

THE IMPACT OF THE *COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE*  
ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION:  
THE CASE OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
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**Master of Arts, 2015**

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**Abstract**

This qualitative study investigates the role of the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR) in Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics (SP) instruction in an Italian secondary school where English and Spanish are taught as foreign languages.

While research points to the considerable influence of the CEFR on language policies, little is known about its pedagogical impact on language teaching. In addition, despite the positive findings regarding the benefits of SP teaching for learners' development of communicative competence, SP usually seems to be neglected in language classrooms. This study sheds light on the presence of the CEFR and SP in foreign language teaching by focusing on teachers' cognition and instructional practices. In-depth analysis of documents, interviews and classroom observations shows that the CEFR and SP play marginal roles in the participant school, and their presence is largely related to the external language exams implemented and to practitioners' knowledge and beliefs regarding these concepts.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the teachers, principal, teaching assistants and students who participated in this study. Your warm welcome, enthusiastic participation and commitment to advance knowledge in language education have been invaluable for the realization of this project.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Enrica Piccardo, for introducing me to the CEFR, guiding me through its discovery, supporting me throughout this research, and for showing me new and fascinating frontiers in the world of language education. My thanks also go to the second member of my thesis committee, Dr. Julie Kerekes, for her precious advice, constant encouragement and unlimited patience.

My academic journey has been filled with the presence of wonderful people who helped me reach the finish line, and to whom I am deeply thankful: Steven, my “OISE husband”, who shared with me the joys and sorrows of graduate student life and has been there to encourage me every step of the way; Mimi, my research personal trainer, motivational coach and tech expert, without you I would still be swamped in incomprehensible data; Jeannie, who made my academic path sweeter with delicious cakes and kind, supportive words; Disa Testa a Tafano, my source of joy and proteins, *ti amoro, deh*; and last but not least, my amazing parents, Nadia and Livio, for their unconditional love and support: each and every achievement of mine is always because of you.

### **Dedication**

To all language educators out there who help make the world communicate,  
one lesson at a time.

## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
RATIONALE .....	3
TERMINOLOGY .....	4
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	5
RESEARCH CONTEXT .....	6
Italian Secondary School System .....	7
<b>CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>9</b>
THE CEFR .....	9
Overview of the CEFR .....	10
The Impact of the CEFR .....	11
<i>Policy Level</i> .....	11
<i>Pedagogy Level</i> .....	15
SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE .....	19
Models of Communicative Competence .....	19
Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics .....	22
Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics Instruction – Research Perspective .....	25
Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics Instruction – Pedagogical Perspective .....	28
CONNECTING THE DOTS: THE CEFR, SPC AND SP INSTRUCTION .....	32
RESEARCH GAPS .....	35
<b>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>38</b>
BASIC QUALITATIVE RESEARCH .....	38
RESEARCH DESIGN .....	40
Participant School .....	40

Participants .....	43
<i>Teachers</i> .....	44
<i>Principal</i> .....	44
<i>Teaching Assistants</i> .....	44
<i>Students</i> .....	45
Preliminary Procedures.....	46
Selection Criteria .....	47
<i>EFL and SFL</i> .....	48
<i>Classes</i> .....	48
<i>Teachers</i> .....	51
Data Collection .....	51
<i>Document Analysis</i> .....	51
<i>Classroom Observations</i> .....	53
<i>Semi-structured Interviews</i> .....	57
Data Analysis.....	57
<i>Preliminary Analysis</i> .....	58
<i>Coding Phase</i> .....	58
Operationalization of instruction and SP .....	58
Definition of coding categories.....	62
<i>Systematic Analysis</i> .....	65
<b>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>67</b>
FINDINGS RELATED TO RQ 1 .....	67
Role of the CEFR in Curricula and Syllabi .....	68
<i>Knowledge and Use of the CEFR</i> .....	69
<i>Sources of CEFR-related Knowledge</i> .....	73
Direct exposure .....	73
Indirect exposure.....	75
External language exams.....	75
Textbooks .....	78
<i>Summary of Findings</i> .....	79
Role of SPC in Curricula and Syllabi.....	80
<i>SPC as Learning Objective</i> .....	81
<i>Connection Between SPC and CEFR</i> .....	83
Summary of Findings Related to RQ 1.....	88
FINDINGS RELATED TO RQ 2 .....	89
SP Features in Teaching Practices.....	91
SP Features and Types of Instruction .....	93
<i>Communicative Functions &amp; Explicit Instruction</i> .....	94

