corpus of texts for interpreting and evaluating the impact of the Italian language and culture on Spanish-speaking countries, especially in Latin America. This is pursued by locating and cataloguing works published in these countries, encompassing didactic texts (IFL grammars and bilingual Italian-Spanish dictionaries) and non-literary translations of Italian originals.

In conclusion, by employing different analytical approaches, the contributions in this volume tackle different cultures and languages, diverse spatial and temporal dimensions, all underpinned by the same historiographical perspective. The variety of texts, periods and genres examined offer new research viewpoints, making this work relevant to the reconstruction of the history of didactic methods and practices of foreign and non-foreign languages.

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