Informal Contact with English

A case study of Italian postgraduate students

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List of abbreviations

AV: audiovisual
CALL: Computer Assisted Language Learning
CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning
EFL: English as a Foreign Language
ELF: English as a Lingua Franca
EMI: English Medium Instruction
ESL: English as a Second Language
ESP: English for Specific Purposes
ICT: Information and Communication Technology
L1: first language
L2: second/foreign/additional language
LBC: language learning beyond the classroom
Ln: any other foreign/additional language
LOTE: Languages Other Than English
MALL: Mobile Assisted Language Learning
MMORPGs: Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games
OILE: Online Informal Learning of English
OTT: Over-the-Top (referred to video platforms)
RQ: Research Question
SLA: Second Language Acquisition

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Acknowledgments

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Introduction

In today's globalised and multicultural world, English has become a part of everyday life for many people and has crossed regional borders, spreading to countries where it is not spoken as a national or official language. New affordances are available through which the language can be used, learned and appropriated by new speakers, in a constant reshaping of identities, communicative and multilingual practices. At the same time, English is increasingly moving out of the domain of formal education to be accessed informally by learners, users and expert users of the language for recreation, study and work. As these shifting scenarios are highly diversified across Europe and worldwide, research is called to address several key questions: what is the status of informal L2 learning in different countries, regions and communities – and in different sections of the population? Which position does English hold in the picture – and what are the extent and modalities of spontaneous contact with this language? What are the profiles of the typical users of English? And which implications does informal access to the language have for L2 input, output, and users' attitudes towards English and other foreign languages?

This volume addresses some of these issues by reflecting on informal contact with English in Italy. It offers a snapshot of students' patterns of exposure to the language within a specific setting, i.e. that of postgraduate education – a hub of contact with English and a place at the forefront of change in linguistic behaviour. The research presented here is a case study involving a varied group of participants at a medium-sized university in Italy. As such, it was conceived as an initial exploration of students' behaviours that, while still broadly undetected, may be drastically changing and resulting in novel uses and acquisitional patterns of English as a foreign language and a lingua franca. Although small-scale and with no pretence of wider representativeness, the study can be envisaged as the testing of a perfectible tool of data collection suitable to gather relevant information from different sections of the target population.

The outcomes encourage further refinements and future developments, while highlighting the need for replications and larger-scale observations.

The book is structured in seven chapters and is ideally divided into two parts. The first two chapters introduce the background to the case study, which is presented and discussed in the following part of the book. Chapter 1 focusses on the unique status of English as the language of international communication in today's world. The spread of English and multilingualism are complementary rather than contrasting phenomena that lead to a wide diversification in language usage and functions. Both the use and the acquisition of English as a foreign language are thus becoming increasingly dynamic processes, as are the identities and the practices of L2 English speakers all over the world. In this complex landscape, new affordances are also changing the environments in which English is accessed and learned, encouraging the shift towards untutored and naturalistic contact with the language. If these transformations are affecting the world at large, there are great disparities among different geographical areas. Against this background, Italy is shown to be lagging behind both in terms of proficiency in English and contact with the global language.

Informal language learning is discussed in Chapter 2, where different denominations for this key phenomenon are presented, including 'out-of-school', 'extramural', 'beyond the classroom language learning' and 'online informal learning of English'. Crucial for any characterisation of informal language learning are the constructs of incidentality and informality of context and language, and the type of language users encounter. The centrality of language input brings about an assessment of how English is used on the web and in audiovisual dialogue; it also leads to a review of the acquisitional impact of exposure to popular media in several European countries. Special attention is paid to subtitled audiovisual input, showing how different types of subtitles can variously benefit incidental learning processes.

Chapter 3 shifts the attention to the empirical investigation itself, a questionnaire-based study that tackles participants' frequency and intensity of contact with English through different media. The dual focus of the study is introduced by the two main research question, the first one probing the different sources of informal contact with L2 English, the second one addressing access to English-language telecinematic input. After illustrating the study's rationale, main aims and sample, the chapter describes the design and structure of the survey and the data collection procedure. The questionnaire, which contains 83 items, draws on previous research on profiles of language contact and recent investigations of students' motivations and attitudes towards L2 English. Data were collected during university lectures from a total of 305 Italian students at

the University of Pavia. At the end of the chapter, an overview of respondents' majors, language learning background and self-assessed proficiency level in L2 English is offered to frame the ensuing analyses and discussion.

Chapter 4 describes the findings on overall informal access to English in the sample. Frequency and intensity of exposure to the different input types are presented and discussed highlighting some of their specificities as well as common features. Different input sources are grouped together, including films, TV-series and YouTube videos; social networks, web pages, blogs and forums; songs; face-to-face interaction, while data analysis taps how often and for how long participants engage in these activities. On the basis of these data, exposure indexes are generated and provide profiles of participants' informal contact with English. Factor analysis is used to obtain groupings and correlations among different informal activities.

Chapter 5 focusses on exposure to films and TV-series in L2 English. It includes an analysis of whether students prefer to watch dubbed or subtitled audiovisual products, which subtitles they opt for and which supports they like best. Additional sections investigate the reasons for participants' preferences as well as additional choices of favourite audiovisual genres, translation and subtitling modalities. Respondents' beliefs about the learning outcomes of this input source are discussed in the final part of the chapter, with a conclusive exploration addressing exposure to films and TV-series in other foreign languages.

Chapter 6 draws together the data gathered through the questionnaires and discusses the implications of the findings. With a view to highlighting general trends, it compares Italian postgraduate students against their peers from other European countries. It also develops a reflection upon the target input and its main characteristics. The Italian students are placed close to French and German peers who also access English prevailingly via receptive activities and adopt other similar modalities of exposure to the language. The input which is accessed by the participants in the study is predominantly multimodal, with important potential repercussions on memorisation and cognitive processing. It also contains specialised registers of English and is generally spoken or oralised, a fact that calls for a more thorough characterisation of telecinematic discourse in view of second language acquisition. Hybridity and interactivity are additional features that typify the language of the media and the web and may affect language learning. The multifaceted nature of access to English by the students in the survey brings the discussion back to EFL, ESL and ELF and to the status and shifting identities of learner-users.

Chapter 7 wraps up the volume and offers some concluding remarks. The complexity of English language use and learning in our contemporary world

comes to the fore as does the overall fluidity of mediated and face-to-face communication. The behaviours emerging from this survey may reflect more general trends, suggesting that the status of English in Italy is changing in line with what is happening in other countries in Europe and worldwide. This shift is likely to intensify in the future and as a result of growing informal contact with English in an increasingly multilingual, complex society.

1.
Changing contexts of language use and learning

Everything in a foreign country seems so hard. And the Italians seem proud of not speaking English. Did you think that when you first came here?
(Elizabeth Strout, *Anything is possible*, 2017: 117)

1.1. *The macro-context: English in a globalised world*

The linguistic scenarios we live in are rapidly changing and developing into increasingly complex landscapes where reliance on two or more languages is perhaps the most common characterisation of language use today (Fricke *et al.* 2018: 200). In the midst of such dramatic changes, English has become the language of international communication. A pervasive means of interaction among speakers within Europe and across the globe, it interacts with national and local languages at diverse sociolinguistic levels. In 2013, Aronin *et al.* summarised recent research on the current global situation by identifying two major trends in contemporary language use. These can be branded as a new linguistic dispensation, and consist of the "unparalleled spread and use of English as an international language" and "the remarkable diversification of languages in use" (p. 6). The two trends are not in conflict as they equally ensue from an unprecedented degree of interaction between people and languages. Contact stems from frequent travelling, work mobility and migrations, leading to extreme societal diversification, or super-diversity, and unprecedented complexity (Vertovec 2007). Contact concurrently results from fast-growing internet communication and mobility of resources.

By zooming in on English in his introduction to the collective volume *Attitudes towards English in Europe*, Ferguson (2015) pointed out a few significant social developments that are presently shaping the role of the current lingua franca in the old continent. Radical changes in the stances towards English are taking place that involve novel beliefs and emotions, but also new behaviours de-

veloped by learners, users and expert users of the language. These changes have crucial implications for the formal learning and naturalistic acquisition of English among the younger generations. They also call for a redefinition of the teaching and researching agenda which should accommodate students' shifting patterns of behaviour and additional competences. Unless we consider the macro-context within which the global language collocates in a growingly interdependent society, we cannot profitably examine the many factors and problem areas that affect the access to English and its acquisition in Italy among other European countries. Some of the recent developments discussed by Ferguson (2015) will constitute the background of our evaluation of issues that affect the learning of English among Italian youth. These developments include, first, the increase in multilingualism and ethnic diversity generated by large-scale migration. Most importantly, they are linked to the spread of English in Europe and elsewhere as a 'bottom-up phenomenon', in response to the extensive awareness of the leading role of English in all social and economic enterprises, international exchanges, cultural events, academic and research output. On the wake of such a broad differentiation and growing hybridisation, English requires a new definition, as it presently "does not stand for a discrete, autonomous and well-defined linguistic system, nor even a set of varieties, but covers rather a heterogeneous set of phenomena [including] images, ideas, or discursive constructions" (Ferguson 2015: 12). The diversification of English is also pointed out by Aronin *et al.* (2013: 7), who see the various factors involved in current multilingualism as giving way to "the dazzling array of faces, facets and flavours that English assumes in a variety of contexts", where it develops niches of distinct functions. The differentiation within English is indeed relevant to local and supranational language policies and central to its role as a lingua franca (Ferguson 2018: 36-37).

The extraordinary diffusion of English corresponds to its unique sociolinguistic position as the only hypercentral language (De Swaan 2001), implying that English not only has acquired *more status* but has also *changed status*. If English is arguably used as a foreign language (EFL), a second language (ESL) and the global lingua franca (ELF)[1] internationally, it is also growingly sharing this communal space with other supercentral and central languages in a dynamic multilingual society (Aronin *et al.* 2013, eds). It is not surprising that students often consider English a default choice to be integrated by other, freer and maybe better liked language options. While the global language is alone in occupying the top posi-

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[1]   For a wide-ranging and updated discussion of ELF, see Jenkins, Baker and Dewey (2018, eds). Formentelli (2017) provides a concise and lucid overview of major linguistic, sociopragmatic and discoursal issues involved in ELF and the relationship between ELF and EFL.

tion in the hierarchical configuration of world languages, it coexists and interacts with other languages. Students and users of English alike will consequently be involved not only in practices of languaging but also of translanguaging.

According to Swain (2006: 98), languaging involves using language as "a process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language. It is part of what constitutes learning. Languaging about language is one way we learn language". Languaging therefore pertains to all language users, whereas multilingual speakers integrate all their languages, including the mother tongue, in their discursive practices when translanguaging. Translanguaging is in fact an extension of the concept of languaging, the discursive practices of language speakers, to which the additional feature of using multiple languages, often simultaneously, is added.

> [A] move to 'trans' in applied linguistics signifies the act of languaging as an always on-the-spot dynamic assemblage and negotiation of resources for meaning making. [...] [I]t positions actors, or authors, and their fluid and creative adaptation of a broad array of semiotic resources at the center of its inquiry (Hawkins and Mori 2018: 2).

If multilingual practices emerge naturally in a society characterised by linguistic superdiversity, the growing multilingualism at a societal level results in widespread individual plurilingualism and multicompetence. Cook (2002, 2013) underlines how the plurilingual speaker's competence cannot be viewed as the sum of two monolingual competences, and L2[2] competence cannot be studied independently of the L1, as the languages of individual speakers consistently interact in the processing of both production and comprehension (Fricke *et al.* 2018). Such competence is better understood as the distinctive combination of more knowledges influencing each other and giving way to a unique, complex linguistic system distinct from that of any monolingual speaker.

The natural integration of more languages during meaning-making processes has also called for a reconceptualization of ELF. ELF should actually be conceived as 'English as a multilingua franca' when it applies to multilingual communication in settings where English is part of participants' multilingual repertoires, regardless of whether or not it is used in interaction and to what extent (Jenkins

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[2] We will use 'L2' as a general expression that refers to second, foreign and additional languages. With this label we stress the developmental dimension of a language other than the native language, assuming that the complex and controversial construct of nativeness still has a function in Applied Linguistics (Davies 2004). Here L2 identifies a language of which the speaker does not possess fully-fledged mastery.

2015: 73-74). This means that languages other than English are present in ELF interactions, either concretely as code-switching and code-mixing, or in the form of second-order language contact (Mauranen 2012), i.e. through the influence of interlocutors' L1, L2, Ln, in their use of English (Guido and Seidlhofer 2014).

Increased multilingualism in societies, plurilingualism in the individuals, and the practices of translanguaging should not, however, detract attention from the unique position English holds in Europe and the implications this position has on language learning (Sockett 2014: 6; see also Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir 2018a). According to Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir (2018b: 7-8), the change in linguistic landscape and linguistic ecology dramatically applies to English, which given its status of world language "calls for a new model of what constitutes a linguistic environment for learning". On a larger scale, as English has gained a new position vis-à-vis other foreign languages taught at least in some parts of the world, we need a paradigm shift in the way languages and language learning are envisaged and theorised.

1.2. *Institutional disregard for the learning and teaching of English*

No matter how vital English has become in the contemporary world, proficiency in this language risks being taken for granted and therefore neglected by higher education institutions. This trend may also be due to the status of English as the hypercentral language as well as to the ample availability of the language in many different settings. It is as if the world status of English by magic also implied learner-users' mastery of the L2, with language skills being acquired somewhere else, an asset with which students ought to be equipped when enrolling in higher education. While university governances stress the importance of internationalisation, they often do not see the need to specifically cater for the teaching of the language. Knowledge of English is viewed as a basic pre-requisite, rather than a complex and disciplinary-specific competence to be developed at university level, as revealed by the growing trend in Italian universities to downgrade the teaching of English. English teaching is being increasingly moved out of university departments and into language centres, with (international) certifications often replacing university courses and examinations to assess the achievement of the required standards in English.

A recent survey carried out by Costa (2016) has shown that at many Italian universities that activate English medium instruction (EMI) courses, proficiency in English is not tested as an entry requirement, nor are language certifications obligatory. Only less than half (41%) of the Italian state universities surveyed require

an international certification as an admission prerequisite. Nonetheless, the same survey shows that Italian universities rank students' insufficient English language competence as the greatest difficulty in implementing teaching through English (accounting for 31% of all difficulties) (p. 56). Lecturers' insufficient English language competence closely follows as the second greatest difficulty in carrying out EMI (30%). A concern about lecturers' skills in English has also emerged in a more recent investigation of Italian Economics and Engineering students' perceptions of EMI (Costa and Mariotti 2017). The contradiction between the role of English as the hypercentral language and the little investment in its teaching/learning in many Italian university departments takes the form of a paradox, which could be dubbed as 'the paradox of the supremacy of English in language learning'.

From the perspective of high-level proficiency at large, in a recent study on language disenfranchisement – i.e. linguistic exclusion –, Gazzola (2014) explained that, while the number of European citizens who have some knowledge of English has increased in recent years, their competence in the language is still quite limited, with 97% of Italian nationals having a difficult access to EU communication. Since English is viewed as the default global language, a pervasive commodity, the ill-placed belief may be generated that it is an easy language to learn and little effort or investment are required to acquire it (Jeeves 2015: 289). Aiello (2018: 48) reported that for most of the Italian secondary school students she surveyed "positive attitudes towards English concerned not only its importance but also its simplicity". These attitudes are part of a common, potentially harming, language ideology which couples simplicity with necessity (Bucholtz and Hall 2008: 196-57). Even in countries like Iceland, where English is becoming a second language due to the broad availability and citizens' mastery of the language, the outcomes of questionnaires and interviews in a nationwide investigation have revealed students' declining interest in the study of English at school and in higher education (Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir 2018a, 2018b)[3]. The consequences of such a disinvestment have led the researchers to warn the scientific and education community that young generations lack adequate competence in written academic English to succeed at university and in the professional world.

1.3. *The expansion of affordances in the access to English*

The same broad, longitudinal study carried out in Iceland has highlighted the growing drive to access English beyond the classroom and through a variety

[3]   See also Henry and Cliffordson (2017) on Swedish secondary school students' attitudes.

of means, such as television and the internet (Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir 2018a). This brings us to the main hypothesis in the present book. Although Italy may still be less inclined to foreign language learning, like other southern European countries (Caruana and Lasagabaster 2013: 46), a shift in the access to English and in L2 learning modality is likely to invest the country – on the wake of what is happening elsewhere in Europe and worldwide, where the learning of English is becoming progressively more informal.

While in the past EFL learners' experience was mostly, if not uniquely, limited to the language classroom, the balance may now have tipped in favour of out-of-the-classroom, naturalistic exposure to the language, at least in some countries such as Sweden, where "English is near-ubiquitous in every day environment and, for young people in particular, is the preferred medium of communication in many discourse practices" (Henry and Cliffordson 2017: 714). Aronin *et al.* (2013: 9-14) indeed include the "expansion of affordances", the resources the environment offers to the individual, among the developments that distinguish current multilingualism from "historical multilingualism". More frequently than before, individuals move around and encounter new languages through people having different nationalities and cultures and belonging to various ethnic groups. Within Europe, citizens commonly move for academic reasons, most notably through the Erasmus exchange programme and on occupational and professional accounts, even for short-term jobs or short study visits. They also intermarry and bring up bilingual or multilingual children. Importantly, the same speakers are also exposed to a remarkable range of language stimuli from different media by means of traditional and digital appliances and supports, i.e. television, radio, the internet, newspapers, online newspapers, videogames, etc. Thanks to these rich and diversified contexts, the opportunities for language learning and the development of new literacies multiply. It is exactly through the media and new technologies that the unlimited access to English and other languages is possible for most people:

> Mobility has brought people to places where they encounter languages of which they previously had no inkling and has delivered languages to locations where they were previously never heard. Furthermore, *the media and technology allow us to become acquainted with dozens of languages without moving from our chair*. This furnishes affordances in respect of acquiring languages in numbers [and] modalities unimaginable to our grandparents (Aronin *et al.* 2013: 14, italics added).

The unprecedented expansion of affordances discussed in Aronin *et al.* (2013) and frequently reiterated in the specialised literature (Sockett 2014; Arvanitis 2020)

is likely to bring about substantial acquisitional outcomes, which have just started to be investigated (see Chapter 2). At the same time, while the spread of English in the contemporary world has brought educators and stakeholders alike to consider English a basic education skill together with reading, writing and mathematics, L2 English as a global language risks becoming a disembodied language (Pinner 2016), which surpasses and exceeds frontiers, cultures and community borders (Ushioda and Dörnyei 2017). Hence, English is increasingly considered the language of international communication, detached from the historical, cultural and literary heritage of the communities that speak it natively[4]. The effects of globalisation may be going as far as influencing the process of appropriation of L2 English (Henry and Cliffordson 2017: 713) and the nature of English language learning may change on account of the "linguistic-cultural heterogeneity" in which English is currently embedded (Canagarajah 2007: 925). This variability means that unique blends of social, individual and linguistic factors determine localised contexts of acquisition where English users access the language in socially-determined and yet highly individual ways. Individual choices from what is extensively available – at schools and universities, in the media and music, through internationalisation programmes, via the internet, exchange programmes, travelling, and the like – make up unique and personalised language learning trajectories whose outcomes have just started to be investigated (Dressman and Sadler 2020, eds).

1.4. *EFL, ESL and other foreign languages*

The relentless diffusion of English in the linguistic landscape of most countries internationally also impacts the role that English plays in the lives of non-native speakers of the language. To start with, the line traditionally drawn between EFL and ESL is blurring while the functions English performs in society increasingly multiply. English has often been defined a second language in some countries that still belong to the expanding circle in Kachru's (1985) model of world Englishes and yet are characterised by an extensive presence of English (Boggio and Molino 2017). As noted by Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir (2018b: 5), the "difference between a second and a foreign language situation lies in the *type* and even more so in the *amount* of input (language exposure) the learner has from the Target Language" (italics in the original). Many are the consequences of the frequent and varied contact with English. First of all, English has a differ-

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[4]   For a critique of the claim that English is a de-territorialised language, ideologically neutral and disconnected from its original sources, the reader is referred to Phillipson (2017).

ent status as opposed to other foreign languages, and not only on account of its special role as the language of international communication, or as a basic skill on par with the country's national language or mathematics. The repeated encounters with English bring in elements of familiarity, habit and practice that strongly contrast with the more distant and school-based approaches to other foreign languages. As suggested by the findings presented below and in the next chapters, considerable proficiency in English is likely to result from regular contact with the language through the media. A clear index of the different status of English vis-à-vis other foreign languages is given by the diffusion of the label 'Languages Other Than English', shortened into LOTE. The acronym is now used to refer collectively to the languages learnt or acquired non-natively with the exclusion of English. While the label was first introduced to identify immigrant languages in Anglophone countries – most notably Australia (Djité 1994) –, it has recently been applied to articulate a fundamental distinction between L2 English and other foreign languages (Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie 2017; Duff 2017).

1.5. *Contexts of second language acquisition: Setting the scene*

In parallel with changes in language ecology and the unprecedented expansion of affordances, in recent years research on second language acquisition (SLA) has become more closely concerned with the different contexts in which language learning occurs, focussing on the various types of exposure to second and foreign languages. Following Pallotti (2014: 121-122), context in language learning is to be interpreted as everything that is activated and becomes relevant during access to the language. This includes the immediate linguistic co-text along with the physical setting where the speech act is uttered, but also the broader geographical area or country where learning develops. Context also comprises speakers' previous knowledge and current information, their social and conversational roles and their attitudes towards the situation and the activity at hand. Online communication – the site of much contact with the L2 nowadays – is in turn constructed as a virtual place, where context may be accessed synchronously or asynchronously.

SLA contexts hence include not only formal teaching, but also study-abroad programmes, CLIL, EMI as well as popular media and the internet[5]. In 2012,

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[5]   The bibliography on study-abroad programmes, CLIL, EMI, popular media, gaming and other L2-mediated internet out-of-school contexts (see later in the Section and Chapter 2) is too extended to be cited here albeit just cursorily. The reader is referred for initial overviews to Nunan and Richards (2015, eds), Campagna (2017), Pérez Cañado (2017), Dressman and Sadler (2020, eds) among many.

the European Commission published a frequently quoted report, *Special Eurobarometer 386: Europeans and their Languages* (fieldwork February – March 2012). The report unveiled the sensible increase in the number of Europeans that had regularly been accessing foreign languages, mostly English, through the internet, radio, television, travelling, reading etc. since the beginning of the millennium. The trend has also been documented more locally, as testified by recent surveys on the habits, attitudes and learning outcomes of learners and users of English in many European countries comprising Belgium, France and Germany (Berns *et al.* 2007; Kusyk 2020), Finland (Leppänen *et al.* 2011), Iceland (Jeeves 2014), Norway (Rindal 2015) and Sweden (Kuteeva *et al.* 2015). These investigations confirm that the shift to informal or naturalistic L2 learning via the media is occurring broadly and most notably in northern countries. Two recent studies allow us to compare and contrast two highly different situations within Europe, while highlighting the north-south divide still in place despite Europeans' generalised drive towards English. For instance, if Iceland represents a context of extensive and intensive exposure to L2 English coupled with positive learning outcomes (Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir 2018a), in France students still exhibit little acquaintance with informal modalities of language contact, although they are increasingly accessing English through leisure (Kusyk 2020).

Given the momentous relevance of spontaneous access to L2 English and naturalistic SLA, it is not surprising that a handbook on informal language learning has just been published. *The Handbook of Informal Language Learning* (Dressman and Sadler 2020, eds) aims to bring together recent research that has been carried out around the world from different theoretical perspectives and methodological standpoints. In different geographical contexts and settings, investigators have become aware of the profound changes that have been taking place under our eyes but have remained largely unexplored. In response to these epochal changes, research on informal language learning has become a vibrant subfield in Applied Linguistics, one that is gaining a prominent position in the wider discipline, although research on error analysis, interlanguage and SLA has foregrounded the inner, autonomous, self-directed drive in the development of any additional language since the 1960's. Informal learning was in fact attributed a key role by leading linguists and applied linguists in the 20th century, starting notably with Palmer (1917), Corder (1981) and Krashen (1985). Below, an extract from Palmer, a founding father of Applied Linguistics, supplies evidence of how far back scientific awareness of the centrality of the spontaneous dimension of language learning goes. In the extract, the author discusses the minority of learners who have mastered the foreign language spontaneously:

We find a minority (alas, a small minority!) who have come to possess the foreign language as if it were their first. […] Inquire in each case how the person acquired his knowledge, and you will find that *he acquired it by methods making no call on his capacities for reasoning, for concentrating, for analysing, or for theorising.* Instead of selecting and adapting previously acquired habits connected with his first language, he was able to form new habits.

To sum up our inquiry, we find that *there are people who have been able to use their spontaneous capacities of assimilation in order to acquire a second or a third language*; we find that young children nearly always do so, that certain adults sometimes do so (Palmer 1917: 42-43, italics added)[6].

What has dramatically changed nowadays compared to previous times is the landscape for language acquisition, which is now defined by the vast and diversified availability of L2 input outside institutional settings, via the media, globalisation, travelling and migrations:

What an incredible time ours is for language learning! In the space of a generation – 25 years – all of humanity, or at least the huge part of it with some access to digital communication and/or intercontinental transport, has moved from near-total dependence on the knowledge and expertise and planning of others to a level of autonomy and opportunity for self-teaching and 'picking up' new language unimagined in any other period of human history (Dressman 2020: 1).

Such a change of scenery and the unprecedented availability of informal L2 input have called for novel research questions that aim to address the issues arising from the unparalleled circumstances in which language learning is taking place at present. First and foremost, information is needed on the actual access to L2 input outside formal contexts in different countries, in various population groups, and depending on age, degree of instruction, language competence levels, and other social and sociolinguistic factors such as educational and translational policies. We also need to inquire about the different interactional dynamics arising when language users are in contact with different media, the distinctive input profiles supplied by the various language sources, the role of other languages and nonverbal semiotic codes activated in old and new media. Most importantly, research is called to tackle the acquisitional processes implicated in these new (media) settings, and the outcomes of such an exposure on the various language levels along with the communication practices and the new uses the L2 is put to.

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[6]   Personal pronouns and determiners as in the original.

Among the many extramural settings, audiovisual contexts deserve special attention due to the pervasive impact of telecinematic media in everyday life, with viewers regularly accessing films, TV-series, web-series etc. in an L2, English in particular, via subtitled translation and captions (Vanderplank 2016), through the internet, video-on-demand and streaming services, satellite television, as well as, more recently, mobile phones. Reliance on subtitling vis-à-vis dubbing has been repeatedly linked to the successful acquisition of English in those countries that opted for that audiovisual translation modality since the onset of talking movies (e.g. Pavesi *et al.* 2019). According to several applied linguists, the subtitling – dubbing divide would account for the hiatus between northern and southern European countries in English proficiency levels, with countries such as Sweden and Norway faring much better than Italy and Spain in the L2 (see Caruana forthcoming for a review and section 1.6.). More recently, subtitling has become an option in all those countries – France, Germany, Italy, Spain – that have traditionally drawn on dubbing as the main mode of audiovisual translation. For many nationals in those countries, the accessibility of multimodal English products in their original versions has been fostered by fansubbing practices which make L1 subtitled TV-series quickly available to audiences of eager young followers (see Massidda 2015 reporting on the Italian situation). Whereas the availability of such fansubbed products has been significantly reduced by the recent enforcement of stringent copyright laws, access to Netflix and other streaming internet entertainment services now supports younger generations' habits of watching English-speaking audiovisual materials in their original language, with or without subtitles (Corvi 2016; Jenner 2018; Vanderplank 2020).

A few initial investigations suggest that learner-users have informal contact with English in Italy as well, with Italian students accessing television, the internet, new media, study-abroad and live-abroad experiences, etc. In an investigation on young people's identity with respect to English attitudes, Aiello (2018) explored three constructs, i.e. language attitudes, language-learning motivation and self-perceived proficiency in L2 English, in two groups of final year secondary school students from Naples and Rome. In the 2012-2013 academic year, a total of 205 respondents completed a questionnaire on the three constructs, with a selection of the students taking part in follow-up interviews. In the interviews and responses to the questionnaire's open questions, most students acknowledged that the popular media had an influence on their attitudes towards English and contributed to constructing their perception of English. Most importantly in terms of access to the language, Aiello (2018) reports that many of the participants and their classmates indicated that they frequently watched their favourite TV-series in English, using the Italian subtitles provided by fansubbers, given the

inevitable delay in the broadcasting of the Italian dubbed versions. One of the interviewees admitted the difficulty of watching the American TV-series *How I Met Your Mother* in its original language as he understood only "some words but they speak very fast", while another student commented on the speaking rate of original actors who speak "American English so so fast and they cut the words a lot. And this is okay: I'm fascinated" (Aiello 2018: 50-51). Irrespective of their specific content, these remarks bear witness to the familiarity Italian secondary school students have gained with watching American television.

The studies carried out so far on Italian users were geared towards objectives different from exploring informal contact with English. Overall, to date non-anecdotal, hard-fast evidence of ongoing changing behaviours in Italy is still scant in terms of number of participants, extent and type of exposure, and motivations to access different media, while no broad or systematic survey has been carried out on university students' current habits and aims supporting such habits in their approach to English.

1.6. *Italians' proficiency in the English language*

One final question needs asking to outline the context for the present investigation. It pertains to Italian nationals' contact with English and their competence levels in the language, also with reference to comparative data about other Europeans. According to the language learning survey presented in Eurobarometer 2012, Italy lags behind in terms of citizens' average extent of engagement in extramural English activities – and generally as far as overall competence in L2 English is concerned. As reported in the 2012 European research, 62% of the respondents in Italy said they were unable to speak any foreign language well enough to have a conversation, a percentage that brings the country's rating below that of Anglophone UK (61%) and Ireland (60%), with their notoriously low standards in foreign language learning and use (p. 15). More specifically, only 34% of Italian respondents thought they spoke English well enough to have a conversation in the L2, as opposed to the Germans, Finns and Dutch, who in much greater numbers evaluated their performance in English as good enough for that skill – 56%, 70% and 90% of the respondents, respectively.

The Eurostat 2016 statistics offers more encouraging data on the L2 competence declared by Italian speakers, although the standards are still lower than those emerging in other areas of the continent, a fact that contributes to the persistence of the European north-south divide in foreign language learning. According to the survey, fewer people aged 25-64 living in the three largest Ro-

mance-speaking countries – France, Italy and Spain – compared to people of the same age living in northern Europe stated to know one or more foreign languages. According to the same self-report statistics, Italians reported on average to have a less advanced command of the foreign language they knew best. With the exception of Turkey and Bosnia Herzegovina respondents, they had the worst self-perception of their L2 competence in the whole group of 35 countries analysed – 63.7% stating that their knowledge of the best-known L2 was basic or very basic. When looking at the top countries for declared L2 competence, the percentages of Europeans who reported knowing at least one foreign language was as follows in decreasing order: Sweden, 96.6; Denmark, 95.7; Finland, 92.1; Norway, 92.1; the Netherlands, 86.4. In the Mediterranean area, the corresponding values were lower as 66.1% of the Italians, 60.1% of the French and 54.3% of the Spaniards stated they knew at least one language beyond their mother tongue (Figure 1.1). Overall, a similar order is obtained for the European nationals who believed they were proficient in the language they knew best, presumably English for the broad majority of respondents: Sweden, 59.7%; Norway, 46.2%; Denmark, 41.1%; the Netherlands, 36.7%; Finland, 34.2%; Spain, 29.8%; France, 19.9%; Italy, 10.8% (Figure 1.2). Data from the more recent Eurobarometer 2018 did not specifically focus on L2 learning.
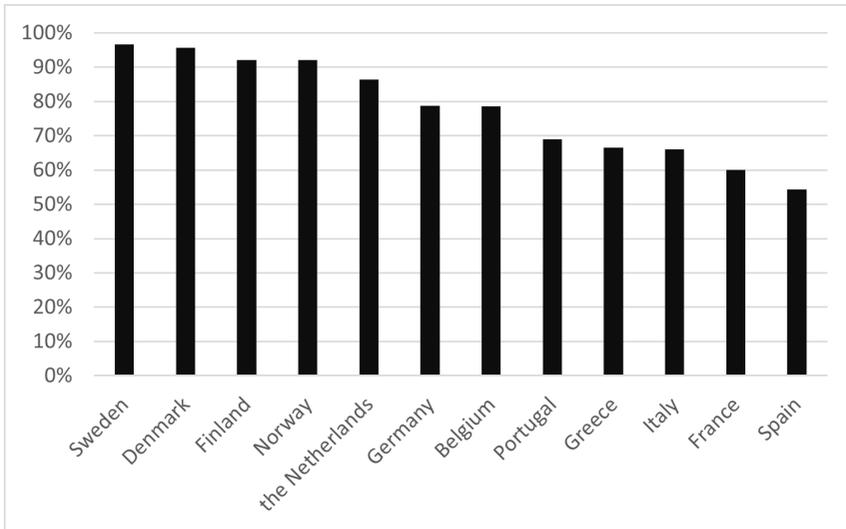
Figure 1.1 – European citizens stating they knew at least one foreign language in Eurostat 2016 (in percentages).
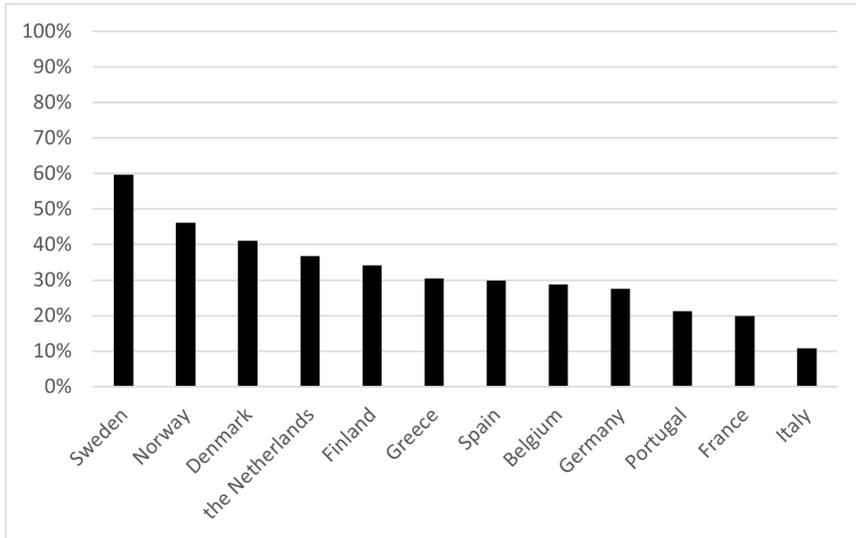
Figure 1.2 – European citizens believing they were proficient in a foreign language in Eurostat 2016 (in percentages).