Corrective feedback.....	95
Metalinguistic explanations.....	96
Lists of language structures.....	97
<i>Communicative Functions &amp; Implicit Instruction</i> .....	98
Opportunities for production .....	98
Oral and written tasks.....	99
Use of the L2 .....	102
Interaction with native speakers.....	103
Opportunities for exposure.....	105
L2 input flood.....	106
Presence of NS assistants .....	107
Authentic materials .....	107
Opportunities for students' processing .....	108
<i>Summary of Communicative Functions &amp; Types of Instruction</i> .....	108
<i>Social Markers and Politeness Conventions &amp; Explicit Instruction</i> .....	109
<i>Social Markers and Politeness Conventions &amp; Implicit Instruction</i> .....	110
Opportunities for production .....	110
Opportunities for exposure.....	112
<i>Summary of SP Features and Types of Instruction</i> .....	113
SP Features and Teaching Perspectives.....	114
<i>Communicative Functions &amp; Pragmalinguistics</i> .....	117
<i>Social Markers and Politeness Conventions &amp; Sociopragmatics</i> .....	119
Teaching Perspectives and Types of Instruction .....	120
<i>Pragmalinguistics &amp; Types of Instruction</i> .....	121
<i>Sociopragmatics &amp; Explicit Instruction</i> .....	122
Summary of Findings Related to RQ 2.....	122
 FINDINGS RELATED TO RQ 3.....	 124
CEFR-related Assessment .....	125
Assessment of SPC.....	128
 <b>CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION.....</b>	 <b>130</b>
DISCUSSION OF RQ 1 FINDINGS.....	130
Practitioners' Cognition and Teacher Education.....	131
Practitioners' Cognition and External Exams & Textbooks.....	132
DISCUSSION OF RQ 2 FINDINGS.....	134
SP Features and Teaching Perspectives.....	134
Types of Instruction.....	138

<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>142</b>
SUMMARY .....	142
PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS .....	144
LIMITATIONS .....	146
SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	147
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>149</b>

### List of Tables

<b>TABLE 1: TEACHERS' AND TEACHING ASSISTANTS' BIO-DATA</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>TABLE 2: CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS SCHEDULE</b> .....	<b>54</b>
<b>TABLE 3: TYPES OF MACROFUNCTIONS AND MICROFUNCTIONS (CEFR)</b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b>TABLE 4: LINGUISTIC MARKERS OF SOCIAL RELATIONS AND POLITENESS CONVENTIONS (CEFR)</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>TABLE 5: CODING SCHEME</b> .....	<b>65</b>
<b>TABLE 6: INSTANCES OF SP INSTRUCTION IN RELATION TO SP FEATURES</b> .....	<b>91</b>
<b>TABLE 7: TYPES OF EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT INSTRUCTION TO TEACH COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS</b> .....	<b>108</b>
<b>TABLE 8: TYPES OF EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT INSTRUCTION TO TEACH SOCIAL MARKERS AND POLITENESS CONVENTIONS</b> .....	<b>113</b>

