Frakeki. Friulian language literacy in preadolescent children

A L E S S A N D R A   B U R E L L I [*]

Abstract. Friulian schools are witnessing a gradual increase in the teaching of Friulian, a minority language native to this area of Europe. As well as providing an opportunity for educational and linguistic research, the activity presented in this paper was aimed at teaching Friulian writing skills to lower secondary school students (11 to 14 year olds), using blog-writing in order to develop linguistic and communicative expertise and especially graphemic and textual competence. The activity, involving six local schools, confirmed that the use of communication technology in minority language teaching can reinforce a student's positive attitude towards the language, thus playing an important role towards the achievement of the educational aims. In addition, the analysis of the written texts produced by the children has shed light on Friulian morphosyntax as used by Friulian-speaking preadolescents, revealing the strategies that they employ as they learn to write in Friulian and progress in their educational route.

Key-words. Friulian language, literacy, blog, lower secondary school.

Introduction. Friulian language teaching has now become widespread in Friulian schools and every day new documentation can be found that bears witness to the multiplicity of educational experiences in this field. It is mostly infant and primary schools that are developing modalities and approaches by which to integrate Friulian in the curriculum, but there are also original and important educational proposals devised by lower secondary schools. However, up until today scarce attention has been paid to the teaching of minority languages to 11- to 14-year-old children, an age group where the process of shaping individual identities is interwoven with an urgency to find ways to communicate with oneself

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and the others, within the family and in larger contexts, and where reading and writing skills are already well developed in Italian and partially also in a foreign language.

Despite the fact that sociolinguistic research has been showing a decrease in the numbers of Friulian speakers (Picco 2002), there are still many preadolescent children attending lower secondary schools in Friuli Venezia Giulia who use the minority language at home and with their friends. They joke, discuss, comment, pass judgement, exchange information also, if not firstly, in Friulian. In these children the process of developing and shaping their personal identity and of analyzing their social and cultural context is marked by a presence and a not insignificant use of the Friulian language (Albarea 1997). However, at the moment no studies are available which describe the discursive and syntactic structures or the thematic aspects of the language used by Friulian-speaking preadolescents when they meet or when, like most of their peers (Censis U.C.S.I. 2008), they communicate with each other using the mobile phone or the internet.

The strong need to communicate and socialize which is characteristic of today's adolescents and preadolescents is best met by linguistic communication through the telephone or the computer. Since 2003 Italian social research institute Censis has been linking the relationship between these new media and the younger generations to a crisis of traditional educational agencies (family, school, church, political party); to the loss of a strong sense of identity; to the importance being attributed to flexibility and adaptability, effectively preventing people from finding stability in cultural, personal, professional contexts; to a distorted self-perception caused by the increasing popularity of adolescent role models (and adolescent looks) in all social classes and age groups. In this situation the media are the only point of reference that children trust in order to define themselves with regards to the world around them (Censis U.C.S.I. 2003). The media are essential components of our daily life and children are confronted with them as they grow up: they look up to them to shape their identity and their value system, and to verify the strength of the persona that they present to others. They are not just instruments to inform and be informed, but also and foremost tools by which children build social ties and create their personal identity.

The research project *Communicating in Friulian on the blog* has arisen from these considerations and from a desire to design an education tool for teaching Friulian writing skills to lower secondary students by using information and communication technology. The study was developed at CIRF, the research centre on Friulian language and culture of the University of Udine; it was financed by the Regional Government of Friuli Venezia Giulia and was conducted in 2007/10 in partnership with 3 and later 6 schools from the Udine and Pordenone provinces.

The development of a literacy

path in Friulian requires that we take into account the particular linguistic and social aspects characterizing this language. Friulian is a neo-latin language used today – mostly orally – by at least half a million people in the region of Friuli in north-east Italy. Despite having a fundamental linguistic unity which is recognized by scholars, Friulian is generally spoken using one of its many diatopic varieties, marked by strong phonological and morphological differences (Francescato 1966, Frau 1984). It is mainly spoken at home and with friends, together with Italian, but is also used at public events, in cultural initiatives, in artistic and literary production (music, theatre, film, novels). In the late 1980s a process of linguistic normalization started which was completed in 1998 when the Regional Government promulgated the official Friulian writing standard (OLF 2002). The standard adopted presented few differences from that of modern Italian, mainly the introduction of the grapheme ç and the use of the digraphs cj and gj to express phonemes which are unique to Friulian. The new standard also included an outline of standard grammatical structures, based on literary language and the Friulian variety of central Friuli (Lamuela 1987, Vicario 2005), but nowadays this common language is not used orally. As a result, in order to learn how to read and write, Friulian speakers need to move away from their own oral variety and become accustomed to a language which is only used in writing, so they often experience a sense of puzzlement and es-