The trends reported in the European surveys are for the most part reiterated in the latest ISTAT national report (2017) on the use of the Italian language, dialects and foreign languages, with self-assessed L2 competence levels that are still rather low, although improving with reference to previous national surveys. In 2015, only 48.1% of Italians overall declared to have some knowledge of English, with a rather limited number of the respondents stating that they had a satisfactory competence in the language: 7.2% very good or excellent and 27% good. When focussing on specific language skills and abilities, the reported overall level was elementary, with just 13.9% of the sample saying they could understand an extensive range of texts and were fully proficient in the foreign language they knew best. It must be stressed, however, that the proportion of respondents declaring some knowledge of English was much higher for the younger sections of the population and reached 74.9% and 71.3% of the participants aged 6-24 and 25-34, respectively[7]. This indexes an ameliorated L2 proficiency in the new generations.

What is available through European and Italian surveys are only proficiency self-assessments. More recent data, however, provide information on actual performance. According to the EF's 2019 English Proficiency Index[8], competence

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[7]   Also, a seven percentual point increase was recorded in comparison to the ISTAT survey carried out in 2006 for the 25-34 age group.

[8]   The EF SET is an online, adaptive English test of reading and listening skills. It is a

in the global language is still rather limited among Italian speakers – although adults' English language proficiency levels have been raising since 2017 (EF EPI 2019). In Europe, Italy is reported as standing in 24th position in reading and listening skills among the 32 countries involved in the testing, with a score of 55.23, immediately preceded by Spain (with a score of 55.46) and followed by Belarus (with a score of 52.39). The top, best-faring countries in the test are, in order, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, with scores of 70.27, 68.74, 67.93, and 67.87, respectively. The survey hints at a close link between technological and EFL literacy and highlights how pervasive access to the internet correlates positively with higher proficiency in L2 English.

More importantly, the results of the 2019 INVALSI – the Italian National Institute for the evaluation of the educational system – have relayed an unsatisfactory picture of Italian secondary school students' competence in L2 English. Since 2018 INVALSI has included standardised tests to measure Italian students' achievements in English[9]. Alongside the more traditional competences in Italian and mathematics, INVALSI also assesses proficiency in English, owing to the global language's growing role in the cultural and professional world and diffusion on the internet. The INVALSI English tests measure students' achievements in the receptive skills (reading and listening) in relation to the levels defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The results have sanctioned that much still needs to be done to reach the set levels at the end of secondary school. Although some improvement was observed with reference to the previous results, in 2019 only 52% and 35% of the students in the whole country achieved the expected B2 level in reading comprehension and listening comprehension, respectively[10].

It is natural to posit a relationship between spontaneous access to the media and other input types in L2 English and proficiency in the same language. As a confirmation of this, Special Eurobarometer 386 reported a clear relationship

standardised, objectively-scored test designed to classify test takers' language abilities into one of the six levels established by the Common European Framework of Reference. Almost all of the test takers are working adults or young adults finishing their studies. The test-taking population represented in the index is self-selected and not guaranteed to be representative. More than 1,300,000 test takers around the world took the EF SET in 2017.

[9]   In 2019 all students at three stages of their educational curriculum – fifth, eighth and 13th grades – nationwide sat the INVALSI tests. A representative sample of geographic and school type distribution was later extracted for statistical analysis.

[10]   The north fared better in both listening and reading comprehension (with 50% and 65% of students achieving B2 level) than central Italy, the south and the islands. 36%, 21% and 16% of Italian students in those areas of the country respectively reached a B2 level in listening comprehension, 52%, 41% and 34% in reading comprehension (p. 91).

between perceived fluency in one language and the frequency with which that language was used (2012: 41). Not surprisingly, if Italians often declare a disappointing or less than positive perception of their competence in L2 English (see also Aiello 2018: 58-61), they fare poorly in the use of the foreign language they know best (presumably English). 61% of the Italian respondents said that they employed it only occasionally, as opposed to a small minority, 9%, reporting daily or almost daily use. European nationals that were most likely to rate their speaking ability in English as very good comprised those who used the internet daily. The other demographic groups included city dwellers and younger people, especially those that were still studying or had finished their education after completing a secondary school degree (pp. 24-25). The same variables, including daily use of the internet, also appeared to account for declared ability to follow the news on television and on the radio, read newspapers and communicate online. It should be finally remarked that the 2019 INVALSI report explicitly mentions the opportunity to benefit from extramural experiences as a possible reason to explain the observed north and south divide in terms of L2 reading and listening comprehension skills.

1.7. *A matter of equal opportunities?*

The key role of English worldwide and the necessity to acquire the global language can be considered from a broader sociopolitical perspective, that of linguistic inequality[11]. We can start from the observation that ample regions of the world do not benefit from the same opportunities of access to English and mastery of the global language as linguistically more privileged countries. The issue hence arises of how to interrupt such inequality and assist L2 user-learners efficiently in their development towards adequate control of the shared means of international communication irrespective of birthplace and country of residence. Of all proposals and discussions appeared in recent years, one is particularly relevant to the issue of informal contact with English. As far back as 2004 and with a focus on the European continent, the political philosopher Van Parijs drew attention to linguistic inequalities in a world that has chosen English as its lingua franca. He took quite a radical view on the issue by considering dubbing as the main factor responsible for the linguistic disadvantage observed in the European countries that rely on that modality of audiovisual translation. His argument drew on empirical data and followed a series of steps. At first, Van Parijs examined a

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[11]   For overviews, see Bonnin (2013), Piller (2016), Ortega (2018, 2019), among many.

sample of European countries whose nationals said they 'knew' English (p. 127). When leaving out Anglophone and multilingual countries, he unsurprisingly found that the five countries where a Germanic language was spoken scored better than the four countries whose national languages were of Latinate origin. A first conjecture was then formulated which confirmed the commonly shared conviction that speakers of a Germanic language have an advantage in learning the contemporary lingua franca – English is a Germanic language, albeit with a considerably-sized Latinate vocabulary. That is, learning English would be easier for citizens speaking Swedish, Danish, Dutch, etc. than for the Spaniards, the Italians and other Europeans speaking a Romance language. However, as soon as the remaining countries in Van Parijs's sample – Finland and Greece – were drawn into the picture, typological proximity proved quite a poor predictor of English proficiency. In particular, Finnish, as a non-Indo-European language, is typologically far from all the other languages considered. Yet, its speakers performed much better in English not only than Romance language speakers, but than German and Austrian citizens as well.

A second conjecture was put forward, which fits the data more consistently than typological proximity. If the eleven countries considered were ordered according to the number of native speakers for each official language, the average proportion of people who declared to know English fell as the country's population increased. "There is a strong negative correlation between size of the language group and competence in English" (p. 129). As smaller countries have a tradition of subtitling whereas bigger countries traditionally dub (e.g. Perego 2005), the better performance on English reported for smaller vis-à-vis bigger European countries can hence be seen as related to the practice of subtitling, which gives full access to the language of the audiovisual programmes' original soundtrack. Van Parijs developed his argument by observing that, while nothing can be done about typological distance, number of native speakers for each language or relative profitability of audiovisual translation modalities, there is a workable solution to reduce language inequality and give all European nationals the chance to master the continent's lingua franca. According to the author (Van Parijs 2004: 129), that solution is to "outlaw dubbing" in favour of subtitling. If this is done:

> while providing supportive language teaching and letting MTV music, web chats and other less virtual trans-national contacts do the rest of the job, competence in English overall will become, in the space of one generation, even less of a problem than it now is in the most English-literate parts of the European continent (Van Parijs 2004: 129).

Although highly pertinent to the present state of affairs, the radicalism of Van Parijs's position has attracted fierce criticism, most generally pertaining to his sponsorship of English as a language of 'freedom for all', a democratic way to linguistic integration. According to Phillipson (2012), such promotion would actually undermine the rights to multilingualism and linguistic diversity. By specifically addressing Van Parijs's proposal on language learning, Ferguson (2018: 41-43) in turn points out that much more than banning dubbing is necessary for L2 users to reach the advanced competence levels required for professional, business and diplomatic communication in Europe. In doing this, the scholar brings attention to the importance of formal schooling, thus echoing Phillipson's (2012) rebuke to Van Parijs. In both linguists' view, the acquisition of a cognitively complex educational language is not easily achieved and exposure to English media, although assisting the learning of the L2, is inadequate to convert receptive skills into productive academic competence. The evidence from contexts where English is widely accessible does support the stand that informal exposure to the media is not sufficient to develop a fully-fledged mastery of the language. For instance in Iceland, where L2 media input is pervasive, learner-users' remarkable proficiency in colloquial English is not matched by an equally satisfactory competence in the higher registers of the language (Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir 2018a).

Pace Ferguson and Phillipson, Van Parijs's drastic position on free, extensive media access to English as a way to overcome linguistic inequalities among European citizens can be interpreted as a provocative appeal to address the topics discussed in the next chapters. In Chapter 2, informal language learning will be tackled and further evidence will be provided in support of extramural, untutored, mainly media L2 input as a vehicle to the incidental acquisition of a second or foreign language.

2.
Informal language learning

Even if it is the case that the process of acquisition is fundamentally the same across contexts, acquisition outcomes may be different, such that learning context is not in any way an issue that should be downplayed in SLA research.

(Howard 2011: 73)

2.1. *Moving towards informal exposure and language learning*

In this chapter learning contexts, informal access to L2 English and the resulting acquisitional outcomes are going to be examined more closely. As access to L2 English is progressively moving outside the traditional site of the language classroom, language learning shades into language acquisition, envisaged as the untutored and naturalistic development of an L2. As the learning of English becomes increasingly spontaneous, the contexts in which it occurs emerge during recreation, study or work. They take form through self-organised access to the media alongside other self-directed activities. Typically, informal L2 learning develops in non-institutional, often domestic and public pedagogy settings, where L2 users are not concerned with their language learning processes – if they are at all aware of such processes taking place.

Following this shift from formal to informal, learning settings have changed and become increasingly fluid and unstructured sites of exposure to the language. Modality of access has turned into a free choice by the individual or self-organised communities of people that meet up face-to-face or online with primary aims that substantially differ from learning the foreign language. These include an array of intellectual, socialisation and mundane activities, such as discussing favourite series, looking up recipes, organising protest events, or keeping up with distant friends.

As usual with all human endeavours, orientations, motivations and drives are not easy to tap or clearly categorise. If watching films or TV-series for entertain-

ment purposes may be initially sustained by the underlying aim of improving one's knowledge of the language, language learning awareness does not necessarily transform an essentially recreational event into a formal, pedagogical activity. For such a switch to occur, a more structured and directed organisation and a constant orientation to language learning is required, as when the learner-viewer makes sustained efforts to memorise novel words, deliberately pays attention to cross-linguistic contrasts, or intentionally focusses on the use of pragmatic routines.

2.2. *In search of a label*

In 2011, Benson and Reinders questioned the commonly held view that learners spend more time learning language inside rather than outside the classroom. According to the two authors, the picture presented in the literature does not correspond to the reality of behavioural patterns among contemporary learners, in that "vast swathes of territory for language learning beyond the classroom remain undiscovered by research" (Benson and Reinders 2011: 2). Richards (2015: 5) in turn drew attention to "two important dimensions to successful second language learning: what goes on in the classroom and what goes on outside of the classroom". He consequently encouraged to pay systematic attention to the different affordances offered to English learners by the media, technology, the internet, as well as face-to-face and virtual social interactions.

To capture the shift out of and away from the pedagogical sites traditionally dedicated to language learning, several labels have been used in the field, including 'out-of-school', 'out-of-the classroom', 'extramural' and 'extracurricular'. These labels refer to activities that occupy learners at home or in places different from school. The concept of extramural English was first introduced by Sundqvist (2009) to refer to the language learners engage with outside the walls of the classroom. The author proposed a model of extramural English built on two variables: *individual learners' driving force* and *physical location* (Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016). As for the first variable, extramural learning is linked to learner autonomy and rests on the assumption that access to English is urged by the learner, not by the teacher or other figures within educational institutions. Individual learners' driving force or motivation to learn may be varied and include the learner's conscious and deliberate goal to exploit and construct situations that are conducive to the learning of English. As for physical location, reference is made to where exactly learning takes place, since learners that acquire English extramurally are also instructed in English at school. Interestingly, these students

often say they have acquired most English at home or outside the official learning places, as Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016: 4), citing a survey by the *Swedish National Agency for Education*, reported: "more than half of the fifth graders stated that they have learned as much, or more, English outside of school as in school"[12].

As a way to include learners that are acquiring a foreign language without simultaneously attending language classes, Benson (2011: 9) opts for the label 'language learning beyond the classroom' (LBC), a more inclusive expression that caters not only for the different types of activities but for various ages, types of learners and learning preferences as well. Benson (2011) initially proposed a model with four variables or parameters to analyse the field and specify the scope of language learning beyond the classroom. The first parameter in the framework is *location*, i.e. inside the classroom or out-of-classroom. *Formality* follows, denoting whether learning is structured by an educational institution and assessed through testing, and therefore distinguishing between formal and informal learning. Third, *pedagogy* defines the extent to which teaching is implicated and is used to distinguish instructed vs. non-instructed learning. Finally, *locus of control* refers to the agent who controls what the learner does, whether the teacher, another educational agent or the learner himself/herself (Reinders and Benson 2017: 562). The combinations between the four parameters account for different conditions within LBC. The model was later developed to include additional variables that were believed to be necessary for a full representation of LBC. Of these, four parameters appear particularly relevant for the categorisation of informal learning: *mediation*, i.e. the resources used in learning such as authentic texts and technologies; *modality*, i.e. the learning practices activated, e.g. reading, listening or spoken interaction; the *linguistic dimension*, concerned with the levels of language competence and skills involved; and *intentional* vs. *incidental* learning (Reinders and Benson 2017). Importantly, according to Benson and Reinders (2011: 4), the learning that takes place beyond the classroom may always involve instruction, "[p]edagogy may always be present in language learning beyond the classroom", as there is inevitably a relationship with the formal setting even when instructed learners are out of it.

By contrast, the naturalistic, informal dimension of language learning outside school takes central stage in Sockett's (2014) model of Online Informal Learning of English (OILE). Here the adjective 'informal' is simultaneously

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[12] Many publications have delved into the various types and forms of activities with which school students can be involved outside the precincts of education institutions, comprising extensive reading, digital gameplay, video watching, tandem learning through e-mails or skype and social networking (Nunan and Richards 2015; Reinhardt 2019; Dressman and Sadler 2020, eds).

collocated with *learning online* and *English*, whereby the increasing digitalisation of the media is viewed as the main vector of change in L2 exposure and English is identified as the only L2 involved in the new acquisitional trends. In OILE, language development is incidental as it "emerges from the intention to communicate and not from an explicit objective of language learning" and is a by-product of what the learner-user does online (p. 5). The model highlights that informal and incidental learning of English via the internet does not simply occur through engagement in individual activities. Instead it mainly derives from the interaction between the wealth of activities learner-users freely get engaged in, the complexity of the language encountered, and the semiotic resources deployed in the multiple texts. This observation leads to the conclusion that OILE offers a fruitful field of application for complex systems approaches to research (p. 113). Complexity theory "helps illuminate the dynamic processes at play; it can untangle sets of nested systems, as is the case here, with language and learners themselves being complex systems within a dynamic framework of L2 development" (Godwin-Jones 2018: 8). In this way, the model brings in an acquisitional component that has not been equally highlighted in other models of language learning via popular media. OILE has strong implications for fields such as CALL and for cognitive approaches to second language acquisition. By Sockett's own admission, his model draws on digital activities because it was first developed in France, where free access to English came only with the digital revolution. A significant difficulty in the model therefore lies in:

> [T]he impossibility of isolating the various factors of influence on language development and separating digital informal learning from students' other activities: meeting people, going to 'language cafés' and pubs, or just reading the English words that are flourishing in analogue media, billboards, and so on around the world (Sockett and Toffoli 2020: 473).

2.3. *Informal language learning and incidentality*

Drawing on the models and constructs outlined above, in this volume we favour the labels 'informal language learning' and 'informal language learning contexts'. Informal learning is here interpreted as involving free, self-directed contact with the L2 in non-educational locations for entertainment, social and information-seeking purposes; it is posited to occur incidentally and in the absence of instruction or self-instruction.

The distinction between incidental and intentional learning is notoriously difficult to tap. According to Hulstijn (2003), incidental language learning ensues

from getting engaged in activities in which the learner's attention is on meaning rather than on language form. It results from 'picking up' words and structures since it occurs "without the conscious attention to commit the element to memory", as when listening to someone or reading a text (Hulstijn 2013: 2632). In such cases, learning takes place peripherally, "out of the corner of one's eye" (Ehrman 1996: 183), while attention is focussed on a different learning objective. The process is triggered when learners are assigned a specific task, like memorising the names of foreign speakers in a video, but are later tested on different features, for example novel lexical verbs. If learners memorise these target verbs, their learning will have been incidental – intentional learning accounting instead for the successful memorisation of the foreign speakers' names. As with the dichotomies previously mentioned, incidentality and intentionality are not categorical constructs but allow for shifting behaviours. Learners may set up a situation for themselves where they expect learning to take place. Yet, as they become oblivious to their original goal, their attention transfers from language onto meaning (Benson 2011) and the space they have created for intentional learning turns instead into a naturalistic setting where incidental learning takes over.

In the case of the university students considered in the present investigation, informal language learning contexts are extended to media environments and all those settings where English input is encountered spontaneously for non-didactic purposes via new technologies. Watching films, TV-series and other television programmes, accessing social networks and web pages, gaming and listening to songs create informal contexts of language learning. In all these instances, support to incidentality is given by media immersion, a psychological construct that can be analysed as comprising spatial presence, transportation, flow and enjoyment. Spatial presence is the illusion of being placed in a mediated environment and with mediated people. When spatial presence occurs, the perception of the immediate physical environment is blocked and the audience experiences the mediated environment as unmediated (Wilken and Kruger 2016: 258). Transportation in turn is understood as "the process of becoming fully engaged in a story" (Green *et al.* 2004: 312). It entails absorption and identification as it relates to "an experience of cognitive, emotional and imagery involvement in a narrative" (Green *et al.* 2004: 311). With flow the viewer is fully absorbed in a specific activity; flow implies utmost concentration, focus and absent-mindedness. Finally, enjoyment corresponds to liking and appreciation, that is the "pleasurable affective response to a stimulus" (Green *et al.* 2004: 311), with aesthetic media ensuring more enjoyment than unaesthetic ones (Wissmath *et al.* 2009: 118). Provided the L2 does not in itself constitute a barrier, learners will feel immersed in the fictional world of the media hence becoming emotionally receptive to the input they receive. That

the access to media input through immersion is conducive to incidental learning and SLA is substantiated by evidence from media psychology. Research has suggested that attention to language features interferes with the positive processes that are involved in these contexts. That is, focussing on the linguistic aspects of text appears to reduce transportation, a factor that by contrast favours an implicit, incidental approach to the task (Green *et al.* 2004: 321).

2.4. *The language of informal exposure to L2 English*

While we observe the growing informalisation of English language learning, crucial questions arise linked to the paramount role input plays in SLA: what is the type of language learner-users access informally? And will such language and modality of delivery affect learners' L2 profiles?

More precisely, is the language that learners access extramurally generally informal? And how can informality of language be defined? In a critical preamble to the analysis of colloquiality in film dialogue, Zago (2016) shows how the two constructs of linguistic informality and colloquiality tap similar linguistic phenomena and, as a result, are often linked and merged together in contemporary linguistic literature. To define colloquiality, the author distinguishes between language and situation of use and draws on two concepts: (i) *communicative immediacy/closeness*, contrasted to communicative distance (e.g. Koch and Oesterreicher 2007), and (ii) *degree of bindingness* (Sabatini 1999), i.e. "the extent to which the situational context poses linguistic restrictions on the speaker" (Zago 2016: 17). By combining the two, Zago offers a definition of colloquiality as "the language of immediacy/closeness in non-binding contexts" (p. 17), which can be easily extended to informality. From related perspectives, informal language has been defined as language that is unplanned and produced without self-monitoring of linguistic performance (Ochs 1979; Labov 2006 [1966]; Hernández-Campoy 2016; among others). Absence of elaboration and inexplicitness are additional features of informality, while little attention during production is paid to grammaticality, standardness, stylistic consistency and fluency (Svartvik and Leech 2006: 209-210; Irvine 1979). Informal language is also strongly interpersonal, often involved and emotional, with a freer organisation and discoursal structure (Finegan and Biber 2001; Warren 2006).

The informality of the learning context, however, does not automatically imply the informality of the language learner-users experience. According to Sockett (2014: 8), 'informal' "relates to settings in which the exposure takes place and should not be confused with the language register of the same name". Learn-

er-users of English may access both informal and formal registers informally as they can take part in spontaneous face-to-face interactions but also read books, textbooks and other specialised material for leisure or study. As the language register correlates with the situational context in which language is used, a three-way distinction should be drawn when dealing with informality in language learning. This tripartite distinction will comprise modality of access, situation of use and language. In informal language learning, the modality of access must always be informal, whereas both contexts of language use and the language itself may vary along several dimensions and be variably formal or informal.

On the grounds of the research findings gathered so far, the language learner-users are exposed to through the media and technology is highly variable, albeit frequently informal and colloquial (e.g. Frumuselu *et al.* 2015). There is indeed strong evidence of the overall colloquiality of the language of contemporary telecinematic dialogue, one of the registers most frequently accessed in English for recreation. Research has revealed a considerable alignment between audiovisual dialogue in films and TV-series and casual conversation in the use of lexico-grammatical features, *n*-grams and conversational routines, as well as discoursal and socio-pragmatic phenomena (Quaglio 2009; Bednarek 2010; Forchini 2012; Formentelli 2014; Pavesi 2016a; Zago 2016; see Section 6.3.2.). By performing a multi-dimensional analysis of the screen dialogue of *Friends*, Quaglio (2009) comes to the conclusion that the language of the American sitcom shares the same core linguistic features as spontaneous spoken language. With reference to the dimension of *involved versus informational production*, the language of *Friends* and that of the conversational corpus used for comparison exhibit almost identical mean values – 34.4 and 35.3 respectively (Quaglio 2009: 65). According to this study, the language of *Friends* is involved, interactive and affective like natural conversation and exhibits a high frequency of key correlated features such as personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, private verbs and *that*-deletions. Forchini (2012) also employed multi-dimensional analysis and compared the language of a set of eleven American movies to the *Longman Spoken American Corpus*. She found that film language comes close to spontaneous conversation on several dimensions by displaying a number of spoken features such as uninflected present tenses, imperatives and private verbs. It should be further pointed out that films and TV-series not only represent face-to-face spontaneous interaction but also stage more constrained contexts where formal registers are employed. This reflects what happens in real life, where people engage in a constellation of activities such as going to church, attending court hearings or university lectures. A high level of colloquiality in English audiovisual dialogue across time was confirmed by Zago (2016) in his study of American films and their remakes.

In their recent publication, *Dimensions of variation across American television registers*, Berber Sardinha and Veirano Pinto (2019) looked at the major programme types in early 21st century American television[13] and identified four dimensions of variation that specifically set apart television productions from other registers: 1. exposition and discussions vs. simplified interaction, 2. simulated conversation, 3. recount, 4. engaging presentation. Notwithstanding the internal differentiation among television programmes, some general traits emerge. No true literate dimension is fully realised, with television discourse in general being far removed from written registers. Although involvement is simulated for the benefit of the audience and television language is largely planned, rehearsed and edited, the study confirms previous research and foregrounds the similarity between television registers and American conversation. "[T]elevision is essentially an oral, involved, stance-marked form of spoken language, close in some ways to but not exactly like face-to-face encounters" (Berber Sardinha and Veirano Pinto 2019: 32). Interestingly, also the register of film subtitling comes close to informal spoken dialogues. Levshina (2017) has shown that both intralingual and interlingual English subtitles display the highest correlations and cluster most readily with British and American conversation as opposed to a range of registers in the two English varieties including written fiction and television and radio broadcast.

Internet registers show more variability in levels of formality, are more fluid than those found in traditional written and spoken media and fulfil several functions which may combine variably and adapt more readily to shifting societal goals (Berber Sardinha 2014: 201). Overall, they are multi-functional, adjustable and changeable (Herring *et al.* 2013), hybridity being another major trait of the language of the internet. Biber and Egbert (2016) moved from the consideration that most research is carried out on individual internet registers, whereas little is known about the full range of English-language registers used on the web and their linguistic characterisation. To fill the gap, they analysed a representative sample of the whole searchable web and, with the help of web end-users, identified a more inclusive and diverse range of register categories than previously used in research on English internet language (p. 95). These categories include general registers serving discrete functions such as *narrative*, *informational description* and *spoken discourse*, hybrid registers, where the communicative purposes and other situational characteristics of two or more general registers merge together,

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[13]   Among these, the following can be found: culinary and lifestyle programmes, reality shows, game shows, live politics, news shows and news debates, courtroom shows, soap operas, drama series, children's animations.

and sub-registers representing specific textual instantiations such as *travel blogs*, *interviews* and *television transcripts*. Thanks to a multi-dimensional analysis, several parameters of variation were extracted. This marked diversification testifies to the richness of registers available online. In its diversification, according to Berber Sardinha (2014), the language of the internet can also be seen to encompass both registers similar to non-web counterparts, such as news reporting and press reviews, and web-specific registers, like menu-based homepages and web pages. The different production circumstances originate two distinct linguistic configurations in internet registers "one oriented towards personal exchanges (Twitter, Facebook, e-mail), and the other to public dissemination of information (web pages and blogs)" (Berber Sardinha 2014: 103). Although Berber Sardinha's analysis points to some distance between conversation and social media, the latter, like other personally oriented registers, still gravitate towards the pole of involved and interactive production. This is the pole that corresponds to informality and colloquiality.

As research has shown, media language is varied and hybrid. Through the media learner-users can therefore access a variety of formal and informal registers, including languages for special purposes, from Wikipedia pages to legal drama, from on-line newspapers to situational comedies. According to Sockett (2014), internet users' freedom of contact entails a previously unmatched variability and unpredictability of the language they will be exposed to.

> Initial conditions for modern language learners in the past, at least in the west, tended to be extremely uniform, with classes of children learning the same items from the same textbooks at the same time and reproducing linguistic forms heard from recordings or from the mouth of the teacher. In OILE, initial conditions now differ for each learner, with their unique repertoire of input and interaction. Learners of English will have seen different English words around them in advertising, will have taken an interest in different English-language music, film or television output and may interact in English online with a range of people (Sockett 2014: 22).

2.5. *Media input and second language acquisition*

In all models and theories of SLA input is considered essential to the development of a second language[14]. In recent theorisation, it is defined "as language

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[14] See Andorno et al. (2017) for an extended review of input in SLA, from beginning approaches to more recent developments.

the learner hears (or reads) and attends to for its meaning" (VanPatten and Williams 2015: 9). As such, it is contrasted to the language used in mechanical drills, and in similar activities, simply to model structures. Since in informal contexts English is accessed for information-seeking, entertainment and social-ising purposes, the emphasis will be on meaning and the language the learn-er-user engages with will fully qualify as input.

In parallel, focus on meaning will trigger incidental acquisition (Section 2.3.). Since in extramural contexts learners mainly access the internet, interact with their peers, watch films and television programmes for socialisation, entertain-ment and information gathering, their attention is diverted from acquiring the L2, while it focusses on meaning and the activity at hand. As a consequence, language learning is hypothesized to occur incidentally, 'out of the corner of one's eye'. The empirical evidence from studies on media and language learning does suggest that accessing audiovisual input in out-of-school contexts promotes successful incidental SLA (see Caruana forthcoming)[15]. Essential support to the role of media input and incidental SLA is given by the large-scale investigations reported in Section 2.5.2. and 2.6.

2.5.1. *Media input and comprehension-based second language acquisition*

If extensive comprehensible input has long been claimed to trigger and sustain SLA, exposure to input in English outside the language classroom and outside the teacher's control can be posited to result mostly in comprehension-based L2 acquisition. Starting with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), it has been ar-gued that by receiving comprehensible L2 input, i.e. by listening and reading for meaning, learners will develop their language abilities. More recent theories such as usage-based SLA models (Ellis and Wulff 2015) and Input Processing Theory (VanPatten 2015) have drawn special attention to the frequency of linguistic fea-tures learners encounter for their L2 development. Empirically, the advantages of wide-ranging receptive activities have emerged in immersion and CLIL pro-grammes (Lorenzo *et al.* 2010), although immersion students have been shown not to achieve a complete mastery of the L2 in spite of the considerable amount of comprehensible input they received during their schooling (Swain 1995). Ow-ing to its intrinsic multimodality, media input is often associated with high de-

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[15]   Yet, incidental learning will require the provision of great quantities of exemplars em-bedded in meaningful contexts together with extensive time to process and internalise new structures (Leow and Zamora 2017: 42). Hence the relevance of type, frequency, extent and intensity of L2 exposure when we deal with incidental learning in media environments.

grees of accessibility and comprehensibility. Drawing on Nencioni's (1983) characterisation of 'actual speech' (*parlato-parlato*), 'recited speech' (*parlato-recitato*) and 'written speech' (*parlato-scritto*), Caruana (2009) points out that television, films and videos 'recited-speech' is the variety in which verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal elements coincide the most. It follows that recited speech favours incidental acquisition the most among other L2 spoken registers.

Vanderplank (2010: 9; 2016), however, has long warned against the illusion of media comprehensibility with specific reference to audiovisual input. With "the paradox of television as a medium of language learning" he stresses how the highly verbal and supercharged medium makes programmes widely *available* for use but hardly *accessible* to language learners. Hence the facilitating role of accompanying subtitles. The complexity of audiovisual language derives from several factors such as fast rate of delivery, variety of represented sociolects and geolects, use of non-standard speech and lexical variety. Even advanced L2 learners may find it challenging to process and parse the fast dialogues from films, TV-series and programmes (Baltova 1999), while the palette of English accents, registers and non-standard forms can make audiovisuals quite taxing for L2 viewers (e.g. Aiello 2018). In addition, vocabulary poses a great challenge to beginners' level and early-intermediate learners, with telecinematic products requiring the knowledge of approximately 3,000 word families for viewers to grasp most of their content (Webb and Rodgers 2009a, 2009b). Although subtitling acts as a support to L2 viewers, it similarly requires them to be fast readers in their L1 or L2 for audiovisual texts to become fully accessible (Vanderplank 2010: 9; 2013).

Related to the complexity of audiovisual input is the difficulty of grading L2 learning experiences in untutored acquisitional settings[16], although a few suggestions on the subject have been advanced in the literature (e.g. Baltova 1999; Webb and Rodgers 2009a, 2009b; Perego and Pavesi 2007). Some film genres and television programmes can be less challenging than others for language learners. Romantic comedies compared to action films or thrillers, for example, will be easier to comprehend as they stage everyday situations and present natural dialogues with a prevalence of duologues. Television fiction, on the other hand, offers specific advantages such as short running time and seriality, the latter allowing for the development of knowledge of setting, storyline and characters' relationships. Familiarity with characters' sociolects and idiolects and recurring topic-related vocabulary also aid comprehension of audiovisual speech.

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[16]   See Lightbown's (1992) experiment on comprehension-based SLA where learners were guided in their choice of audiovisual material according to competence levels.

Another drawback of traditional media is the monodirectionality of screen language whereby television watchers and web users cannot participate in interaction or text creators modify the original texts to adapt to interlocutors. Conversely, in bidirectional exchanges input is made more comprehensible and accessible to learners by the interactional work carried out by the two participants. Many researchers (Long 1996; Mackey *et al.* 2012; see a review in Andorno *et al.* 2017) accord considerable importance to face-to-face interaction not only as a means to guarantee that language input is adapted to the learner's competence level, but also as a way to promote second language development through processes such as scaffolding, error correction and contingent speech production. However, if audiovisual dialogue allows only a vicarious experience of two-way interaction, new media and web 2.0 affordances provide interactive opportunities for naturalistic SLA that need to be fully explored (Jenks 2014; Reinhardt 2019).