### List of Figures

<b>FIGURE 1: TYPES OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT EXPOSURE TO THE CEFR</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>FIGURE 2: MODEL OF FACTORS THAT SHAPE THE ROLE OF THE CEFR FOR LANGUAGE PRACTITIONERS</b> .....	<b>80</b>
<b>FIGURE 3: PRESENCE OF SP FEATURES IN EFL AND SFL SYLLABI</b> .....	<b>82</b>
<b>FIGURE 4: ANALYSIS OF RELATIONSHIPS AMONG SPC-RELATED CODES AND CEFR-RELATED CODES</b> .....	<b>84</b>
<b>FIGURE 5: CONNECTION CEFR-SPC IN EFL AND SFL CURRICULA AND SYLLABI</b> .....	<b>89</b>
<b>FIGURE 6: COMPARISON OF SP FEATURES WITH TYPES OF INSTRUCTION</b> .....	<b>93</b>
<b>FIGURE 7: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SP FEATURES AND TYPES OF INSTRUCTION</b> .....	<b>94</b>
<b>FIGURE 8: COMPARISON OF SP FEATURES WITH TEACHING PERSPECTIVES</b> .....	<b>115</b>
<b>FIGURE 9: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SP FEATURES AND TEACHING PERSPECTIVES</b> ....	<b>116</b>
<b>FIGURE 10: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SP FEATURES AND TEACHING PERSPECTIVES ACROSS DATA SOURCES</b> .....	<b>117</b>
<b>FIGURE 11: COMPARISON OF TYPES OF INSTRUCTION WITH TEACHING PERSPECTIVES</b> ..	<b>121</b>

<b>FIGURE 12: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TYPES OF INSTRUCTION AND TEACHING PERSPECTIVES .....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>FIGURE 13: RELATIONSHIPS AMONG SP FEATURES, TYPES OF INSTRUCTION AND TEACHING PERSPECTIVES .....</b>	<b>124</b>

**List of Appendices**

<b>APPENDIX A: Information Email and Informed Consent for School Principal .....</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: Information Email and Informed Consent for Teachers .....</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: Information Letter and Informed Consent for Teaching Assistants ...</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: Information Letter and Informed Consent for Students .....</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>APPENDIX E: Waiver and Parental Consent.....</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>APPENDIX F: Teachers’ Interview Protocol .....</b>	<b>176</b>
<b>APPENDIX G: Principal’s Interview Protocol.....</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>APPENDIX H: Extracts of Grade 10 SFL Syllabus.....</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>APPENDIX I: Samples of Teaching Materials About Communicative Functions (Grade 10-2 EFL).....</b>	<b>182</b>

## **List of Abbreviations**

Below is an alphabetical list of abbreviations frequently used in this dissertation with the terms they refer to.

CAE: Cambridge English: Advanced (Cambridge examination)

CEFR: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning

DELE: *Diploma de Español como Lengua Estranjera* (Instituto Cervantes examination)

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

FCE: First Certificate in English (Cambridge examination)

FL: Foreign Language

ILP: Interlanguage Pragmatics

L1: First/native language

L2: Second/foreign/target language

NNS: Non Native Speaker

NS: Native Speaker

PET: Preliminary English Test (Cambridge examination)

RQ: Research Question

SFL: Spanish as a Foreign Language

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

SP: Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics

SPC: Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Competence

TA: Teaching Assistant

## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction**

Over the course of my graduate program in Languages and Literacies Education, I experienced two “revelation moments” which I view as turning points both for my learning and understanding of language education and for my own teaching practice.

The first moment was during a Language Teaching Methodologies course, when I had the opportunity to learn in depth about the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR). Although the CEFR is not a new document (it was published in its online version in 2001), I only had very superficial knowledge of it and had not had any experience with it as a language teacher, having started my career in Canada, where the CEFR is not yet a consolidated reality for language practitioners. While the CEFR has been primarily considered a policy document that principally affects national and international language protocols, after a closer study I have found it to be a valuable pedagogical tool for language teachers. The CEFR provides guidelines for the definition of learning objectives, it proposes an innovative teaching approach, and it relates theoretical constructs and research findings to language teaching practices (a comprehensive description of the CEFR is provided in Chapter 2). At the same time, however, I noticed that fairly little research had been conducted regarding the impact of the CEFR on practitioners’ views of language education and actual instructional practices, compared to the large amount of available information about the influence of this document on language policies and testing. My interest, therefore, has been directed towards understanding whether the CEFR, beyond its influence at the macro-level – that of language policies – also has had a significant impact

on language pedagogy at the micro-level – that of individual schools, classes and teachers -, as it is my belief that any kind of educational innovation needs to reach the classroom and its everyday reality in order for change and improvement to truly take place.