trangement. Educational activities promoting Friulian literacy skills need to take into account the sociolinguistic context which has only been briefly outlined here, but which has been described in detail elsewhere (Picco 2002, De Agostini & Picco 2007). Research has shown that Friulian is present, in different proportions, throughout the territory of Friuli, and is easily encountered by non-speakers in everyday contexts. Even when it is not actively used, it is not perceived as a "foreign" language, but as a language of the community. Therefore, Friulian language teaching needs to take this multilingual context into account and become an integral part of language education (GISCEL 1975), aiming at developing good communication skills, using language skills in a variety of contexts, encouraging an awareness of language use (Mioni 1987, Ricci Garotti 2011).

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) in language teaching has quickly developed over recent years. ICT has become an important feature of everyday life and economic activities, and every day more so. An increasing majority of people, particularly in Europe, are using the computer for different reasons and, especially with young people, computer use has become part of a normal daily routine (Eurydice 2011). In the last fifteen years ICT has been increasingly employed in educational activities, but this is often hindered by a lack of access to the internet. Internet access can make a difference, in terms of quality and quan-

tity, to the educational resources available to the students; it can help them develop their ability to explore the web and exploit it to its full learning potential, an ability which is increasingly important "for full participation in a knowledge-based society" (OECD 2011: 148).

Using these technologies means producing communicative events. Finding information, writing an e-mail, reading a message, updating a website, listening to music, watching a video are all communicative activities (Council of Europe 2001), carried out by using linguistic and communicative skills in ways which depend on the specific context and technological tool. For this reason language teaching, and not just foreign language teaching, should use information and communication technologies in order to develop learning activities aimed at reinforcing the ability of students to communicate with ease and discernment in these new forms.

The project *Communicating in Friulian on the blog* has dealt with these issues with an interdisciplinary approach, which included educational evaluation, glottodidactic application, linguistic analysis, and ICT application in teaching practice. Research work concentrated on finding ways to integrate Friulian in the curriculum, making reference to the studies on multilingualism and multilingual education, and pursued the following objectives: i) analyse if and in which ways ITC can contribute to fostering the perception of Friulian as a verbal code able to meet the ex-

pressive needs of contemporary preadolescents; ii) create an educational context which can encourage students to speak out, compare positions and attitudes, have a critical approach to communication on the web; iii) analyse the themes that children deal with when writing in Friulian on the blog; iv) analyse the formal characteristics of the language used in oral interaction in class and in web writing; v) observe the process of successive literacy acquisition (Baker 2006) in 11 to 14 year olds; vi) find techniques and teaching strategies which can develop Friulian language literacy in ICT environments.

Participants. The project was conducted over a period of three school years and with the participation of a variable number of lower secondary schools, all of them state school, and a variable number of classes. As shown in Table 1, 3 schools took part in the project for a full three-year period, 1 school only for the second and third year, 2 schools only for the last year. With regard to classes, 3 participated for the full period, 2 for two years, and 5 only for the last year.

The 3 schools which were originally involved in the study are situated in different social and cultural contexts within the Udine province. School "E. Feruglio" in Feletto is part of a "comprehensive institute" based in the municipality of Tavagnacco, immediately to the north of Udine. Once entirely Friulian-speaking, Tavagnacco (almost 15,000 inhabitants) has experienced over the last decades a deep social and eco-

Table 1. Schools taking part in the project *Communicating in Friulian on the blog.*

