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DANIELA SORRENTINO

## Teaching writing across languages in the Italian secondary school. An intervention-based study with learners of German as a third foreign language and effects in a plurilingual perspective

### *Abstract*

This paper presents an intervention carried out in the context of a research on the teaching of argumentative writing to Italian-speaking secondary school learners of German as a third foreign language after English and French. The study was designed with the dual aim of testing the hypothesis of an improvement in writing performance in German and in the other foreign languages. To this end, a mixed-methods approach was adopted and various empirical data were collected, including a plurilingual corpus of argumentative texts written by learners in German, English, French and Italian before and after the intervention. The article discusses some theoretical foundations of plurilingual writing in relation to the possibilities of teaching argumentative writing in an educational setting. In this context, a writing arrangement embedded in the teaching of German as a tertiary language is presented. Finally, writing processes and strategies are examined from a cross-linguistic perspective through a partial analysis of the data collected during the research study. The paper concludes with some reflections on the role of foreign language teachers in promoting plurilingual writing in the school context.

### *Keywords*

Plurilingual writing, argumentative writing, writing intervention, transfer of writing skills, writing in the tertiary language

### *1. Introduction*

The article presents a research study aimed at promoting argumentative plurilingual text production strategies in Italian secondary school students learning German as a third foreign language. A writing intervention in German was carried out through an argumentative task in a special writing arrangement, i.e. a didactic setting for text production, designed to support plurilingual writing. The impact of the intervention on the quality of writing and the writing process was investigated not only in German, but also in the learners' other languages, including Italian, through the analysis of different learner data. The choice of argumen-

tative writing is supported, on the one hand, by its relevance in the writing curriculum of the Italian upper secondary school and, on the other hand, by the need for didactic support in this area. Another reason is that, at the time of my study, the participating students had experienced little or no exposure to argumentative writing, either in their first language or in foreign language classes, making its promotion in the German classroom an opportune choice. The results indicate a general improvement in writing performance and strategies from a plurilingual perspective, both in terms of text products and writing processes. At the same time, they allow the differentiation of individual factors that may play a role in this improvement.

## *2. Research design*

The present work is part of a larger study that aims to contribute to the still under-researched field of written text production in German as a tertiary language among Italian upper secondary school learners, also taking into account the students' writing skills in their other languages, i.e. English as a first foreign language, French as a second foreign language and Italian as a mother tongue. In tertiary language research, the term 'tertiary language' refers to the language learnt after the first language (L1) and the first foreign language (L2) (Marx 2016: 295). In the school context, however, the term can also include any other foreign language learnt after the first foreign language, regardless of the chronological order (Fäcke & Meißner 2019: 415). This also applies, for example, if it is the third foreign language learnt (Hufeisen & Neuner 2003: 5), as is the case in the present study.

At the centre of my work is the question of how effective cross-linguistic use and transfer of writing strategies can be promoted, starting with the teaching of German as a tertiary language. Investigating the potential cross-linguistic dimension of writing production and the ways in which it can be fostered in plurilingual and tertiary language classrooms is a highly topical research issue. While research has so far focused on receptive skills, especially in related foreign languages (Bonvino et al. 2011, Hufeisen and Marx 2014), recent studies have highlighted the interactions of productive skills in plurilingual writing, showing that writing strategies can also be multidirectionally transferred between learners' languages, both from the first language (L1) to the first (L2) and other foreign languages (L3) and vice versa (Forbes 2021, Manno et al. 2020, Sorger et al. 2013). Furthermore, it has been found that plurilingual transfer of writing strategies and processes can be didactically supported, in particular by raising learners' awareness of metacognitive strategies (Forbes 2021) and of linguistic actions and text patterns (Rüßmann et al. 2016).

