

Preface by the editors

This volume gathers together a selection of papers presented at the 14th Annual Symposium on *Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults (LESLLA 2018)*, which was held in Palermo, Italy, from 4th to 6th October 2018.

Almost fifteen years after the first symposium in Tilburg in 2005, the panorama of studies on LESLLA learners has been considerably enriched and refined, in the field of education and in that of second language learning/acquisition (although not to the same extent). This broadening of perspectives and interests, but also of the places and people involved, is well reflected in the Palermo symposium (during which, among other things, an important turning point in the history of the association was sanctioned, as, precisely in that year, LESLLA became a formally constituted international organisation, see <https://www.leslla.org/our-story>).

LESLLA 2018 brought together about 80 presentations (including plenaries, paper and poster sessions), 130 presenters and overall, more than 200 participants, both educators and researchers, from Belgium, Canada, England, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Spain and US. Thematically, the symposium embraced a wide range of topics, organised in nine sessions, namely: 1) plurilingual repertoires, acquisition, metalinguistic awareness; 2) non-formal approaches to learning; 3) language, inclusion, participation; 4) testing and assessment; 5) literacy perspectives, approaches and practices; 6) teaching perspectives, practices and tools; 7) teacher training; 8) educational system and policies; 9) teaching perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, LESLLA 2018 was complemented by the one-day conference on *Alfabetizzazione e italiano L2. Ricerca, pratiche e politiche dalla scuola al volontariato* ('Literacy and L2 Italian. Research, practices and policies from school to volunteering'), held on 3rd October, 2018. This side event was entirely dedicated to Italy and to specific local situations involving the

LESLLA population, which represented an important territorial spin-off of LESLLA research and practices¹.

The 25 articles collected in this volume are grouped in four thematic sections. The first one, “Research perspectives”, has been assigned an introductory role, as it offers some of the most topical views on the major themes outlined in the title of the book: people, languages and literacy in new migration. **Beacco** discusses how language policies developed by States to promote the integration of migrants, while reflecting specific ideological choices, must nevertheless comply with the recommendations of supranational authorities, particularly the Council of Europe, which is at the heart of the article and provides the general framework of values for individual national policies. **D’Agostino and Mocciano** focus on the place of the conference, Palermo, expanding on the opening text of the symposium and accounting for the changes affecting the Italian migration context in recent years. Combining sociolinguistic and linguistic perspectives, they reconstruct the forms of linguistic exchange between the local and new migrants population in one of the main gateways of Europe and the specific conditions for acquiring the local languages by newcomers. By adopting the perspective of superdiversity, **Spotti** describes the sociolinguistic features of a Flemish centre for asylum seekers. In this space, two sociolinguistic regimes contrast: the normative one emerging from the daily life and the one that results from the use of the Web by “guests”, which offers pop-culture models acting as a bond that transcends ethnic, religious and sociolinguistic differences. The section closes with a spotlight on the state of the art of LESLLA studies, pointed by one of its founders. On the basis of a review of the thirteen symposia that preceded the Palermo one, **Young-Scholten** discusses the approaches adopted and the themes addressed, the participants, the countries and languages involved and, above all, highlights how much of the association’s objectives remain unfulfilled or still to be built, and suggests some ways to achieve them.

The other sections variously reflect the keywords that form the

¹ Cf. the Webpage of the conference at:

<https://www.unipa.it/strutture/scuolaitalianastranieri/Ricerca-/Convegni/alfabetizzazione-e-italiano-12.-ricerca-pratiche-e-politiche-dalla-scuola-al-volontariato-palermo-3-ottobre-2018/>.