School	School Year 2007/08		School Year 2009/09		School Year 2009/10	
School	*Class*	*No. of children*	*Class*	*No. of children*	*Class*	*No. of children*
"P. Diacono", Cividale	2C	19	3C	19	2C	24
"E. Feruglio", Tavagnacco	1D	19	2D	19	3D	18
"D. Faleschini", Lestizza	1A, 1B	30	2A, 2B	30	3A, 3B, 2A, 2B	73
"L. Da Vinci", Mortegliano	//	//	2A, 2B	40	2A, 2B	42
"A. Venier", Ajello	//	//	//	//	2A	13
"B. Partenio", Spilimbergo	//	//	//	//	3A	22

nomic transformation, following the development of a large shopping and business area along the main roads linking Friuli to Austria, as well as an important population growth, attracting inhabitants from other parts of Friuli and Italy. School "Paolo Diacono" is located in Cividale (just under 12,000 inhabitants), a historic town not far from the Slovenian border. The town is built on the edge of the Slovene-speaking area of the Udine province and includes a sizeable Slovenian minority, mostly workers who settled in Cividale to be near their workplace. School "D. Faleschini", part of the "comprehensive institute" of Mortegliano, is situated in Lestizza (just under 4,000 inhabitants), a village to the south of Udine. Built in the middle of the Friulian plain, Lestizza still maintains its original agricultural aspect, but the majority of its inhabitants are working outside the village in the service sector or in factories (Guaran 2008). Starting with school year 2008/09 two more classes were included in the project, both of them part of School

"Leonardo da Vinci" of Mortegliano, near Lestizza. Like Lestizza, Mortegliano (5,000 inhabitants) has a strong agricultural tradition and a large number of Friulian speakers, but today its inhabitants are mostly working in the service sector or in factories situated nearby.

At the beginning of school year 2009/10 two further classes joined the project, Class 2A from School "A. Venier" in Ajello, in the province of Udine, and Class 3A from School "B. Partenio" in Spilimbergo, in the province of Pordenone. Traditionally part of the Friulian-speaking area, Spilimbergo (15,000 inhabitants) is a historic town on the right bank of the River Tagliamento. It includes a number of manufacturing companies in the furniture-making, construction and mechanical sectors, is the seat of an internationally-renowned mosaic school, and plays host to several artistic and cultural events. Ajello (just over 2,200 inhabitants) is a village in the southern Friulian plain, about thirty kilometres to the south of Udne. Including a large number of

voluntary associations, it is characterized by a lively cultural scene and is host to an important Agricultural Museum.

Every school involved in the project is situated in areas where Friulian is currently spoken: a western Friulian variety in Spilimbergo and central-eastern varieties in Ajello, Tavagnacco, Cividale, Lestizza, and Mortegliano. It is difficult to establish, however, what percentage of the population speak the language. Recent data, referred to the whole of Friuli, estimate that in Friulian-speaking areas 57.2% of the population speak Friulian regularly, 20.3% speak it occasionally and only 2.6% neither speak nor understand it (Picco 2002).

The data regarding the Friulian language competence of the children who took part in the project, collected through a self-administered questionnaire, have shown different degrees of familiarity with the language in the different classes and schools (Figure 1). The highest percentage of Friulian-speaking children was in Class 3B in Lestizza, where only one child did not know the local language. The lowest percentage (16%) was in Tavagnacco which also had the highest percentage (17%) of children who did not understand the language. Considering that those who speak a language also understand it, it appears that the great majority of children involved in the project could understand the local language. In the two Mortegliano classes, in Class 2A in Lestizza and in the Ajello class, all children understood the language; in three more classes (Classes 3A and 3B
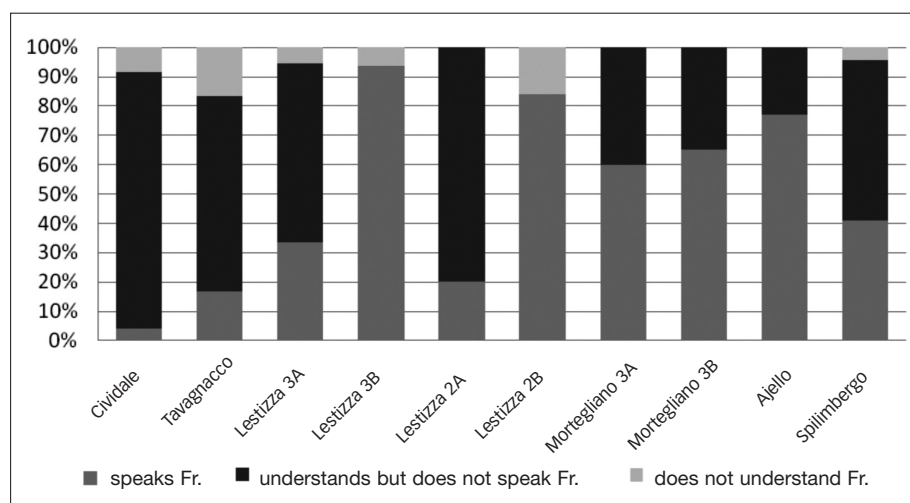