On the basis of these findings, and drawing on a concept of transfer as a dynamic, pluridirectional process of transferring declarative and procedural knowledge from one language to another, which can be didactically supported (Marx 2020), it was assumed that in a didactic context, under certain conditions, a multidirec-

tional transfer of writing skills and strategies from the tertiary language German to the other (foreign) languages of the learners might be possible. As Marx (ibid.: 20) notes, studying transfer from a plurilingual didactic perspective requires a complex research design and a teaching intervention in which something that has not yet been learnt in a particular language is introduced into the classroom and then checked to see if it is taken up in other languages. In this context, the quality of texts and writing processes, and the differences between them in different languages, may depend on a very complex set of conditions. For example, more than one language may be used for cognitive operations, learners may have different writing and linguistic skills, and they usually also bring a variety of learning and writing practices from their school and language classes. In addition, there are reciprocal influences between languages, phenomena of transfer of oral means of expression and the fact that also the development of writing in the L1 is not yet complete. Finally, there are individual differences between learners and extra-curricular factors such as family, social and cultural background.

Approaching this complex area of research methodologically requires intra-individual surveys of the same learners in different languages, focusing not only on writing products but also on processes and learner-related factors, ideally combining different research methods (Janíková & Reitbrecht 2014: 83-85). On this basis, my research adopted a mixed-methods approach and collected various empirical data: a corpus of learner texts in German, English, French and Italian, a questionnaire to collect metadata on learners' biographies and writing experiences, a learning diary kept throughout the study, and retrospective interviews with some students. In addition, a group discussion was held with the teachers of German, English, French and Italian. These data were analysed using quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods, for example by examining changes in the quality of writing through a one-group pre-test post-test research design (Albert/Marx 2016: 89). The role of individual, linguistic and extra-linguistic factors was also taken into account in order to gain a detailed insight into the strategies and processes of text production in the learners' different languages.

### *3. Teaching writing skills in a cross-linguistic dimension*

Writing competence requires the efficient, task-oriented control of the writing process as well as the competent handling of different text types and linguistic structures so that the addressee can (re)construct the written text as a coherent unit. In the debate on which pedagogical measures are appropriate to support writing processes and strategies in a plurilingual perspective, a cross-linguistic approach is advocated, which focuses on transferable knowledge and skills and, at the same time, promotes the linking of languages in the classroom, also with regard to writing processes and practices. One possible strategy in this context is to raise awareness with the aim of actively accessing and applying existing and new knowledge in more than one language. For example, teaching transferable

knowledge about text patterns and text types and encouraging reflection on language learning processes and experiences (Forbes 2021) can have a metacognitive facilitating effect on plurilingual writing and facilitate planning and formulation strategies.

For several reasons, the foreign language classroom has emerged as a privileged setting for the development of plurilingual writing skills. Explicit writing training often takes place in the foreign language rather than in the first language teaching, so that potential transfer bases from the L1 to the learners' foreign languages are missing and may rather occur in the opposite direction (Dengschertz 2010). In addition, foreign language teaching can encourage learners to reflect consciously on their own writing processes and strategies. Forbes (2021: 296, 214) states that:

the FL classroom, where students are more explicit aware of and engaged in their thinking about language (as compared to the L1 classroom), provides an environment which is highly conducive to the development of valuable metacognitive skills that relate to language more broadly. (...) [It] may be a key context for developing transferable metacognitive writing strategies which can also benefit the L1.

In this respect, tertiary language teaching in particular, where learner awareness is central (Hufeisen and Neuner 2003), offers a particularly suitable environment for training awareness of linguistic and textual knowledge as well as of one's own writing and writing learning processes. For this purpose, a special writing arrangement was designed in which the learners acted in a cross-linguistic dimension: the intervention initially took place in the German classroom, but then the boundaries between the learners' other languages were crossed. From a didactic-methodological point of view, the aim was to combine methods of process-oriented writing didactics with pragmalinguistic approaches oriented towards linguistic action in texts and based on a close interdependence between reading and writing skills (Feilke et al. 2016).

#### *4. Characteristics of the writing arrangement*

Argumentative writing is about making the controversial plausible in one's own text. According to Toulmin (1996, 86 ff.), the basic structure of an argumentation is characterised by a controversial position supported by arguments that are formulated and developed on a common ground of shared values and knowledge. Studies concerning the development of argumentative writing skills show a relatively language-independent developmental process through various stages, ranging from the subjective selection of arguments in associative order to their objective selection and synthetic integration. In general, there is an improvement in the quality of texts, which is accompanied by an increasing degree of coherence and greater consideration of the role of the reader (Augst et al. 2007, De Bernardi & Antolini 1996).