The second moment was when I learned about pragmatics in the course Language Awareness for Language Educators. I did not know what pragmatics exactly entailed, but when I learned more about it I realized that it represents an area of language use – that of the relationship between language and context – which I find is often neglected in language education and yet extremely important for successful communication. While I was taking this course and learning about pragmatics, I started a new job teaching Academic Conversation Skills to international graduate students whose first language was not English. This course aimed at helping advanced ESL learners acquire the skills to communicate appropriately and successfully in a North American academic environment. In other words, I was teaching pragmatics. The opportunity I had to study the theories and research about this field and apply them at the same time prompted reflection and several questions about the role of pragmatics instruction in language education: Can pragmatic competence only be acquired at advanced proficiency levels or should it be a learning objective for all levels? Why do proficient learners with a high command of the target language seem to struggle with social and contextual appropriateness? Are language instructors usually aware of what teaching pragmatics encompasses, and do they systematically include it in their practices? As a teacher, what can I do to help my learners better develop pragmatic competence?

As I developed a dual interest in the CEFR and pragmatics, I decided to examine whether and how the concept of pragmatic competence was addressed in the CEFR document and how it was incorporated in its pedagogical guidelines. This analysis then led

me to conceive the present study, which seeks to shed more light on the roles of the CEFR and pragmatics in language education, specifically by focusing on how pragmatics instruction is envisioned and enacted by language teachers, and whether and how the CEFR has an impact on the role of pragmatic competence in foreign language curricula, syllabi and teaching practices.

### **Rationale**

This study responds to CEFR scholars' calls for more research regarding the pedagogical impact of the CEFR in language classrooms (Figueras, 2012; Little, 2011). To date, there is a dearth of written accounts on CEFR-related practices – the main publications being over ten years old (Alderson, 2002; Morrow, 2004) – as well as of research studies that investigate the relationship CEFR – language teaching in depth, beyond the results of surveys and questionnaires. In addition, there is a particular aspect of the CEFR, which – to my knowledge – has never been previously examined in relation to language instruction: the presence of clear definitions and descriptors for Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Competence (SPC) – included as a fundamental component of communicative competence – and the potential impact that the CEFR guidelines about SPC and SP instruction might have for language teaching. By addressing these gaps, the present study will also open up new research avenues regarding the teaching of SP from a CEFR perspective.

In the field of interlanguage pragmatics – which studies the teaching and learning of SP – the majority of recent research has been devoted to exploring the effectiveness of different types of SP instruction (see Taguchi, 2015 for a comprehensive review of empirical studies). Little attention has been given to investigating the actual presence and influence of

SP teaching in both language teacher education and language education (some exceptions are Eslami & Eslami-Rasekh, 2008; Farashaiyan *et al.*, 2014; Ishihara, 2011; Vasquez & Sharpless, 2009), and to examining such issues from the practitioners' perspective. More naturalistic research is needed to explore the role of SP instruction for language teachers and their practices to ultimately examine the extent to which theories and research findings have a place in teaching practices, and thus contribute to bridging the gap between these often distant worlds.

Finally, the majority of studies about the CEFR and SP instruction focused on practitioners' perspectives have mostly employed surveys and/or interviews as primary data collection instruments. There is therefore a need for more complex research designs that include naturalistic observations and document analysis in order to carry out in-depth explorations of the relationships between the CEFR, SP and teaching practices.

### **Terminology**

In the report of the study conducted I make use of concepts and definitions that belong to the applied linguistics field, and more specifically to the subfields of pragmatics and interlanguage pragmatics (ILP). In addition, I refer to the CEFR's approach of labelling and describing such concepts.

As I have employed various sources of reference, although the concepts are the same, the terms used to describe them and their taxonomies differ in some cases. For instance, the CEFR distinguishes between Sociolinguistic Competence and Pragmatic Competence, whereas in ILP the concepts that the CEFR divides into these two categories are actually subsumed in one category, that of Pragmatic Competence. As a result, in order to

acknowledge both perspectives, the terminology I have adopted in my dissertation is as follows:

- Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics (SP), when I refer to them as fields of study or topics of instruction (*e.g.*, SP instruction, SP features)
- Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Competence (SPC), when I refer to the specific sub-type of communicative competence that is the focus of SP instruction.