subtitle of the volume. Section 2, “Second language and literacy acquisition and teaching”, gathers together contributions dedicated to LESLLA learners’ language and literacy skills, as well as to their educational effects. **Asta and Pugliese** address the key issue of migrant learners’ linguistic repertoires and the educational usage of these standard and non-standard languages. Based on a conversation analysis approach, they analyse the use of Nigerian Pidgin English during Italian L2 lessons, which is shown to support communicative needs as well as learning objectives. **Böddeker and Feldmeier** describe *Alphalernberatung*, a project which offers literacy and basic education to adults with limited literacy. During its implementation, also training courses for counselling staff in the social area, learning counselling and self-learning materials in German and different L1 will be developed. **Chao García and Mavrou** analyse error types and spelling strategies in the written productions of adult migrant learners of Spanish and identify the positive or negative correlation of such errors and strategies with various variables, namely length of residence in Spain, learners’ age, gender and level of education in L1. The article by **Cheffy, Haznedar, Minuz, Miles, Peyton and Young-Scholten** focuses on *Heritage language hub*, a new online tool whose aim is to support heritage languages of migrants with limited literacy, as well as their children’s bilingualism through creating access to online resources, e.g., reading and teaching materials, in their languages. **DeCapua and Triulzi** focus on the assumptions underlying school tasks (in Germany and elsewhere), which reflect Western-style formal education and thus literacy. This makes access to educational content and educational success particularly difficult for LESLLA students. The case study proposed by **Di Rosa, Gucciardo, Argento and Leonforte** concerns Sicily. Based on a large-scale survey involving hundreds of unaccompanied minors who were receiving language instruction at a Territorial Centre for Adult Education, the authors highlighted the strong correlation between the language skills of minors and their social inclusion. Also the contribution by **Sabina Fontana** is dedicated to Sicily. She reports on a study conducted in a Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers, where professionals and migrants were involved in an experiential learning process, which showed the relevance of a narrative approach to deconstruct

stereotypes and prejudices. **Guerrero Calle** focuses on the acquisition of Roman alphabet literacy by Eritrean refugees who were literate in a different writing system. Conducted in the German-speaking Switzerland, the study tested the effectiveness of the syllabary approach, whose influence is said to be positive only in the initial teaching phases. **Marongiu, Berretta and Honegger** discuss an L2 teaching tool, the “Enquiry (*Inchiesta*)”, inspired by the principles of active pedagogy. Aimed particularly at adolescents, it combines language learning and teaching with the real interests and needs of the individuals and the group in which they are involved. **Mocciaro** presents the theoretical-methodological premises of a research conducted with a group of new migrants living in a reception centre in Palermo, some of whom had limited literacy skills. The aim was to assess what role (if any) limited literacy plays in the acquisition of L2 morphosyntax and, therefore, the applicability of existing descriptions of L2 Italian to the LESLLA learners population. **Stratford and Mahoney** present “North East Solidarity and Teaching (N.E.S.T.)”, a project led by student volunteers from Newcastle University and aimed at refugees and asylum seekers in the North East of the UK. What characterises N.E.S.T.’s learning activity is its strong focus on reducing social isolation among this migrant community. **Surian and Surian** report on an action-research experience combining Freire's approach to the learning of Italian L2 by migrants with limited literacy. Implemented in the Padua area (Italy), the project included literacy practices based on a syllabic approach and training, and reflective activities involving teachers.

Section 3 groups together four articles dealing with “Digital learning and practices”. **Malessa** argues that technology-enhanced language learning has the potential to improve the initial literacy acquisition of LESLLA learners. More broadly, it is imperative to promote the digital inclusion of LESLLA learners so that they can actively participate in a social context in which technology profoundly informs the way we interact, work and learn. **Salvaggio**'s article shows how digital technologies can be used to overcome the well-known paradox of teaching activities that involve oral skills but make use of written schemes. This situation creates problems especially for students with limited literacy, who cannot participate in class activities despite possessing adequate oral skills. In their collaborative

work, **Schumacher, Czinglar, Faseli and Mirova** describe a new literacy test developed to assess the literacy skills of students with L1 Dari and initial L2 German. The test is based on language-independent criteria and – the authors explain – can therefore be given without any knowledge of Dari on the part of the administrators. In the last contribution of the section, **Sokolowsky** discusses the experience that adult education centres in Germany have gained in recent years in the field of learning German as a non-mother tongue and basic education through the development and use of digital technologies.

The last section, “On the teachers’ side: reception, training and other tools”, brings together articles addressing the issue of language and literacy from the perspective of teachers and professionals. Inspired by Deridda’s thought on hospitality, **Bucca and Melluso’s** contribution is a reflection on everyday practices addressed to migrants, both in institutional and non-formal contexts. These include various types of actions related to reception, social and legal assistance, and linguistic support. The section opens with an article by **Cowie**, who reports on a small-scale study conducted in the UK at a time of reduced funding for ESOL provision. Through questionnaires and interviews to providers and teachers, the author brings to light the vicious circle whereby the educational needs of LESLLA students are largely neglected, in favour of those students who are more likely to achieve results and, therefore, more likely to drain funding. **Della Putta** describes a training course for volunteer teachers of L2 Italian to migrants with limited schooling and literacy. The course had largely positive effects because it activated a virtuous circle of change in the teachers’ educational practices. This emerged from the final questionnaire, which also brought to light the great difficulty that teachers experience in teaching literacy. **Minuz and Kurvers** present LASLLIAM, a tool promoted by the Council of Europe which proposes new descriptors below A1 to complement those of the Common European Framework for Languages. This is a response to the observation that literacy has always simply been assumed to be the entry level of the CEFR and therefore this tool cannot be used with learners with limited literacy. Finally, **Tammelin-Laine, Bogdanoff, Vaarala, Mustonen and Kärkkäinen** describe “Getting a grip on basic skills”, a pilot teacher training project designed and