Feilke's (2014) so-called text procedure model – *Textprozeduren* – has shown great didactic potential in the teaching of argumentative writing, also from a pluri-

lingual perspective. Text procedures are context- and text-type-specific expressions that include grammatical constructions as well as lexical phrases and denote linguistic action components relevant to text composition – such as marking one's own position with expressions like *Ich denke, dass...* or *meiner Meinung nach ...* or conceding with grammatical structures like *zwar...*, *aber...* (ibid.: 16). They evoke a particular scheme or pattern of linguistic action, stand between the writing process and the product in terms of content generation, and correlate with high text quality in learners' written productions<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, the writing arrangement was action and text oriented, focusing on typical argumentative text procedures, but also process oriented, sequencing the writing process in the steps of planning, formulating, and revising<sup>2</sup> (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1987). It provided further strategic support for managing the writing process in class by discussing individual writing strategies based on Ortner's (2000) classification proposal and ways of making notes and mind maps to find ideas and develop the argumentation. In addition, text revision was facilitated through a checklist-guided annotation of one's own texts, covering various aspects of text composition. Finally, the writing arrangement was designed to give learners the opportunity to reflect on what they had written and on their own writing learning process. To this end, they recorded spontaneous comments in a learning diary during the intervention.

The writing arrangement was characterised by a strong link between reading and writing activities. The writing task was embedded in a concrete action sequence in which the learners wrote a letter to different addressees in different situations and were asked to take a position on a certain controversy. Then there was the confrontation with authentic argumentative text examples related to the topic and the subsequent joint reconstruction of an argumentative text model, which is presented below:

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<sup>1</sup> Text procedures also represent a didactically relevant factor from an intralingual perspective, as learners tend to transfer them from one language to another (Rüßmann et al. 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Although writing processes can take very different individual courses (Ortner 2000), even in a plurilingual context (Lange 2002), the project assumed that sequencing the writing process into its basic components would lead to a better and more conscious writing.



Fig. 1 – *Reconstruction of an argumentative text model in the German class*

- Einleitung  
in die Kontroverse einführen: *eine strittige Frage ist...; man diskutiert oft über die Frage...*  
gegensätzliche Positionen kontrastieren: *Einige meinen, dass...andere hingegen sind der Ansicht, dass...; im Gegensatz/im Unterschied zu ...; demgegenüber...*
- Eigene Positionierung  
These formulieren: *meiner Meinung nach...; meines Erachtens...; ich denke, dass...; ich finde, dass...; ich bin der Ansicht, dass...*  
modalisieren: *vielleicht...; möglicherweise...; es könnte sein, dass...*
- Anführen von Argumenten  
begründen: *weil...; da...; denn...*  
schließen: *deshalb...; aus diesen Gründen...; infolgedessen...*  
Argumente hinzufügen: *ein weiterer Vorteil ist...; dafür spricht auch, dass...; man muss auch bedenken, dass...; hinzu kommt, dass...; außerdem...*  
Argumente strukturieren: *zunächst..., dann/danach..., schließlich...; erstens..., zweitens..., drittens...*  
eigene argumentative Handlungen explizieren: *ich werde einige Gründe nennen...; das beweist, dass...; ich gebe ein Beispiel...*
- Stützung von Argumenten  
ein Beispiel geben: *zum Beispiel...; beispielsweise...; denken wir an...*  
einen Beweis anführen: *ein Beweis dafür ist...; Studien belegen, dass...*
- Antizipation möglicher Einwände und Zurückweisung: *man könnte einwenden, dass...jedoch...; ein Problem könnte sein, dass...jedoch...; zwar...aber/jedoch...; sicherlich...aber/jedoch...*
- Konzession und Zurückweisung: *zwar...aber/jedoch...; sicherlich...aber/jedoch...; es stimmt, dass...aber...; einerseits...andererseits...; zum Einen...zum Anderen...; ich weiß, dass...doch...*
- Redeschluss  
die Hauptpunkte der eigenen Argumentation zusammenfassen: *zusammenfassend...; also...*  
die eigene Position noch einmal bekräftigen: *ich finde/denke deshalb/deshwegen, dass...*

As can be seen, the model included the basic argumentative structure and typical text procedures through the assignment of action schemes and related procedural expressions. It was hypothesised that the writing arrangement described here could have a positive effect on the promotion of writing strategies in German and their transfer to the learners' other languages.