2.5.2. *Evidence supporting the role of media input in second language acquisition*

Despite their limitations, media environments can promote second language acquisition. A few large-scale investigations have confirmed the positive impact of media input on various skills, and have addressed the role of receptive exposure to popular media in L2 English development. A recent longitudinal study has addressed the role of out-of-school input in SLA by focussing on popular media among secondary school learners (Verspoor *et al.* 2011). The investigation was conducted in the Netherlands, a country where viewers are reported to receive at least one hour of English input daily. Subtitled audiovisuals were among the main sources of extramural input to be considered, alongside songs and videogames. A total of 556 students were involved in the study, divided into four groups: two groups attending the first and two groups the third year of secondary school. The study comprised a comparison between students that had regular access to English popular media and students whose out-of-school contact with English was rather limited. Learners were observed throughout a school year, tested at the beginning and two more times during the same year. Measurements of general scholastic aptitude and questionnaires on motivation and self-assessment were also delivered. Learners regularly exposed to input from the media rated themselves as generally higher-proficiency and showed more positive attitudes towards English – being also more likely to engage in other activities involving the use of the L2, such as reading books and taking part in face-to-face interactions. Whereas not all comparisons were statistically significant, the testing results highlighted the advantage of media learners, who outperformed non-media learners on both

receptive and productive skills. The study also showed that exposure to the media has a long-term effect: at the end of the third year learners who received plenty of media input scored significantly better on self-assessment, vocabulary and writing tests than learners who did not have that opportunity. In addition, media input proved to interact with proficiency, as students at more advanced levels profited more from exposure to English-language extramurally.

Crucial support to the role of media input and incidental SLA is given by two long-lasting research programmes carried out in the living laboratories of Malta (Caruana 2003, 2006; Brincat 2011) and Iceland (Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir 2018a). These studies, including many hundred people and covering several years of empirical observations, attested that L2 learners benefit in various language areas from watching TV-programmes and accessing the Internet in the L2 outside formal settings. In Malta more than 1,000 subjects were involved across a timespan of almost 15 years (1991-2003) "when, apart from national television (Television Malta), only Italian television channels could be received locally" (Caruana 2006: 160). Multiple data collections showed that L2 Italian learner-users considerably profited in comprehension, lexis and grammar from watching television programmes in the second language. We can envisage two phases in the project, testing reception and production respectively. During the first phase (1991-1996), large samples of television viewers belonging to different age groups were tested on the comprehension of Italian lexical expressions and short sentences. Results were surprisingly good for the children who had not started Italian at school and young viewers, demonstrating that television may be a powerful medium for language learning. By contrast, findings were mixed for senior citizens, who had grown up without the opportunity of accessing television broadcasting. In the second phase, a more in-depth data collection was carried out on two comparable groups of formal and informal leaners (Caruana 2006). No significant differences were recorded in verb-usage and other measurements of narrative productions between students who were studying Italian and students who took other foreign languages at school[17]. Importantly, irrespective of the benefits of formal instruction, a significant relationship was established between length of exposure to Italian television channels and level of L2 proficiency in narration and several morphosyntactic features. As programmes were received unsubtitled from Italian television stations, the findings offer strong evidence that unmodified screen dialogue meant for native speakers may be advantageous for L2 learner-viewers who start from native

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[17]   In the comparison, informal learners were considered only if they were capable of narrating a story in Italian.

languages related to or similar to the target language. This is the case of Maltese nationals, who speak a Semitic language that nonetheless contains a large stock of Latinate lexis coming from Italian and Sicilian (Caruana 2006)[18].

Support to the role of media input in boosting the acquisition of a second language also comes from the declining competence in L2 Italian observed in Maltese youth following diminished exposure to Italian television in more recent years (Caruana 2013)[19]. With the availability of satellite television, and the many computer-based attractions such as the internet and online chatting and blogging, media consumption by the Maltese has changed significantly. As Maltese viewers, in particular those belonging to the younger generations, tend to watch English programmes and use English on the internet more than in the past, they access L2 Italian much less, with strong implications on the informal acquisition of the language.

> The Italian language had a very strong presence on the Maltese linguistic scene through television up to some years ago, but it has shown signs of a decline recently. This was largely due to the fact that Italian television channels were received locally and the media was dominated by the Italian language which served as a vehicular language to the world of news, sports, entertainment etc. […] (Caruana and Lasagabaster 2013: 56)

Iceland constitutes a unique laboratory in which growing contact with English has been examined together with L2 users' attitudes and motivations and language learning outcomes. The collective seven-year research project reported in Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir (2018a) investigated amount and type of exposure to English in the Icelandic population at large, the resultant acquisition of English from childhood to adulthood and the functions served by the language in Icelandic society. Priority was given to children, since they are the most suitable population group to investigate in research on informal language learning due to their limited schooling in the L2. Accordingly, Johannsdóttir's (2018) study focussed on Icelandic fourth graders, exploring their English vocabulary proficiency at the beginning of formal instruction in the language, when it amounts to a maximum of 40 minutes a week. A representative sample of 416 children (9-10 years of age) took part in the data

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[18]   Many Maltese nationals are bilingual in Maltese and English, knowledge of which represents an additional help in the comprehension and the acquisition of Italian.

[19]   See also Eurobarometer (2012: 77) reporting a very notable decrease with reference to previous surveys in the number of Maltese who reckoned Italian a useful language for their children to learn.

collection in 2010 by completing a questionnaire. The questionnaire explored students' motivation and attitudes and surveyed seven context-specific factors: Television/Music (watching and listening), Computers (playing games), Education (English at school), Peers (speaking to friends), Family (speaking to family members), Texts (reading) and Lingua Franca (speaking to foreigners). Participants were also tested on their receptive vocabulary size and their word knowledge with two tests that conjunctively showed estimated vocabulary knowledge. The results showed that the learners in the sample possessed a good knowledge of basic English vocabulary for their age. They primarily used English when watching television, listening to music and playing on the computer while they rarely read, wrote or interacted in English. Remarkably, the educational factor was the only one that showed no significant relationship with vocabulary scores and consequently did not appear to contribute to learners' outcomes. These findings strongly suggest that "a primarily media exposed youth acquir[es] English incidentally through recreational activities rather than focused learning such as school" (Johannsdóttir 2018: 72). They replicate results on previous cohorts of Icelandic children who scored highly on English texts prior to the beginning of English instruction as a result of extramural exposure to the language (Arnbjörnsdóttir 2018a: 27).

The success of informal contact with L2 English is confirmed in the whole project, which comprised L2 learners and users of different ages and relied on several data collection tools, i.e. surveys, interviews, diaries, and proficiency (self-) assessments. In a series of nationwide telephone surveys that started in 2001, Icelanders declared to have an intense exposure to the popular media, with an overwhelming involvement in listening activities and little use of writing (Arnbjörnsdóttir 2018b). The 2014 national survey, conducted on 906 participants, revealed that a very high percentage of respondents rated their ability to understand and speak English as good or very good – 74% and 65% respectively. Yet, in this survey as in follow-up studies on different sections of the population, writing skills lagged behind hence hindering the successful use of academic and professional English. Iceland appears to have completed the cycle, whereby receptive skills and very highly contextualised colloquial speech are picked up by the learners after years of exposure to the input from television and the internet, whereas proficiency in written academic English is inadequate for the country's educational demands. The results of the Icelandic project hence caution against considering extensive extramural exposure to informal English as a panacea for full mastery of the different language levels and registers of the L2. They expose the misconception that competence in colloquial and receptive English achieved informally is enough to meet the

high standards required by the educational system and the professional world in northern European societies. They demonstrate, however, that informal exposure is indeed effective in developing comprehension skills and proficiency in colloquial English. That is, the selectivity of input type is reflected in uneven competence levels. "Extramural exposure to English in Iceland is to an informal language register, and this has consequences for the uptake, i.e. the type of language learners learn, and consequently the purposes for which it can be used" (Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir 2018b: 5). The experience in Iceland clearly illustrates how relevant the distinction between informal language learning, informal registers and informal contexts of use is.

Additional variables linked to informal exposure to L2 English emerged in other studies on the role of activity types and gender and their impact on specific foreign language skills. In her 2009's study, Pia Sundqvist focused on the impact of extramural English on the development of vocabulary and oral proficiency skills in L2 English among ninth-grade students in Sweden – aged 15-16. Both questionnaires and language diaries were used to investigate learners' informal contact with English and speaking and vocabulary tests were designed to assess their L2 performance. Swedish students were shown to engage in different forms of contact with English, including reading books, newspapers and magazines, watching films and television, surfing the Internet, playing videogames and listening to music. Results show a positive correlation between the extent of informal access to English and oral and lexical skills in the language; in particular, vocabulary knowledge was the area that benefitted most from exposure. Different types of activities also appeared to have a diverse impact on learning: activities that the author defines as more active and productive turned out to be most effective for the development of L2 vocabulary and oral proficiency, and included gaming, surfing the web and reading. Watching films and TV and listening to music had a lower impact because they "allow learners to remain passive" (Sundqvist 2009: 203). The distinction between productive vs. more receptive tasks in the study is not straightforward, since reading is traditionally viewed as less interactive – very much like listening to music and watching audiovisuals. In parallel, learners can also engage actively with monodirectional media, by cognitively interacting with the input and activating processing strategies (Sockett 2014; Ludke 2020). The reduced accessibility of audiovisual dialogue and lyrics should be also considered as an explanation for varying gains in the two targeted skills. A gender difference also emerged in Sundqvist's research, since Swedish teenage boys were more prone to accessing English informally than girls from the same age range.

2.6. *Focussing on subtitles and informal language learning*

For some decades now, audiovisual input has been considered from a language learning perspective and is widely acknowledged as an effective resource for gaining literacy in an L2 also informally. Starting from more strictly anecdotal evidence coming from subtitling world regions (see Vanderplank 1988; d'Ydewalle and Pavakanun 1996; Gottlieb 2004), surveys and empirical studies have been conducted specifically to explore the learning potential of subtitled audiovisual texts in assisting the development of several skills in a foreign language. When added to images, subtitles provide a useful support to general comprehension and contribute to lowering learners' affective filter and creating a more relaxed viewing environment. Concurrently, they promote the activation of matching processes between spoken dialogues, written text and images, whereby learner-viewers are stimulated to compare oral and written text and associate verbal input with visual elements, thus engaging in a multimodal and multisemiotic meaning-making process (Vanderplank 2010, 2015; Pavesi and Perego 2008). The visual contextualisation of verbal data favours their memorisation and boosts learners' attentional capacities (Paivio 1986; d'Ydewalle 2002; Mayer 2003; Frumuselu 2018). The matching activity between semiotic resources leads to overall deeper processing of the input and can drive viewers' attention to form, potentially triggering noticing processes (Pavesi 2002; Ghia 2012).

Subtitling encompasses different dialogue-text combinations, based on the language(s) the two appear in. An initial distinction is made between interlingual subtitles, i.e. L1 subtitles integrating dialogue in the foreign language, and bimodal or same-language subtitles, which are in the same language as the dialogues. Reversed subtitles represent a special type of interlingual subtitles, whereby an L2 translation is added to the audiovisual text in the viewers' L1. Recent reviews on subtitling and foreign language learning have pointed out how all of these different subtitle types can positively affect L2 learning in diverse ways, both at an implicit and an explicit level (see Vanderplank 2010, 2015; Gambier 2014; Danan 2015).

2.6.1. *Benefits of subtitling types*

The benefits of subtitling on various language skills are numerous and may be gained irrespectively of the learning context. Bimodal subtitling is especially associated with the development of listening comprehension and vocabulary skills (Neuman and Koskinen 1992; Montero Perez *et al.* 2013; Talaván 2011). By providing redundant input in the foreign language in the oral and written medium simultaneously, same-language subtitles favour the pairing of orthographic

and phonological forms (Mitterer and McQueen 2009) and aid syntactic and textual processing (Vanderplank 1988; Pavesi *et al.* 2019). Furthermore, they assist learners in bridging the gap between their reading and listening skills in the L2 (Bird and Williams 2002: 509). Bimodal subtitles are particularly popular among upper-intermediate and advanced learner-viewers, but have been shown to be effective at various levels of proficiency in the foreign language (Montero Perez *et al.* 2013). Due to the presence of the L1, standard interlingual subtitles can be accessed by learners with lower mastery of the L2, as they impact primarily on text comprehension and vocabulary development (d'Ydewalle and Pavakanun 1996; Van de Poel and d'Ydewalle 2001; Markham and Peter 2003). More recent research also indicates the potential of interlingual subtitling on the learning of syntax among intermediate-level learners: the presence of the two languages can stimulate L1-L2 comparison and contribute to shifting viewers' attention to L2 structure, overall facilitating input segmentation (Ghia 2012). Reversed subtitles are a less traditional viewing mode, and are generally designed for classroom settings and explicit learning aims. In spite of their pre-eminently artificial nature, they appear to be useful for lexical recall and development, and to be effective with learners from beginning to upper-intermediate competence level in the L2 (Holobow *et al.* 1984; Danan 2004; Pavesi *et al.* 2019).

Given their use as the mainstream audiovisual translation mode in subtitling countries, interlingual subtitles are traditionally associated with informal and incidental foreign language learning. Viewers' extensive and repeated exposure to subtitled input leads to an increased mastery of the L2 heard in television dialogues (d'Ydewalle and Pavakanun 1996; Kuppens 2010; Lindgren and Muñoz 2013). Bimodal subtitles - so-called closed captions (Vanderplank 1988, 2016) - come next, as they were not uncommonly accessed in traditional viewing media. Nowadays, both modalities can be equally accessed informally on the numerous OTT platforms which offer multiple dialogue-subtitle combinations and lend to greater control by the viewers themselves (Vanderplank 2020). Confirming such access flexibility and as part of a large-scale survey ranging across several European regions (the *Subtitles and Language Learning* project), Mariotti (2015) reports data on the use and perception of subtitles for L2 learning among 258 university students. The study covered both formal and non-formal[20] settings; in the latter condition, learners were required to watch subtitled audiovisuals

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[20]   The study used the label 'non-formal contexts' to refer to settings in which learners used audiovisuals autonomously to learn an L2 (Caimi 2015: 12). These settings are different from informal ones mainly in terms of incidentality, since participants explicitly aimed at improving their L2 competence (Mariotti 2015: 86).

for a period of approximately one year and fill out two questionnaires delving into their viewing habits and preferences, as well as their beliefs concerning subtitles and SLA. Most of the participants expressed a general preference for interlingual subtitling, even if students showing a strong learning orientation tended to favour bimodal subtitles. The majority of the subjects viewed subtitled input as a useful tool for learning foreign languages, and especially for developing listening skills. As a result of the extensive exposure, they believed to have boosted their reading and interactional skills, and felt stimulated to access more L2 audiovisuals on future occasions.

2.6.2. *Empirical investigations of incidental language learning through subtitling*

As seen in Section 2.3., incidentality in learning refers to L2 recall and development occurring as a by-product of a meaning-oriented activity – film and television watching in our scenario – and often pairs with informal learning settings. In the literature on subtitling and SLA, several studies recreated incidental learning situations without taking place in actual naturalistic contexts, and mostly found evidence of L2 vocabulary development. Examples are the seminal experiments carried out in Belgium by d'Ydewalle and Pavakanun (1995, 1996, 1997), where learners at different ages (schoolchildren, teenagers, college students) and proficiency levels were exposed to short subtitled videos in different L2s. In post-exposure tests, learners generally showed good text comprehension and improved vocabulary performance. Similarly, Koolstra and Beentjes's (1999) early study gathered evidence for word recognition and retention in a group of Dutch elementary school pupils watching an English television programme with Dutch subtitles. More recently, Peters *et al.* (2016) also tested incidental word recall among high-school EFL learners exposed to a short documentary or a cartoon episode and found positive effects for both bimodal and interlingual subtitling in relation to viewers' vocabulary size. Pavesi *et al.*'s (2019) study bore similar results when assessing word recall, lexical and overall comprehension in 80 university students who watched a TV-series episode in different viewing modes. All subtitle types proved to be effective: the reversed mode was especially useful for general and lexical comprehension, the bimodal condition promoted exact word recall and memorisation and standard subtitles assisted general and lexical comprehension.

Whereas the studies mentioned so far considered short exposure times, other projects simulated incidental learning settings where more extensive access to subtitled audiovisuals took place. In many cases, exposure occurred out of the classroom, even though proficiency tests were administered in guided or group

contexts. Ghia's (2011) and (2012) quasi-incidental studies suggest the effectiveness of more prolonged and self-regulated access to interlingually subtitled films on the development of L2 syntactic competence in adult viewers. In Ghia (2011) participants were exposed to 15 films in L2 English with Italian subtitles for three months and showed improvement in a set of syntactic tests on typical spoken language phenomena (e.g. questions, cleft sentences, dislocations). Ghia (2012) considered an exposure to the L2 of four to five weeks and additionally paid attention to the impact of subtitle translation on short-term syntax learning. The results suggested a role for subtitling strategies in triggering input salience and viewers' attention to specific language structures. Pujadas and Muñoz (2019) assessed EFL vocabulary learning among teenagers exposed to a subtitled TV-series in incidental and formal instruction conditions over the course of one academic year. Two subtitling modalities were considered, i.e. same-language and interlingual. Participants appeared to learn L2 vocabulary regardless of subtitling modalities. Even though pre-instruction helped students fare better, vocabulary learning also occurred in the incidental group, "[supporting] previous findings on the learning potential that watching TV series may also have outside the classroom" (Pujadas and Muñoz 2019: 492). Additionally, viewers' proficiency level in the L2 played a significant role, since learners at higher competence level (B1) benefitted most from exposure. This also suggests a threshold level for learners to be able to access subtitled audiovisual input in the L2 and for such input to be in its most part comprehensible to them – and therefore best effective from an acquisitional point of view.

Extended exposure to subtitled products can also assist the incidental learning of typically oral and colloquial vocabulary, as suggested in Frumuselu (2018). In Frumuselu's study, both bimodal and interlingual subtitles were found to facilitate the retention of conversational expressions, including slang words, idioms, phrasal verbs and set formulae among university learners watching episodes from the TV-series *Friends* over a 7-week period (p. 66).

2.6.3. *Exposure to subtitled audiovisual input in naturalistic settings*

More naturalistic settings are considered in a few large-scale surveys and investigations which elicit data on learner-viewers' access to audiovisuals and their correlation with L2 proficiency, self-assessment or personal beliefs about language learning. Kuppens (2007, 2010) correlated the self-reports of 374 Flemish primary school pupils on their exposure to English media with their performance on a vocabulary test. Significantly better scores were reached by those pupils who declared to frequently access subtitled English-language TV-programmes and films.

Lindgren and Muñoz (2013: 105) also tackled a young age group in their study of 865 10-11-year-olds coming from seven different subtitling and dubbing countries, Croatia, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK. Having investigated the role of different out-of-school factors, including exposure to subtitled television, they concluded that "watching subtitled films (and television programmes) was the most powerful exposure type for both listening and reading" among young European learners of English. Not surprisingly, Italian children, who had grown up in a country where television programmes are dubbed, fared much worse than children in other countries where films and TV-programmes are screened in the original language with subtitles. By exploring naturalistic L2 contact albeit within a narrower focus, Kusyk and Sockett (2012) conducted a study on exposure to English-language TV-series among 30 L1 French learner-viewers. The participants preferred watching series in the original version with interlingual (French) subtitles, followed by bimodal subtitles. Overall, they showed a positive attitude towards subtitling, which was of great assistance to comprehension, and tended to modify their viewing habits over time. In particular, a shift from interlingual to bimodal modes was reported as their proficiency level increased (Sockett 2014: 53)[21]. In line with previous research projects (Sockett and Toffoli 2012; see also Orrego-Carmona 2014), learners believed exposure to subtitled video to be useful for improving their listening skills in the L2, as well as for boosting their vocabulary knowledge and development. Similar trends were observed in a following study on access to fansubs in TV-series (Sockett 2014). Here, students' L2 writing skills were additionally tested and set in relation with their reported frequency of exposure to audiovisuals. As proficiency increased, participants showed better mastery of tense and aspect combinations in L2 English. Moreover, frequent viewers were observed to produce more idiomatic written texts and to consistently use the most pervasive 4-grams found in the TV-series input (Sockett 2014: 106-107).

2.7. *Rationale for the present study*

The review of the literature presented so far reveals the paucity of studies on informal access to English and informal learning of the language in Italy.

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[21] The trend to prefer bimodal subtitles or no subtitles at all when L2 proficiency is high is also documented in Bednarek (2018). In this survey, the author explored consumption of TV-series among 600 German university students who were predominantly prospective English teachers. Most of the participants surveyed reported regularly accessing English-language TV-series without subtitles; if any subtitles were added (by a minority), bimodal ones were preferred. The study is not detailed here since its main focus was not on subtitled audiovisuals.

In line with the research avenues pursued in other European countries, in the next chapters we will explore the degree and modalities of spontaneous and naturalistic access to English by Italian university students. A survey was set up to investigate several contexts of informal exposure to English – ranging from audiovisual input to other multimodal environments and to face-to-face interaction with native speakers – in a sample of postgraduate students at the University of Pavia. This study is meant as a first systematic investigation – albeit limited to a single university – of how a specific sector of the Italian population may be changing patterns of access to English outside traditional, institutional contexts of language learning. The survey also taps into users' reasons for contact with the L2 and sets data in relation to demographic and background information, such as university majors and proficiency level in English, with the aim of gaining a better insight on the profiles of the individuals that are most likely to come in contact with English informally.

3.
An Italian case study:
Aims, questionnaire and participants

3.1. *A questionnaire to postgraduate students at the University of Pavia*

Traditional and new media have been offering novel and ever-growing opportunities of contact with English among non-native speakers. Studies on informal access to English have been flourishing in Europe and beyond, but have mostly interested northern European countries (Chapters 1, 2). By contrast in Italy, like in other areas from southern Europe, research on the issue is still scant, and there is no large-scale documentation on the extent to which individuals are exposed to English outside the formal context of education – and on their potential motivations in doing so. At the same time, there is a widespread perception among educators and laypeople alike that access to English-language media in Italy has increased considerably in the past few years. Yet, no systematic exploration to substantiate this perception has been carried out so far. To begin addressing this gap, a research project was set up at the University of Pavia to investigate informal contact with English among postgraduate students[22]. Postgraduate students were selected as the target population as they have usually completed their formal education in English and are therefore less likely to be affected in their behaviours by the direct influence of classroom teaching and learning. In addition, postgraduate students are more likely to have been mobile through Erasmus and other international exchange programmes and encounter other students coming from abroad in their daily life on campus. Universities represent potential thriving centres to investigate shifting behaviours, "because education is a key domain for language policy and a site of English language learning but also because [university students]

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[22]   The study was initially part of the strategic research project *MIGRA-TI-N: Towards a Governance Model for International Migration: An Interdisciplinary and Diachronic Perspective*, University of Pavia, 2015-2017.

are often those in most direct contact with English and at the forefront of change" (Ferguson 2015: 15). Concentrating on younger adults rather than older generations also appeared appropriate to replicate the choice of respondents in other studies on the diffusion and access to English in non-English speaking countries (e.g. Gnutzmann *et al.* 2015; Sockett 2014; Kusyk 2017). All data were collected at the University of Pavia, a prestigious and historical, middle-sized university located in northern Italy. The University of Pavia qualifies as a good starting point for the systematic investigation of informal contact with English in Italy for a number of reasons. It is a multi-disciplinary university, hence attended by students coming from different academic backgrounds and having a variety of interests and expertise. This allows for a variegated sample of respondents majoring in many disciplines. In addition, its size makes it a more representative university of average student population as opposed to very large universities in Italian metropolises, whose students would probably exhibit a more international attitude to media exposure and personal exchanges than most young Italians (Eurobarometer 2012). Moreover, the University of Pavia displays a geographically diversified population as students come from nearby places as well as elsewhere nationally. Finally, its good lecturer/student ratio makes it a student-friendly university, where ease of personal contact was likely to favour smooth data collection.

3.2. *Aims and research questions*

The current study moves from the hypothesis that a shift in patterns of access to English may be in place in Italy and may affect L2 learning dynamics among learner-users, on the wake of what is happening in other European countries and beyond. The study was structured as a questionnaire survey and aimed to investigate exposure to several informal sources of English input in the target sample (see Collentine and Freed 2004). The questionnaire collected information on participants' demographics, L2 learning background, and access to L2 English through a variety of resources and activities, including audiovisuals, online media, music and face-to-face interaction (Sections 3.3.1. and 3.3.2.). More in detail, the attention was focused on i) participants' preferred sources of informal contact with English and their access patterns to different input types, and ii) participants' exposure to audiovisual input in English, preferred viewing and subtitling modalities and main reasons for watching audiovisuals in English. The attention to audiovisual input ensues from the relevance of telecinematic media in today's daily life worldwide, where individuals regularly watch

films, TV-series and web-series – which are predominantly English-language productions – often and increasingly with the support of subtitles. Moreover, this source of contact with the L2 has been reported in the literature as a major vector to SLA (Chapter 2).

The aims of the study converge into two research questions (RQs), which develop into further sub-questions and are contextualised within participants' biographical data. The first research question addresses the overall extent of access to various forms of informal English among Italian postgraduate students. The second research question addresses in more detail access to audiovisual input in the sample, in the form of English-language films and TV-series, with special attention to subtitled audiovisuals. The two main research questions and their internal sub-questions are structured as follows:

RQ1: What is the extent of informal exposure to English within a sample of Italian postgraduate university students?

    RQ1.a: What informal activities do learners mostly engage in? How often and for how long? Are there any relations between access patterns to different input sources?

    RQ1.b: Can we outline participant profiles based on frequency and intensity of exposure to different sources of informal English input?

RQ2: What is the status of informal exposure to English through audiovisual input, especially subtitled telecinematic input, among Italian postgraduate university students?

    RQ2.a: What are the preferred viewing and subtitling modalities and the main reasons for learner-viewers' preferences?

Following up on the main research questions, some corollary topics were also tackled in the research project for a more detailed description of participants' background and habits of informal exposure to English as detailed below.

3.3. *Methodology: Questionnaire and participants*

3.3.1. *Questionnaire design*

The value of questionnaires and observational research in gathering data on the social context of L2 acquisition is widely acknowledged in SLA, as is the paramount importance of the social context itself (Lantolf 2000; Norris and Ortega 2001). In 2004, Freed *et al.* (p. 351 ff.) proposed a comprehensive language contact profile in the format of a questionnaire that drew on the different (and

sometimes alternating) contexts of foreign language exposure (Collentine and Freed 2004: 155-156). These comprised formal instruction, 'intensive domestic immersion' and study abroad experiences. Informal settings were also considered, including TV, film and video watching, reading and interaction with other people. The questionnaire format was also meant to gather detailed information about frequency and intensity of engagement in the various activities, and respondents' use of their L1 or other L2s when carrying out the same tasks (Freed *et al.* 2004).

In the current study, we followed the format of contact profiles put forward by Freed *et al.* (2004) and constructed a questionnaire that focussed on informal contexts of L2 exposure. The questionnaire was meant to elicit information from postgraduate students on type of access, sources of informal contact with English, extent of access, reasons and preferences for access. Relevant background information prompted in the questionnaire also included demographics, university majors and some aspects of participants' language learning history, i.e. years of L2 study, self-assessed proficiency level in English, knowledge of other foreign languages, study abroad experiences. In constructing the questionnaire, we were aided by the outcomes of preliminary studies that involved questionnaires, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. These surveys addressed a wider population of both undergraduate and postgraduate students and were carried out as part of two postgraduate thesis projects on informal and study-abroad contact with L2 English (Cravidi 2016; Casiraghi 2016). The two investigations identified main sources of exposure to English outside language courses, most popular genres and sub-genres accessed, main reasons for exposure to different sources or access modalities, viewing supports, difficulties encountered when accessing English informally, attitudes towards specific input types and generally relevant details on different input sources. Prior to administration, the questionnaire was piloted with a small sample of postgraduate students who were asked to comment on whether the questions were clear, made sense and were relevant. The questionnaire was revised accordingly before being administered to the final sample of students.

3.3.2. *Structure and contents of the questionnaire*

The questionnaire consists of a total of 83 questions and is organised in three main parts (see Appendix). The first part captures personal data, including gender, date of birth, geographic provenance, university course attended, number of known foreign languages, estimated level of English. More specific questions further address the age at which respondents first started learning

English, participation in any study abroad programmes and their duration in case of positive answer.

The second part focusses on access to films and television programmes in English and the third part assesses exposure to other media, the internet and additional online input such as YouTube, videogames, social networks, e-mails, blogs and forums. Other sources of input that are investigated are songs and English-medium interaction. The questionnaire contains items mostly phrased as two-option and multiple-option questions and items on frequency and intensity of exposure. Participants' frequency of informal contact with different sources of English input is measured through a 4-point Likert scale with the options i) *very often (every day)*, ii) *often (from once to twice a week)*, iii) *sometimes (once in a fortnight)* and iv) *rarely (once a month or less)*. Intensity of access to informal English sources is quantified through 5-point Likert scales which involve the choices i) *more than two hours*, ii) *between one and two hours*, iii) *about an hour*, iv) *between 30 minutes and an hour*, v) *less than 30 minutes* per session. Due to the relatively short length of YouTube videos, different Likert options are given for this input type only, and include i) *more than two hours*, ii) *between one and two hours*, iii) *from 30 minutes to an hour*, iv) *from 15 to 30 minutes*, v) *less than 15 minutes* per session.

In the section on audiovisual products more choices are allowed for some questions. Open questions are also included to gain a better understanding of the reasons behind respondents' preferences for modality of access and translation. The areas of investigation include: exposure to films and TV-series in English and viewers' preference between the two; frequency and intensity of exposure to films and TV-series in English respectively; preferred viewing modality and dialogue language, as well as participants' reasons for their choice; subtitling and preferred subtitling modalities, as well as participants' reasons for their choice; preferred support for watching; preferred film genres; preferred TV-series (titles); preferred genres of TV-programmes; exposure to audiovisuals in other languages and reasons for watching; exposure to reversed subtitling; beliefs on audiovisual input and the development of L2 competence.

The third questionnaire section on access to other media in English includes items on frequency and intensity of exposure to YouTube and preferred video types; frequency and intensity of videogame playing in English and preferred game categories; frequency and intensity of access to social networks in English, preferred social media and reasons why; frequency and intensity of access to English-language blogs and preferred blog topics; frequency and intensity of access to English-language forums and preferred forum topics; frequency of searches on English-language web pages and reasons why; frequency of

e-mail correspondence in English; frequency and intensity of access to apps in English[23]; frequency of exposure to English-language songs, degree of attention allocated to the lyrics, preferred music genres and beliefs about songs and the development of L2 competence; frequency and intensity of participation in face-to-face interaction in English and interlocutors.

3.3.3. *Sampling and participants*

Participants were selected through both criterion and convenience sampling (Dörnyei 2007: 98). Criterion sampling drew on level and area of study: the survey aimed to target first-year postgraduate university students majoring in a variety of disciplines, mainly non-linguistic ones (i.e. non-language specialists), at the University of Pavia. First-year students in the second-level degree (*Laurea magistrale*) were preferred as they constitute a larger group and are more likely to be based on campus than second-year students. In a preliminary phase, the university statistics office was contacted to gather data on second-level degree programmes, first-year courses available, student numbers and lecturers. Only Italian-medium courses that were compulsory in different study programmes and curricula were selected as they were most likely to guarantee the participation of large numbers of students. No courses on English Language or Literature were targeted. Once a set of disciplines and courses had been identified, the lecturers holding the courses were contacted via e-mail. The researchers presented the study and its aims and asked for permission to administer the questionnaire to students at the start of regular class hours.

365 questionnaires were distributed in spring 2016; of these, 305 were returned and considered valid for the present analysis as they pertained to Italian speakers only (questionnaires filled out by Erasmus or visiting students were excluded from the analysis so as to explore the specific exposure habits of students residing in Italy). The students surveyed were distributed among different courses as follows, in decreasing order (above five respondents): Psychology (48), Civil Engineering (47), Pharmacy (45), Biology (40), Economics (33), Chemistry (27), Linguistics (26), Italian Philology (13), Political Science (9), Communication Studies (5), Mathematics (5), others (7). Students thus came from different backgrounds and embodied different academic orientations (Figure 3.1).

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[23]   This item was not analysed in the present context because it was found to largely overlap with other categories (e.g. YouTube, social networks, games).
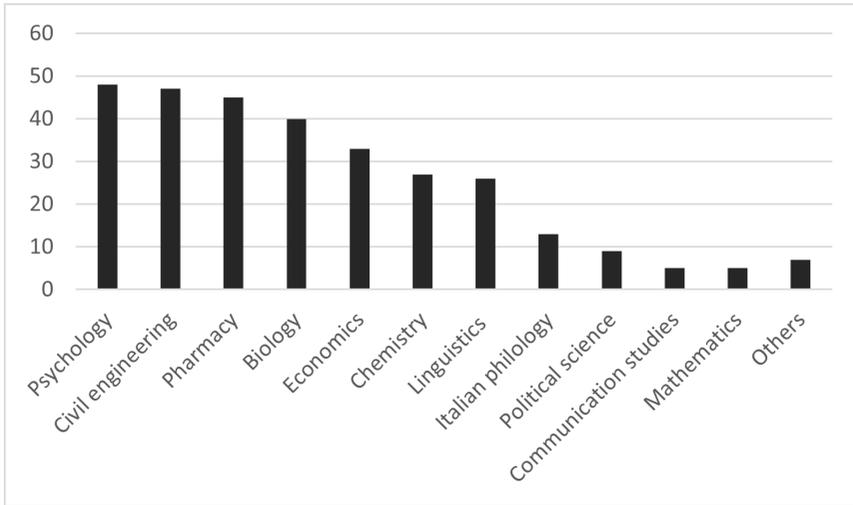
Figure 3.1 – Participants' distribution by degree course.

3.3.4. *Procedure: Questionnaire administration and data coding*

Once permission had been obtained by several lecturers to visit their classes, the research assistant met each class at the agreed-upon time. The research purposes and rationale for data collection were explained to students at the beginning of each session. It was made clear that completing the questionnaire was anonymous and voluntary[24]. Questionnaire completion required about 30 minutes. The decision to have respondents fill out the questionnaires during regular lectures was made to encourage students' participation. Furthermore, this modality of administration also minimises the bias of participant self-selection, according to which mainly most motivated students tend to volunteer for surveys or research projects (Dörnyei 2003: 75; Kusyk 2017). This helped increase the representativeness of the sample.