Figure 1. Friulian language competence among the children taking part in the project in the school year 2009/10.

in Lestizza and Spilimbergo) more than 90% of children could understand it; in the remaining three classes (Cividale, Tavagnacco and Class 2B in Lestizza) the percentage exceeded 70%.

Materials e methods. In order to reach the educational goals we had identified, we decided to involve the children in creating and updating a blog, one of the most popular forms of written communication on the web. As a communicative form, blogs retain elements of continuity with more traditional textual forms such as the diary, the newspaper article, the letter. Yet compared to these, blog writing is less harnessed by formal rules, is more subjective, implicitly inviting readers to take part in the conversation, therefore showing great potential for building contacts. In blogs, like anywhere in the web, a new form of writing is gaining ground, showing elements of oral speech, moving beyond its traditional function as a social and cultural memory or as an expression of the imaginary. It is a change which requires a different competence and introduces new ways of doing things, which translate into a new language.

Blogs have often been used in educational activities and in particular in second and foreign language learning (Camilleri et al. 2007). The reasons are many-fold. First of all, as is often the case with the new media, blogs can answer a teacher's need for innovation and experimentation of new classroom practices and work tools; they can also act as a powerful motivational lever, having a greater effect than the conventional educational tools available at school; last but not least, they are easy to use. Opening a blog and keeping it updated is simple and quick and does not require particular skill. Its technological framework is basic, it is easy to find ready-made, so the author can concentrate on the production of texts. A second and educationally-interesting aspect is the balance between individual and collective production which characterizes blogs. A blog brings together individuality and sociality through its nature of being a personal diary which is shared with a group of people who may be adding their comments, so it can easily become a place where to conduct a sort of communal discourse.

From the point of view of linguistic education, using blogs to develop writing skills enables us to overcome the artificial nature of traditional educational activities, often leading to lack of motivation: writing on a blog is writing for a real-life reader and collaborative interaction takes place as posts are published and comments are received, as opinions are exchanged on different kinds of texts (Arani 2005). Publishing a text on a blog requires that we reflect on the idea that we want to express and on the interpretation that readers may make of it: we need to be aware of what we write and of who our readers may be. Thanks to its double nature as private diary and public space, a blog is a type of writing of great social value and particularly useful for developing writing skills (Pugliese

2006). When writing on a blog we need to choose both an appropriate expressive form and an effective communicative approach: we need to find ways to "socialize" our thoughts, bearing in mind our possible readers, the nature of the topic, the context where our message is received (Mancini 2007). By blogging we are given the opportunity to verify our ideas and reflect on them both offline, as we write the text, and online, as we confront ourselves with our readers and possibly review our position, so writing becomes both a medium and a product of communication. Blogging is a computer-mediated communication form that can answer the children's need to keep in touch with friends, look for new friends, share their personal problems, discuss on facts and topics of their everyday life. For these reasons, a blog is a valuable tool for reaching the educational and linguistic goals that we mentioned before.

To create the blog we chose the WordPress blog tool and adapted it by translating into standard Friulian all the technical terms appearing on the screen, both to users (students) and administrators/moderators (teachers).

The educational activity was carried out by the class teachers (7 Italian teachers, 1 English teacher, 1 Religious Studies teacher, 1 Technical Education teacher) during their normal (curricular) school hours. In Lestizza and Mortegliano an external teacher was called in to assist with and oversee the project. The activities were carried out during the second part of the year, for one hour a week.

Most of the time work was conducted in the computer room, but at times part of the activities were carried out in the classroom.