### 5. Implementation of the intervention

The intervention was part of a research study carried out with 42 learners aged between 16 and 17 from two third-year classes at a *liceo linguistico* (modern language secondary school) in Sant'Arcangelo (PZ) in the southern Italian region of Basilicata. The students acted in an explicitly plurilingual teaching and learning environment where German was their third foreign language, after English as their first and French as their second. At the time of the study, the learners' expected language proficiency in German and French was on average between levels A2 and



B1, and in English between levels B1 and B2<sup>3</sup>. The didactic intervention took place between November 2016 and January 2017, with 32 lessons per class and a total duration of eight weeks. It was carried out by me as the German teacher of the two classes participating in the project and started with the spontaneous production – without any guidance – of four different argumentative texts in German, English, French and Italian within four weeks between October and November 2016. As mentioned above, the proposed writing tasks consisted of the learners spontaneously writing a letter to different addressees based on different potentially authentic communicative situations and taking a position on a certain controversy<sup>4</sup>. The next phase of the intervention related exclusively to the German classes, where an argumentative writing arrangement was set up based on the following steps:

- 1) Analysis of the controversy by interacting in groups in order to construct a common argumentative ground and to spontaneously try out certain text procedures;
- 2) Reconstruction of an argumentative text model based on the immediate context of use by reading and analysing authentic text examples on the topic;
- 3) Text production through 1) checklist-guided revision of the first version produced before the intervention, 2) planning and formulating of the second version, 3) checklist-guided revision and 4) formulating of the final version;
- 4) Joint final discussion about the texts produced and about the learners' own writing learning process.

Text production was therefore primarily about the revising production of one's own texts as a dynamic form of writing, that could be improved step by step. The learners produced a total of three versions of their text, commenting on and revising the first and second versions with the help of the checklist until they produced the third and final version. In the final phase of the study, the other languages, i.e. English, French, and Italian, were reintroduced and the learners revised their texts written in these languages over the next three weeks in the same way as they had done in the final phase of the writing intervention in German. For this purpose, they were given a checklist similar to the one for the German text. In this case, they started directly with the production phase, omitting the phases of initial oral interaction between learners and text reception and analysis. The aim was to be able to assess the impact of the intervention in German on the learners' writing in the other languages by observing whether they tended to use their writing resources across languages, thus economising the learning processes in a plurilingual approach to argumentative writing.

<sup>3</sup> This information refers to the school's description of expected language competence at this level.

<sup>4</sup> In German, it was a discussion with parents about whether to get a puppy. In English, the writers were asked to help a pen pal decide whether to move to a big or a small town. In French, it was a discussion about whether to shop online or (traditionally) in a shop. Finally, in Italian, writers were asked to act as mayors of an Italian town and decide whether to continue a partnership in the face of a controversy over the construction of a border fence to keep out refugees in a Hungarian town.

## 6. *Cross-linguistic features and individual factors influencing the use and transfer of writing strategies*

The results of the analysis of the learners' data, which included a comparison of the first and final versions in the four languages in terms of argumentative structure, textual organisation, and language use, as well as the course of the respective writing processes<sup>5</sup> (Sorrentino 2024), suggest an overall positive cross-linguistic effect of the intervention on the learners' writing performance and processes. For example, whereas before the intervention there was a tendency to neglect planning and revision when writing in all languages, after the intervention there was an increased awareness of the writing process and the strategic relevance of planning and revision. In addition, the learners' final texts are in several cases characterised by a better quality of argumentative structure, partly due to more frequent use of text procedures and improved cohesion, and there is a greater awareness of one's own plurilingual repertoire and the strategic potential it offers for writing in several languages. This is evident from the comments that learners wrote in their learning diaries throughout the study, as some examples below show:

Having planned my text with an outline allowed me to improve its content and structure and to approach writing with more composure.