Questionnaire administration was followed by a data-coding phase, and all individual answers were transferred onto worksheets for subsequent data analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to the data, including frequency distributions, factor analysis and correlations (see Chapters 4 and 5). Further data coding involved the conversion of Likert-scale options into ordinal data (numeric values) to generate conventional indexes of general informal exposure to English or of exposure to specific input types (Chapter 4).

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[24] The same information is reported in writing at the beginning of the questionnaire.

3.4. *Students' background, self-evaluations and language-related data*

The answers to the first part of the questionnaire allow us to draw a biographical picture of the participants, which will be used as the background for the analyses and discussion presented in the next chapters. Respondents have completed a three-year first-level degree (*Laurea triennale*) and mostly attend the first year of a postgraduate course. All students studied English in school, their formal instruction in the language having lasted a considerable time: 82% of respondents began studying English at primary school, one third (106) from the age of six. Yet, two thirds of the sample estimate their level of English as intermediate (B1 and B2 of the CEFR), 16% declare a beginning competence in the language, whereas only 16% believe they have an advanced mastery of English. Although the self-perceived knowledge of English is not advanced, the respondents exhibit a degree of plurilingualism. Less than one third of students (89) declare to know English only, as opposed to almost half who report speaking two foreign languages while 23% more than two. These percentages indicate a greater degree of multilingualism in comparison to that declared by European students as a whole in 2012 (Eurobarometer 2012), coupled however with a perceived lower proficiency in English. More than two thirds of the respondents are female (210), reflecting the overall composition of attending postgraduate students. Only few students in the sample report having had a study abroad experience, namely 16% – and mostly for a short time. Among them, just 7.5% have spent more than three months abroad.

3.5. *Limitations in participants and data collection*

The study aims to provide a detailed view of informal access to L2 English among a sample of Italian postgraduate students. However, it shows some limitations inherent to questionnaire structure and potential respondent bias. In spite of the inclusion of several informal activities, no full data on intensity of exposure were collected for all input types. More specifically, no data on length of access per session are available for web pages, e-mails and songs. More detailed information on these input sources should be collected in follow-up studies in order to give a fuller picture of participants' habits that may allow closer comparisons among input sources.

Respondent bias is sometimes inevitable in questionnaire-based surveys, and concerns participants' tendency to provide answers in compliance with what they believe to be the researchers' expectations and the prestige of given target languages (Dörnyei 2003: 12; Bednarek 2018: 222). As questionnaires

were administered in classroom settings, students may have tended to over-estimate their learning orientation and aims while accessing English input informally. Furthermore, since the questionnaire targets a prestige language, or the language of international communication, which many individuals aspire to master, answers may be leaning in specific directions. For these reasons, respondents may report using English more than they actually do. Future research in the field will benefit from the inclusion of qualitative, emic-oriented data obtained from a more varied set of data collection procedures. However, although the data collected via the present questionnaire may not reflect exact trends, we believe they still indicate underlying attitudes towards English and reflect an overall assessment of English-based informal activities, hence providing a first outlook on changing behaviours and attitudes in present-day Italian young generations, as well as a useful springboard for broader investigations.

A detailed analysis and discussion of questionnaire results is provided in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 is devoted to overall exposure data, describing participants' access to English in a variety of informal settings (films, TV-series, YouTube, social networks, e-mails, songs, blogs, forums, videogames, interaction). Chapter 5, in turn, focusses on audiovisual input (films and TV-series), students' preferred viewing modalities (original vs. dubbed versions; subtitling and different subtitle types) and self-assessed outcomes. Additionally, the analysis explores participants' reasons for specific viewing choices, preferred media supports and favourite audiovisual genres.

4.
Informal exposure to English.
Sources of input, patterns of access, participant profiles

> A final attraction of informal language learning as a field of study is that
> it is constantly changing as new technologies and trends develop.
>
> (Sockett and Toffoli 2020: 483)

The primary aim of the survey is to address the extent of exposure to English in informal, out-of-the-classroom contexts among Italian postgraduate university students, to identify the major sources of such informal input and to search for any consistent patterns of behaviour among respondents (Research Question 1, Research Question 1.a). Additionally, the study endeavours to define participant profiles based on frequency and intensity of exposure (Research Question 1.b). It also explores telecinematic input and subtitling strategies more in depth (Research Question 2).

This chapter addresses Research Question 1 and its sub-questions 1.a and 1.b by focussing on the analysis of questionnaire results on participants' overall informal contact with English through several online and offline media, including films, television series, YouTube, web pages, blogs, forums, videogames, e-mails, songs and interactions with other speakers.

The first part of the chapter provides an overview of participants' informal contact with L2 English and, drawing on length and frequency of access, identifies the major activities that learner-users report engaging in. Descriptive statistics are used to illustrate in detail the results for each input type, and are integrated by reflections and comparisons with findings from parallel research projects. The second part of the chapter clusters and correlates data on participants' behaviour. First, exposure indexes are obtained based on students' extent of access to different media, and access trends are set in relation to one another, to search for potential correlations among various informal activities. In other words, is students' access to one specific input source in English, e.g. audiovisuals, predictive of contact with other input types, e.g. blogs or videogames? Inferential statistics is used in this

phase, involving both factor analysis and statistical correlations. As a subsequent step, the exploration of students' exposure patterns allows to sketch more detailed participant profiles. These can range from learner-users who regularly access several media in English to those who have hardly any contact with the L2.

4.1. *Major sources of English input outside the classroom*

The exploration of students' contact with English through a variety of informal activities drew on a list of online and offline media, namely films, television series, YouTube, web pages, blogs, forums, videogames, e-mails, songs and interactions with other speakers. With a view to gaining general insights into participants' habits, a series of questions were asked about i) whether users access the different input sources, ii) how frequently they do so and iii) for how long. Four frequency options were provided, including *very often* (every day), *often* (once or twice a week), *sometimes* (once a fortnight) and *rarely* (once a month or less). Length ranged from a maximum of two hours per session to a minimum of less than 15 minutes – or no access at all (see Section 4.1.1. and following).

Before looking at the different input sources in detail, Figure 4.1 illustrates students' access to different media in English irrespective of amount of exposure. In the sample, participants come into contact with English through a variety of media, testifying to the wide array of learning opportunities that informal L2 learning offers (Dressman 2020a). Data show that most students access web pages, songs, social networks, YouTube contents and films and TV-series in
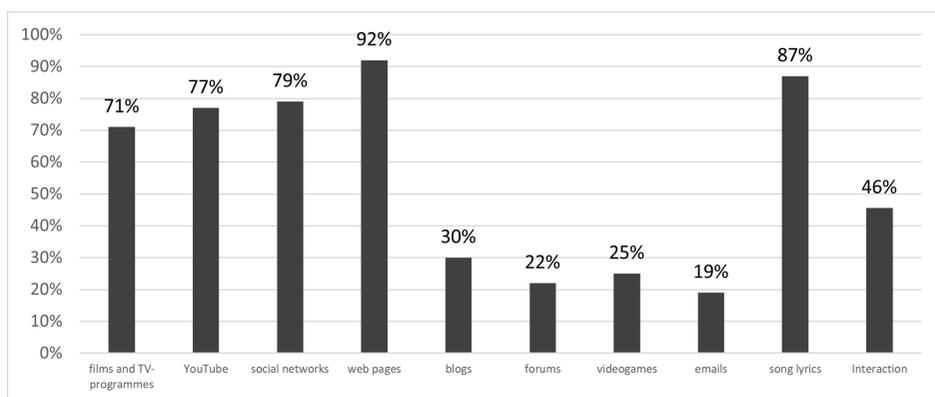
Figure 4.1 – Percentages of participants accessing different media in English.

English[25]. In the following sections, exposure trends are described more thoroughly in terms of frequency, length and participants' preferences.

4.1.1. *Access to films, TV-series and YouTube videos in English*

More than two thirds of the respondents (71%, 216 students) state that they watch films and television programmes in English, and they do so quite frequently, with a preference for television series: 87 students prefer TV-series exclusively, whereas 34 choose films alone and the great majority likes watching both (see Chapter 5). Series are watched at least once a week by 41% (i.e. 126) of the surveyed students, of whom 17% (52) watch them everyday (Figure 4.2). When they watch TV-series in English, more than half of the participants (172, i.e. 56%) spend at least one hour doing so; a small number (20 out of 305, about 7%) may even be prone to binge watching as they say they access TV-series for more than two hours each time (Figure 4.2)[26].
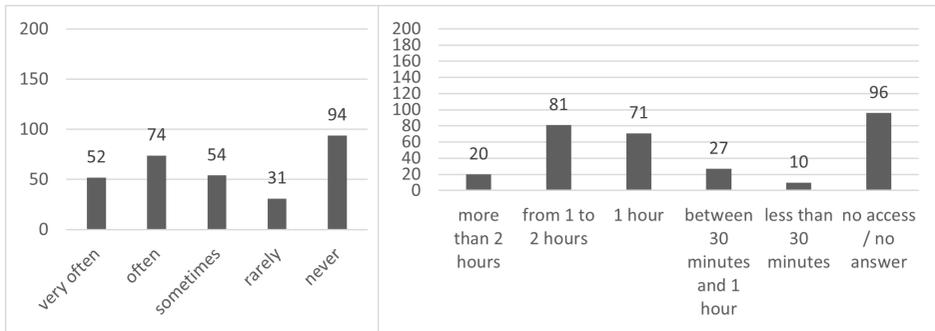
Figure 4.2 – Frequency and length of exposure per session to English-language television series in the sample.

Based on the frequency and length of exposure respondents report, it is safe to state that almost half of them are exposed to the English of TV-series for at least one hour a week – which makes at least 50 hours a year. The preference for TV-series over films and other audiovisual genres is documented in several large-scale surveys on informal exposure to English (e.g. Sockett 2014; Bednarek 2018)

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[25] Films and TV-series were considered as a single category based on the questionnaire (see Appendix) and given their similarity. In both cases, they are built on monodirectional audiovisual dialogue (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 6) and they consist of full-length narratives – in contrast with generally shorter YouTube videoclips or interactive videogames.

[26] The options 'no access' and 'no answer' were part of a single category, as we assumed that those respondents who did not reply did not access that type of input either.

and is related to their ever-growing popularity as a genre and their increasing availability on Internet-based video services[27].

Films are watched by a quarter of all participants on quite a regular basis (from once a week to every day). As mentioned above, the frequency of access to films is lower than for TV-series, but films require longer individual exposure time – their average length being between 90 and 120 minutes (Figure 4.3).
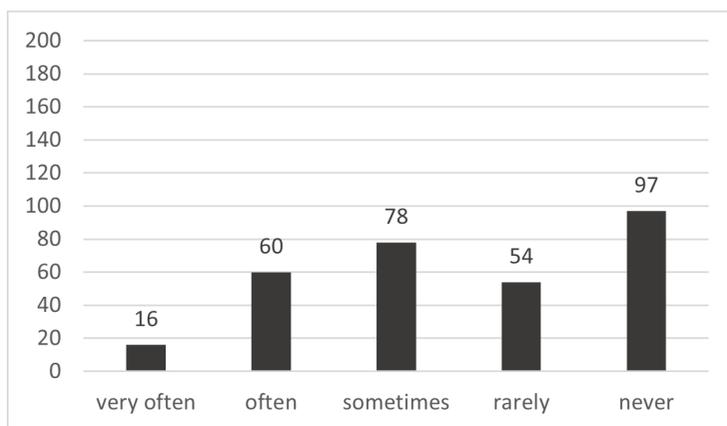
Figure 4.3 – Frequency of exposure to English-language films in the sample.

In terms of numbers of students involved, YouTube attracts even more users, with slightly more than three quarters of the respondents (234) reporting that they connect to the video-site in English, almost 40% (115) at least once a week (Figure 4.4). YouTube is generally a very popular resource among the younger generations, and is often a locus for informal learning (Sundqvist 2020). If compared to films and television programmes, however, time of exposure is reduced, with only a small percentage of viewers in our sample accessing YouTube for at least one hour each time (12%, i.e. 36 students). Most of the respondents (151, about 50%) report that they use it less than 30 minutes every time – quite an expected trend if considering the nature of YouTube videos themselves, whose average duration is generally fairly short (Figure 4.4).

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[27]   A more in-depth analysis of access to telecinematic input is carried out in Chapter 5. For different input sources, there is sometimes a lack of correspondence between the total number of students reporting accessing that resource and respondents' data on frequency and length of exposure. This is due to missing replies to the questionnaire items on frequency and length of contact with L2 English through the target activities.
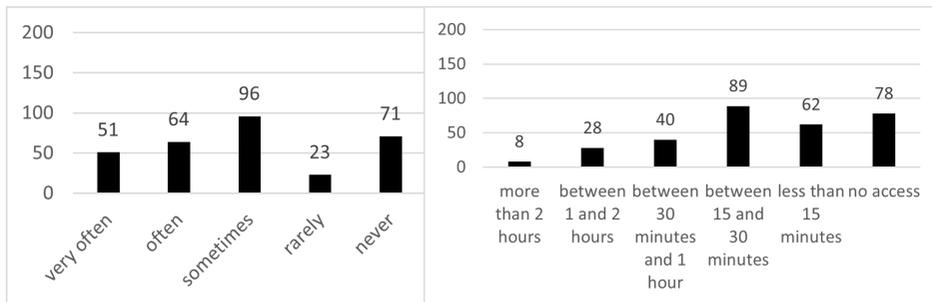
Figure 4.4 – Frequency and length of exposure to YouTube contents in English in the sample.

The questionnaire section devoted to YouTube included an item on preferred video genres on the platform (Item 2.4):

Item 2.4
Which types of videos do you search for on YouTube? (More than one option is possible)

□ Music videos
□ Tutorials
□ Reviews
□ Scenes from films or TV-series
□ Sport videos
□ Comedy videos
□ Documentaries
□ Video recipes
□ Talk shows
□ Gameplay
□ News
□ Film trailers
□ Interviews
□ Viral videos
□ Other (please specify) _____

Among YouTube genres, learner-users express a preference for music videos, video tutorials, trailers and scenes from films and TV-series, as well as interviews (Figure 4.5). It can be assumed that, overall, entertainment is the primary reason for accessing English-language contents on YouTube. Students also access this input source for information gathering, but appear to do so to a lower extent. Genres that most typically associate with this function (e.g. tutorials, recipes, gameplay) can involve viewers' potential contact with more specialised registers of the language (see Section 6.4.).
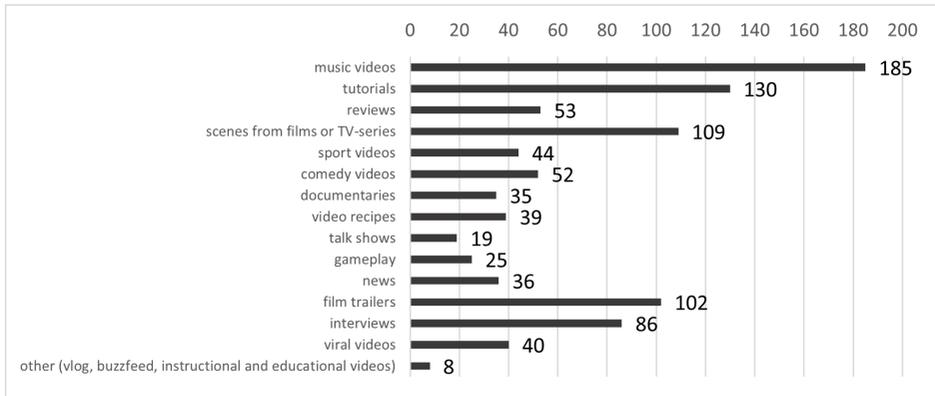
Figure 4.5 – Preferred English-language YouTube genres in the sample.

Films, television programmes and YouTube footages are eminently multimodal input sources, with an extensive visual and non-verbal component. On the whole, respondents report accessing them in English to a considerable extent especially as audiovisual dialogue, but not all of them do. As shown above, it can be gathered that almost 30% of the respondents (89) do not watch films or television programmes in English, whereas 23% (70) do not access the English language through YouTube. Quite interestingly, however, these viewers do not happen to be the same ones: only 29 participants in the sample (less than 10%) access neither telecinematic input nor YouTube contents in the foreign language. Students in this group are mostly majoring in technology and hard sciences including Engineering, Pharmacy and Biology. More respondents use YouTube in English, but do not watch films or TV-series in the L2 (61, i.e. 20% of all participants). Similarly, 15% (43 students) watch films and TV-series but do not access YouTube in English. This suggests that learner-users have quite diversified habits and perceive YouTube and full-length telecinematic products as clearly distinct input resources. In particular, YouTube offers a wider range of video genres, often with a prevalent visual component, and allows for much shorter viewing sessions. YouTube texts may therefore be less linguistically demanding for L2 users than films and TV-series.

4.1.2. *Access to social networks, web pages, blogs and forums in English*

After a focus on films, TV-series and YouTube, the following questionnaire items address social media, web pages, blogs and forums – all internet-based genres. A high number of students (240, 79%) state that they access contents in the English language through social networks. Although more than half of all the respondents say they use social networks in English regularly – at least once a

week (67, 22%) or everyday (99, 32%) – only about a quarter of the students (82, 27%) report spending on them one hour or more each time they log in. Most (118, about 39%) access English-language social media for less that 30 minutes per session (Figure 4.6). This trend ties in with the intrinsic nature of social media, where information is conveyed through short posts, threads, images or multimodal content, and communication is fast and limited in time.
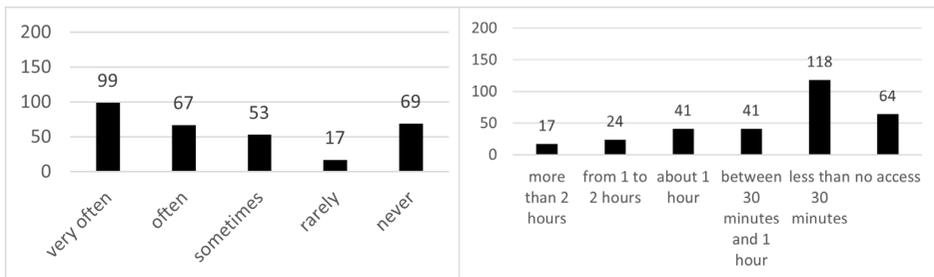
Figure 4.6 – Frequency and length of exposure to social networks in English in the sample.

Facebook is the social network almost everyone who spends time on social media claims to use in English (229 users, 75% of the sample), followed by Instagram, another strongly visual Internet-based site (125 users, 41%), and Twitter, which relies upon short and compact verbal messages (45 users, 15%). Needless to say, the use of social media varies greatly. For example, these may be accessed for retrieving information, to read news items, etc., but also to chat and to react to posts. A distinction hence needs to be drawn between the receptive use of these means and other uses which involve learners' direct interactions. Such variety in terms of language and approach is worth reflecting upon although more data, including emic data from the subject's perspective, would be required than those available in the present investigation.

At the same time, the near totality of the respondents states that they navigate web pages in English (280, 92%), and 50% of the informants (153) say they do so on a regular basis (Figure 4.7). Entertainment does not seem to be the main reason for access, since most of the participants claim to search the web for study reasons only (141, i.e. 46%) or for both study and leisure (108, i.e. 35%). However, although half of the students surveyed presumably receive plenty of written English input while they look for general information, discipline-specific contents and entertainment, the other half of the respondents either navigate only occasionally (once a fortnight/month) or not at all. These percentages point to a clear divide in access to web-based written English by students and show that there still exists a substantial group of respondents who has limited contact with this type of input.
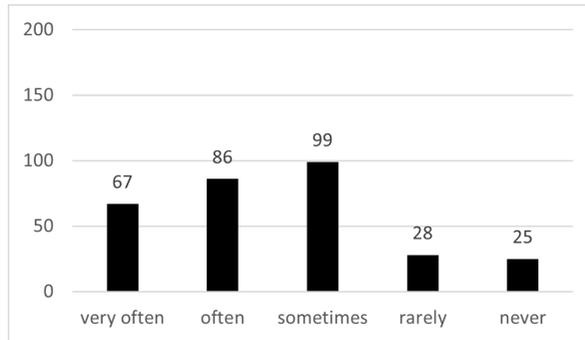
Figure 4.7 – Frequency of access to web pages in English in the sample.

As the ensuing questionnaire sections illustrate, fewer students surveyed state they read blogs in English (93, about 30% of the total), mostly only occasionally (Figure 4.8). Even fewer presumably access forums in the same language (68, 22%), and do so quite rarely (Figure 4.9).
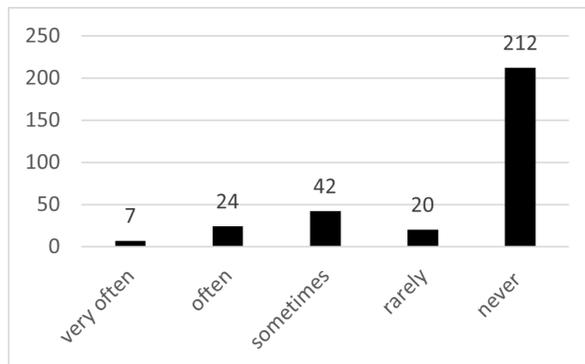
Figure 4.8 – Frequency of access to blogs in English in the sample.
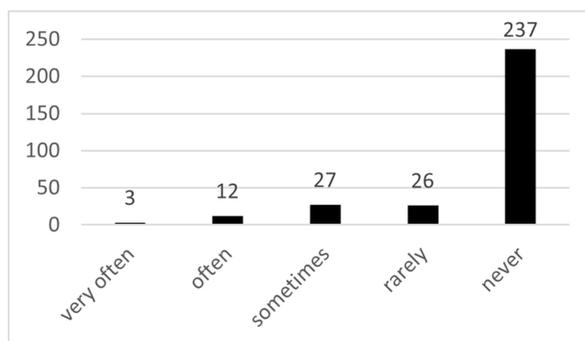
Figure 4.9 – Frequency of access to forums in English in the sample.

Music, cinema, books and technology are the top content selections for blogs (Figure 4.10); technology comes first for forums, followed by cinema and music (Figure 4.11). Although they may involve different degrees of specialisation, many of these domains can view the use of specific jargons and represent potential sources of exposure to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) among learner-viewers (Section 6.4.). In the sample, privileged ESP genres include technology, music and cooking.
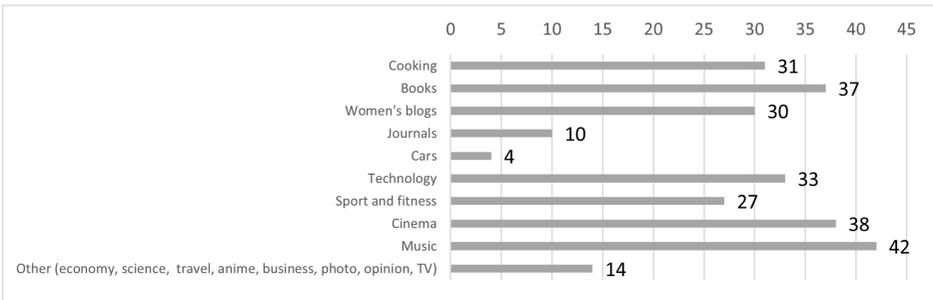
Figure 4.10 – Content of most frequently accessed English-language blogs.
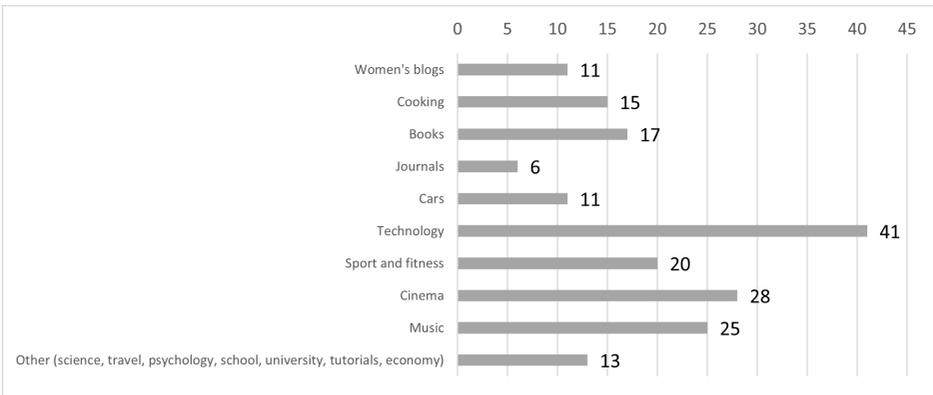
Figure 4.11 – Content of most frequently accessed English-language forums.

Only about a quarter of all participants (75, 25%) say that they play videogames in English (Figure 4.12). Most of these students (50 out of 75) engage in the activity frequently, although for relatively limited amounts of time. In several studies on extramural English, game players are found to access videogames on a regular basis, often in the form of 'massively multiplayer online role-playing games' (MMORPGs), which entail interactions with several other players and the reenactment of settings and identities (Sylvén and Sundqvist 2012; Knight *et al.*

2020). Regardless of users' main aims, this is an activity which is mainly conduct-
ed in English and by prevailingly male gamers (Sundqvist 2009; Kuppens 2010).
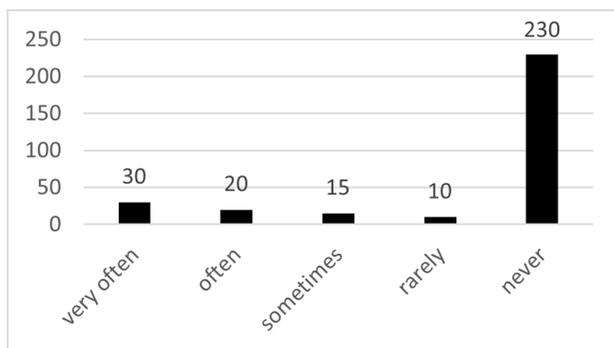
Figure 4.12 – Frequency of access to videogames in English in the sample.

To conclude the overview of predominantly internet-based genres, we finally
explored e-mail writing in English. E-mail correspondence in the foreign lan-
guage is quite infrequent, as only 19% of the respondents (58) report receiving
e-mail messages in English regularly, from once a week to every day. This trend
is not uncommon in other European countries, namely France and Germany,
where university students do not often exchange e-mails using English as the
language of communication (Kusyk 2017; Chapter 6).

4.1.3. *Listening to songs in English*

English music represents a considerable potential source of comprehensible
input for the respondents, as 87% (265 students) state that when they listen to
English songs, they focus on the lyrics (Figure 4.1). Among these students, expo-
sure is quite frequent, and more than half of the sample (187, i.e. 61%) say they
engage with song lyrics often or very often (Figure 4.13). Recent survey-based
research has led to similar findings, showing that music with lyrics in the foreign
language ranks among the top means of informal contact with an L2 (Toffoli and
Sockett 2010, 2014; Ludke 2020).

Given the focus on lyrics, this questionnaire section included additional ques-
tions about participants' perception of the L2 learning potential of foreign-lan-
guage songs. Almost four fifth (241, 79%) of the respondents believe that their
language competence has advanced as a result of paying attention to song lyrics.
Among these, unsurprisingly two third (176) acknowledge an improvement in
listening comprehension, but importantly about 40% (104 users) in L2 lexis.
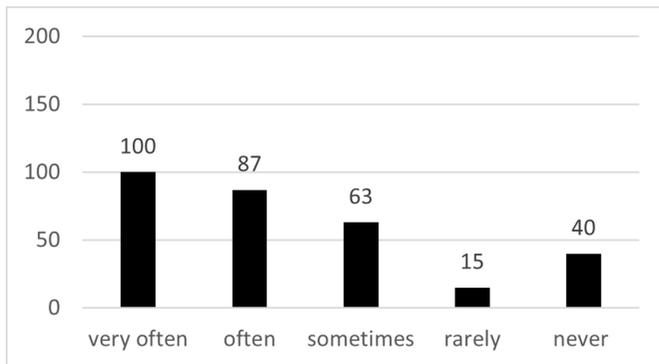
Figure 4.13 – Frequency of attention allocation to lyrics when listening to English-language songs.

Paying attention to English lyrics is not seen as really beneficial for the acquisition of grammar since only 6% of these students (15) think they have bettered in that respect.

The role of song lyrics in informal L2 learning is controversial. Some studies suggest that listening to music in a foreign language may improve pronunciation and vocabulary skills, especially as a result of lyrics' repetitiveness and memorability and users' prolonged and recurrent access to the same songs over time (Milton 2008; Ludke 2020). Other studies show no clear evidence of L2 acquisition following exposure to song lyrics: Kuppens (2007, 2010; see also Sundqvist 2009) found that contact with English-language songs had no impact on the development of vocabulary among Flemish EFL primary-school learners, even if music appeared to affect their familiarity with non-cognate words in the foreign language. Age, however, might be a relevant factor at play: Kuppen's study focused on primary-school pupils, while other studies targeted teenagers and university students, who may access a wider variety of music genres. Music style itself can also be a variable since some genres, such as rap or folk music, provide more authentic and everyday language input to listeners in terms of their adherence to real-life conversational use and phonological and suprasegmental patterns (Ludke 2020). Moreover, there may be a gap between learners' perception and actual evidence of L2 learning: while most learners agree on the beneficial impact of songs, the actual acquisitional outcomes are less evident and more difficult to pin down. What exposure to song lyrics can bring about is a greater confidence in L2 pronunciation skills and an increased motivation to engage with the foreign language, concurrently boosting "the learning impact of other encounters with English" that L2 users may experience close in time and that can involve more active contact with the foreign language (Toffoli and Sockett 2014: 204). Hence,

contact with English through songs may work synergistically with other activities, such as additional informal access to the L2 (video watching, commenting on the songs on blogs and forums) and autonomous learning practices that may stem from the listening process, like reading and reenacting the lyrics (McCarthy 2009; Toffoli and Sockett 2014; Ludke 2020). Its multifaceted nature makes exposure to L2 music a unique learning environment as learner-users are likely to pay attention to the language itself, if only because they want to sing along with the song, be sure of what the lyrics are saying and memorise the lines. According to Milton (2008), a learning-oriented attitude and a willingness to improve L2 skills are common among those listeners who show more noticeable learning outcomes.

4.1.4. *Interaction in English*

The following questionnaire section investigates learner-users' participation in interactional exchanges involving the use of English as the language of communication. More than half of the students surveyed state that they do not experience direct contact with English-speaking partners (166 students, 54%). Among those who do, only few (39, i.e. 13% of the whole sample) interact in English with other people regularly, whereas most do so only occasionally or rarely (Figure 4.14).
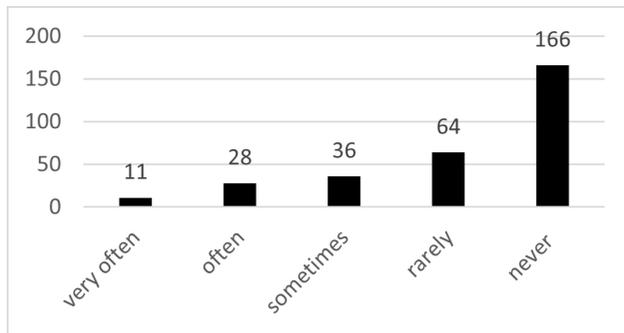
Figure 4.14 – Frequency of interaction in English in the sample.

The most frequent partners of these rather uncommon interactions are friends (68), acquaintances (59) and university fellow students (49) – hence people with whom respondents will have an ongoing and mostly informal relationship. The relatively scarce impact of interactional face-to-face exchanges as a source of input outside the classroom is confirmed by the low number of students who overall have benefitted from a study abroad period (49, i.e. 16%) for a period longer than three months (22, i.e. 7.5%).

4.2. *Exposure indexes and types of input*

In a subsequent phase of analysis, all data on participants' frequency and length of exposure to different media were used to generate overall exposure indexes. Indexes were calculated by converting exposure frequency and approximate length of access per session into ordinal values on two scales (ranging from 0 *never* to 4 *very often* for frequency and from 0 *no time at all* to 7 *more than two hours* for length) and by multiplying frequency by length. This led to conventional exposure indexes ranging from 0 – lowest exposure rate – to 28 – highest exposure rate. Individual exposure rates were then added up to obtain total exposure indexes indicating a conventionalised, aggregate value of access to different input types. Individual, per-subject indexes thus ranged from 0 – minimum score – to 224 – maximum score. Consistently with Section 4. 1. (Figure 4.1), input from films and TV-series constitutes a single category, as the two are comparable types of audiovisual input, involving spoken dialogues acted out and a narration over a quite extended time span through the audiovisual medium. The indexes do not include web pages, e-mails and songs since respondents were not specifically asked about length of access to these resources – for which only frequency data were collected. Figure 4.15 shows total exposure indexes in the sample.
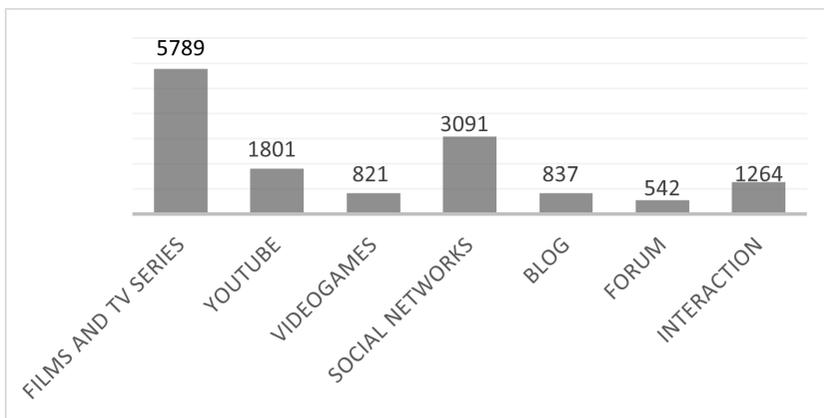
Figure 4.15 – Total exposure indexes (frequency X length of exposure) per input source.