Friulian was the language of communication in class during all blog-related activities. However, particularly when there were children who did not understand the language, a few exceptions were made, and Italian was used for communication in specific circumstances (Cook 2002). Friulian-speaking children were encouraged to use it in class, without obligation to do so.

Initially, the proposal of a Friulian-language blog was presented to the children by the class teachers and a discussion followed, aimed at illustrating this particular writing environment/tool and its communicative function and establishing if the children were already familiar with the blog format. Later teachers guided the class in an online exploration of blogs, including some that the children were not already familiar with, encouraging them to analyse their technical characteristics, content, and linguistic form. Children were curious to get to know the other classes involved in the project and who would also contribute to the blog, so they exchanged e-mails where they introduced (individually or in groups) themselves, their school, their town or village, adding any information that they felt was important to communicate.

In order to choose a title for the blog, all children, individually or in a group, made a proposal explaining the meaning of the name they had

chosen and the reasons for choosing it. Later researchers and teachers examined the proposals, eliminating repetitions and titles that did not follow the criteria of brevity and meaning that had been discussed and agreed with the children. The eight remaining titles were given back to the children with a brief explanation for each name, and were voted. "Frakeki" (an unorthodox spelling of the Friulian phrase meaning "push here") and "Il cjanton dai pensîrs" (the corner of thoughts) were the most popular; the former, which was the one that children preferred, became the name of the blog, the latter became its subtitle.

To retrieve and monitor children's writings a template was devised, which was named "Diari" (diari.dot) and included two boxes. Children would write their post/comment in one box and then, individually or in small groups, they would use the other box to edit the text with the help of the teacher before uploading it and publishing it on the blog. The page with the original and edited texts would then be saved as a document with the name of the author (i.e. Marchisio.doc) in the personal folder of each child. In this way the children's original texts were preserved and it was possible to keep track of revisions and corrections, which could also be used for self-correction.

Children wrote their very first Friulian texts without worrying about spelling. Starting from these texts, teachers drew the children's attention to the representation of the different phonemes. Rules were gradually in-

troduced, either on the input of the children who made enquires as they wrote or when a certain topic was dealt with. In Mortegliano and Lestizza a PowerPoint file was created which illustrated the orthographic rules which had been presented in class; the file was uploaded on the blog as a tool available to all users. Children were also invited to use online language tools such as the Italian-Friulian dictionary (*Grant dizionari bilengâl talian-furlan*), the Friulian spelling dictionary (*Dizionari ortografic*) and the spell checker (*Coretôr ortografic*) developed by CFL2000 (www.cfl2000.net). They were also given a copy of the spell checker (COF) produced by SSTeF (www.sstef.org).

In text revision, teachers followed a common set of rules: i) to accept and value the linguistic varieties used by the children and spoken in their communities, which were written following the official writing standard; ii) to gradually introduce the Friulian common language, not as a replacement of local varieties but as an additional tool which would be used in written language; iii) to correct only what was strictly necessary in order to produce a text which would be read by other children and seen as an example of written prose; iv) to encourage self-correction once orthographic rules had been acquired.

Children were free to choose the topics that they would deal with. When they proposed to publish a text or an image that could be in breach of someone else's privacy (or their own) or could be offensive to someone, the

teacher would discuss with the author (or authors) whether it was advisable to do so, and what consequences this would have. In this way we tried to preserve the personal freedom of expression which is the main characteristic of blog communication, at the same time encouraging children to become aware of the social aspects of web communication and of the personal responsibility attached to publishing texts or images on the web. The initial idea of allowing an open access to the blog was turned down by the teachers who, in line with school directives aiming at guaranteeing the safety of children, decided to restrict the access to the blog to the school children involved in the project.

Results. The project has proved without doubt that communication technologies can contribute to fostering the perception of Friulian as a verbal code able to meet the expressive needs of contemporary preadolescents. According to the observations of teachers, all children, including those who at first could not understand the local language, were enthusiastic at the idea of writing on a Friulian-language blog and immediately tried to produce an article. No child showed diffidence or reluctance to use the Friulian language and nobody thought it could not be used to communicate on the computer. The motivations that accompanied their proposals of a title for the blog indicate that they considered this activity as a good opportunity to express themselves, to acquire new friends and to keep in touch with their peers.