I rarely considered the other side and tended to develop arguments only in favour of the thesis. In the project, I realised that argumentation is more effective when you are able to anticipate and refute the other side's arguments.

Use organising connectors to better link the paragraphs of my text; keep an order between the parts of the text, otherwise the reader cannot follow the argumentation.

It was good to find out that thanks to German I was also able to improve my writing in other languages; although I still don't write well in German, I understood how to improve my argumentative writing in other languages.

At the same time, it is clear that the use and transfer of writing strategies is linked to a dynamic set of factors that can be individually determined. These include learners' level of proficiency, their metacognitive engagement with the writing task, their motivation and attitudes towards writing in the different languages, and their strategic use of other languages in their own repertoire. Particularly positive results can be observed for those learners who have relatively well-developed literacy skills in all languages. This is also in line with previous research findings (see, for example, Schoonen et al. 2011) and can be seen in the following examples, which compare the first and final versions of a learner who had very good language and writing skills in Italian and English and quite good skills in German and French:

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<sup>5</sup> For this purpose, the manifest traces of text planning and text revision in the learners' texts, the notes in the learning diary and the data from the retrospective interviews were taken into account.

Fig. 2 – Texts by the same learner in four languages, first and final versions

<p>Hallo Papa! Wie geht's?</p> <p>Heute bin ich für sieben Stunden in der Universität geblieben, ich habe viel studiert. Gestern habe ich mit Giuseppe gesprochen, ich weiß, dass Mama einen Hund kaufen will. Ich mag Hunde.</p> <p>Wenn ich nach San Chirico komme, kann ich mit ihm spielen. Hunde sind treu und mit ihnen ist man nie allein.</p> <p>Aber du magst nicht Hunde und ich weiß, dass du und Mama immer arbeitet und wenn ihr arbeitet ist der Hund allein, das ist nicht gut!</p> <p>Hunde verlieren viele Haare und du müsst viele Geld für sein Essen ausgeben.</p> <p>Trotz dieser Dingen ich finde, dass es eine gute Idee sein könnte. Ich muss gehen!</p> <p>Tschüss</p>	<p>Hallo Papa! Wie geht's?</p> <p>Heute bin ich für sieben Stunden in der Universität geblieben, ich habe viel studiert. Gestern habe ich mit Giuseppe gesprochen, ich weiß, dass Mama einen Hund kaufen will.</p> <p>Hunde sind die besten Freunde der Menschen. Sie sind treu und man kann mit ihnen spielen. Ein Nachteil ist, dass Hunde viele Haare verlieren zum Beispiel aus dem Bett, dem Tisch, dem Sofa, und du musst viel Geld für sie ausgeben zum Beispiel für den Tierarzt und für das Essen. Jedoch kann er ein tolles Familienmitglied sein. Er ist sehr liebevoll. Sicherlich, wenn du einen Hund hast, sollst du viel Zeit haben, man könnte einwenden, dass du und Mama viel arbeitet, und wenn ihr arbeitet, ist der Hund allein, aber wenn ihr arbeitet, kann Opa mit dem Hund Zeit verbringen, er mag Hunde! Wenn ihr in den Urlaub fahrt, gibt es einen weiteren Nachteil: viele Hotel akzeptieren keine Hunde, aber es gibt viele Hotel, dass Hunde mögen. Zusammenfassend, denke ich dass, es viele Vorteile und Nachteile gibt. Ich finde, dass es eine gute Idee sein könnte Ich muss gehen!</p> <p>Tschüss</p>	<p>Cher journal,</p> <p>Noël t'approche et nous devrions acheter des cadeaux pour nos amis. Mais, où achèterons-nous les cadeaux? Sur le net ou dans les magasins?