In this way, I have included both the terms “sociolinguistics” and “pragmatics” as presented in the CEFR, while at the same time treating them as one concept as this is the shared view of applied linguists and my own.

### **Research Questions**

The overall goal of this study is to investigate the impact of the CEFR on SP instruction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) at the individual school level. To do so, three research questions have been formulated:

1. How and to what extent is SPC as described in the CEFR reflected in EFL and SFL curricula and syllabi?
2. Beyond what is stated in the curricula and syllabi, how is SP addressed in the teaching approaches and practices in EFL and SFL language classrooms?
3. Is SPC systematically assessed / evaluated? If so, does the CEFR have an impact on the assessment tools used?

## Research Context

This study was conducted in a private high school in Italy. The reason for choosing this country as my research setting is twofold: (a) The CEFR has been widely used in Italy for over a decade; therefore, schools in this country provide fertile ground for examining the pedagogical impact of this document. In addition, in 2010 the Italian secondary school system experienced a reform which included the drafting and publication of the new national curriculum guidelines (*Decreto delle Indicazioni Nazionali per i Licei*). In this document, the sections of all the foreign language curricula were informed by and directly referenced the CEFR, thus officially recognizing its valuable role as a reference tool for language education. (b) My personal and academic background is Italian. Therefore, I am very familiar with the language and culture as well as with the country's school system and language teaching practices. As my research is positioned in the qualitative spectrum, I, as the investigator, am the primary research instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009); therefore, I deemed important to choose a context of which I had extensive knowledge and understanding, in order to provide a more accurate interpretation of the findings.

My rationale for selecting the particular participant school is that in this high school language teaching is strongly emphasized and the school is known for being a pioneer in introducing and experimenting with new initiatives and programs to improve language education. It was one of the first schools in Italy to introduce CEFR-informed external language examinations as part of the language curricular objectives, in order to provide students with certifications that attested their proficiency levels. Based on such premises, I expected to find relevant data regarding both the CEFR and SP instruction that could possibly be translated into useful information for language education research and practice.

In the following section, a brief overview of the Italian secondary school system is provided.

### **Italian Secondary School System**

Italian secondary education is divided into two types: *Licei*, which prepare students for academic studies, and *Istituti*, which focus on vocational education and technical skills. Both types of schools can be public or private. The main difference between the public and private education systems is that private schools have more freedom in terms of selection of academic subjects (*i.e.*, types, amount of hours) and teachers, while for public schools these decisions are directly mandated by the government. However, both public and private schools follow the same curriculum provided by the Ministry of Education, and lead to equally recognized high school degrees.

*Licei* and *Istituti* are further divided into different types according to their course offerings and specializations. In the case of *Licei*, for instance, students may choose from the following programs: classical studies, scientific studies, language studies and arts studies.

Italian *Licei* are organized in five grades: from Grade 9 to 13, with the average student age ranging from 14 to 19. In addition, grades are divided into three groups: Grades 9-10 (called *primo biennio*, which means “the first two years”), Grades 11-12 (called *secondo biennio*, which means “the second two years”) and Grade 13 (called *quinto anno*, which means “the fifth year”).

Typically, in the *primo biennio* students learn the foundations of core subjects and acquire the competences and knowledge required to complete compulsory education. In the *secondo biennio* new, more specialized subjects are introduced, subject contents become more complex, and students gradually develop the learning skills to enter university. Finally,

in the *quinto anno* learners complete the development of their knowledge and skills and prepare for their final exams.

The participant school of this study is a private *Liceo* that offers a language studies program and a scientific studies program. The language classes examined are English as a Foreign Language (EFL) both in the language studies and scientific studies programs, and Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) in the language studies program. The grades observed are Grade 10 (which belongs to *primo biennio*) and Grade 12 (which belongs to *secondo biennio*). More detailed information about the participant school is provided in Chapter 3 (“Methodology”).

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

In this chapter I will provide a detailed description of the two theoretical constructs of my study: (a) the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR) and (b) the concept of Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Competence (SPC).