In addition, they suggest that children perceived the use of Friulian as an element of personal identification. This can be seen in the explanations they added to their title choices: "because we are Friulian kids"; "because we speak Friulian"; "because we come from Friuli"; "because we surf the net speaking Friulian"; it is also suggested by the presence of the words "Friulian" or "Friuli" in most titles and by the fact that all of them, except two, were in Friulian. The children who did not understand the local language still took part in the activity: it was for them an opportunity to share a new experience with the rest of the class and, working individually or with the assistance of more experienced friends, they wrote articles and comments and attempted to say a few sentences in Friulian. In addition, the fact of using Friulian on the blog opened a debate on the importance of knowing more languages and preserving the mother tongue (also in the case of foreign people); it encouraged children to think about Friulian: why to use it, and in which contexts; it made them aware of the existence of different Friulian varieties and of the necessity of a unified spelling. Teachers took notes, recording observations and opinions, which generally indicate that children were able to develop an awareness of linguistic diversity and of its social and individual dimension, both at local level and at a much larger level in Italy and Europe.

Altogether 180 articles and 559 comments were published on the blog, for a total 27,640 words. Arti-

cles and comments were of variable length: some of them were texts of just one word or phrase, while others were much more elaborate. Articles were organized in categories, on the basis of the interests expressed by the children: "Cinema and TV", "Music", "School", "Sport", "Everything". The highest number of articles (70) and comments (495) fell under the category "Everything", then "School" (43 articles and 22 comments) and "Sport" (39 articles and 22 comments). The difference in numbers is explained by the fact that texts often had no category indication and so were automatically published under "Everything".

The majority of messages were expressions of preference, mostly regarding sports and music personalities, but also music in general, films, clothes, and generally activities carried out by the children in their spare time. The lexical frequency index includes among the 200 most-used words the forms of the verb *plasê* (like): *plâs*, *plasin*, *plasarès*, *plasût* and those of the adjective *biel, biele, bielissim* (beautiful). Higher up in the table are the words *scuele* (school) and *film*; lower down are the names of favourite football teams such as *Milan*, *Inter*, *Udinês.* This last one is also mentioned as *Udin* (masculine, *l'Udin*) and *Udinese* (feminine).

With regard to the process of literacy acquisition in Friulian, teachers' report indicate that children found it natural to start writing a language which up to then they had only spoken or heard, even if they had not yet learned how to spell it. Looking at the texts children had pub-

lished on the blog, it appears that they made reference to Italian spelling rules and not to those of the foreign language they were learning at school. Italian graphemes were used to represent phonemes which are unique to Friulian: <ch> instead of <cj> (*anchie*, *chiavei*) to represent the voiceless palatal plosive /c/; <gh> instead of <gj> (*ghias*, *ghinastiche*) to represent the voiced palatal plosive /ɟ/; in the case of phonemes which are present in both languages, but represented by different graphemes: <gi> instead of <z> for the voiced palato-alveolar affricate /ʤ/ (*giui*); <ch> instead of <ç> (*tiarch*) for the voiceless palato-alveolar affricate /ʧ/; <q> instead of <c> (*quasi*, *squadre*) for the voiceless velar plosive /k/. There are double graphemes (*success*, *meccanic*) for consonantal phonemes which in Friulian are single; there is the grapheme <h> in the third person singular of the present indicative of the verb *vê* (*ha*). The grapheme <sc> (*scelt*; *dodisc*; *conosciût*) is used for the voiceless palato-alveolar /ʃ/ which in Central Friulian has no autonomous phonological status (Finco 2007) but which is present as an allophone in local varieties. Similarly the use of <d> instead of <t> at the end of the gerund and of other words (*vindind*, *mond*) may be influenced by the Italian equivalents which present this grapheme in the final syllable, while in Central Friulian final obstruents become voiceless. To form the adverbs in -*mentri* children almost always use the ending -*a* of feminine adjectives instead of –*e* like in the stan-