</p> <p>Je pense qu'acheter les cadeaux sur le net est mieux que les acheter dans les magasins. Si tu habites dans un petit village où il n'y a pas de magasins tu sais que trouver le parfait cadeau est très difficile. Mais, si tu cherches sur le net, tu trouveras beaucoup de robes, en plus, sur le net, tu pourrais trouver des offres très convenables; mais si tu achètes un objet sur le net tu ne sais pas quand il arrivera!</p> <p>Mais, où achèterez-vous les cadeaux?</p>	<p>Cher journal,</p> <p>Noël t'approche et nous devrions sortir et acheter des cadeaux pour nos amis. Mais, est-il nécessaire de sortir pour les acheter? Nous pourrions acheter les cadeaux sur le net! Je pense qu'acheter les cadeaux sur Internet est mieux que les acheter dans les magasins. Sur le site internet d'une boutique de vêtements il y a beaucoup de robes que généralement, tu ne trouves pas dans les magasins, en plus, sur le net tu pourrais trouver des offres très convenables. S'il est vrai que sur le net tu ne trouves pas les vendeurs qui t'aident à choisir le parfait produit, c'est aussi vrai que sur un site internet tu peux trouver les critiques faites par ceux qui ont déjà acheté le produit. En effet, les vendeurs t'aident à choisir le parfait cadeau, toutefois, très souvent, ils sont émissifs! Quant à acheter un objet sur un site internet tu ne sais pas quand il arrivera, cependant, ordinairement, les objets que tu commandes sur Internet arrivent en quelques jours.</p> <p>Donc, où achèterez-vous les cadeaux?</p>
<p>Hi Joseph!</p> <p>I read your letter, the fact that you are leaving England is really sad. Leaving all your friends and learning a new language from zero is the worst thing, that could happen to a 17-year-old boy. As I want to help you, I'll give you some tips: I think that the best place to live in is the city, there are a lot of shops, pubs and restaurants. You could buy a house near a school so you don't have to catch the bus every morning.</p> <p>I live in a really small town and I have to wake up at 6:00 a.m., get ready and catch the bus every single day. Cities give you a lot of opportunities, you can attend language courses, karate courses ... and there are more teenagers to meet, if you don't fit in a group, you can get to know other people. Unfortunately, cities are a bit chaotic but you'll get used to it.</p> <p>Now I have to go!</p>	<p>Hi Joseph!</p> <p>How are you? I've just read your letter, leaving England must be really hard, right? Leaving all your friends, learning a new language ... all these things seem hard challenges, but I know you will be fine soon! You told me you wanted some advice, and you also wanted to know where would I live if I had to leave Italy in a small town or a city? Well, in a small town, you can go wherever you want, it's less dangerous! But in a little town there are not a lot of opportunities and you would just get bored of everything: if you live in a town and you want to go out at night, you can't stay in pubs, restaurants because there aren't any! Of course, when you leave in a city and you go to pubs, cafés you pay more attention because there are a lot of bad people out there, but at least you can do it! In a city there are not only restaurants, cafés, there are also shops, cinemas and in a city you can cultivate your interests, for example, you can attend karate courses, dancing courses, language courses. Besides, there are more teenagers to meet, if you don't fit in a group, you can get to know other people! It's true that in towns, you can find more green places, but in cities there are big parks too. Cities could be a little chaotic but they are also more functional; if you live in a little town, you have to get up early and catch the bus, the train or take the subway every morning to go to school or to work, for example, I live in a really small town and I have to wake up at 6:00 a.m. to get ready and catch the bus every single day but you could buy a house in a city, near a school, so you don't have to use public transport to go there. Well, as you may have noticed, I'd literally live in a city!