Firstly, each construct will be illustrated individually, and relevant literature will be reviewed. (a) I will present an overview of the CEFR and its impact at the policy level and at the pedagogy level. (b) I will describe influential models of Communicative Competence and show how SPC is included in such models. (c) I will briefly illustrate the fields of Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics and show how SPC is primarily situated in Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP), a subfield of Pragmatics. (d) I will provide an overview of studies in ILP that have focused on instruction aimed at developing SPC, both from a research perspective and a pedagogical perspective.

Secondly, I will explain how both constructs (CEFR and SPC) relate to each other and how the link between them constitutes the core of my theoretical framework.

Finally, the research gaps that have emerged from the literature review will be summarized and I will demonstrate how my study is well positioned to address such gaps.

### **The CEFR**

My rationale for adopting the CEFR as one of the conceptual constructs of my study is that this document is unique in its genre, because it constitutes a link between theories of language education, linguistics theories and pedagogical practices. More specifically, the

CEFR contains theory-driven concepts, such as that of communicative competence and SPC. These concepts are presented as pedagogical guidelines and practical objectives that language practitioners can reflect on and refer to when they engage in SP instruction.

In this first part of the chapter, I will describe the CEFR and the impact of this document as a whole on language policy and pedagogy. Later in the chapter (section “Connecting the Dots”), I will discuss more in detail the mediating role that the CEFR has the potential to play between the disciplines of sociolinguistics and pragmatics and the teaching of SP.

### **Overview of the CEFR**

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) is a groundbreaking language policy document developed by the Council of Europe in the 1990s, and published in its online version in 1996 and in its final paper version in 2001. It “provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc.” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 1). Originally conceived to facilitate language learning and mobility within Europe, it has subsequently gained worldwide recognition: The document has been translated into 39 languages and has been employed or consulted by numerous countries around the globe for the development of their foreign language policies (Figueras, 2012; Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007).

One of the main purposes of the CEFR is the alignment of language learning, teaching, assessment and testing to ultimately ensure comparability of learning outcomes across languages, contexts and countries. In other words, the CEFR is a tool that is intended to “be used to analyse L2 learners’ needs, specify L2 learning goals, guide the development of L2 learning materials and activities, and provide orientation for the assessment of L2

learning outcomes” (Little, 2006, p. 167), all in a coherent and transparent manner. To this end, the CEFR (1) describes the competences learners need to develop to become effective language users; (2) proposes sets of descriptors that indicate what learners can do when they possess a given competence at a given proficiency level; (3) offers guidelines about how to teach and assess such competences; (4) provides a common reference level scale for the recognition and comparability of language competences across countries.

By equipping its users with a common methodology and metalanguage for language teaching, learning and assessment, the CEFR promotes cooperation among different language educational institutions and stakeholders worldwide, as well as mobility across countries (Council of Europe, 2001).

The CEFR is a comprehensive and descriptive – rather than prescriptive – document, in that it refers to all languages and its goal is to encourage language practitioners’ reflections about their own specific educational and geographical contexts, learners, objectives, etc. (Goullier, 2007; North, 2007). North (2007) defines the CEFR as a “concertina-like reference tool, not an instrument to be applied” (p. 656), that should therefore be consulted and adapted to one’s local reality, rather than followed like a set of rules.

### **The Impact of the CEFR**

**Policy level.** After over 15 years of existence and implementation, the CEFR has undoubtedly had major influence on language policies and has informed language education reforms especially at the level of curricula and assessment in many countries around the world (Byram & Parmenter, 2012).

In Europe, a survey administered to 30 Council of Europe member states (Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007) showed that the CEFR was employed and viewed as a useful tool for curriculum planning and development, for the development of tests and examinations and for textbook writing in the majority of the participant countries.

More recently, a study by the European Parliament's Committee on Education and Culture (Broek & van den Ende, 2013) reported similar results following an analysis of the extent of CEFR implementation in six European countries<sup>1</sup>. Foreign language policies and curricula are informed by the CEFR and most language tests, examinations and schoolbooks are linked to it.

SurveyLang, a large-scale survey provided to language teachers, learners and school principals of 16 European educational systems<sup>2</sup> to compare language policies, teaching approaches and learning in different contexts (European Commission, 2012), indicated that in all but two educational systems the CEFR was either mandated or recommended by the educational authorities primarily for curriculum development, followed by teacher training, testing and assessment, and development and selection of instructional materials.