On the basis of exposure indexes, films and television series represent the greatest source of out-of-the-classroom L2 English input according to the respondents[28] (5789 index). Telecinematic input is followed by social networks (3091 index).

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[28] Among the input types for which more complete information is available.

YouTube is the third most common means to access English in terms of both frequency and length of contact (1801 index); here, the total amount of exposure is lower, due to the shorter duration of videos compared to full-length films or television series. Lower exposure indexes are observed for face-to-face interaction in L2 English (1264), blog reading (837), access to videogames (821) and to forums (542). Exposure to videogames is generally prolonged, but only concerns a minority of students – and thus leads to a comparatively low index.

Indexes show that computer-mediated contact, especially online, is considerable in the sample. Among the activities that were explored, it represents by all means the most frequent form of contact with English. Even films and TV-series, which can be accessed through different supports, are mainly watched from computers and electronic devices (by 110 and 172 students respectively, corresponding to 36% and 56% of the entire sample; see Section 5.4. for a more detailed account). This trend is in line with findings from other studies, mainly addressing OILE (Sockett 2014; Kusyk 2020). Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and more recently Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), have been shown to play an increasingly relevant role in learners' lives (Arvanitis 2020: 120; Kukulska-Hulme and Lee 2020) and to benefit SLA in a variety of ways, primarily through the development of communicative skills and multicompetencies and a boosting of motivation and working memory capacity (Cheetham 2019; Codreanu and Combe 2020).

In terms of raw access numbers, exposure to fictional dialogue comes first, in the form of TV-series and films, followed by YouTube contents. A polarisation is observed between these mainly monodirectional genres and other input sources which may be bi- or multidirectional (blogs, forums, videogames involving online competition with other users) and are accessed less frequently and regularly in English. Monodirectional input forms are thus prominent in the sample (with a total index of 7590 for films, TV-series and YouTube)[29].

Interestingly, as an offline, non-computer-mediated form of input, face-to-face interaction represents only a very small portion of participants' experience with English. Despite involving quite limited access or attracting fewer users than more strictly audiovisual sources, forms of computer-mediated, written interaction seem to prevail over traditional face-to-face exchanges where English is used as the language of communication. In particular, social media

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[29]   As the questionnaire did not contain queries about time spent interacting with other users online, the present data do not allow us to make claims about the degree of bidirectionality and interactivity generated by these internet genres. This important question calls for research attention in the future.

are accessed to a great extent in the L2 and can be considered as additional potential loci for online interpersonal exchanges, since they are likely to stimulate further interactional forms, such as chats, comments and content sharing (Sockett 2014: 38). Interactional input is known to benefit SLA by providing learners with opportunities for negotiation (Long 1996; Mackey *et al.* 2012) and output production (Swain 1985, 2005), which is assumed to favour noticing and syntactic processing (see Section 2.5.2.). The same processes are liable to emerge in written interaction and to trigger similar socio-cognitive mechanisms, from the selection of relevant input stimuli to attend to, to information elaboration and transformation (e.g. writing about or commenting on topics, videos, TV-series, etc., Sockett 2014: 38), to the enactment of speech acts and communicative language functions, such as requests, apologies, collaborative sequences, greetings and leave-takings (Thorne 2008; Knight *et al.* 2020: 105).

4.3. *Clustering of activities and students' preferences*

Based on exposure data, a successive phase of analysis aims at outlining typologies of L2 users in relation to their patterns of access to media and out-of-the-classroom input. To this aim, individual responses from all participants were extracted from the questionnaires and explored in relation to one another. After excluding all no-answer cases, leading to consider a total of 293 subjects, factor analysis was used to correlate and group together different exposure indexes. Factor analysis aims at finding patterns in quantitative data, reducing the number of variables by grouping them into general, higher-level factors (Dörnyei 2007: 233). It was used here for two main purposes: grouping input sources together can help identify any underlying factors potentially affecting learner-users' behaviour and any common traits shared by different input types. Secondly, it allows us to observe the strength of potential relations holding between different input sources (RQ1.b, i.e. is access to one specific input type related to exposure to another?).

The results of the analysis show that different exposure habits can be grouped into three separate clusters[30]. Access to forums, videogames, blogs, YouTube and social networks in English belongs to the same cluster, which coincides with typically online input sources. This first factor (Factor 1) can be named 'Internet genres'. A second group includes exposure to films and TV-series in the foreign language, a factor which can be labelled 'telecinematic

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[30] For a similar methodology, see Verspoor *et al.* (2011: 157-158).

input' and which involves access to full-length audiovisual products. Lastly, participation in interactional exchanges in English is part of a separate category, i.e. input derived from face-to-face interactions in English or 'personal contact' (see Verspoor *et al.* 2011 for this label). Input clusterings are illustrated in the rotated component matrix (Table 4.1), which shows the three factors emerging from the analysis[31]. Every input source ascribes to the factor for which it shows the highest loading (Dörnyei 2007: 233-234). The three factors are showed separately and are ranked by loading, with highest values per source and per cluster in italics.

FACTOR 1 INTERNET GENRES		FACTOR 2 TELECINEMATIC INPUT		FACTOR 3 PERSONAL CONTACT	
forums	*.782*	TV-series	*.874*	interaction	*.782*
videogames	*.668*	films	*.871*	blogs	.517
blogs	*.595*	social networks	.368	social networks	.326
YouTube	*.554*	YouTube	.307	films	.135
social networks	*.513*	videogames	.275	TV-series	.084
films	.116	interaction	.221	forums	.073
TV-series	.096	blogs	-.022	YouTube	.007
interaction	-.001	forums	-.077	videogames	-.419

Table 4.1 – Rotated component matrix, with loadings per factor

English-language forums and videogames rank first in Factor 1, which refers to typically web-based genres. Although to a lower extent, access to blogs, YouTube and social media in the L2 is ascribable to the same factor – suggesting the presence of regularities among some viewers who tend to access these resources in the foreign language rather than others. Telecinematic input and interaction show low loadings for the first factor and interaction has a negative value. This happens in spite of the fact that films and TV-series are mostly accessed online, since they represent a category of their own, as evident from

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[31]   The extraction method is Principal Component Analysis. The rotation method is Varimax with Kaiser normalisation (output from IBM SPSS Statistics). The rotated component matrix (Table 4.1) shows the correlations between each variable and the components, or factors, that emerge from the analysis. The correlation coefficient ranges from 0 to 1 values, and a strong correlation shows a coefficient value between .5 and 1. Each variable (i.e. input source) is part of the component or factor in which it shows the highest value – and a high correlation. High variance in the sample (63.5), however, indicates that the results have to be taken with due caution.

Factor 2. Typically online input sources distance themselves from the telecinematic genre, with blogs and forums ranking lowest. The trend suggests the presence of participants who regularly access films and TV-series prevailingly, but have no contact with other English-language sources. Personal contact seems to show a pattern of its own, and students report inconsistency of behaviour when this factor is concerned, i.e. they behave in unpredictable ways with respect to all other input sources in English. To this end, it is interesting to note that some respondents who are generally scarcely exposed to English-language input still state that they take part in face-to-face interactions where English is used as the language of communication. These subjects are often students from scientific disciplines and Psychology, and may need to interact in English for study or professional reasons: some are working students and use English in the workplace; many report using English to interact with foreign peers. Hence, there is a small minority of people who use English in face-to-face social encounters rather than online. Despite their highest loading for Factor 1, blogs rank higher than .5 in 'Personal contact', interestingly suggesting that they still involve a form of interaction – which is computer-mediated rather than face-to-face. Table 4.2 illustrates the correlation indexes and statistical significance among the different sources[32].

Although relations among factors are overall statistically significant, correlation indexes are generally low (lower than .5), with the exception of the correlation between exposure to films and TV-series: students exposed to films in English also access TV-series to a similar extent (or, conversely, most of those who do not access films generally do not watch TV-series either). Participation in interaction shows the lowest degree of correlation with the other variables and testifies to variability in users' behaviour: some participants just interact, some others only engage in a different activity, some both interact and access English-language input through other sources.

[32] Single correlation indexes or coefficients (ranging from 0 to 1) are provided for each pair of input sources in the upper half of the table; conventionally, a strong correlation shows a coefficient value between .5 and 1. The statistical significance of the relation is reported in the lower half of the table, and statistically significant relations are conventionally set at p<.05.

		You-Tube	video-games	social net-works	blogs	forums	inter-action	films	series
Correlation indexes	YouTube	1.000	.302	.368	.250	.215	.093	.277	.203
	video-games	.302	1.000	.253	.128	.400	-.033	.236	.207
	social networks	.368	.253	1.000	.353	.251	.216	.298	.360
	blogs	.250	.128	.353	1.000	.367	.166	.184	.163
	forums	.215	.400	.251	.367	1.000	.098	.111	.104
	interaction	.093	-.033	.216	.166	.098	1.000	.264	.176
	films	.277	.236	.298	.184	.111	.264	1.000	.672
	series	.203	.207	.360	.163	.104	.176	.672	1.000
Significance (one-tailed)	YouTube		.000	.000	.000	.000	.057	.000	.000
	video-games	.000		.000	.014	.000	.285	.000	.000
	social networks	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	blogs	.000	.014	.000		.000	.002	.001	.003
	forums	.000	.000	.000	.000		.047	.029	.037
	interaction	.057	.285	.000	.002	.047		.000	.001
	films	.000	.000	.000	.001	.029	.000		.000
	series	.000	.000	.000	.003	.037	.001	.000	

Table 4.2 – Correlation matrix.

In spite of this oscillation, the three factors suggest some more frequent trends among respondents, namely: i) some students first and foremost enjoy TV-series and films in English, and do not engage in many other informal activities involving the foreign language; ii) some other learner-users like surfing the net and interacting online using English – and do not necessarily access telecinematic input in the L2; iii) fewer students interact offline in English; among them, some may also occasionally access English online, especially through interactive platforms, e.g. blogs and social networks.

4.3.1. *High-input learner-users vs. low-input learner-users*

Further analysis of individual questionnaire items can help sketch participant profiles, in response to Research Question 1.b. Generally speaking, the

data show quite a clear divide between 'strong', regular English users, who are actively involved in several activities in the L2, and 'weak' users, who access little or no English input in informal settings. Hence, a distinction can be made between 'high-exposure subjects', or 'high-input learner-users' on the one hand, and 'low-exposure subjects', or 'low-input learner-users', on the other hand.

High-exposure subjects correspond to those participants who report high frequency of access to English input, from *often* to *very often*, and a length of exposure exceeding 30 minutes each time. A threshold level was identified by multiplying highest frequency values by highest length values. Based on this, it is possible to conventionally identify high-exposure subjects with those showing a total exposure index greater than or equal to 96 (corresponding to participants who access different resources in English at least once a week for at least 30 minutes per session per source). The potentially highest individual value is 224. A maximum 162 value was reached by only one student. A total of only 19 high-exposure subjects can be identified, scoring 96 or higher and accounting for about 6% of the sample. Participants reaching an exposure rate of 16 or lower (corresponding to no or rare exposure and a lower exposure length than 30 minutes per session) can be considered as low-exposure English learner-users. 63 informants classify as low-exposure, and account for 21% of the sample. The majority of students ranks in-between the two poles (211 subjects) and shows diversified behaviour. The trend is evident in Figures 4.16 and 4.17, which illustrate the dispersion of subjects and their grouping by index ranges. In Figure 4.16, most participants (horizontal axis) place in the middle and lowest grid areas based on their total exposure indexes (vertical axis), following rather variable and unsystematic patterns. When grouped into ranges, indexes predominantly cluster around middle values (40 to 64 and more generally 17 to 95; Figure 4.17).
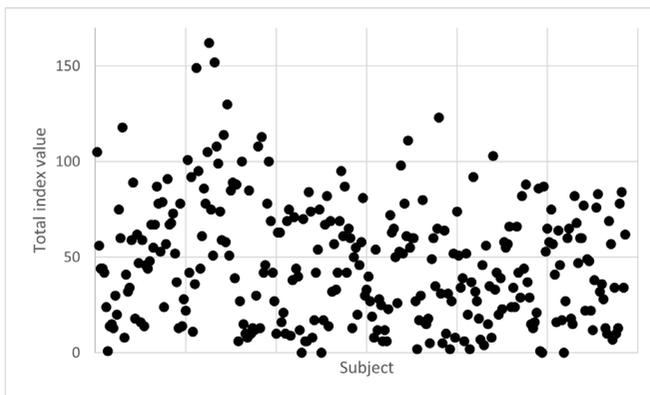
Figure 4.16 – Dispersion plot of exposure indexes in the sample.
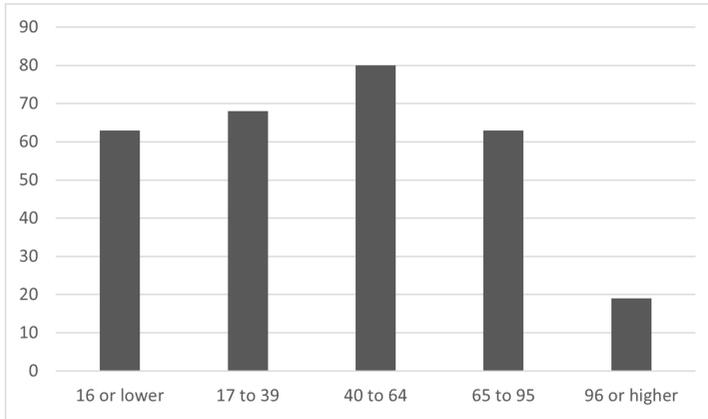
Figure 4.17 – Exposure indexes grouped by ranges.

If we look at exposure to telecinematic input alone (telecinematic index), the data interestingly show that more than half of all participants (51%) access this resource frequently and at length. On the other hand, viewers who have little or no contact with films and TV-series in English amount to 32% of all respondents. This shows a polarisation of users and a rather marked divide between high-frequency and low-frequency (or zero-frequency) viewers. Similarly, a rather high percentage of the students who access social networks in English do so very frequently (44% of the entire sample are highly exposed to social media), and 20% stand out as infrequent users in this category alone.

The other input sources are accessed by few students on a frequent or very frequent basis. 19% of the students are regular YouTube watchers, whereas participants who access YouTube on an infrequent basis amount to 41%. As seen before, access to blogs, forums and videogames in the foreign language is more limited and generally occasional. Only 11% of all respondents play videogames in English at higher-than-average frequency, whereas 75% classify as infrequent users in this category (and never access this resource in English). Concerning blogs, only 9% access them in English often or very often, whereas most subjects rank as infrequent users (70%, with most reporting no exposure whatsoever). Even fewer students read or participate in forums in L2 English at higher-than-average frequency (only 4% are highly frequent forum users vs. 77.5% who are infrequent or non-users when this source alone is considered). Some of the students in the sample engage in interaction in L2 English frequently or very frequently (14% report high exposure to this category), but more than half never do so (55%). The distribution of regular vs. infrequent users per each input type is summarised in Figure 4.18. The results suggest that subjects who access telecinematic input or

social networks in English tend to do so on a rather regular basis, whereas they do not engage in other activities to the same extent.
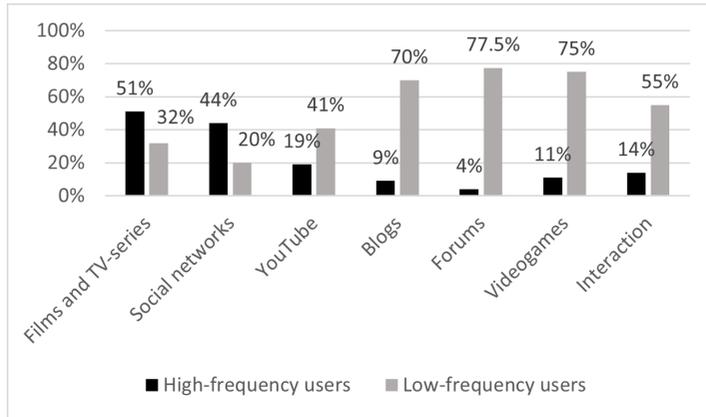
Figure 4.18 – High-frequency and low-frequency users per input source.

When referring to all input sources, high-exposure subjects represent a very small section of the sample (19 students). They are both male and female participants and show a high interest in language; more than half of high-input learner-users, i.e. 10, are majoring in Linguistics; the majority state that they speak between two to four languages other than their native tongue (average 2.8; only two report speaking just one foreign language) and that they have reached an advanced proficiency level in English (C1-C2). Eight among them have had a study-abroad experience, whereas 11 have not. On the basis of these data, it is evident that frequent access to informal sources is still the prerogative of mostly language specialists – or people who already share an interest in language – and who are proficient in English.

By contrast, there are more low-exposure subjects (63). These are mainly enrolled in technology and hard science courses (Biology, Engineering, Pharmacy, Chemistry, Maths), Psychology and Economics. Most of them state that they speak two foreign languages, but a good portion (19 students) only mentions mastery of a single L2. Their self-assessed proficiency level in English is prevailingly intermediate (43 students self-report as B1-B2 level) or, to a lower extent, elementary (18 students self-assess as A2). Only two low-input learner-users state they have achieved C1-level. The great majority (57 out of 63) has never been on a study-abroad programme. It should be highlighted that most students in the sample (84%) have never had a study-abroad experience.

4.4. *Summary of the results*

Based on the analysis of the questionnaires, the main trends on informal access to English through several sources can be summarised taking into account frequency and intensity of exposure, input types and participants' profiling. In response to Research Question 1.a, learner-users in the sample report accessing English informally to quite a considerable extent and through a variety of sources, mainly multimodal. In terms of intensity, participants are mostly exposed to TV-series and films in English. They also access social media in the L2 to a great extent, but their general exposure time per session is shorter. A similar trend is recorded for YouTube contents in English, which attract many viewers, but for limited viewing times. The majority of students also navigates web pages in English and listens to the lyrics of English songs. Less frequently accessed input sources in English include e-mails, blogs, forums, videogames and participation in conversational exchanges. It should be stressed that results reveal that while there is a considerable exposure to English, especially insofar as 'recognition' (e.g. reading, listening) is concerned, opportunities to use the language productively (e.g. chats via social meda, e-mails) are not as frequent.

Some polarisation trends are worth noticing: there is a marked divide between learner-users who regularly access English input informally (mostly through TV-series, films, YouTube and social media) and those who do not. Overall, patterns of informal access to English are quite diversified in the sample, although some polarisation exists among access to the web, exposure to telecinematic input and offline interaction. Students show especially predictable behaviour as far as films and TV-series are concerned, i.e. participants who tend to watch English-language films also tend to view TV-series in the foreign language. Definitely, mediated contact with L2 English prevails over direct and unmediated contact with the language through personal and social encounters, travelling and study experiences.

Finally addressing Research Question 1.b, participant profiles suggest that the students who report being considerably exposed to English-language input are mainly language specialists who self-assess as advanced-proficiency in English.

5.
A focus on audiovisual input.
Films, TV-series and viewing modalities

[I]nformal language learning through video material has never looked such a good bet for learners as it does now.

(Vanderplank 2020: 197)

This chapter provides a detailed description of the questionnaire items specifically devoted to audiovisual input (questionnaire section 1) and aims to explore the status of informal exposure to English through audiovisuals among Italian postgraduate university students, with a special focus on subtitled telecinematic input (Research Question 2). Concurrently, it looks at preferred viewing and subtitling modalities and the main reasons for learner-viewers' preferences (Research Question 2.a). Further areas of investigation involve favourite genres, participants' beliefs about the learning potential of subtitled audiovisual input, and exposure to audiovisuals in other foreign languages (LOTE).

After introducing data on viewers' general preferences, films and TV-series are considered separately, exploring the main reasons why students access them in English. The attention later shifts onto subtitles and different viewing modes to offer an overview of participants' preferred dialogue-subtitle combinations. Supports for watching audiovisual input are also investigated, including more traditional ones, such as cinema and television, as well as present-day prevailingly Internet-based supports. In parallel, attention is given to the multiple telecinematic and audiovisual genres participants are exposed to, which can entail contact with different language registers including specialised varieties of English (ESP).

The final sections of the chapter illuminate access to foreign languages other than English through audiovisuals and students' perception of the learning potential of telecinematic products, especially in terms of their impact on different L2 skills.

5.1. *Exposure to audiovisual input*

Several questionnaire items investigate learner-viewers' access to audiovisual input in English, especially coming from films and television series. As seen in Chapter 4, exposure to telecinematic products represents the major informal activity that participants in our sample engage in in the foreign language.

In questionnaire section 1, 34 questions focus on audiovisual input, exploring students' viewing habits and preferences in terms of cinema and television products, privileged supports for watching, the role and preferred types of subtitles, participants' reasons for their choices and self-evaluated language learning outcomes (see Appendix).

5.1.1. *Films and TV-series in English: General preferences*

The majority of students in the sample, i.e. 216 participants (71%), state that they watch telecinematic products in English (Figure 5.1), with a preference for TV-series (87 vs. 34 students, i.e. 29% and 11%, plus 96 respondents, i.e. 31%, watching both films and TV-series in English; Figure 5.2).
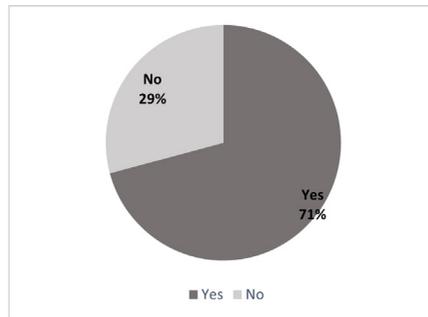
Figure 5.1 – Students watching films and TV-series in English (answering the question: 'Do you watch films and TV-series in English?').
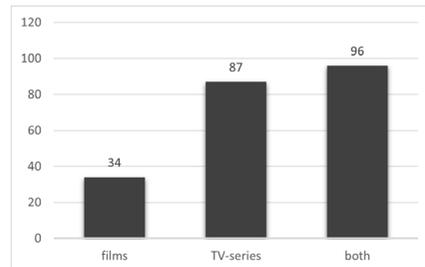
Figure 5.2 – Students' preferences for telecinematic genres (including students who access telecinematic input only).

TV-series are an ever-growing telecinematic genre, which is enjoying increasing success among the young generations due to its seriality and its diffusion through multiple supports, primarily streaming or Internet-based, OTT (Over-the-top) video platforms (Corvi 2016; Bednarek 2018). These platforms release huge amounts of high-quality products on a regular basis and allow for multiple dialogue-subtitle combinations. Viewers are able to self-regulate their access to audiovisual texts, since the platforms are independent from the typically "linear television schedule" (Jenner 2018: 4) and release multiple episodes simultaneously, possibly encouraging binge-watching. Self-regulation concerns time scheduling, the location and support from which to watch, and the selection of dialogue (and subtitle) languages (Casarini 2014; Corvi 2016; Vanderplank 2020). Most of the TV-series released on the market originate from English-speaking countries (primarily the United States), therefore it is fairly common among the younger generations to access these products in English (Bednarek 2018). Additionally, as remarked by Jenner (2018: 25, 141), the Netflix video platform only introduced "new dubbing languages, such as Russian, Italian, Czech or German" in August 2017. Before that date, and given the worldwide expansion of the platform since 2013 (Netflix arrived in Italy in 2015, Marrazzo 2016), it is highly likely that viewers accessed Netflix in-house productions in English – with or without subtitles.

Other aspects that contribute to the appeal of TV-series pertain to their short duration and episodic nature. Each single episode has limited length and is generally shorter than a film – hence, exposure is less demanding and time-consuming. Furthermore, characters recur throughout the entire series or for several episodes, leading viewers to develop feelings of affection for them or to become utterly captivated by their personality and storyline. The affective component is undeniably an essential and distinctive aspect of TV-series, and one of the keys to their overall success. Seriality and the affective drive are also not deprived of potential learning repercussions. Sockett (2014: 104) argues that the episodic and recurring nature of series can make them suitable loci for narrow listening when they are accessed in the L2, prompting re-watching of the same episodes, the development of growing familiarity with the language and topic and an increased focus on meaning and content, linked to deeper immersion (see also Pavesi 2015). Additionally, TV-series have a strong social impact and role: watching them is a means for viewers to later engage in offline and online discussion with others and to spend time with friends, thus turning TV products into social instruments for peer interaction (Orrego-Carmona 2014: 61; Bednarek 2018). Sociability also plays a crucial role when choosing the language of dialogues, especially on online platforms, since peers affect

the selection of in-group viewing modes, translation options and video service providers.

5.1.2. *Films: Preferred viewing options and reasons for watching*

The ensuing questionnaire items focus separately on English-language films and TV-series[33]. A first set of questions is devoted to films and is meant to gather general information on the respondents' preferred viewing modalities. To this aim, the following question was asked[34]:

Item 1.4.1) You like watching films in:

□ dubbed Italian
□ their original language
□ both

Most respondents (116, i.e. 54% of those who filled in this questionnaire section) state that they watch films in both their original and dubbed versions (Figure 5.3). Similar percentages of students watch either dubbed or English-language films only (19% and 22%), which means that a small ratio of viewers access films exclusively in their original language.
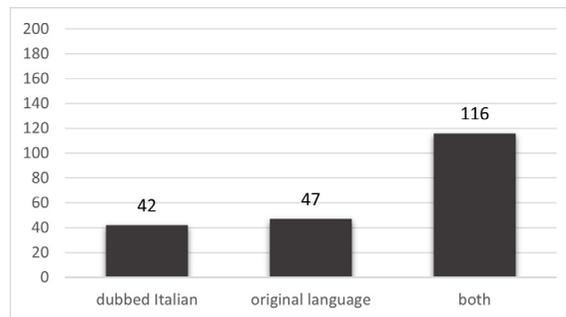
Figure 5.3 – Preferred viewing modalities of English-language films.

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[33]   If not specified otherwise, the questionnaire items in this chapter include the answers of only those students who report watching English-language films and TV-series (subsample of 216 respondents).

[34]   Items are adapted and translated into Italian. See the Appendix for the original questionnaire.

In the following item, the reasons for watching English-language films in their original version are investigated, to gather more details on access in the sample:

Item 1.4.1.3) If you watch films in their original language (with or without subtitles), you do that because… (more than one option is possible):

□ you like listening to the actors' voices
□ original dialogues are more natural
□ you want to learn the language
□ you want to grasp all linguistic nuances, wordplay, humour
□ Italian dubbing is bad quality
□ other (please specify)

A variety of reasons triggers participants' preference for English-language films in their original version (Figure 5.4). Language orientation prevails among the respondents: the desire to learn the language comes first among the options offered, and is chosen by 128 students. Viewers' reference to the possibility of grasping all linguistic nuances, instances of humour and wordplay from original dialogues also testifies to an interest in the English language, expressed by 98 respondents. The attention to the linguistic component is additionally evident from students' considerable appreciation of the greater naturalness of original dialogues as opposed to dubbed ones (108 preferences). This feature can be ascribed to participants' desire to access the authentic unmediated product and the resulting immersion into the audiovisual text. Still related to a search for authenticity is viewers' choice to listen to the actors' original voices, made explicit in 110 responses. Only 27 out of 216 participants indicate the poor quality of Italian dubbing as the main reason for accessing English-language films in their original language, whereas most students in the sample appreciate national dubbed products (see also Item 1.4.1.2, Appendix; 64 students explicitly state that they appreciate Italian dubbing). This trend contrasts with recent suggestions that viewing choices among young audiences are influenced by their perception that the quality of contemporary Italian dubbing is declining. According to some authors, this is one of the reasons young Italian generations may prefer subtitling over dubbing (Casarini 2014; Massidda 2015). In the sample, the students who express their dislike for dubbing are a diversified group and distribute across different disciplines, with only four of them specialising in language-related areas (Linguistics and Philology). The choice does not therefore appear to be linked to any specific university background or majors.
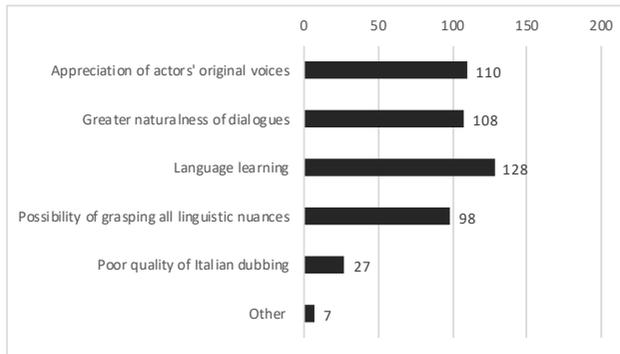
Figure 5.4 – Reasons for watching films in English.

When opting for dubbed films, language comprehension is the main driving factor, but sociability also plays a relevant role. Watching films with friends or family who do not speak or understand English can unquestionably affect language selection, as does the support on which the film is accessed: Italy is a dubbing country, and dubbing is usually the only or mainstream translation mode available for cinema and television.

Although several participants declare a general language orientation when watching English-language films, and report specific viewing choices with the desire to learn English, it does not follow that they are involved in an intentional activity. Attention is likely to fade away as soon as viewers are absorbed in a film, and enjoyment and immersion in the fictional worlds depicted on screen are likely to take over. As we have seen, immersion by definition involves "the sensation of viewers of being transported into the story world", making them forget about their physical environment and causing them to become engrossed in the fictitious universe (Wilken and Kruger 2016: 258). In these terms, immersion triggers an increased focus on content and meaning (Sockett 2014: 104), and leisure is likely to enter the picture no matter what learners' primary reported reasons for viewing were. This phenomenon is attributable to self-directed naturalistic learning in general, where "at the time of the learning event, learners' focus of attention might be on communication or on learning something other than the target language" (Sundqvist 2009: 24).

Sockett (2014: 96) remarks the general difficulty of measuring L2 viewers' "orientations towards learning or leisure-based motivations" in survey-based studies without conducting follow-up in-depth and qualitative research on participants' general attitudes and processing of the incoming verbal input. In addition to that, it is to be noted that respondents may overstate their language learning motiva-

tions when questionnaires are administered in an educational setting – a fact that, by its very nature, can bias participants' responses towards what they believe are the researchers' expectations or the most prestigious options (Bednarek 2018; Section 3.5.). In the sample, the difficulty to discriminate between L2 viewers' leisure or learning orientation while watching English-language audiovisuals is especially attributable to the dominance of dubbing in Italy, which makes exposure to original-language telecinematic products the exception rather than the rule.

5.1.3. *TV-series: Preferred viewing options and reasons for watching*

Parallel questions to the ones on films were asked about TV-series. Item 1.5.1 focusses on students' preferred viewing options:

Item 1.5.1) You like watching TV-series in:

□ dubbed Italian
□ their original language
□ both

Most participants report watching TV-series in both their dubbed and original-language versions (100, about half of the students who overall watch foreign language telecinematic products). However, there is a higher percentage of those who like watching TV-series in the original language with respect to films (69, i.e. 32%; Figure 5.5).
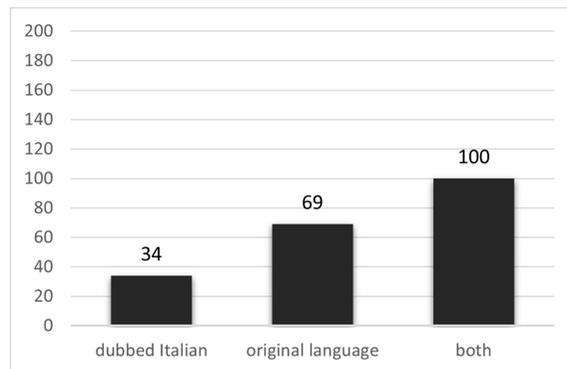
Figure 5.5 – Preferred viewing modalities of English-language TV-series.

Fewer students watch TV-series only in dubbed Italian as compared to films. However, if we add up the average number of viewers who prefer dubbing

when accessing both films and TV-series and the number of respondents who do not access telecinematic input in English at all (89 out of 305), we end up with about 40% of the total sample. The percentage is high and suggests that still a significant portion of a young, educated and potentially very dynamic section of the population spontaneously accesses audiovisual input in English only rarely – if at all. This may also be an indication of the proportion of students in the sample who are aware of not having enough competence in the L2 to be able to access audiovisual programmes in English.

After collecting general data, we looked at respondents' main reasons for preferring original language TV-series:

Item 1.5.1.3) If you watch TV-series in their original language (with or without subtitles), you do that because… (more than one option is possible):

☐ you like listening to the actors' voices
☐ original dialogues are more natural
☐ you want to learn the foreign language
☐ you want to grasp all linguistic nuances, wordplay, humour
☐ Italian dubbing is bad quality
☐ other (please specify)

As illustrated in Figure 5.6, there is a general attention to the L2 even when motivating viewing choices for TV-series, as language learning comes first with 124 preferences. It is closely followed by viewers' appreciation of the greater naturalness of original English dialogues as opposed to dubbed ones (118 preferences). A similar number of preferences is expressed for the enjoyment of actors' original voices (107 responses). The appreciation for both naturalness and the actors' actual voices are part of the desire to experience the full authenticity of the audiovisual product, including the original flow and flavour of dialogues. Relevant in this respect is also the possibility of grasping all linguistic nuances in the dialogues, particularly humour and wordplay (103 responses). On the contrary, dubbing may undermine the effectiveness of puns, jokes and punchlines in students' perception, leading them to feel they are missing part of the enjoyment deriving from verbal expression and artistry.