</p> <p>I have to go now!</p>	<p>Aggrego colleghi,</p> <p>mi è giunta notizia della sua decisione, personalmente non la condivido e credo pertanto che sia giusto interrompere il gemellaggio tra i nostri paesi.</p> <p>Le esporrò i motivi per i quali trovo che la sua decisione sia ingiusta: Viutare l'accesso a migliaia di uomini, donne e bambini che cercano di giungere in Europa fuggendo da una situazione insostenibile è un atto meschino.</p> <p>Gli uomini che arrivano dagli altri Stati non sono in alcun modo inferiori a noi. Pensare a loro come ladri e assassini non è altro che una stupida generalizzazione, anzi, a parte alcune eccezioni, sono proprio loro a fare i lavori più "scomodi" per ricevere un salario minore rispetto a quello di un normale cittadino solo a causa della loro etnia.</p> <p>Nel secolo scorso furono tantissimi gli italiani a scappare via dal loro Paese per avere un futuro migliore e sono diventati una risorsa per il Paese dove sono emigrati.</p> <p>Mi auguro che lei e le mie parole abbiano fatto riflettere Lei e anche i cittadini di Aggrego colleghi. Distinti saluti</p> <p>Il sindaco</p>	<p>Aggrego colleghi,</p> <p>sono venuta a conoscenza del suo progetto di costruzione di un muro anti-migranti e della sua decisione volta a vietare l'ingresso agli uomini provenienti da Paesi in difficoltà. Io non sono d'accordo con la sua decisione e intendo comunicare che il mio paese, San Chirico Raparo, non ha alcuna intenzione di continuare il gemellaggio con la vostra cittadina. Le esporrò i motivi per i quali trovo che la sua decisione sia ingiusta. Vietare l'accesso a migliaia di uomini, donne e bambini che cercano di giungere in Europa fuggendo da una situazione insostenibile è un atto meschino perché significa condannarli alla morte e perché in questo modo veniamo meno al nostro dovere di aiutare i popoli in difficoltà.</p> <p>Gli uomini che arrivano dagli altri Stati non sono in alcun modo inferiori a noi. Pensare a loro come ladri e assassini non è altro che una stupida generalizzazione, anzi, a parte alcune eccezioni, sono proprio loro a fare i lavori più "scomodi" per ricevere un salario minore rispetto a quello di un normale cittadino solo a causa della loro etnia.</p> <p>Conto, per poter accogliere nuove persone bisognerebbe avere una perfetta organizzazione e strutture adatte ed è vero che in molti Paesi questo non succede: per esempio in Italia sono migliaia gli immigrati che vengono "imprigionati" in case-famiglia incapaci di dare loro una spinta efficace verso il mondo esterno, non viene trovato loro un lavoro e sono costretti a vivere di ciò che gli viene dato: una piccolissima parte di denaro non sufficiente per le loro esigenze. Tuttavia, il problema alla base di ciò è provocato dalla disorganizzazione della comunità ospitante, non dai migranti!</p> <p>Infine, i migranti possono essere una risorsa e non un problema. Infatti, caro sindaco, vorrei informarla che, nei secoli precedenti, moltissimi cittadini italiani, sì, quelli che hanno vissuto nella stessa patria con cui Aggrego colleghi ha fatto un gemellaggio fino ad oggi, sono fuggiti verso le Americhe alla ricerca della felicità, sono stati accolti e hanno contribuito allo sviluppo economico e sociale dei paesi in cui sono emigrati.</p> <p>Mi auguro che lei abbia compreso ciò che cerco di dire e spero che la mia lettera possa far cambiare la sua opinione e la scelta che ha fatto.</p> <p>Distinti saluti</p> <p>Il sindaco</p>