In Italy, the country where my study was conducted, the reform of national high school curricula of 2010 resulted in new language curriculum guidelines collected in the ministerial document “*Decreto delle Indicazioni Nazionali per i Licei*” (National guidelines for high school), in which learners’ expected proficiency is described with CEFR reference levels (for instance, students are expected to achieve a B2 level in their first foreign language by the end of high school), and which draw on the concepts and terminology used in the

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<sup>1</sup> Italy was not among the participant countries.

<sup>2</sup> Italy was not among the participant countries.

CEFR for the definition and description of competences, knowledge, learning strategies and domains (*Decreto delle Indicazioni Nazionali per i Licei*, 2010).

Other examples of national language policies informed by the CEFR include: (a) France, where language learning outcomes are also associated with the CEFR reference levels and language pedagogy has embraced its main tenets (Bonnet, 2007; Goullier, 2012), (b) Germany, where the CEFR has played a significant role in the development of language education standards and competence-based curricula (Rönneper, 2012), and (c) Central and Eastern Europe, where projects to align school leavers' language examinations to the CEFR are under way (Beresova, 2011).

Over the years, the influence of the CEFR has crossed the European borders and the document has entered the foreign language education systems and/or language education discourse and is now employed, adapted, consulted or studied in a variety of countries worldwide, such as Argentina, Japan, China, New Zealand, Taiwan, USA, and Colombia, among others (Byram & Parmenter, 2012; Nagai & O'Dweyer, 2011; Piccardo, Germain-Rutherford, & Clément, 2011).

Canada has also shown an increased interest in the CEFR. The first official action was taken within the Official Languages Research and Dissemination Program (2004–2005): A report with recommendations for the adoption of a common framework for language curricula, teaching and assessment across Canada strongly based on the CEFR, which was identified as a viable reference tool to be used in the Canadian context (Vandergrift, 2006). Drawing on such recommendations, a document was published in 2010 by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) to encourage the use of the CEFR at the pan-Canadian level (CMEC, 2010). In addition, small-scale research studies on language

practitioners' beliefs have indicated that Canadian language educators have favourable views of the CEFR and support its use to address many of their pedagogical issues (Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith, & Crowle, 2011; Mison & Jang, 2011; Piccardo, 2013b). To date, the CEFR has underpinned the revision of K-12 language curricula in several provinces: the French as a Second Language (FSL) curriculum in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) and additional resources for the implementation of the CEFR (<http://www.curriculum.org/fsl/home>); a common FSL curriculum in the Atlantic provinces (Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training, 2010); a common framework for ESL teaching in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013).

However, the CEFR implementation in national education systems worldwide, while being widespread and significant on one hand, on the other has also been partial and inconsistent, rather than systematic. By not embracing the CEFR's holistic vision of coherence in language learning, teaching and assessment, it appears that language education at large is not fully benefitting from the innovation that this document promotes.

To date, the major contribution of the CEFR appears to be its reference levels, which have been widely employed by testing agencies, ministries of educations, textbook publishers to define transparent and standardized levels of language proficiency, and are now part of the commonly used terminology among language stakeholders (Figueras, 2012; Little, 2011).

However, it appears that in many contexts the CEFR concepts have been mainly used as labels without a thorough study and consequent awareness of the document itself and actual practical implementations (Coste, 2007; Figueras, 2012). For instance, as Little (2012) points out, "curriculum guidelines do not make detailed use of the CEFR's descriptive

scheme to specify learning outcomes, so that the link to a particular proficiency level is a matter of assertion only. Similarly, the instruments by which learning outcomes are assessed are not systematically linked to the CEFR” (p. 5).

This brief overview of the impact of the CEFR on languages policies provides a picture that is both promising and somewhat disappointing at the same time. On one hand, this document has become the official – or *de facto* – reference for many European and non-European countries, and some of its elements and its terminology are now the common currency that is employed to describe language proficiency. On the other hand, after almost two decades from its first publication, it appears that the CEFR has not yet been employed in ways that can exploit its full potential. In the following section I will show how this observation also applies to its pedagogical impact.