Interest in the L2 once again emerges as a strong motivation to access telecinematic media in English. The poor quality of dubbing appears to be almost irrelevant (29 answers; see section 5.1.2). As observed for films, this aspect is mentioned by few students from a variety of disciplines (mostly majoring in Psychology, Economics, Engineering and Sciences; three are Linguistics and Modern Philology students).
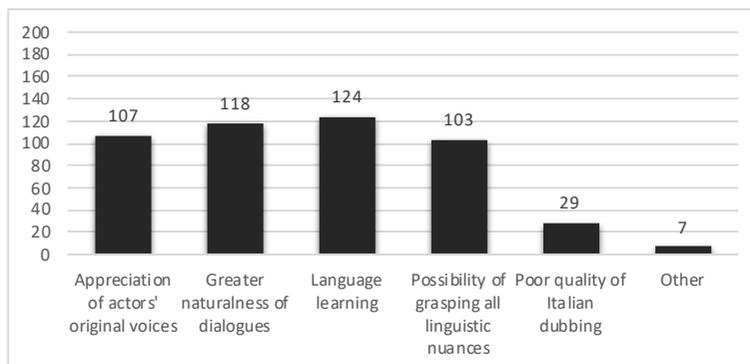
Figure 5.6 – Reasons for watching TV-series in English.

When looking at the overall results, the reasons for watching films and TV-series in English appear to be similar among students in the sample. Language learning is what mainly drives participants' decisions, but an overall attraction to language is documented even among non-specialists and is inextricably linked to the hedonic dimension, suggesting the relevance of enjoyment when accessing audiovisuals even in a foreign language, be they feature films or episodic TV-series.

5.2. *Input and subtitle types*

A subsequent set of questions investigates participants' use of subtitles when accessing audiovisual material in English. Separate items focus on films and TV-series, respectively:

Items 1.6 and 1.6.1.1) If you watch films/TV-series in English, you prefer watching them

□ with subtitles
□ without subtitles

Items 1.6.1. and 1.6.1.2) If you watch subtitled films/TV-series, which subtitles do you prefer?

□ original-language subtitles
□ Italian subtitles

When watching films and TV-series in the L2, the great majority of students reports adding subtitles – respectively 188 for films, i.e. 87%, and 180 for TV-se-

ries, i.e. 83% of the respondents (Figure 5.7).
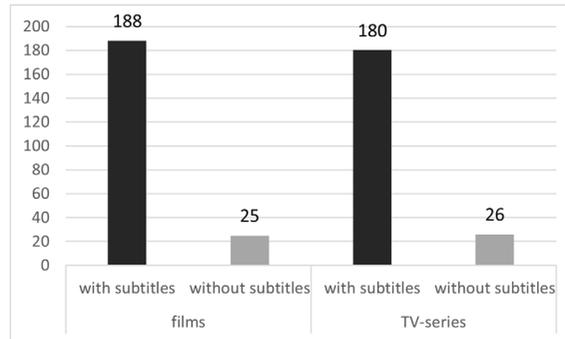
Figure 5.7 – Use of subtitles when watching English-language films and TV-series.

Participants say that they use both same-language, i.e. English, and interlingual, i.e. Italian subtitles – with a slight preference for same-language subtitles when watching English original films (Figure 5.8). A limited set of respondents states they prefer watching English-language films and TV-series without the support of subtitles (25 and 26, i.e. 12%). About a third of them are high-exposure viewers (see Section 4.3.1.), showing a keen interest in foreign languages (8 students). Although they do not classify as high-exposure, most of the others (11) display comparatively high overall indexes (65 or higher, Section 4.2.) and report quite regular exposure to English-language media. They are prevailingly majoring in language-specific disciplines (9), followed by fewer students from other, diversified fields (five majoring in Economics and Biology, four in Engineering, three in Psychology). Participants may choose different modalities across different situations, such as varying audiovisual genres, viewing supports and exposure contexts, but overall show preferred viewing options.
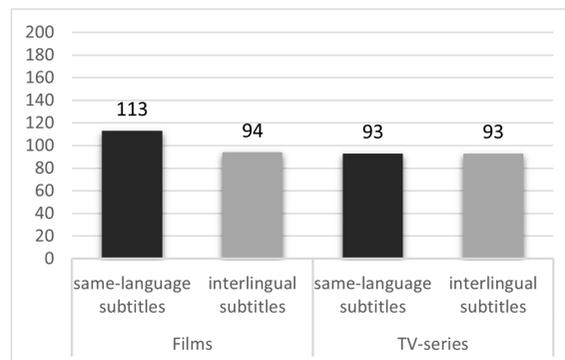
Figure 5.8 – Preferred subtitle types for English-language films and TV-series.

In the current sample, the slight preference for same-language subtitles suggests that a good share of the students consider themselves proficient enough in English to be able to understand bimodal input exclusively in the L2 – a particularly interesting fact in a dubbing country.

The following items inquire about viewers' reasons for selecting specific subtitling modalities, starting from same-language subtitles:

Item 1.6.1.2.1) If you watch English-language films and/or TV-series with same-language subtitles, you do that because (more options are possible):

□ they help you understand original dialogues
□ they help you remember English word spelling
□ you want to see the written form of what you hear
□ you think you can learn more by listening to original dialogues with English subtitles
□ you want to learn new forms and expressions
□ the English subtitled version is available earlier
□ Italian subtitles are poor quality
□ other (please specify) _____

Interestingly, same-language subtitles are selected by participants primarily for text comprehension (133 preferences), since they enable viewers to simultaneously access oral and written input, with the latter clarifying or reinforcing the former and filling any gaps in comprehension. As is generally assumed, reading competence usually develops earlier than listening skills among L2 learners, and the co-occurrence of foreign-language dialogue and subtitles can bridge the gap between the two abilities (Garza 1991; Danan 2004). This is especially true from an upper-intermediate proficiency level, when learners have built a wide-enough vocabulary for written input to be comprehensible in its most part (an average of approximately 3,000 word families; Laufer 1992). When further exploring responses, a variety of language-related reasons follows (Figure 5.9), including the possibility of matching the written and spoken forms of words (83 preferences), the general learning potential of L2 subtitles in viewers' perception (77 preferences), the opportunity to learn new items in the foreign language (57 preferences) and the chance to check and memorise word spelling (47 preferences). Despite their potential influence on subtitling choices among young Italian audiences, the earlier availability of English subtitles and the poor quality of Italian ones (resulting from tight deadlines, market requirements and priorities, see Massidda 2015: 33; Casarini 2014) show low incidence in the sample (15 and 12 preferences respectively).
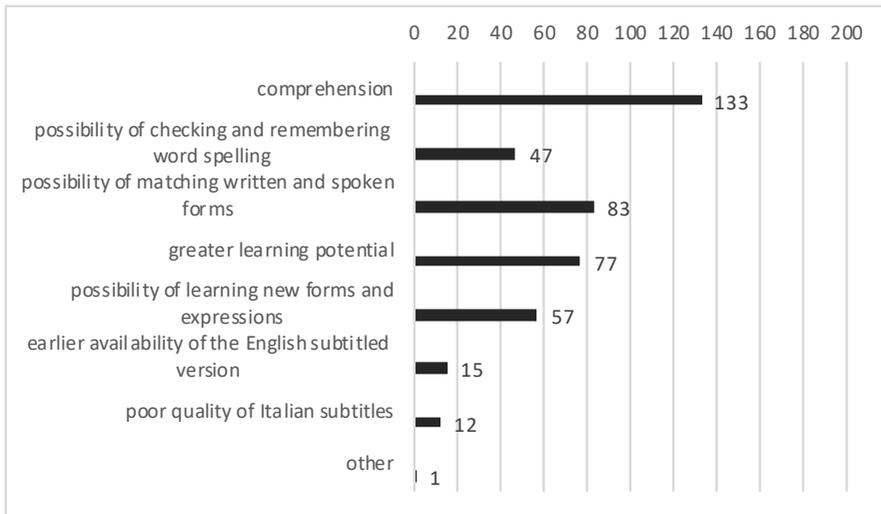
Figure 5.9 – Reasons for choosing same-language subtitles.

As for L1 subtitles, respondents were given the following options:

Item 1.6.1.2.2) If you watch English-language films and/or TV-series with Italian subtitles, you do that because (more options are possible):

□ they help you understand original dialogues
□ you are interested in translation
□ the Italian subtitled version is available earlier
□ English subtitles are too difficult
□ you read faster in Italian than in English
□ other (please specify) _____

Interestingly, respondents also put a premium on comprehension of the telecinematic text as the main reason for opting for interlingual subtitles when watching English-language films and TV-series (Figure 5.10) (124 responses). The lesser accessibility of English-language subtitles is also implied in two further options, which mention students' slower reading in English and the overall excessive difficulty of L2 subtitles. Together, these amount to a total of 75 responses. The difficulty may be linked to a lower proficiency level in the L2, which probably prevents viewers from grasping most of the meaning in same-language subtitles.

Quite a number of students (75) pick interest in translation as a reason to prefer L1 subtitles. Being a form of synchronous and additive translation (Gottlieb 2001:

186), interlingual subtitles have the advantage of being immediately comparable with the original spoken dialogues, allowing for comparative processes, hypothesis testing and the assessment of translation choices. The respondents who vent an interest in subtitle translation are several and are distributed among different disciplines, including not only language specialists (six of them) but also students majoring in other fields such as Pharmacy, Engineering and Psychology. Again, these data show that the curiosity for linguistic issues and cross-linguistic contrastivity is not the prerogative of language specialists but applies to a cross-section of university students from many different areas. Less important is the earlier availability of Italian subtitles (which is not usually the case, since English subtitles are generally available earlier), which matches the little relevance attributed to the availability of English subtitles. Hence, adding subtitles appears to be a deliberate choice made by the students – and not one dictated by practical constraints.
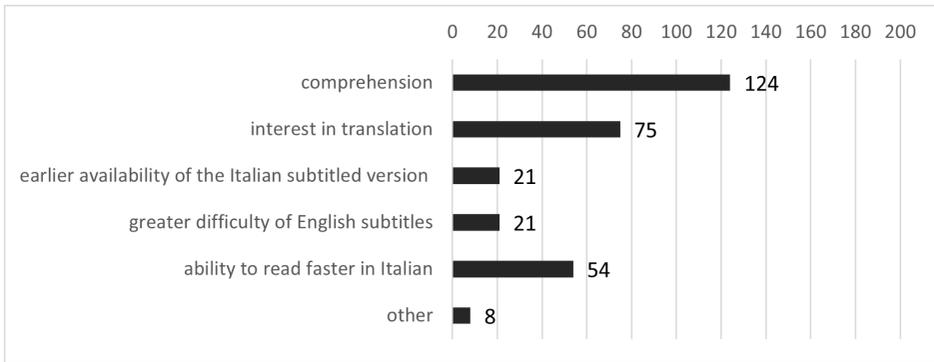
Figure 5.10 – Reasons for choosing interlingual subtitles.

The ensuing item focusses on non-subtitled L2 input:

Item 1.6.1.2.3) If you watch English-language films and/or TV-series without subtitles, you do that because (more options are possible):

- □ subtitles are too long and fast
- □ subtitles distract you from the film/episode
- □ you think you can learn more by listening directly to original dialogues without the support of subtitles
- □ often subtitles do not match dialogues
- □ other (please specify) _____

When asked about the reasons why they happen to watch video-only telecinematic products, more students answered than those who state they generally

prefer accessing non-subtitled audiovisuals (items 1.6 and 1.6.1.1). The trend is probably attributable to the fact that the same viewers may shift viewing modalities and subtitle types depending on specific situations, showing preferred exposure habits but occasionally trying out alternative modes (see above).

The majority of respondents, i.e. 80 students, mentions the distracting nature of subtitles, which could hinder their processing of the audiovisual text as a whole (Figure 5.11). The counterproductive role of subtitles is reinforced by 26 answers addressing the fact that the written lines are too long and change too quickly on screen. Since the first value still outnumbers that of those respondents expressing a preference for non-subtitled audiovisual products, we could attribute it to a reference to a less habitual viewing mode, or to specific occasions in which subtitles may have created disruptions in viewing. The students who consider subtitles distracting come from a variety of disciplines, with most of the language specialists underlining this factor (12 Linguistics students and six Philology students respectively), followed by students in Pharmacy, Engineering, Psychology and Economics (62 in total). 44 students list language learning as a reason for preference, and thus believe that accessing non-subtitled audiovisual material benefits L2 acquisition the most. Attention to language is also testified in 29 more cases, where students complain about subtitles not matching the original dialogues.
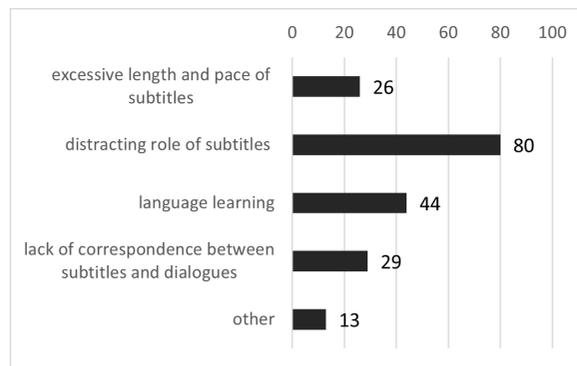
Figure 5.11 – Reasons for watching non-subtitled films and TV-series in English.

5.3. *Alternative viewing modes: Reversed subtitling*

Two questionnaire items focus on a less central subtitling mode, i.e. reversed subtitling, and its use by learner-viewers. Reversed subtitling involves dialogue in the viewers' L1 accompanied by subtitles in a foreign language. Apart from few rare cases when audiences may be incidentally faced with reversed subtitles

in contexts of naturalistic exposure (e.g. viewers residing in a foreign country and happening to watch subtitled films in their mother tongue), this modality is explicitly geared towards language learning. Here, spectators intentionally choose it as a means to foster L2 literacy and match foreign language items with their source text equivalents, relying on their L1 to decode L2 written input more easily (Holobow *et al.* 1984; Danan 2004; Fazilatfar *et al.* 2011).

14% of the entire sample, i.e. 44 respondents, report accessing Italian films and TV-series subtitled in English, and to do so only rarely or occasionally (Figures 5.12 and 5.13). This choice potentially reveals an awareness of the learning implications linked with the reversed modality. These participants include mostly students majoring in scientific disciplines and Psychology, plus a few Humanities, particularly Linguistics, students.
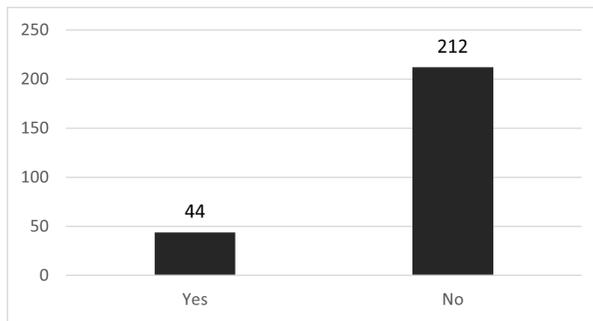
Figure 5.12 – Students who watch Italian films and TV-series subtitled in English.
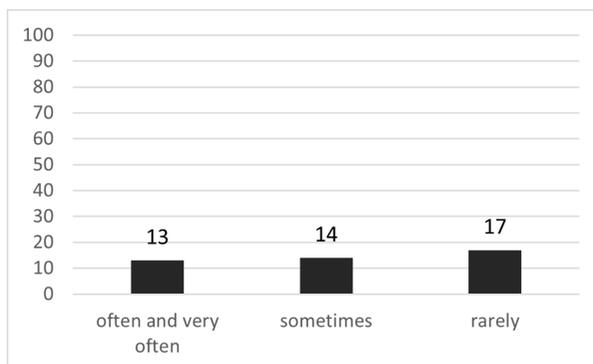
Figure 5.13 – Frequency of access to Italian films and TV-series subtitled in English.

Since it is often linked with explicit learning purposes, reversed subtitling is less compatible with focus on content and incidental learning, as it most like-

ly implies a disruption to the immersion process. Adding subtitles to L1 input is superfluous for comprehension and is likely to entail viewers' emphasis on L2 learning, focus on translation, or generally metalinguistic awareness. As a language learning tool, reversed subtitling is especially recommended for initial learning stages, where learners can strengthen their foreign language vocabulary and reading skills by relying on the oral support of the L1 (Danan 2004); however, recent research has shown the reversed mode to be effective with intermediate learners as well (Pavesi *et al.* 2019). In the current sample, it is a modality that participants are still most unfamiliar with – and probably tend to associate with instructional or research settings.

5.4. *Changing media supports*

After collecting data on preferred viewing modes, a set of questionnaire items focusses on participants' privileged supports when accessing audiovisual input in the foreign language:

Item 1.7) Do you prefer watching films?

□ at the cinema
□ on television
□ online

Item 1.7.2) Do you prefer watching TV-series?

□ on television
□ online

The internet is the main support on which both films and TV-series are accessed in English (50% of the respondents watch films online, 80% watch series online; Figures 5.14 and 5.15). About a quarter of the students who watch English-language films do so at the cinema. Television is not a major device from which to access telecinematic products in a foreign language, showing a shift away from more traditional viewing supports. Due to the growing convergence of media, the internet itself relies upon a wide range of different supports – such as laptops, tablets, smartphones or even smart TVs, as today "different media forms are [increasingly] united online through a variety of texts and practices" (Jenner 2018: 16; Grasso and Penati 2016). As noted in Section 5.1.1, online watching, especially on OTT platforms, allows for self-scheduling and self-management practices, where learner-viewers are able to decide the

time, place and modality of access to films and TV-series (Casarini 2014; Corvi 2016) and can select preferred products from a very wide and diversified range of options (Sockett 2014). These trends are in line with the globally changing viewing habits among young viewers, which, thanks to media availability and accessibility, lead to audiences engaging more directly with audiovisuals.
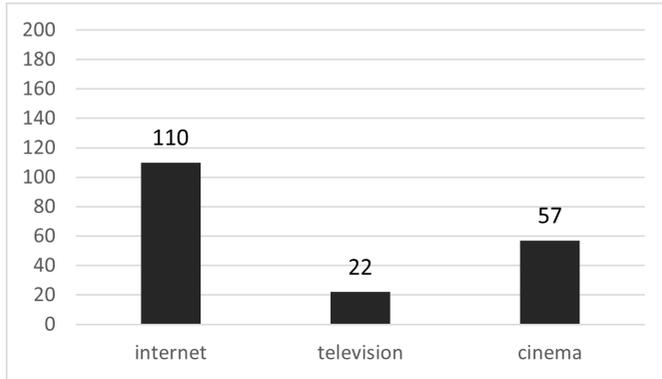
Figure 5.14 – Preferred support for watching films in English.
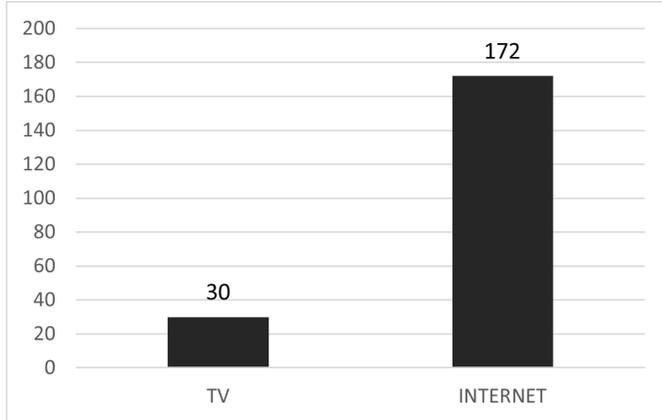
Figure 5.15 – Preferred support for watching TV-series in English.

The following items (1.7.1 and 1.7.2.1) are open-ended questions where respondents are asked to provide their own reasons for favouring a specific support. Answers can be grouped in a limited number of subsets as reported below. The reasons for watching English-language films online are mainly attributed to accessibility, given the great availability of streaming platforms where many films can be viewed in several languages (see Orrego-Carmona 2014; Jenner 2018). On

these channels, films are often released earlier – and sometimes exclusively. Cinema is mainly preferred for immersion and aesthetic motivations, as respondents claim to be able to better concentrate on the film and enjoy its images and sound effects. When television is (very rarely) preferred, this is mainly due to availability and ease of access. All reasons for choosing a specific support are summarised in Table 5.1, along with the corresponding number of answers.

INTERNET	Answers	TELEVISION	Answers	CINEMA	Answers
I can access a lot of films and programmes	81	Programmes are easy to access	9	I can concentrate on the film	24
The internet is more convenient	17	It is easier to select programmes	4	I prefer the quality of images and sound	21
The internet is cheaper	10	I watch television because I am lazy	2	I can spend time with friends	3
Films are available sooner and whenever I want to watch them	7	I prefer the quality of sound	1	It triggers emotions	1
There are no commercials	2	There are frequent breaks and I can engage in other activities at the same time	1	Cinema conveys values	1
I don't have a television	1				

Table 5.1 – Reasons for choosing a support when watching films in English.

When it comes to English-language TV-series, television is even more scarcely used. Internet is still preferred for the early availability of the audiovisual products, which are often exclusive online productions, and for practical reasons, including convenience, lack of commercials, and limited cost (Table 5.2). As noted previously, the growing popularity and availability of OTT platforms is likely to play an even more relevant role in affecting learner-viewers' answers when it comes to TV-series.

5.5. *Audiovisual genres*

Films and TV-series are the most popular full-length audiovisual products that respondents report accessing in English. The following questionnaire item focusses on preferred genres, providing a list as in Figure 5.16:

Item 1.8) If you watch British or American films, what are your favourite genres? More options are possible.

Television	Answers	INTERNET	Answers
Images have a better resolution	9	A lot of series are immediately available and easily accessible	123
I cannot access any streaming platforms	8	Watching series on my laptop is more comfortable	28
I cannot access the internet	4	The internet gives you greater freedom (in choosing what to watch and when to watch it)	17
Television has a better aesthetic quality	3	The internet is free or cheaper	10
Watching television is more comfortable	2	There are no commercials	10
I can concentrate more	2	The internet is a great resource	8
I watch television because I am lazy	1	Images have a better resolution	5
I don't trust new technologies	1	I can watch series as soon as they are released	4
		The internet has a better aesthetic quality	2
		I can concentrate more	1

Table 5.2 – Reasons for choosing a support when watching TV-series in English.
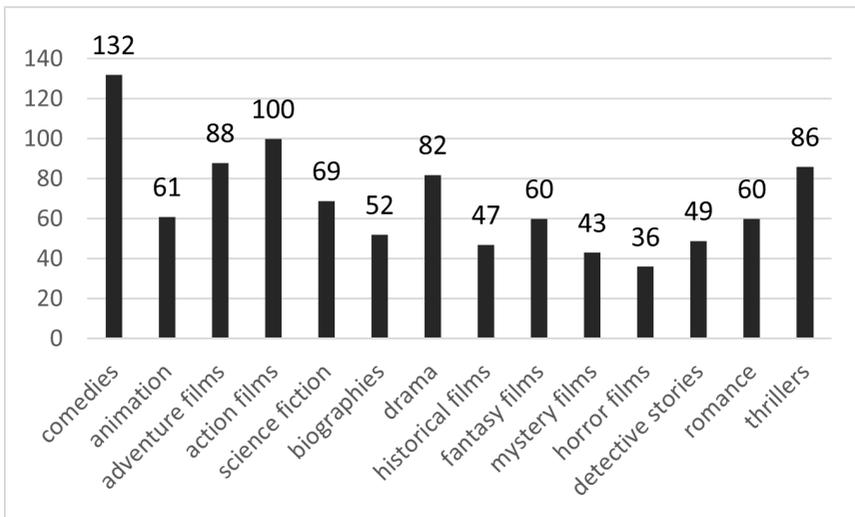
Figure 5.16 – Preferred genres of English-language films..

Learner-viewers report being exposed to a wide array of film genres, ranging from action films, thrillers, fantasy films and dramas to comedies, romance and animation films.

The following item, in the form of an open question, focusses on TV-series, asking participants to list their favourite shows:

> Item 1.8.1) If you watch British or American TV-series, please list the ones that you regularly view.

Like films, TV-series also spread over a wide range of genres, including fantasy (e.g. *Game of Thrones*), crime (e.g. *Breaking Bad*, *Sherlock*), drama (e.g. *Grey's Anatomy*) and comedy (e.g. *How I Met your Mother*) among many. This large variety of genres entails a notable diversification of the language learner-viewers are exposed to, including jargons and specialised English registers (see Chapter 6). In these terms, audiovisual input, especially from TV-series, can potentially contribute to ESP literacy and viewers' familiarisation with field-specific terminology and usage in the L2 (Forchini 2018; Bonsignori 2018, 2019a, 2019b). Programmes belonging to the same sub-genre are claimed to be especially effective in drawing viewers' attention to specialised vocabulary, due to the higher recurrence of the same items and word families over and over again (Webb 2011). The high frequency of given words makes them likely candidates for noticing and puts lower lexical demands on learner-viewers, who are faced with fewer word types and can be left with more time to allot to new lexicon (Webb 2011: 117, 128).

Exposure to specialised language registers is reinforced through access to additional full-length audiovisual products, which is investigated in the following item and offers the options illustrated in Figure 5.17:

Item 1.8.2) Besides films and TV-series, which other genres do you like watching?
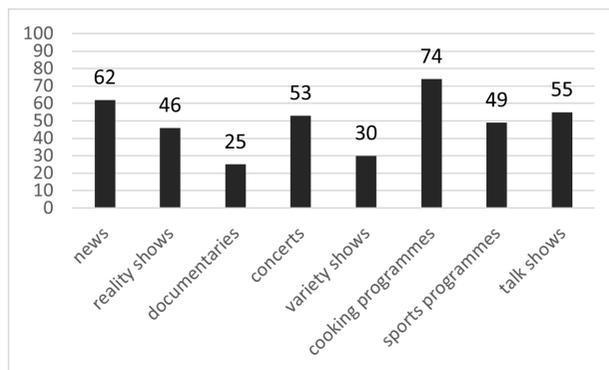
Figure 5.17 – Additional audiovisual genres accessed in English.

Additional audiovisual genres to be accessed in English are diversified in the sample, including language in action and written-to-be-spoken varieties (news and documentaries), as well as more spontaneous commentaries and interaction (reality shows). This multiplicity of genres is another index of the general variability and unpredictability of the input accessed by learner-users through informal exposure, with an unrivalled and unprecedented freedom and diversification of choice (Sockett 2014; Sundqvist and Sylvén 2016).

5.6. *Exposure to foreign languages other than English*

The questionnaire additionally addresses participants' degree of informal exposure to foreign languages other than English (LOTE) in the following items:

Item 1.9) Do you ever watch films or TV-programmes in other foreign languages?
Item 1.9.1) If so, which ones?

□ French
□ German
□ Spanish
□ Japanese
□ Other (please specify) _____

Only a minority of students (61, i.e. 25% of those who answered this question and 20% out of the entire sample) states that they watch films and television programmes in other foreign languages (Figure 5.18). These data confirm that English is the foreign language that learner-viewers access the most, with 71% of participants reporting watching audiovisuals in this language.
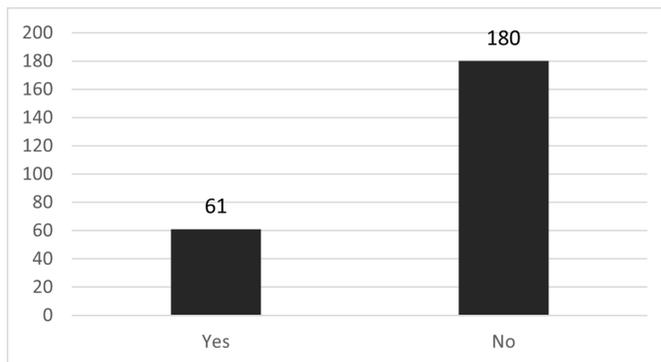
Figure 5.18 – Students who watch television programmes in foreign languages other than English.

Prevailing other languages include Spanish and French, with German and Japanese also being mentioned by some students (Figure 5.19). A good portion of language specialists (20 students) accesses audiovisuals in other foreign languages; nonetheless, the remaining students spread across several disciplines and majors. Most high-exposure subjects (11) say they watch films and television programmes in foreign languages other than English; 11 more subjects are also widely exposed to films and TV-series in English and show generally high exposure indexes (65 or more). Access to audiovisuals in LOTE is quite unpredictable in the sample, but students who spend higher-than-average amounts of time on English-language media often also tend to show an interest in different L2s.
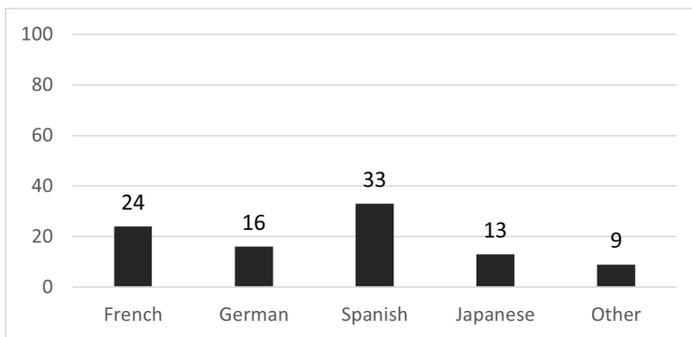
Figure 5.19 – Other languages in which audiovisual material is accessed.

When accessing audiovisual materials in other L2s, the respondents state to mainly add subtitles, both same-language (15) and interlingual (39). Interlingual subtitles include both subtitles in the viewers' L1, Italian (20), and subtitles in English (19).

5.7. *Why access different types of audiovisual input: Participants' beliefs*

The conclusive questionnaire section on audiovisual input focusses on participants' beliefs about the impact of audiovisuals on the development of their L2 competence:

Item 1.10) Do you believe your L2 competence has improved by watching foreign (subtitled) films and TV-series?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Item 1.10.1) If your answer to 1.10 was yes, which skills do you believe have improved?

□ Listening skills
□ Vocabulary skills
□ Grammar skills
□ Reading skills
□ Conversation skills

Mirroring their orientation to language(s), language practice and learning while accessing media in an L2 (see Section 5.1.2), most students (174) believe in the acquisitional value of audiovisual input and see it as a support to foreign language learning. More specifically, approximately 80% of the students who have experienced, even occasionally, exposure to telecinematic input in English believe they have improved their language competence in L2 English thanks to this resource (Figure 5.20). The positive attitude towards these media and their role in foreign language literacy aligns with reports from other large-scale surveys from different countries, such as Sockett (2014) and Mariotti (2015) (see Chapter 2).
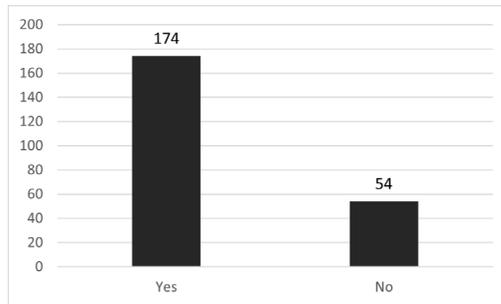
Figure 5.20 – Students who believe their L2 has improved through exposure to audiovisual material in the foreign language.

Among students who do not believe in the acquisitional role of audiovisual products, many are those who state that they do not watch films and television-series in English at all. 10% of all respondents do not think their L2 competence has improved even after exposure to films and TV-series in English – quite a low percentage.

When asked about specific competence areas (Item 1.10.1), students indicate their L2 listening skills and vocabulary knowledge to have mostly benefitted from exposure (Figure 5.21). Interaction and reading skills are also mentioned, whereas grammar development is not believed to have resulted from access to telecinematic input. When tackling respondents' beliefs, findings are very much

in line with parallel reports from other countries, as viewers primarily sense an improvement in their receptive skills (mostly listening comprehension) and a development in their L2 vocabulary (Sockett and Toffoli 2012; Mariotti 2015). These opinions also find support in the ample literature on subtitled audiovisual input as a tool to enhance lexical and listening abilities in the foreign language (see Chapter 2 for a review). A significant portion of participants believes in the development of L2 interaction skills following exposure, suggesting an awareness of the impact that audiovisuals can have on pragmatic competence and productive skills, as well as in overall confidence building when using the foreign language (Mariotti 2015).
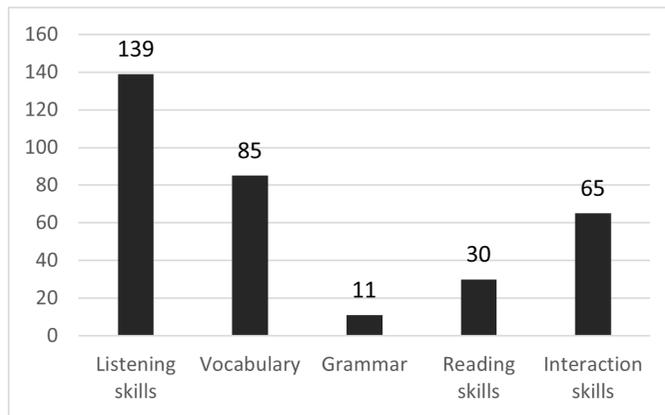
Figure 5.21 – Skills which have mostly benefitted from exposure to L2 English audiovisual input according to students.

5.8. *Summary of main results*

The present chapter focussed on Research Question 2 and investigated the status of informal exposure to English through audiovisual input among Italian postgraduate university students, looking especially at access to subtitled telecinematic products. Additionally, it explored preferred viewing and subtitling modalities and the main reasons for learner-viewers' preferences (Research Question 2.a). The chapter also addressed some corollary issues, including preferred genres, participants' beliefs on subtitled audiovisual input as a learning resource, and exposure to audiovisuals in other foreign languages.

Exposure to films and TV-series in English is quite significant in the sample. Participants show a preference for TV-series and access telecinematic dialogue in English mainly for language-related reasons, such as L2 learning and practice

or their appreciation of the original accents and sounds. Authenticity also plays a relevant role, and relates to the pleasure of listening to the actors' original voices and to the greater naturalness of original dialogues.

Although some sample sections watch exclusively English-language audiovisuals, most learner-viewers also report appreciating dubbing and accessing films and TV-series in both original English and dubbed Italian. The latter is especially liked for its high quality.