dard language (*siguramentri*). Surely the ending –*a* of feminine adjectives is used in Italian to form the adverbs in –*mentre*, but it must be said that adverb formation whereby the suffix –*mentri* is joined to the feminine form of the adjective with the ending modified to –*a* is frequent also in Central Friulian (Vanelli 2007). Articles and comments also contain numerous expedients which children used to convey the "phonicity" and expressiveness of oral speech and to reproduce the mimical, gestural, proxemic elements which naturally prop up verbal interaction in the presence of an interlocutor. Children used rows of punctuation marks to indicate the tone of their voice (*mandi!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*), multiplied graphemes to represent the duration of phones, used capital letters to mark the intensity of the voice, mixed small and capital letters to represent the tone (*non finis plui!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! VONDEEEE EEEEEEEE!!!!!!!!!!!!*); they used emoticons to convey moods and feelings. It is clear that these linguistic modalities were already well known by the children, who use them in personal communication via text messages or e-mails and easily transposed them into their written Friulian productions. Reading the text, it becomes apparent that the fact of using Friulian to express themselves, in forms which are very close to oral speech, enabled the children to convey that "comical-expressionist differential", that "add-on of reality" which according to Raboni (1997) dialects have implicitly and naturally within themselves.

Children slowly acquired a graphemic competence by continually comparing the two languages and their respective spellings, helped in this by a number of language tools (spelling checkers, PowerPoint, GDTF, DOF) and by the corrections made by the teacher. First they consolidated the digraphs <cj> e <gj> representing the palatal plosives /c/ e /ɟ/ which are absent from the Italian phonological system; then they learnt to distinguish between short and long vowels; fairly quickly they were able to learn the correct spelling for the problematic sounds indicated above. It took them a much longer time to learn how to write correctly certain grammatical structures which are very frequent in Friulian:

– relative pronoun *che* + clitic subject pronouns *al*, *e*, e *a* is written in various ways: <u>cal si clame</u>; <u>c'al sta</u>; **chal*, **che*, **ca vinc int di amici*);
– clitic subject pronoun *al* + *è* third person singular of the present indicative of the verb 'jessi', + *à* third person singular of the present indicative of the verb 'vê', + *àn* third person plural of the present indicative of the verb 'vê'; children write: *a le Di Natale*; *A lè mat!*; *al'è une vore pericolos*; *alè plui fuart la juve*.

To analyse the characteristics of the Friulian used by the children we considered the articles written by the Mortegliano and Lestizza classes who, like we said before, showed the highest percentage of children having at least a passive competence in the language and who had produced more and longer texts. These articles

were examined in their original uncorrected form. The morphological marks indicating the gender and number of nouns, the system of articles and the system of clitic subject pronouns suggested that children had used their local variety, although there were some morphological and syntactical forms that were different from those of the common language but could not be attributed to a local variety (Finco 2008). For example, forming questions without correctly placing the clitic subject pronoun in enclitic position after the verb (*A cui plâs il basket? *No l'ere biel?*); the omission of the clitic subject pronoun (*Nicola sune la ghitare*; *a vint Sabrina*; *e ai un cjanut*; *no sin divertudes un mond*); the use of the personal pronouns *vi* instead of *us* (*jo vi plasarai; no vi scrivin)* and *ci* instead of *nus* (*a ci plâs*; *chist sport, ci unis une vore!*); the incoherent use of articles (*le firme e la foto*; *el rock e avonde il pop*) and clitic subject pronouns (*O soi bibi … ma a sint*; *o vin voe … a savin sunâ*); the variation of the morphological marks of the feminine plural forms of adjective and nouns (*dutes lis materis*).

As is often the case with linguistic communication mediated by technologies, the language of the blog displayed formal features which were more typical of oral speech than of written language. The register was informal, the vocabulary colloquial, there were examples of contamination with Italian and English, there were references to the jargon of sports, music and show-business. Phrases were mostly organized with paratactic constructions, using generic connectives such as *e*, *che, parcè che*, *dopo*, *cuant*.

Discussion. The activity has shown that computer-based communicative technologies were able to interest and motivate children and to produce positive results, but the project was not devoid of problems. Teaching hours were limited and taken out of the time allocated to the teachers' own subjects. The timetable was not always respected, because of the unexpected introduction of extracurricular activities or the delay in carrying out other work. In addition, there were difficulties in using the technology available at school. Every school had a computer room which was used in turns by all classes, but often turns were not respected and the room was not available. Also, there were fewer computers than children and when a computer broke down or did not work properly the activity was seriously disrupted.