implemented in Finland to help LESLLA teachers to support their students' needs. The authors present the main outputs of the project, provide examples of good practice developed during its implementation and discuss the challenges of a long-term web-based training model.

We would like to conclude with some notes on the choice of hosting the 14th LESLLA Symposium in Palermo. The idea was launched two years earlier, during the 12th Symposium in Granada, in 2016. At that time, the *School of Italian language for Foreigners* of the University of Palermo (ItaStra) had already been involved for some time, since 2011 to be precise, in the reception and language training of the migrant population in Palermo, including the newcomers who in large numbers reach Sicilian coast by sea via the Mediterranean routes. ItaStra was also beginning to explore areas of linguistic and didactic research in the field of LESLLA that had hitherto been unknown in its tradition of studies. The time seemed ripe to engage in international debate.

Two years later, the symposium in Palermo opened on a rapidly changing political scene of violent nationalist enclosures in which policies of exclusion in the field of migration seemed to prevail². The dramatic change of political course in those days was explicitly referred to in the speech read by Mustapha Jarjou, linguistic mediator of ItaStra and direct witness of the migratory experience, at the opening of the symposium. And the symposium itself turned out to be extremely topical in terms of the themes proposed and the wealth of experiences and people, which for days populated the corridors of ItaStra, as a living example of openness, diversity and resistance.

Three years on, the Italian political scene has experienced new changes and at least the harshest aspects of recent anti-immigration

² See in particular the Decree Law n. 53/2019, that is, the so called Security Decree, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2019/06/14/19G00063/sg>, which introduced important changes and restrictions in the reception system and procedures for international protection, de facto cancelling humanitarian protection. Not to mention the violent campaign against NGOs, which were accused of encouraging illegal immigration, and the fight against shipwreck rescue missions by imposing a ban on the entry into territorial waters of ships that rescued migrants and an enormous increase in sanctions against those who violated this ban.

legislation have been erased by subsequent laws³. While we were even so still far from a real policy of reception and inclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic intervened, drastically reducing mobility (also international) in other unexpected ways. In this rapid succession of events, ItaStra has continued to work behind closed doors, with hard work and obstinacy, like most people in the world. The delay in publishing this volume can be partly explained if we consider that ItaStra and the University of Palermo, together with many institutions and associations, have substantially contributed over the last two years to supporting migrant population in Palermo, especially young newcomers, suddenly deprived of work and economic resources.

Today, as the doors are slowly being reopened and the classrooms are once again filling up with old and new voices, the publication of this volume also acquires for us the symbolic and auspicious significance of a new (and hopefully stable) openness to people and their languages.

We are deeply grateful to all the people who made possible the organisation of the conference and then the production of this volume: the participants and authors, the LESLLA board, our colleagues at ItaStra who actively participated in the organisation (in alphabetical order, Luisa Amenta, Marcello Amoruso, Adriana Arcuri, Giuseppe Paternostro, Vincenzo Pinello) and the indispensable organising support (Dennis Joseph Appiah, Souleymane Bah, Kirolos Bebawy, Fiorella Caltagirone, Salvo Cavaliere, Malick Ceesay, Carmen Ciallella, Laura Di Benedetto, Abdou Dieye, Maria Luisa Faulisi, Jawhar Farhan, Antonio Gervasi, Rita Guttadauro, Tindara Ignazzitto, Mustapha Jarjou, Balla Moussa Koulibaly, Angelo Lo Maglio, Miriam Mesi, Sofian Mozian, Eleonora Palmisano, Valentina Salvato, Solange Santarelli, Athnasous Shafik Gad Abdalla, Chiara Tiranno, Laura Zambianchi). We would also like to thank the many reviewers who anonymously and with dedication contributed to the selection and improvement of the articles in this volume.

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Mari D'Agostino and Egle Mocciaro

³ See the Decree Law 130/2020, then Law 173/2020, whose text can be read at the following link: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/12/19/20G00195/sg>.