When watching films and TV-series in English, the vast majority of students adds bimodal or interlingual subtitles – with a slight overall preference for bimodal subtitling. Dialogue comprehension is the primary factor driving viewers' choices. If L2 proficiency is lower, and English subtitles are too complex to access, standard interlingual ones are used. A prevalent language orientation also emerges from participants' subtitling choices, and an interest in translation reportedly leads to the selection of L1 subtitles on several occasions. By contrast, the earlier availability of subtitles vs. dubbing does not seem to play a major role in motivating students' preferences. Occasionally, learner-viewers declare that they do not add any subtitles, especially when these are perceived as distracting or somewhat invasive and deviant from the original dialogues. However, this is a much more infrequent situation in the sample. As might be expected, reversed subtitling is mostly not an option for students.

Participants access English-language audiovisuals mainly online, due to earlier release and the wider diversification of that offer. They like watching a wide range of film genres and TV-series; even when they access other types of programmes, the picture that emerges is highly heterogeneous, ranging from talk shows and news to cooking programmes.

Although English predominates, some learner-users also access telecinematic products in other languages, including mainly European languages such as Spanish and French, and tend to add here Italian subtitles. Most of the students believe in the learning potential of exposure to subtitled audiovisual input, which they consider to be particularly effective in the development of L2 listening comprehension and vocabulary skills. What emerges is thus the picture of an audience who makes diversified choices, who also watches audiovisuals in English (although not exclusively) and who does so with a certain degree of language awareness, albeit not to the detriment of immersion and enjoyment.

6.
Accessing English informally:
Italian postgraduate students in a wider context

> Clearly, there are both similarities and differences between the language used in contemporary US television series and the language used by US speakers in the 'real' world. However, TV dialogue need not be identical to unscripted conversation to be useful for language learning and teaching.
>
> (Bednarek 2018: 244)

> The Internet world is an extremely fluid one, with users exploring its possibilities of expression, introducing fresh combinations of elements, and reacting to technological developments. It seems to be in a permanent state of transition, lacking precedent, struggling for standards, and searching for direction.
>
> (Crystal 2006: 16)

6.1. *General trends of informal contact with English*

The findings of the present survey offer a snapshot of Italian university students' current behaviours and motivations in accessing English informally, outside the precincts of formal schooling. Within the limitations of a single case study, some patterns have emerged that deserve further scrutiny as they project changes possibly taking place in the country at large. The overview of the data gathered from the questionnaires relays a widespread, although generally not very frequent, access to L2 English outside formal contexts. Most of the students surveyed are not language specialists, hence their interest is not motivated by a specialisation in English Studies or a focus on language more generally. They however represent the most advanced section of the young population, i.e. future professionals who are most likely to need English in their working life. In the sample, English is mainly accessed through web pages (90%), music (almost 90%), social networks (almost 80%), YouTube (almost 80%) and telecinematic dialogue (more than 70%). When accessing English informally, postgraduate

students demonstrate a divided attention between entertainment and more cog-
nitive-oriented contact with the media via the web – with the latter implying
information-seeking and study-driven queries.

In terms of intensity of exposure, audiovisual dialogue has a predominant
role as it is accessed by a considerable number of students for more extensive
time-spans as compared to other input sources: films and TV-series are full-
length texts that spread over longer duration times or, as in the case of series,
may stimulate consecutive viewing sessions and even binge-watching (Grasso
and Penati 2016). Participants watch TV-series in English more than films, and
choose to be exposed to telecinematic products in the foreign language because
they appreciate the authenticity of the original versions and view them as re-
sources for learning the L2. A strong interest in the foreign language is thus the
main driving force for accessing audiovisuals in English, although not to the
detriment of the overall enjoyment of the experience. Respondents report mainly
watching English-language films and TV-series via the internet, rather than on
television or by going to the cinema. They generally add subtitles – bimodal,
or alternatively interlingual – to enhance comprehension and L2 segmentation.
Students also believe in the learning potential of subtitles, especially as an aid to
listening comprehension and vocabulary skills. In spite of a few learner-viewers
watching telecinematic products in other languages, English remains the main
foreign language that the participants access informally.

With the exception of social networks, which lend themselves to a variety
of interactional activities, the most common means of informal contact with
English in the sample are receptive and monodirectional. Participants appear
to engage less frequently in more strictly interactive tasks, such as accessing
English-language blogs and forums and playing videogames. Even the most
prototypical form of interaction, i.e. face-to-face conversational exchanges in
English, is infrequent among participants.

The results bear evidence to the great variability of online resources and
the diversification and unpredictability of learners' informal experience with
English. Not only are learner-viewers exposed to a wide variety of genres and
registers, but they also get in touch with a highly differentiated and individually
tailored input in L2 English, which is fully user-controlled. The unpredictability
and variability of input have been identified as common features of informal
exposure to English (see e.g. Sockett 2014; Sundqvist and Sylvén 2012; see
Chapter 2). As Sockett states:

> In all likelihood, no two online informal learners of English will be exposed to
> the same contents at the same time, a situation unthinkable even a few years ago

when the fashions in music and television imposed by major television and radio channels led to a considerable uniformity in the consumption of viewers and listeners (Sockett 2014: 13).

6.1.1. *User profiles*

The sample mostly includes Italian postgraduate students who self-assess their English proficiency level as intermediate or upper-intermediate (CEFR B1 and B2). Smaller sets of participants rate themselves as beginner's level (16%) or advanced (16%, see Section 3.4.). In Chapter 4, more detailed participant profiles were outlined in relation to comprehensive exposure data. Exposure indexes were calculated based on participants' frequency and intensity of informal contact with English in several situations and indicate that the students divide into three main groups. First of all, there is a small set of 'high-exposure' students, who access English informally in a wide range of contexts, quite often and extensively. On the opposite pole 'low-exposure' students are found, who are never or rarely exposed to English in informal settings. In between the two groups, we find the great majority of respondents, who position themselves between regular English users and non- or only occasional users and engage variably and unpredictably with different input sources. High-input and low-input students generally show different profiles: while high input users vent a frequent interest in languages (often majoring in Language Studies and Linguistics) and quite an advanced competence level in English, low-exposure students come mostly from scientific disciplines and self-assess as low-proficiency in L2 English. These profiles mirror the tendency for more proficient learner-users to engage in more L2-based activities (Verspoor *et al.* 2011) – while conversely less advanced learners would search for fewer or no opportunities of contact with the foreign language. Low-exposure users testify to the presence, at the time of data collection (spring 2016), of pockets of students who essentially do not have any contact with English informally – or have extremely limited and almost irrelevant access to the language.

Although they are clearly identifiable in the sample, high- and low-exposure students represent a minority. Most participants fall in between and get in contact with English input more variably. When considering exposure to films and TV-series alone, a polarisation between frequent viewers and non-viewers is even more evident. A higher percentage of participants report regularly watching films and TV-series in English, often with the exclusion of other genres. Other students are seen to access English mainly via typically online media (e.g. social media, YouTube, blogs, forums, videogames), while disregarding audio-

visuals. Fewer say they take part in face-to-face interactions in English; for some who do, this is the only – or one of the rare – occasions of informal contact with the language.

Further research on user profiles is very much needed to explore more thoroughly the characteristics of the Italian learner-users who are most likely to engage or not engage in extramural English activities. In parallel, more can be said about the input types that participants report accessing most frequently, and the general nature of the English input received in untutored settings. In the following sections the findings concerning the Italian group will be framed within the European context and assessed by comparing them to those from similar surveys carried out in other countries including Iceland, Sweden, the Netherlands, France and Germany. More focussed considerations will follow as different issues result from the recurring and variable English input that users access through the media and other forms of informal contact with the language. Multimodality, informal language and colloquiality, specialised discourse registers (ESP) and the relationship between informal contact with English and EFL, ESL and ELF are all relevant constructs for a better understanding of informal exposure to English among present-day L2 learner-users.

6.2. *The Italian case study: A comparison within Europe*

Chapter 1 has evidenced that Italy lags behind other European countries in terms of citizens' competence in L2 English and their extent of exposure to the language in informal learning settings (Eurobarometer 2012; Eurostat 2016; EF EPI 2019). The findings of the current study suggest encouraging trends in the growing incidence of untutored contact with English in the country. The sample of the young adults surveyed reports more learning-conducive behaviours with respect to the Eurobarometer (2012), where extremely low percentages of the interviewees declared to watch films and TV-series in an L2 and to listen to foreign language radio (4%) or to engage in interaction with native speakers (8%). But how do our findings fare in relation to similar studies carried out more recently in different geographical areas? How do the surveyed Italian students compare with their peers from other European contexts?

The picture emerging from our survey still differs from the situation in northern European countries, where informal contact with English is strongly rooted in everyday life and starts at a very early age (Verspoor *et al.* 2011; Henry and Cliffordson 2017; Johannsdóttir 2018). One major factor at play is the status of these areas as traditionally subtitling countries. Contact with English is extensive

among teenagers and continues throughout adulthood, with differences in preferred input sources based on age and gender (Sundqvist 2009; Arnbjörnsdóttir 2018b). Receptive activities like television watching and surfing the internet are the most popular, although listening to music and playing videogames in English are also widespread in those countries, especially among the younger population. As a result of this massive exposure through the media, proficiency in L2 English is high in northern Europe, and is most evident in vocabulary development, reading, listening and speaking skills (Sundqvist 2009; Arnbjörnsdóttir 2018b). Due to the media specificity, users tend to acquire colloquial and informal registers of the language, to the detriment of academic writing skills that are required in the educational and professional sphere (Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir 2018b; see Chapter 2 for a detailed review of the topic).

Informal access to English appears to occur at a later age in dubbing countries such as France and Germany, namely in secondary school or at the start of university (Kusyk 2017). In these areas, exploratory research was mainly carried out among university students – who in most cases were not majoring in English or foreign languages (Toffoli and Sockett 2010; Kusyk 2017). These studies show greater comparability to the Italian survey as they take place in countries where viewers had until recently limited chances to watch audiovisuals in the original language. However, the spread of satellite and cable television, the internet and streaming platforms has contributed to the availability of original language telecinematic products and to their growing popularity in dubbing countries as well. The French, German and Italian students represent a section of the population that nowadays engages in extramural English activities to a considerable extent. For these student samples, the preferred means of contact with English are songs, videos, films and TV-series in the foreign language, as well as web pages on both leisure and educational content. As far as audiovisuals are concerned, TV-series appear to be the most popular choice, and are mainly watched online (Kusyk and Sockett 2012; Bednarek 2018). Across many studies, learner-viewers say they rely on the support of subtitles for the most part (Sockett 2014), although preferred viewing modalities vary as a function of availability and L2 proficiency. As an instance, more advanced users tend to opt for bimodal subtitles or no subtitles at all, as documented for the German informants in Kusyk (2017) and Bednarek (2018). On the whole, learners' behaviour is seen to be quite fluid and changeable over time, in what is one of the most distinctive and striking features of informal learning everywhere (Kusyk 2017: 147).

A common aspect which emerges from all studies, but is especially accentuated in Italy, France and Germany, is the polarisation between receptive and productive activities. Learners from central and southern European countries

tend to engage with English in primarily receptive tasks, such as listening to music, watching audiovisuals and navigating web pages. The divide in participants' frequency of access to receptive vs. productive input sources is wider than in northern Europe, despite the general popularity of English language music, the internet, TV-series and films. Apart from sheer availability, this gap can be still attributable to L2 proficiency and familiarity with extramural English. Northern European citizens generally rate themselves as highly proficient EFL/ESL users, and regularly use English in a variety of informal settings. The higher degree of linguistic self-confidence can lead to a greater willingness on the part of learners to engage in more activities that involve the English language, including those that require L2 production (i.e. online and offline interaction, playing multi-player videogames, posting text on forums and social networks).

Amidst the great number of recent European studies on the informal learning of English, Kusyk (2017)'s survey is the one which comes closest to the present investigation in terms of sample, questionnaire items and findings. Although the two studies were conducted independently, they show a striking similarity – which allows for interesting and systematic comparisons of the results. In particular, some trends appear to be quite generalised and to be shared by French, German and Italian university students when they approach English extramurally.

6.2.1. *A closer look at Italian, French and German learner-users*

Meryl Kusyk (2017) conducted a large-scale survey on OILE among French and German university students. The survey relied upon questionnaires, which were administered online, and follow-up case studies, which were based on the longitudinal observation of two students and their proficiency level in L2 English assessed in written and oral tests. The participants (a total of 953 students from two French and four German universities, divided into 538 French and 415 German students) are university students from first-level degree to PhD level, with a prevalence of undergraduates. Similarly to the current study, students were not language specialists but came from a variety of disciplines, including science, technology, ICT and economics. They attended weekly English language classes as part of their curricula, but these were not their university majors. To overcome the issue of participant self-selection, questionnaires were presented as a compulsory activity to fill out at the start of their weekly English classes. The focus of Kusyk's study was on online input sources only, but the main questionnaire findings align with data from the Italian sample. As we have seen, in the three samples (French, German and Italian) respondents appear

to show a preference for receptive activities, which include watching films and TV-series, watching online videos (YouTube), reading and accessing web pages, listening to music. Speakers engage quite frequently in these activities, express a preference for TV-series and also list similar favourite programmes[35]. Conversely, the participants rarely use English in tasks that require their production skills. Playing videogames is not a popular means of informal access to English in the three student groups, nor is e-mail writing. The latter is especially uncommon among the French and Italian students; the German respondents reported writing more emails in English, albeit not very frequently. A more diversified behaviour emerges for social networks: while French and German students rarely access them in English, Italian learners report doing so to a greater extent[36].

As highlighted in Section 6.2., telecinematic input has a major role in informal learning in France, Germany and Italy (see also Sockett 2014). Respondents in both Kusyk (2017)'s and the current study mention similar reasons for watching films and TV-programmes in English, which pertain to L2 appreciation and learning, authenticity, entertainment and availability. Availability and L2 proficiency also affect the choice of viewing and subtitling modalities, which vary to a certain extent across the three student groups: while most of the French and the Italian students add subtitles when watching English-language films and TV-series, the German learner-viewers generally reported not doing so (Kusyk 2017; see also Bednarek 2018). Concurrently, the German group showed generally higher proficiency in English with respect to the other samples. Subtitling modalities also vary between the Italian and French groups. Whereas the Italian students report preferring L2 subtitles on slightly more occasions, the French respondents tended to opt for interlingual, L1 subtitles as an aid to comprehension. However, as their proficiency level increases, it is not infrequent for learners to shift to alternative viewing modes (Sockett 2014: 53). This is in line with Vanderplank's observation that, as vocabulary expands and reading skills improve, L2 subtitles progressively become more easily accessible and start serving more as a support and a back-up to dialogue comprehension (2016: 80).

Entertainment is the primary reason that drives students' access to other online input sources such as music and videogames in Kusyk's survey. Conversely, and very much like in the Italian group, French and German participants

[35] The surveys were carried out approximately over the same time period.
[36] Kusyk's survey was more detailed here, as it asked students about specific social media activities, such as status updates, posting of comments, or private messaging through Facebook, and mostly focussed on Facebook and its related activities. Our data may be less reliable in this respect and further studies should investigate the actual use of English in social networks (see section 4.1.2.).

search through web pages in English mostly because they want to gather infor-
mation about specific topics. Users' main reasons for access may suggest they
view audiovisual texts as the greatest sources of L2 input and the most effective
tools for L2 acquisition – a fact that is also explicitly stated by the students in
Kusyk's sample when asked about their beliefs in the learning potential of differ-
ent informal activities. In the present study, Italian learner-viewers stressed how
audiovisuals can contribute to the development of English vocabulary and oral
comprehension skills.

The common patterns in the French and German student groups led Kusyk to
the conclusion that learner-users' behaviour is not necessarily specific to national-
ity or source culture (2017: 173). This point is supported by the trends recorded
among the Italian respondents, as Italian postgraduate students appear to follow
very similar patterns to their French and German peers. The general profiles for
the three groups describe users who show a clear preference for receptive over
productive contact with English and choose among different genres depending
on whether they want to be entertained, acquire information or socialise.

6.3. *Kaleidoscopic input and informal exposure to L2 English*

Despite its diversification, the input that learners access informally shows
common core features and raises interesting reflections on cognitive processes
and SLA, medium, register, ESP, EFL and ELF. Relevant core traits concern the
multimodal nature of most informal input, spoken language, genre hybridity,
register specificity and the status of learner-users. These will be addressed in turn
in the following sections.

6.3.1. *Multimodal input and L2 learning*

Most of the informal English input that L2 users report accessing in the
sample is multimodal, as it relies upon multiple channels, modes and semiotic
systems. Multimodality is especially relevant for telecinematic input, given the
interaction between verbal, acoustic and visual information that characterises
audiovisuals. Multimodality is also a valuable resource for language comprehen-
sion and learning, thanks to redundancy and its motivational role, positive effect
on cognitive processes and triggering of media immersion[37].

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[37]   In this respect, multimodality is a key aspect in CALL and more recently MALL studies
(Cheetham 2019; Arvanitis 2020; Kukulska-Hulme and Lee 2020).

The acquisitional potential of multimodal texts is supported by a variety of cognitive theories and models, which have been recently used in support to research on audiovisual input and SLA (Talaván 2011; Frumuselu 2018; among many). Some models of multimodal processing and learning that are especially relevant to the field of informal language learning are Multiple Trace Memory Theory (in d'Ydewalle 2002), the Theory of Multimedia Learning (Mayer 2003) and its development into the Cognitive Affective Theory of Learning with Media (Moreno and Mayer 2007; Frumuselu 2018). These theories can be understood based on their focus, which is respectively input redundancy and its impact on memory, input redundancy and its relation to individuals' limited attentional capacity, and the affective role of multimodal input.

The redundancy of stimuli, sources and codes that characterises multimodal texts can have an impact on input memorisation by learners, as already stressed in Paivio's Dual Coding Hypothesis (1986). According to the hypothesis, signs from different semiotic systems mutually activate when they are dually coded (verbally and nonverbally), as they refer to the same entities. In other words, several memory paths are activated simultaneously, facilitating input retention and information storage in long-term memory. This hypothesis has been often applied to the study of subtitled video and SLA (Ghia 2012). In his research on the topic, Géry d'Ydewalle (2002) mentioned an analogous model, Multiple Trace Memory Theory, according to which multiple perceptual channels work simultaneously in the human brain and are capable of merging data from different pools. The more pools input is available from, i.e. the higher the redundancy of information, the deeper the trace left in memory will be. Evidence for the benefits of bi- or multimodal input also comes from phonological studies showing that learners' simultaneous exposure to both auditory and pictorial cues – such as speaker's face and torso – leads to better sound segmentation and greater speech comprehension (Hardison 2005; Sueyoshi and Hardison 2005).

The Theory of Multimedia Learning connects input redundancy and multimodality to our limited attentional capacity (Mayer 2003). Human beings have fixed attentional and working memory storage, and too much data is liable to overload the system. However, when input comes from different sensory systems (e.g. auditory and visual), different storage areas in working memory are activated, so that we can assist to an actual increase in overall working memory capacity (Cheetham 2019: 186). Hence, when input is received through several channels in parallel, individuals' limited attentional capacities are boosted and learners are able to fully exploit their resources for processing information (Mayer 2009: 6). Information can be more easily stored in memory, with redundancy acting as a reinforcement and a facilitating factor (Frumuselu 2018). Quite obvious-

ly, redundancy does not imply that the input coming from different channels and modes is identical or fully equivalent. Rather, there can be "overlapping correlated content" (Cheetham 2019: 187) and input sources can complement one another. According to Mayer (2009: 7), "human understanding occurs when learners are able to mentally integrate corresponding pictorial and verbal representations". Not only can exposure to multimodal information boost memory capacity, but it can also positively impact the processing of monomodal input in the L2 (Cheetham 2019). The Cognitive Affective Theory of Learning with Media is a further development that links multimodal learning with the affective dimension, and which is mentioned by Frumuselu (2018) with reference to subtitling and L2 learning. According to the theory, when learners are engaged with L2 multimodal texts and are motivated to use the foreign language to access them, the cognitive processing of input is facilitated, as is the integration of multiple input pools (Moreno and Mayer 2007: 313). In the authors' view, engagement with multimodal input is especially likely when users can interact with it, either by strictly "dialoguing" or by searching and navigating content (p. 311). Exposure to L2 multimodal texts such as audiovisuals and videogames can be extremely involving for viewers. When they are engaged in those activities, learners will be more open and ready to attend to all the available perceptual channels and to integrate information coming from different pools.

The strong motivational potential of multimodal input is connected to its ability to trigger learners' immersion (Section 2.3.). Immersion is favoured by input contextualisation in semiotically rich environments (Pavesi and Perego 2008), and leads to the dominance of meaning over structure, which facilitates the processing of L2 input (VanPatten 2015). That is, contexts where learner-viewers do not focus on language and language learning to a significant extent but access input to communicate or grasp a storyline are consonant with the meaning-oriented processes triggered in SLA. In neurological terms, immersion also relates to the stimulation of mirror neurons. Mirror neurons are visuomotor neurons which activate when an action is either performed or observed, and are capable of generalising "the goal of the observed action across many instances of it" (Rizzolatti *et al.* 2002: 37). These neurons are the basis for action understanding, learning by imitation, and empathy. In their mimicking of real-life scenarios and their depiction of human or human-like actions, audiovisuals can trigger the activation of mirror neurons and favour immersion processes and feelings of empathy, involvement and identification among viewers. This is most evident with films, TV-series, YouTube videos and videogames – especially those that involve virtual worlds and simulations.

6.3.2. *The primacy of audiovisual input and its relation to second language acquisition*

The main findings of the survey show that access to spoken English is considerable and stems from exposure to TV-series, films and YouTube. This contrasts with access to other internet genres such as blogs and forums, whose language is closer to traditional written language. Although the data available are not sufficient to appreciate the frequency and intensity of contact with different web sources, the current findings suggest that present-day Italian university students are prevalently exposed to spoken English, in particular as telecinematic dialogue. This trend calls for a more in-depth assessment of the language of films and TV-series, given the potential role of audiovisual input in the development of listening and speaking skills (Chapter 2). When we look at the learning implications of audiovisual dialogue, a first aspect to evaluate is its degree of alignment with spontaneous speech, the underlying question being whether the language of telecinematic products is realistic enough to provide adequate input for the acquisition of spontaneous spoken language. Much research has focussed on defining the degree of realism or naturalness of audiovisual discourse and recent corpus-based studies have documented the similarity between contemporary English telecinematic dialogue and real-life conversation. Overall, the spoken L2 English input learner-viewers are exposed to on screen is realistic and leans towards informal and colloquial registers of the language. Moreover, since in audiovisual contexts learners watch sociolinguistically plausible interactions, they assist to representations of open skill environments. These are situations in which many different factors occur and which require participants to control linguistic resources in the wide social dimension of language (Segalowitz and Trofimovich 2012). In this way, learners can increase their knowledge of complex behaviour incidentally and improve in L2 areas that are notoriously difficult to learn in the classroom.

The realism and naturalness of telecinematic language draw attention to additional features that may assist learner-viewers to engage with and benefit from the incoming input, irrespective of audiovisual input's intrinsic complexity (Section 2.5.2.). In her overviews of audiovisual input and SLA, Pavesi (2012, 2015) mentions a number of aspects in the makeup of films and television products that create a favourable context for L2 learning. Among those, we find eufluency and pausing, increased discourse immediacy and reduced vagueness, formulaicity and predictability. While screen dialogue contains phenomena connected with online, impromptu language production, there are overall fewer dysfluencies (Rodríguez Martín 2010). "Compared with naturally occurring interaction,

typically there is less overlap and abrupt topic shifts, fewer interruptions, repair sequences, and speech errors, false starts, hesitation phenomena, and minimal responses" (see Bednarek 2018: 19-20). In fictive orality, features of impromptu speech are used only sparingly for mimetic reasons and to delineate characters linguistically. At the same time, silent and musical sequences are common. They constitute actual resources for learner-viewers as they "compensate for the dense language of film and create a space for the language learner to process input and internalise intake" (Pavesi 2015: 94).

Discourse immediacy in telecinematic discourse involves reference to the 'here and now' rather than displaced events and activities. As a manifestation of context-boundedness, it results from the higher incidence of features that are embedded in the situations presented on screen, such as present tense verbs, first and second person pronouns (vis-à-vis third person pronouns), deictics and temporal adverbs (*here*, *this morning*, *now*) and vocatives, including familiarisers like *guys*, *man* and *buddy* (Quaglio 2009; Forchini 2013; Formentelli 2014). In her research on deixis in film language, Pavesi (2020) shows how exophoric demonstratives invite characters and audiences alike to converge on specific objects in the scene or portions of the narrated story. With demonstratives "viewers' attention may be directed onto given entities or locations by means of gestures, pointing and gazes focussed on by the camera. [...] it can also be ingeniously guided by a variety of visual and acoustic cues made available by the richness of cinematic affordances" (p. 25). With utterances such as *These all new carpets, are they, sweetheart?*, learner-viewers are thus guided to focus on pictorial elements, while they may benefit from the explicit match between the extra-linguistic reference and the spoken input.

Discourse immediacy and contextualisation facilitate input comprehension by providing the learner-viewer with redundant information as they tie in with the multimodality of the telecinematic text. They are also consistent with the reduced vagueness reported for both TV-series and films, whereby audiovisual products in comparison with face-to-face conversation display a smaller number of hedges (*kind of*, *sort of*), fewer vague coordination tags (*or something*) and nouns of vague reference (*thing*, *stuff*) (Quaglio 2009: 71-86; Forchini 2012). Reduced vagueness and consequently increased explicitness also make onscreen conversation easier for wider audiences, the overarching purpose of audiovisual dialogue being to attract and retain viewers, particularly in case of television products (Quaglio 2009: 86; Bednarek 2018: 15). The repetitiveness and predictability of language choices are additional characteristics of screen dialogue (Taylor 2008) that may assist input comprehension and the acquisition of L2 language patterns and formulae. Conversational routines have emerged as a re-

current trait of audiovisual dialogue, which reproduce mimetically what occurs in real life and perform specific narrative functions. The repetition of the same conversational routines and stock phrases also contributes to textual cohesion within the same film and to intertextuality across films. In turn, the seriality of television programmes correlates with the high predictability of their dialogues, which results from recurring situations, settings and discourse topics and the permanence of characters across episodes and seasons.

6.3.3. *Interactivity in screen dialogue and other media*

In an assessment of language features that facilitate SLA, attention should finally be paid to interactivity. A key aspect of screen language, it is frequently realised by listener-oriented deictic features and linguistic expressions of emotional and empathic content (Quaglio 2009; Bednarek 2012, 2018; Zago 2018; Pavesi 2020). At the textual level, film language is strongly biased towards two-party interactions, with dialogues between characters being the backbone of audiovisual orality. As pointed out by Kozloff (2000: 72-73):

> Duologues are the most fundamental structure of screen speech, because they are a dramatic necessity. Two characters in conversation provide more 'action', more suspense, more give-and-take than monologues, because new information or emotional shadings can be exchanged, questioned, reacted to. On the other hand, in true polylogues, too much is going on; there are too many speakers, too many agendas, too much distraction […]. Duologues between hero and associate, between lovers, between antagonists, are the engines that drive film narratives forward.

From a micro-linguistic point of view screen dialogue exhibits a greater frequency of several interactional traits than face-to-face conversation. These include more adverbial intensifiers, copular verbs such as *feel* and *look*, minimal and non-minimal responses like *sure* and *fine* (Quaglio 2009: 87-105). The occurrence of such spoken language features in audiovisual language has wide implications. The reiterated response signal *yes*, for instance, points to the pervasive activation of turn taking and adjacency pairs, two basic organisational structures of dialogicity and co-construction of meaning in spontaneous interaction (Rodríguez Martín 2010). In films, turns are short and the floor is frequently handed over by one speaker to the next, in such a way as to keep viewers alert and tuned in on what is going to be said next.

Interestingly, several investigations confirm the overuse in films and TV-series of first and second person pronouns, one of the strongest indicators of in-

volvement in spoken and written English (Forchini 2012; Pavesi 2016b; among others). A closer look at the available data reveals an even greater frequency of *you* pronouns in fictional dialogue than in spontaneous conversation (Pavesi 2009; 2016a). Their frequent use grabs interlocutors' attention, while provoking greater involvement on their part. Vocatives too are effective devices of interactivity. They clarify who the addressee is in conversation and attract diegetic and extradiegetic participants' attention while binding them to the verbal exchanges on screen. Vocatives in film language also greatly outnumber those found in spontaneous conversation (Formentelli 2014; Zago 2015). The central position of second person pronouns and vocatives, together with the resulting increased dialogicity, is consistent with other characteristics of fictive speech. Ghia (2014, 2019) found that direct interrogatives – *yes-no* as well as *wh-* – in film dialogue almost double those found in conversational English. As they are prototypically addressed to the interlocutor rather than the self, questions are powerful interactional markers connected to alignment and disalignment practices and the stronger emotional load of screen dialogue.

The increased frequency of dialogic features is expected to trigger greater participation and immersion in viewers and smoother processing in learners. Learners may therefore profit from screen input through processes similar to those activated by L2 speakers who still benefit from witnessing face-to-face interactions in which they are not actively involved (Mackey 1999; see also Lantolf *et al.* 2015: 218).

Interactivity is a defining feature of other media that users may experience informally. These include online genres that present users with interactional exchanges, as well as providing opportunities for personal engagement. As versatile sources, social networks are repositories of multiple subgenres, such as written texts, videos and other multimodal content and can be the loci for different forms of engagement with the foreign language. Not only do social media involve self-directed reading and writing, but they can also "scaffold learner interaction, [by means of activities] such as online chat, posting text or images, sharing media, commenting on the posts of others and 'liking' other items" (Sockett 2014: 38). Blogs and forums can also offer opportunities for output production, as they may trigger online conversation threads with other users. Similarly, gaming activities, especially online MMORPGs, involve interaction with other players and gaming communities – often from all over the world –; hence, the use of English is frequent as it is the language in which most online conversations are carried out (Knight *et al.* 2020).

In spite of the presence of more strictly participative genres, the new media do not always allow for a clear-cut distinction in terms of input directionality

and the degree of active participation by the learner-user. This last aspect, in particular, is hardly applicable to SLA, as learners may engage actively with all input forms – be they more productive or receptive in nature. Social media, blogs, forums and videogames allow for both typically receptive contact with L2 input (i.e. reading) and more multifaceted forms of interaction and interpersonal involvement. At the same time, audiovisual texts are the product of a cultural universe and may act as social tools, prompting learner-viewers to engage in other related activities such as repeated watching (Sockett 2014: 104), performing side queries stemming from viewing (e.g. accessing data on films or TV-series on web pages, wikis, fan forums) or interacting with other viewers (Orrego-Carmona 2014: 61; Bednarek 2018).

In sum, the English input L2 users encounter informally outside formal instruction is kaleidoscopic in its variety, heterogeneity and fluidity, and yet it exhibits a series of features that are likely to foster the spontaneous acquisition of the language.

6.4. *Informal learning and English for specific purposes*

Findings from the current study point to the wide diversification of the English input that today Italian university students access informally for both entertainment and information-seeking reasons. On the whole, the range of informal input accessed by learner-viewers in the sample can also include specialised genres, although subject to variability and unpredictability (Sockett 2014, 2020). This has important implications for English for specific purposes (ESP), as input can potentially trigger the development of users' specialised competence and multiliteracies (Kalantzis and Cope 2009) in an increasingly diverse and mainly multimodal environment.

In this survey, the sources which can mostly associate with ESP include web pages, YouTube, TV-series, blogs, forums and videogames. Among these, TV-series, YouTube and web pages are those to which users are exposed most extensively, and hence have great potential as sources of specialised registers. TV-series and films contain a significant amount of specialised language as shown in descriptive studies of these multimodal genres. Forchini (2018) and Bonsignori (2018, 2019a, 2019b) have investigated legal drama films and series focussing on the courtroom, business communication and medical peer interactions. These multimodal genres have been shown to be relevant for learning purposes for their authenticity, that is, because they are meant for native speakers while approximating spontaneous conversation and specialised discourse's

rhetorical strategies. The authors start from analyses of multimodal genres and suggest their use in the ESP classroom. On the basis of the present study's results, university students can equally benefit from exposure to the same genres through processes of incidental acquisition. These take place out of the language classroom, occur spontaneously while media users engage in recreational tasks or search for specific content, and are not governed by teaching intervention. When asked about their viewing preferences (see Section 5.5.), participants in the sample listed eight main TV-series, including in order *Game of Thrones*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *Breaking Bad*, *Sherlock*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *House of Cards* and *The Vampire Diaries*. Some of these series contain specialised jargons in their dialogues, related to the fields of medicine (*Grey's Anatomy*), chemistry and drugs (*Breaking Bad*), physics and science (*The Big Bang Theory*), technology (*Sherlock*) and politics (*House of Cards*). These jargons entail the use of domain-specific terminology, formulae and lexical bundles. General recurring clusters can also associate with specialised fields and genres. Emblematic is a case mentioned in Sockett (2014: 69, 99-102), who addresses the incidental acquisition of the four-gram *I need you to* among regular watchers of series in L2 English. Corpus evidence showed the high frequency of this cluster in the medical drama *House MD*, where it was often used by doctors on screen addressing patients (e.g. *I need you to roll up your sleeves*).

In the present study, participants mainly report accessing YouTube in English to watch music clips and film trailers, but also to search for specialised audiovisual genres, e.g. tutorials and video recipes (Section 4.1.1.). Although these are not the primary choice for viewers, they may still represent a potential for ESP. Information seeking is instead listed as the main reason for navigating web pages in English, with participants stating that they search for mainly university-related – hence most likely discipline-specific – content (81%). A similar trend was observed in Kusyk (2017) with French and German university students, suggesting a potential contact with ESP through specialised fields and topics. Not only can these activities help learner-viewers familiarise with domain-specific L2 use, but they can also make them aware of the presence of different registers and encourage users to categorise linguistic items by field. "[P]lacing words in [semantic] categories enables the learner to focus on the meaning of the text rather than worrying about the specific meaning of the item" (Sockett 2014: 80).