The final texts of the learner are longer and of better quality in the four languages, with more elaborated content and argumentative structures using different appropriate text procedures (highlighted in bold) and a higher level of cohesion. In addition to levels of language and writing competence, learners' attitudes and motivation to write in each language also seem to promote interlingual connections in the use of writing strategies. Also relevant is the degree of metacognitive engagement with the writing task, which increases learners' awareness and sensitivity to their own

writing processes and strategies. Below, I quote some comments made by a learner of average proficiency in all languages, who partially improved her writing strategies and performance and was particularly motivated and engaged in her metacognitive management of the writing task:

I didn't plan my texts before, but I realised that planning helps me to clarify my thoughts and structure the text better, even in Italian.

I also realised the importance of more thorough revision. Before, I tended to correct only a few words or sentences while writing, but now I check my text on different levels, because I have noticed that I can improve it in this way... In short, with a little more attention and reflection, I have written much better. I am really happy!

The student explicitly reflects in her learning diary on the relationship between the use of certain writing strategies, here related to text planning and revision and text structure, and the results obtained, also in a cross-linguistic dimension, in terms of text production in the first language. When she wrote her first versions, as she also confirmed in our retrospective interview, she generally did not take notes and tended to concentrate directly on the formulation phase, neglecting the revision phase. Now, when she edits her first versions, she pays more attention to planning and revision and considers the benefits of reflective processes for her writing.

In conclusion, after the intervention, learners generally considered strategies for planning, formulating and revising to be increasingly relevant across languages and, in particular, were more aware of the connection between their writing processes and the quality of their writing performance and text products.

## *7. The role of the teachers*

Teachers, especially foreign language teachers, play a crucial role in promoting plurilingual writing and learning at school, as they can enhance the synergies and connections between different languages and cultures in their language teaching. However, some recent studies, including those from notoriously multilingual regions such as Switzerland, Scandinavia and South Tyrol, show that although teachers recognise the importance of plurilingual didactics in principle, they rarely use them to create a plurilingual learning environment in their classroom practice (see Barras et al. 2019, Daryai-Hansen et al. 2019, Haukås 2019, Stopfner 2021). Communicative interactions also tend to take place exclusively in the target language, with plurilingual resources being used more by teachers who frequently switch between languages depending on the needs of their interlocutors (Stopfner 2021: 22). In addition, language teachers often do not use consistent terminology in the classroom and conceptualise the learning of a third foreign language differently from the learning of an L2, which is why they rarely address the transferability of certain learning strategies (Haukås 2019). Finally, textbooks often lack texts and tasks that support the implementation and transfer of previously acquired language learning strategies (Haukås 2017).

Teachers should therefore be made aware of how they can support learning and writing across (foreign) languages through a plurilingual approach. This includes knowledge of didactic approaches and tools to promote plurilingual writing processes, to develop and raise awareness of useful writing strategies and to make conscious use of already developed language skills (Pilypaitytė 2013: 36). In addition to existing, effective training materials on writing strategies (Oxford 1990, Philip 2014), techniques such as think-aloud protocols for self-observation of one's own writing behaviour should also be implemented in classroom practice (Heine 2020, Krings 1992) in order to raise awareness of writing processes, especially in relation to plurilingual aspects. Furthermore, individual learning needs and plurilingual resources should be taken into account when organising writing tasks. During the writing process, learners should be able to activate and mobilise their whole linguistic repertoire, especially when planning and organising their text and they should be exposed to texts in different languages, including comparative corpora, in order to provide learners with content and formulations from more diverse perspectives.

This goes hand in hand with the acquisition of research skills by teachers, including opportunities to explore and practise research-based teaching in schools through the ability to collect empirical data such as learners' texts, questionnaires and interviews, to use and combine qualitative and quantitative empirical research methods, to analyse texts and writing learning processes in different languages and to manage learning environments on the basis of one's own research teaching objectives. In this context, I argue for greater efforts to link research skills and classroom practice in schools as a worthwhile way to improve the quality of language teaching and learning processes, especially in a country like Italy where the teaching of basic research methodology skills has not yet played a role in foreign language teacher training.

## 8. *Conclusions*

Due to very different and largely independent practices in foreign language teaching, the potential of plurilingual writing in schools is often underestimated and therefore neglected. The study presented here and some of the results of the empirical analysis point to the clear advantages of promoting plurilingual writing through a stronger integration of the learners' languages, in this case starting with the teaching of German as a third foreign language. In this context, it is important to focus on cross-linguistic, transferable linguistic, textual, and strategic knowledge that enables learners to draw on resources from their plurilingual repertoires when writing in several languages.

The examples discussed serve as 'snapshots' of writing strategies and performance at a particular stage of the learning pathway, with the understanding that these skills will develop and strengthen over time. In order to fully realise and analyse the extent of these benefits, it would have been necessary to collect data from the same learners over a longer period of time.



Despite the need for further research, the study provides a basis for foreign language teachers to play a crucial role in promoting plurilingual writing in the school context, as they can be particularly effective in emphasising interlingual connections in writing in their teaching. As Forbes (2018: 2) rightly observes: “Foreign language teachers, therefore, who are able to focus more explicitly on the development of language strategies, are in a unique position to contribute to the overall improvement in writing standards.”

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