Children proved to be "digital natives" (Prensky 2001) and were able to move with great ease in this technological environment, showing they were used to a very frequent and intense relationship with the media. Writing in Friulian without knowing its orthography did not diminish their motivation: they mostly took it as a game, expressing a desire to form, expand and strengthen personal relationships with their peers, without limitations of time and space.

Interpersonal relationships and communication were also the distinctive element of the work carried out

in class, and efforts were made to favour interaction in heterogeneous groups. Friulian-speaking children acted as tutors to their schoolmates with little or no language expertise, helping them by making vocabulary suggestions or by giving morphosyntactical indications, and most of all by becoming linguistic mediators, in the sense that they translated and explained to them oral and written expressions and phrases. All children had a chance to practice their language skills: those whose L1 was neither Friulian nor Italian had the opportunity to present it to their friends and everybody had a chance to compare different languages by direct experience, in their interaction in class.

By writing on the blog children were able to express and strengthen their knowledge, as a combination of general cognitive processes and linguistic-cognitive ones, experiences and concepts, writing skills and technological abilities. They did it through educational activities which privileged an active acquisition of knowledge, which was referred to a real-life context and carried out through processes of cooperation and social mediation. The blog succeeded in pulling down the class walls, opening up the classroom to new friends on a potentially planetary level. We would not be wrong to say that this blog managed to create a "community of practice" (Wenger 1998) among the children of every class and among all the classes, since participants shared a common aim and a passion for what they were doing, and by this interaction they learned to do it better.

As it has been observed (Infantino & Santambrogio 2004), the desire to communicate of preadolescent and adolescent children is often expressed in a confused, scarcely linear way, which sometimes clashes against the adult world and sometimes conforms to the pressures of the peer group. Communicating on the blog, writing what they wanted – about their preferences, about friendship and friends, dreams and everyday life – looking in a mirror made of articles and comments, children were able to develop an awareness of themselves in relation to others and to the world around them. Concealed behind their nickname, they could put their own efficacy to test, checking the effect of their words on others without fear of being judged or ridiculed, so fully preserving their spontaneity. In the end they found themselves in the position of devising and acting out strategies of metacommunication, metacognition and syntonization depending on their interlocutors.

The decision to use a blog to teach Friulian writing skills enabled us to bring to light the fundamental link between cognition, sociality and culture which characterizes writing (Della Casa 2003). In devising this educational route we always considered the fact that writing a text is never just using a language, but is operating through discourse in a rhetorical-social context, and that the cognitive mechanisms implicated in the production of a text are always socially connoted, meaning that texts are not individual constructions but are derived from a process of social learn-

ing. During class work, teachers drew their students' attention to the communicative context defined by the recipients, to the aim, content, type of text; to the creative effort required by the expression of personal contents; to the cognitive processes involved in writing: looking for an idea, organizing, writing and editing the text; to the textuality expressed by the textual layout of information. The desire to publish a text and to present it in a correct form encouraged children to learn orthographic rules, to use the language fairly freely in web writing, and to have a more positive attitude towards mistakes and correction. In a context of collaborative work between students and teachers (Kagan 1992) and with the modality of peer learning, linguistic and orthographic mistakes were perceived as a necessary step in the process of learning a language which would enable them to communicate and relate with their friends on the blog. Correction lost its traditional connotation of external intervention, that simply demanded that the work be done again, and was perceived as a re-evaluation of a decision taken, as a legitimate part of the learning process. Friulian-speaking children developed good writing skills, even if not everyone had the patience, at first draft, to pay attention to the graphic form of their texts made of "half a dozen words with lots of dots and exclamation marks, in the style of text messages" (Beltrame 2009). The children who did not speak Friulian and those whose families had arrived in Friuli from other countries showed curiosity and interest, trying to understand the language and attempting to say a few phrases. All children confronted themselves with the system of the common language, helped in this by multimedia and online language tools, and there was an increase in the use of Friulian in spontaneous interaction between children, both in the informal breaks between lessons and in the more formal pauses during a lesson.

The experience of the blog was not only an interesting opportunity to introduce a new teaching tool, but it also gave us the possibility to enrich the curriculum of the schools taking part in the project by involving teachers from different disciplines, even if they were not directly engaged in Friulian language teaching.

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