Access to blogs, forums and videogames in L2 English can also entail contact with domain-specific content, domain-specific terminology (gaming vocabulary is a case in point, see Piirainen-Marsh and Tainio 2009; Kuure 2011) and participation in domain-specific online interaction. Gaming, in particular, involves different subtypes of input and degrees of specialisation, as it exposes players to

(monodirectional) game narratives and (multidirectional) interactions with other gamers, both while playing and when discussing the game itself (Knight *et al.* 2020: 101). The latter situation is the typical scenario characterising MMORPGs (Sylvén and Sundqvist 2012). Here, learners are pushed to engage in communicative exchanges which "call for progressively less scripted and more natural language use" and concurrently involve the sharing of expert knowledge and terminology (Knight *et al.* 2020: 105-106). Although access to blogs, forums and videogames was quite limited in the sample, it may still have entailed a certain degree of contact with specialised language use within a small subgroup of learners – who nevertheless reported playing games for prolonged amounts of time.

6.5. *The prevalence of the spoken and oralised dimensions*

As emerged in the previous sections, the new media and technological supports allow for a variegated use by L2 speakers who access English informally and autonomously. Overall, input sources are mainly multimodal, with several channels and modes merging, so that learner-users can simultaneously engage with spoken and written L2 input. However, although both spoken and written English is accessed informally, spoken registers dominate, while the written forms learner-users are mostly involved with are peculiar to the web. Aural input is mostly experienced as telecinematic dialogues, followed by speech from different genres of YouTube videos (including non-fiction, such as interviews or tutorials) and song lyrics. Therefore, the spoken registers learner-viewers mostly come across through the web are predominantly informal, and result from the growing colloquialisation of web genres and telecinematic discourse alike (Zago 2016; Berber Sardinha and Veirano Pinto 2019). Written input sources mainly consist of the subtitles accompanying the spoken dialogues, web pages and written text on social networks (posts, comment threads, chats), blog entries as well as exchanges on forums and gaming platforms. These all constitute hybrid forms and distance themselves from traditional written genres, since they share several traits with spoken language. They are unplanned (due to lack of drafting) and present higher immediacy and greater synchronicity of communication, while carrying strong expressivity and emotional load (Crystal 2006; Danet and Herring 2007; Chapter 2). The increasing consumption of telecinematic products together with more frequent use of the internet and the new media hence suggests that learners and users mostly appropriate English through a language that is either spoken or displays many features of colloquiality and informality.

As informal contact with English is growing and language input is becoming increasingly spoken, oralised and informal, we are in dire need to investigate to what extent media language plays a role as a model of English in SLA. We need to find out which L2 (spoken) language competence foreign language speakers are developing as a result of the unprecedented modalities and frequency of contact with English characterising the world today. The investigation of novel types of contact with English and patterns of language exposure is a first necessary step in a much wider investigation of contemporary informal learning of L2 English in Italy as much as elsewhere.

6.6. *Reassessing constructs: EFL, ESL or ELF?*

In Chapter 1 the constructs of EFL, ESL and ELF were discussed with reference to the changing role of L2 English in contemporary, multilingual society. As already pointed out, the long-established distinction between EFL and ESL has been powerfully undermined by the findings emerged in research on users' contact with English across Europe and beyond. By endorsing this view, Sockett remarks that English, given its ubiquitous availability through technology, now "has the characteristics of a second language for a large number of internet users around the world" (2014: 122). Drawing on the outcomes of the seven-year-long Icelandic project, Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir (2018a) have in turn argued that the distinction between second and foreign language contexts now rests on the type and, in particular, the *amount* of input learner-users receive from the target language. Discussing the widespread presence of English in some sections of the Expanding Circle (Kachru 1985), they demonstrated the obsolescence of the traditional dichotomy between language learning in contexts where the L2 is acquired in the target culture and contexts where it is approached primarily at school in the learners' home country. Iceland is indeed reaching a stage in which "English is no longer a foreign learner language to be mastered, but a utility language, a necessarily skill to survive" (Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir 2018b: 11). If the picture depicted for Iceland and other Nordic countries is considerably different from that emerging for Italy, the boundaries between ESL and EFL appear to be blurring in Italy as well. Here EFL learners are increasingly accessing naturalistic input in informal settings, as suggested by the present results, and may be changing their status into that of ESL learners.

If the contrast between EFL and ESL is today less relevant than it was in the past, the distinction between EFL/ESL and ELF still calls for in-depth consideration. Worthy of further reflection is also the claim that ELF is predominant

in informal contact with English outside school settings. In the debate on the role of English in non-native communities where it is frequently encountered in the media and face-to-face interactions, the L2 has often been constructed as a lingua franca rather than a foreign/second language. Grazzi (2012: 176), for instance, moves from the assumption that:

> The internet should be considered an authentic social environment, inhabited by culturally and ethnically diverse communities who mainly use ELF to interact online. In a globalised world, the heterogeneity of the growing population of net users is perhaps the most tangible manifestation of cross-cultural communication, and the pervasiveness of English as the primary contact language has given strong impulse to the emergence and swift diffusion of non-standard varieties.

The author thus argues in favour of acknowledging L2 speakers' double identity as both EFL students living in countries where English is not the native language and ELF users resorting to English as a contact language in authentic communicative settings. From this perspective, the informalisation of language contact is seen as impinging on L2 speakers' identities and possibly coexisting EFL/ELF orientations. According to Eskildsen and Theodórsdóttir (2017: 143), "in the classroom, L2 users are typically and primarily labelled 'learners', whereas beyond the classroom, 'in the wild' […] any aspect of their identity might take prominence". Following a similar line of reasoning, Firth (2009) has suggested that when L2 speakers interact in a non-educational environment, they focus on the task and disavow their status as L2 learners. The results of the nation-wide project in Iceland (Arnbjörnsdóttir and Ingvarsdóttir 2018a) have also encouraged a rethinking of L2 speakers' identity, the relationship between informal contact with English and its status, and has supported the claim that different stances towards the L2 emerge in different settings. While EFL learners study English to communicate with native speakers and aim to reach near-native competence, ELF speakers use English mainly to interact among non-native speakers and do not align with native speakers' linguacultural norms (Seidlhofer 2011).

The issue however remains about which stance learner-users *actually* take towards English when they access English informally for leisure, educational goals or social interaction. That is, L2 speakers' attitudes, motivations and underlying reasons when approaching the language in extramural contexts should be ascertained from the speakers themselves before claims about the activation of any specific linguistic identity are formulated. The relevance of students' linguistic attitudes and orientations in defining EFL/ESL vs. ELF has emerged in previous research (Xu and Van de Poel 2011; among many). Gnutzmann *et al.*'s (2015), for instance, discussed these constructs with reference to 1,000 students from

several disciplines at the University of Braunschweig (Germany). The authors found that the surveyed respondents put a premium on native varieties of English and declared a strong bias in favour of English native-speaker standards, hence displaying an EFL/ESL orientation towards the language. Interestingly, these attitudes emerged despite the German students had reported frequent contact with English for leisure and during holidays, a factor that should have led them to show a greater acceptance of ELF as a legitimate language of communication in Europe. As for the present study, the university students surveyed have declared quite a strong language learning orientation, coupled with a marked attention to the language itself when they access audiovisual media in English. This appears to reflect a perception of the L2 as a language to be learned rather than just used for communication purposes, even when approaching English informally. If learner-viewers have an awareness of the learning potential of contact with the L2, they are more likely to perceive the language as a second or foreign language, rather than a lingua franca. The evaluation of native varieties as expressions of the authentic norms to pursue and the desire to learn the language as a motivation to access English-language media are two aspects of the same stance. They both project learners' awareness of the transient and goal-oriented nature of their developing L2.

Finally, the pervasive exposure to native English through television and internet genres should also be considered in view of the implications it bears for the distinction between EFL/ESL and ELF. As the data presented above show, the students surveyed at the University of Pavia spend a significant amount of their free time watching audiovisual products. Films and TV-series overwhelmingly stage native speakers' dialogues, although increasingly intermingled with multilingual and multicultural voices. It is an empirical question to ascertain whether the prevalence of native speakers' input embedded in a consonant cultural background affects learner-users' stance towards English. Only further research can shed light on how they perceive themselves as either acquirers or users of the language in these media environments where native speakers' English, or Englishes, still prevail.

7.
Shifting landscapes

English is the language that is most frequently accessed out of formal learning contexts, with more and more L2 users regularly engaging in a vast array of self-directed activities focused on information-seeking, entertainment and socialisation. These involve access to English-language websites, social media, audiovisual products through satellite television or video and streaming platforms, digital games and offline and online interactions with peers. The greater spread and availability of media affordances have opened up novel opportunities of L2 access and acquisition even in national communities where traditionally contact with English has been mainly restricted to educational settings and few other occasions of social interaction. While Italy is a country where children are taught English from a very early age, its citizens' language proficiency still lags behind that of many other Europeans. However, the noticeable increase in extramural, naturalistic contact with English that has recently affected several European countries – dubbing regions included – suggests that a similar trend of informalisation in exposure to English may be taking place within our national border as well.

The questionnaire distributed to a sample of Italian postgraduate students from the University of Pavia has relayed a dynamic picture of rising, although differentiated, informal exposure to English, alongside a keen interest in the language and growing motivation to learn it. These trends pertain to the majority of the respondents, but by all means not all, as a good share of the survey respondents are still unaccustomed to accessing English outside educational precincts. According to participants' reports, several media such as TV-series, online videos, social networks, web pages and songs are accessed often or very often in English – as opposed to others like forums, blogs, videogames and face-to-face interaction, activities with which students do not engage frequently or at all.

Since the patterns emerging from the survey may reflect changes and tendencies occurring in the country at large and especially concerning the younger

generations, it is crucial to understand the fluid and dynamic nature of the L2 input itself, and the role it plays in the enhancement of new acquisitional profiles. The increasing informal contacts with the language have repercussions on learner-users' identities and beliefs, competence and skill development, L2 input and output. They also impact on the interrelationship between informal learning extramurally and formal education inside schools and universities. Formal learning and teaching are still there, but the questions are: what functions do they have with reference to what happens outside the language classroom? And what are the effects of today's media saturation on SLA and on the emerging acquisitional contexts? Are university students in Italy going to develop the required fluency in spoken, colloquial English as reported for countries that have long experienced the availability of subtitled original audiovisual products?

The primacy of oralised language registers at present matches the growing interest in spoken English and spoken grammar in applied linguistics and SLA, as well as the more recent attention to multimodality and multiliteracies. Oralised registers do not only include the fictional interactions represented on screen in film and television dialogues. They also encompass the hybrid discourse of many internet genres and registers, which come to represent innovative dimensions of texts (or hypertexts) and written language use, characterised by greater fluidity and informality and not subject to the traditional norms and canons of writing. Internet-based media thus have profound implications for both L1 and L2 literacy and learners' written competence, resulting in today's thriving reflection on new and digital literacies and the role of education as the promoter of textual awareness (Palermo 2017). As evidenced in recent statistics, the booming of internet communication goes hand in hand with the spread of English, a fact that could unfortunately reduce the space previously occupied by other languages. These trends reflect two parallel effects of globalisation, which, however, is at the origin of the increasingly multilingual web that we experience today. As a locus of superdiversity, the web might enhance linguistic justice and participation through EFL, ESL, ELF shifting identities along with language contact and translanguaging, involving and fostering speaker-users' multilingual competences. Our data still testify to a scarce degree of participation in web-based exchanges, with a prevalence of receptive and monodirectional activities over more typically interactional ones. Yet, Italian users' active participation may rise in the next few years, entailing not only a more participated use of English among the younger generations, even in such a relatively recent setting as Italy may be, but also bringing about a wider diversification of languaging and translanguaging practices. Informal access to audiovisual dialogue in other languages is still limited in the sample and no query actually tapped multilingual uses in differ-

ent media. Nonetheless, the interaction among English, the mother tongue and other known languages is likely to contribute increasingly to the complexity of the university students' linguistic experience in informal settings (Godwin-Jones 2020: 458-459). Users' participation involves partaking in culturally organised activities, which is essential for learning to materialise and "entails not just the obvious case of interaction with others, but also the artefacts that others have produced, including written texts" (Lantolf *et al.* 2015: 218). The multiplicity of resources and the vast availability of English and Englishes within arm's length and at fingertips are bound to radically bear on young generations' behaviours and L2 developmental paths. These effects still need to be illuminated on a larger scale. What is needed to fully explore the ongoing shift and informalisation of English language learning today are more quantitative surveys, qualitative and ethnographic studies in different settings, as well as investigations of individuals' acquisitional trajectories.

At the time this volume is being released, we are witnessing a booming of internet use linked to an unmatched global situation – the COVID-19 pandemic. Never before has the web been so essential in our everyday lives, from remote working and distance education to contact with faraway family members and friends, to leisure, knowledge seeking and exercise. A possible implication of this boost may be an upsurge in encounters with English. The upshots of such unprecedented linguistic and communicative circumstances are there to be probed while they impact on a process already in progress, as emerged in the present study.

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Appendix – The questionnaire

Il presente questionario anonimo ha lo scopo di individuare le modalità di accesso alla lingua inglese da parte di studenti delle lauree magistrali. I risultati saranno utilizzati all'interno del progetto di Ateneo *Migrating* e del network internazionale *Audiovisual translation as cross-cultural mediation: Tapping the power of foreign language films*.

Siamo molto grati per la tua disponibilità.

A. INFORMAZIONI ANAGRAFICHE

1. Sesso:
   □   Maschio
   □   Femmina

2. Età (indicare anno di nascita): |__|__|__|__|

3. Corso di laurea: _____

4. Anno di corso:
   □   I
   □   II

5. Provincia di residenza (indicare la sigla): |__|__|

6. Qual è la lingua che si parla nel tuo Paese (lingua madre)?
   □   Italiano
   □   Inglese
   □   Francese
   □   Spagnolo
   □   Tedesco
   □   Portoghese
   □   Russo
   □   Rumeno
   □   Albanese
   □   Lingue nordiche (svedese, danese, norvegese, finlandese)
   □   Arabo
   □   Cinese

▢ Giapponese
▢ Altre lingue africane
▢ Altre lingue orientali

7. Numero di lingue conosciute oltre alla propria lingua madre (almeno a livello elementare):
▢ 1
▢ 2
▢ 3
▢ 4

8. A che età hai iniziato a studiare la lingua inglese?: |__|__|

9.In inglese, ritieni che la tua competenza sia:

▢ A un livello elementare (corrispondente a livello A2)
▢ A un livello intermedio (corrispondente alle certificazioni PET - Preliminary English Test- B1 e FCE - First Certificate in English-B2)
▢ A un livello avanzato (corrispondente alla certificazione CAE-Certificate in Advanced English-C1)
▢ Nativa o vicina a quella di un nativo (corrispondente alla certificazione CPE-Certificate of Proficiency in English-C2)

10. Hai trascorso un periodo di studio all'estero con il progetto Erasmus o altri programmi di scambio?
▢ Sì
▢ No

10.1 Se la risposta è Sì, quanto tempo hai trascorso all'estero con il Progetto Erasmus?
▢ 1-3 mesi
▢ 3-6 mesi
▢ 9-12 mesi
▢ Altro (specificare) _____

B. QUALI SONO LE MODALITÀ CON CUI ACCEDI ALLA LINGUA INGLESE AL DI FUORI DEI CORSI DI LINGUA INGLESE?

1) Programmi televisivi e film inglesi o americani
1.1. Guardi film o programmi quali serie, news, talk show ecc. in lingua inglese? (Se la risposta è NO, vai direttamente al punto 2)
▢ Sì   ▢ No

1.2. Preferisci guardare:
- □ Film
- □ Serie TV
- □ Entrambi

FREQUENZA

1.3. Quanto spesso guardi film?
- □ Molto spesso (tutti i giorni)
- □ Spesso (da 1 a 2 volte alla settimana)
- □ Qualche volta (una volta ogni 15 giorni)
- □ Raramente (1 volta al mese o meno)

1.3.1 Quanto spesso guardi le serie TV?
- □ Molto spesso (tutti i giorni)
- □ Spesso (da 1 a 2 volte alla settimana)

1.3.1.2 Per quanto tempo guardi le serie ogni volta?
- □ Più di due ore
- □ Da una a due ore
- □ Circa un'ora
- □ Da trenta minuti a un'ora
- □ Meno di trenta minuti

FILM

1.4. Ti piace guardare film americani o inglesi (sono possibili più risposte):
- □ Per la qualità estetica delle scene
- □ Per gli effetti speciali
- □ Per imparare la lingua straniera
- □ Perché ti immedesimi con i personaggi
- □ Perché i film hanno una loro unità e conclusione
- □ Perché li guardi in compagnia
- □ Per il piacere di ascoltare i dialoghi
- □ Per capire gli usi e i costumi dei Paesi di lingua inglese
- □ Perché la lingua è più accessibile rispetto a quella delle serie TV
- □ Per poterne discutere con altre persone
- □ Altro (specificare) _____

1.4.1. Ti piace guardare film in:
- □ Italiano doppiato
- □ Lingua originale
- □ Entrambi

☐ 1.4.1.2 Se guardi film in <u>italiano doppiato</u>, lo fai perché (sono possibili più risposte):

- ☐ Preferisci andare al cinema
- ☐ Li guardi insieme ad altre persone che non capiscono l'inglese
- ☐ Il film che ti interessa non è disponibile in lingua originale
- ☐ Il doppiaggio dei film è solitamente di buona qualità
- ☐ Non afferri tutti i contenuti se i dialoghi sono in lingua originale
- ☐ Altro (specificare) _____

1.4.1.3 Se guardi film in <u>lingua originale</u> (con o senza sottotitoli), lo fai perché (sono possibili più risposte):
- ☐ Ti piace ascoltare la voce degli attori
- ☐ I dialoghi originali sono più naturali
- ☐ Vuoi imparare la lingua
- ☐ Vuoi cogliere tutte le sfumature e i giochi linguistici, lo humour ecc.

SERIE TV
1.5. Ti piace guardare le serie TV americane e inglesi (sono possibili più risposte):
- ☐ Perché gli episodi hanno una durata limitata
- ☐ Perché ti affezioni ai personaggi
- ☐ Per il piacere di ascoltare i dialoghi
- ☐ Perché ne discuti con altre persone (su forum, social network o faccia a faccia)
- ☐ Per imparare la lingua straniera
- ☐ Per la qualità estetica delle scene
- ☐ Per gli effetti speciali
- ☐ Per capire gli usi e i costumi dei Paesi di lingua inglese
- ☐ Perché la lingua è più accessibile rispetto a quella dei film
- ☐ Perché ti immedesimi con i personaggi
- ☐ Altro (specificare) _____

1.5.1 Preferisci guardare le serie in:
- ☐ Italiano doppiato
- ☐ Lingua originale
- ☐ Entrambi

1.5.1.2 Se guardi serie TV in <u>italiano doppiato</u>, lo fai perché (sono possibili più risposte):
- ☐ Puoi guardarle con altre persone
- ☐ Non afferri tutti i concetti se le guardi in originale
- ☐ La serie non è reperibile in lingua originale
- ☐ Il doppiaggio è solitamente di buona qualità

▢ Altro (specificare)_____

1.5.1.3 Se guardi serie TV in <u>lingua originale</u> (con o senza sottotitoli) lo fai per-ché (sono possibili più risposte):
▢ Ti piace ascoltare la voce degli attori
▢ I dialoghi originali sono più naturali
▢ Vuoi imparare la lingua straniera
▢ Vuoi cogliere tutte le sfumature ei giochi linguistici, lo humour ecc.
▢ Il doppiaggio italiano è scadente
▢ Altro (specificare) _____

SOTTOTITOLI
1.6. Se guardi film <u>in lingua inglese</u>, li preferisci:
▢ Con sottotitoli
▢ Senza sottotitoli (passa a 1.6.1.2.3)

1.6.1 Se guardi film in lingua inglese <u>con sottotitoli</u>, quale tipo di sottotitoli preferisci?
▢ Sottotitoli in lingua originale
▢ Sottotitoli in italiano

1.6.1.1 Se guardi serie TV <u>in lingua inglese</u>, le preferisci:
▢ Con sottotitoli
▢ Senza sottotitoli

1.6.1.2 Se guardi serie TV in lingua inglese <u>con sottotitoli</u>, quale tipo di sottoti-toli preferisci?
▢ Sottotitoli in lingua originale
▢ Sottotitoli in italiano

1.6.1.2.1 Se guardi film e/o serie TV in lingua inglese <u>sottotitolati in lingua originale</u>, lo fai perché (sono possibili più risposte):
▢ Ti aiutano nella comprensione del dialogo originale
▢ Ti aiutano a ricordare lo spelling delle parole inglesi
▢ Vuoi vedere scritto ciò che senti oralmente
▢ Pensi di imparare di più ascoltando il dialogo originale con i sottotitoli in inglese
▢ Vuoi imparare nuove espressioni e forme
▢ Perché la versione con sottotitoli in lingua originale è disponibile prima
▢ La qualità dei sottotitoli in italiano non è soddisfacente
▢ Altro (specificare) _____

1.6.1.2.2 Se guardi film e /o serie TV in lingua inglese <u>sottotitolati in italiano</u>, lo fai perché (sono possibili più risposte):

- □ Ti sono utili nella comprensione del dialogo originale
- □ Ti interessa vedere la traduzione
- □ Perché la versione con sottotitoli in italiano è disponibile prima
- □ I sottotitoli in inglese ti risultano troppo difficili
- □ Leggi più velocemente in italiano che in inglese
- □ Altro (specificare)_____

1.6.1.2.3. Se guardi film e/o serie TV e film in inglese <u>senza sottotitoli</u>, lo fai perché (sono possibili più risposte):

- □ I sottotitoli sono troppo lunghi e veloci
- □ I sottotitoli ti distraggono dalla visione del film/dell'episodio
- □ Pensi di imparare di più ascoltando direttamente il dialogo originale senza l'aiuto di sottotitoli
- □ I sottotitoli spesso non corrispondono al dialogo
- □ Altro (specificare) _____

DOVE GUARDI FILM/SERIE TV?

1.7. Preferisci guardare i film

- □ Al cinema
- □ In TV
- □ Su Internet

1.7.1 Per quale motivo?

_____
_____
_____
_____

1.7.2 Preferisci guardare le serie TV:

- □ In TV
- □ Su Internet

1.7.2.1 Per quale motivo?

_____
_____
_____
_____

GENERI

1.8. Se guardi film inglesi o americani, quali generi preferisci? (sono possibili più risposte)

- □ Commedie
- □ Film di animazione
- □ Film di avventura
- □ Film d'azione
- □ Film comici
- □ Film di fantascienza
- □ Film biografici
- □ Film drammatici
- □ Film storici
- □ Film fantasy
- □ Gialli
- □ Film horror
- □ Film polizieschi
- □ Film sentimentali
- □ Thriller

1.8.1. Se guardi serie TV britanniche o americane, elenca quelle che segui abitualmente:

_____
_____
_____
_____

1.8.2 A parte film e serie TV, quali altri generi ti piace guardare?

- □ Sport
- □ Talk show
- □ Reality show
- □ Concerti
- □ Varietà
- □ Documentari
- □ Programmi di cucina
- □ News

FILM E PROGRAMMI TV IN ALTRE LINGUE STRANIERE (per es: in francese, tedesco, spagnolo)

1.9. Ti capita di guardare programmi TV e film in altre lingue straniere?

- □ Sì   □ No

1.9.1 Se la risposta è SÌ, in quali altre lingue straniere?
- □ Francese
- □ Tedesco
- □ Spagnolo
- □ Giapponese
- □ Altro (specificare)_____

1.9.1.1. Preferisci guardarli:
- □ Doppiati
- □ In lingua originale senza sottotitoli
- □ In lingua originale con sottotitoli nella stessa lingua
- □ In lingua originale con sottotitoli in lingua italiana
- □ In lingua originale con sottotitoli in inglese
- □ Dipende dalla lingua (specificare)_____

1.9.2. Ti capita di guardare film/serie TV in italiano sottotitolati in inglese?
- □ Sì   □ No

1.9.2.1 Se sì, quanto spesso?
- □ Molto spesso (tutti i giorni)
- □ Spesso (da 1 a 2 volte alla settimana)
- □ Qualche volta (una volta ogni 15 giorni)
- □ Raramente (1 volta al mese o meno)

COMPETENZA LINGUISTICA
1.10 Ritieni che la tua competenza linguistica sia migliorata guardando film/serie TV tradotti/sottotitolati?
- □ Sì
- □ No

1.10.1 Se la risposta è Sì, in cosa?
- □ Nell'ascolto
- □ Nel lessico
- □ Nella grammatica
- □ Nella lettura
- □ Nella conversazione

2) YouTube
2.1. Ti capita di cercare contenuti in inglese su YouTube? (se la risposta è NO, vai direttamente al punto 3)
- □ Sì   □ No

2.2. Quanto spesso cerchi contenuti in inglese su YouTube?
- ☐ Molto spesso (tutti i giorni)
- ☐ Spesso (da 1 a 2 volte alla settimana)
- ☐ Qualche volta (una volta ogni 15 giorni)
- ☐ Raramente (1 volta al mese o meno)

2.3. Per quanto tempo guardi video su YouTube ogni volta?
- ☐ Più di due ore
- ☐ Da una a due ore
- ☐ Da 30 minuti a un'ora
- ☐ Da 15 a 30 minuti
- ☐ Meno di 15 minuti

2.4. Quale tipo di video cerchi? (sono possibili più risposte)
- ☐ Video musicali
- ☐ Tutorial
- ☐ Recensioni
- ☐ Scene tratte da film o serie TV
- ☐ Sport
- ☐ Video comici
- ☐ Documentari
- ☐ Ricette di cucina
- ☐ Talk show
- ☐ Gameplay
- ☐ News
- ☐ Trailer
- ☐ Interviste
- ☐ Video virali
- ☐ Altro

3) Videogame

3.1. Ti capita di giocare ai videogame in inglese? (Se la risposta è NO, vai direttamente a l punto 4.)
- ☐ Sì   ☐ No

3.2. Quanto spesso?
- ☐ Molto spesso (tutti i giorni)
- ☐ Spesso (da 1 a 2 volte alla settimana)
- ☐ Qualche volta (una volta ogni 15 giorni)
- ☐ Raramente (1 volta al mese o meno)

3.3. Per quanto tempo ogni volta?
- □ Più di due ore
- □ Da una a due ore
- □ Circa un'ora
- □ Da trenta minuti a un'ora
- □ Meno di trenta minuti

3.4. A quale categoria di videogame giochi? (sono possibili più risposte)
- □ Strategia
- □ Avventura
- □ Azione
- □ Carte
- □ Sport
- □ Quiz e enigmi
- □ Piattaforma
- □ Simulazione
- □ Manageriale
- □ Picchiaduro
- □ Sparatutto
- □ Puzzle
- □ Di ruolo
- □ Musicale
- □ Altro (specificare)_____

4) Social network

4.1 Ti capita di avere accesso a contenuti in lingua inglese sui social network? (Se la risposta è NO, vai direttamente al punto 5.)
- □ Sì   □ No

4.2 Quanto spesso?
- □ Molto spesso (tutti i giorni)
- □ Spesso (da 1 a 2 volte alla settimana)
- □ Qualche volta (una volta ogni 15 giorni)
- □ Raramente (1 volta al mese o meno)

4.3. Per quanto tempo ogni volta?
- □ Più di due ore
- □ Da una a due ore
- □ Circa un'ora
- □ Da trenta minuti a un'ora
- □ Meno di trenta minuti

4.4. Su quali social network? (sono possibili più risposte)
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Pinterest
- ☐ Tumblr
- ☐ Altro (specificare)_____

4.5. In quali contesti? (sono possibili più risposte)
- ☐ Chat
- ☐ Divertimento
- ☐ Organizzazione eventi
- ☐ Ricerca di informazioni
- ☐ Utilizzo del proprio account in inglese
- ☐ Altro (specificare)_____

5) Forum e blog
5.1. Accedi a blog in lingua inglese? (Se la risposta è NO, vai direttamente al punto 5.5)
- ☐ Sì   ☐ No

5.2. Quanto spesso?
- ☐ Molto spesso (tutti i giorni)
- ☐ Spesso (da 1 a 2 volte alla settimana)
- ☐ Qualche volta (una volta ogni 15 giorni)
- ☐ Raramente (1 volta al mese o meno)

5.3. Per quanto tempo ogni volta?
- ☐ Più di due ore
- ☐ Da una a due ore
- ☐ Circa un'ora
- ☐ Da trenta minuti a un'ora
- ☐ Meno di trenta minuti

5.4. A quali tipi di blog accedi? (sono possibili più risposte)
- ☐ Cucina
- ☐ Libri
- ☐ Blog femminili
- ☐ Diari
- ☐ Auto

    □ Tecnologia
    □ Sport e fitness
    □ Cinema
    □ Musica
    □ Altro (specificare)_____

5.5. Accedi a forum in lingua inglese? (Se la risposta è NO, vai direttamente al punto 6.)
    □ Sì   □ No

5.6. Quanto spesso?
    □ Molto spesso (tutti i giorni)
    □ Spesso (da 1 a 2 volte alla settimana)
    □ Qualche volta (una volta ogni 15 giorni)
    □ Raramente (1 volta al mese o meno)

5.7. Per quanto tempo ogni volta?
    □ Più di due ore
    □ Da una a due ore
    □ Circa un'ora
    □ Da trenta minuti a un'ora
    □ Meno di trenta minuti

5.8. A quali tipi di forum accedi? (sono possibili più risposte)
    □ Forum femminili
    □ Cucina
    □ Libri
    □ Diari
    □ Auto
    □ Tecnologia
    □ Sport e fitness
    □ Cinema
    □ Musica
    □ Altro (specificare)_____

6) Ricerche web
6.1 Ti capita di navigare su pagine web in inglese? (Se la risposta è NO, vai direttamente al punto 7)
    □ Sì   □ No

6.2. Quanto spesso ti capita di navigare su pagine web in inglese?
- □ Molto spesso (tutti i giorni)
- □ Spesso (da 1 a 2 volte alla settimana)
- □ Qualche volta (una volta ogni 15 giorni)
- □ Raramente (1 volta al mese o meno)

6.3. Con quale scopo? (sono possibili più risposte)
- □ Ricerca di informazioni per interesse personale
- □ Ricerche universitarie
- □ Svago
- □ Altro (specificare)_____

7) Email

7.1. Quanto spesso ti capita di ricevere email in lingua inglese?
- □ Molto spesso (tutti i giorni)
- □ Spesso (da 1 a 2 volte alla settimana)
- □ Qualche volta (una volta ogni 15 giorni)
- □ Raramente (1 volta al mese o meno)
- □ Mai

8) Smartphone e app

8.1 Ti capita di accedere a contenuti in inglese anche su smartphone e tablet (app, ricerche web, guardare video ecc.)? (Se la risposta è NO, vai direttamente al punto 9.)
- □ Sì   □ No

8.2. Quanto spesso?
- □ Molto spesso (tutti i giorni)
- □ Spesso (da 1 a 2 volte alla settimana)
- □ Qualche volta (una volta ogni 15 giorni)
- □ Raramente (1 volta al mese o meno)

8.3. Per quanto tempo ogni volta?
- □ Più di due ore
- □ Da una a due ore
- □ Circa un'ora
- □ Da trenta minuti a un'ora
- □ Meno di trenta minuti

9) Musica

9.1 Quando ascolti la musica in inglese, ti concentri sul testo delle canzoni? (Se la risposta è NO, vai direttamente al punto 10).
- □ Sì   □ No

9.2. Quanto spesso?
 □ Molto spesso (tutti i giorni)
 □ Spesso (da 1 a 2 volte alla settimana)
 □ Qualche volta (una volta ogni 15 giorni)
 □ Raramente (1 volta al mese o meno)

9.3. Ti concentri sul testo di:
 □ tutte le canzoni
 □ la maggior parte delle canzoni
 □ alcune canzoni
 □ solo poche canzoni

9.4. Quale genere di canzoni ascolti in inglese? (sono possibili più risposte)
 □ Rock
 □ Pop
 □ Blues
 □ Hip-hop
 □ Jazz
 □ Metal
 □ Indie
 □ Folk
 □ Rap
 □ R&B
 □ Dance
 □ House
 □ Elettronica
 □ Country

9.5. Ritieni che la tua competenza linguistica in inglese sia migliorata prestando attenzione al testo di canzoni in lingua inglese?
 □ Sì   □ No

9.6. se la risposta è Sì, in cosa?
 □ Nell'ascolto
 □ Nel lessico
 □ Nella grammatica
 □ Nella conversazione

10) Interazione faccia a faccia
10.1. Al di fuori dei media qui elencati, hai contatti di persona faccia a faccia con persone con cui comunichi in inglese?
 □ Sì   □ No

10.2. Quanto spesso?
- □ Molto spesso (tutti i giorni)
- □ Spesso (da 1 a 2 volte alla settimana)
- □ Qualche volta (una volta ogni 15 giorni)
- □ Raramente (1 volta al mese o meno)

10.3. Per quanto tempo ogni volta?
- □ Più di due ore
- □ Da una a due ore
- □ Da 30 minuti a un'ora
- □ Da 15 a 30 minuti
- □ Meno di 15 minuti

10.4. Con chi ti capita di interagire?
- □ Parenti
- □ Amici
- □ Conoscenti
- □ Compagni di università
- □ Altro (specificare)_____

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