**Pedagogy level.** As the focus of my study is on the role of the CEFR in language teaching practices, in this section I will reflect on the pedagogical impact of this document at the small and micro-level, that is, in specific educational institutions and/or language classes.

There is general consensus among CEFR experts and scholars on using words of caution when discussing language teachers’ knowledge and uses of the CEFR. Many argue that the impact of this document on teacher education and classroom practices has not been as significant as its impact in other contexts, such as language policy and testing (Byram & Parmenter, 2012; Byrnes, 2007; Figueras, 2012; Little, 2007, 2011; Martyniuk & Nojion, 2007; North, 2014a; Westhoff, 2007). In addition, similarly to the tendency observed at the policy level, most practitioners have only partial knowledge of the CEFR, which is often limited to the reference levels and the reference level descriptors (Coste, 2007; Piccardo, 2010, 2011). Some of the explanations behind the relatively small influence of the CEFR on

teaching practices are that (1) the CEFR is a complex and not very reader-friendly document which does not address teachers and learners in a highly comprehensible language (Martyniuk & Nojion, 2007; Piccardo, 2011); (2) there is a lack of adequate knowledge mobilization and dissemination about the CEFR in teacher education and development programs (Martyniuk & Nojion, 2007; Piccardo, 2010, 2011); (3) the CEFR encounters resistance on the teachers' part (Byram & Parmenter, 2012; Piccardo, 2010).

An additional issue is that there are still relatively few published accounts on the CEFR pedagogical uses (Figueras, 2012). Therefore, it seems difficult to form a clear picture of the relationship between the CEFR and the realities of language learning and teaching. Research focused on the pedagogical impact of the CEFR can be classified into two categories: (1) written reports of CEFR-related practices and (2) academic studies on teachers' perspectives of the CEFR.

(1) To date, the two main publications that include case reports on the implementation of the CEFR in specific educational contexts are Alderson's (2002) and Morrow's (2004), in which language practitioners describe CEFR-related projects carried out to design new courses and materials or to improve existing curricula/courses/programs (Garrido & Beaven, 2002; Jaakkola, Viita-Leskelä, Sävy, & Komsu, 2002; Little & Lazenby Simpson, 2004; Manasseh, 2004; Wall, 2004). As the publication years suggest, such reports date back to the first years of CEFR implementation and were intended in part to provide examples of good practices and models for other educational institutions and professionals to follow. However, to my knowledge, no other case reports of this kind have been published subsequently in European settings. By contrast, more recent written accounts have been published with regards to non-European contexts, such as Mexico (Despaigne & Grossi,

2011), Japan (Nagai & O'Dweyer, 2011) and Turkey (Üstünlüoğlu, Zazaoğlu, Keskin, Sarayköylü, & Akdoğan, 2012).

(2) There are also a small number of qualitative research studies that investigated the role of the CEFR on teaching and assessment from the practitioners' perspective. Hehl & Kruczek (2011) administered a survey to language instructors of two German universities to examine to what extent the CEFR was known and used in their practices. They found that the CEFR was reflected in the course structure, learning objectives, assessment procedures, and was considered a helpful tool for the application of communication-oriented teaching approaches, but the degree of teachers' knowledge and uses of the CEFR varied considerably, most instructors pointed out the complexity of the document and expressed the need for more training in this area.

A larger-scale study (Moonen, Stoutjesdijk, de Graaff, & Corda, 2013) was conducted among language teachers of the Dutch secondary school system to explore the relationships between the CEFR and teaching, assessment and curriculum development, as a result of a national teacher development project previously conducted by the Dutch Ministry of Education to facilitate the implementation of the CEFR. Data collection measures included a survey, interviews and focus groups. Findings showed that, while the majority of teachers reported to have basic knowledge of the CEFR, its main influence in the language classroom was "limited to the use of CEFR-related textbooks and preparation for national examinations aligned to CEFR" (p. 244).

Data on teachers' opinions and knowledge about the CEFR were also collected during the exploratory phase of a teacher development project conducted in four European countries (Piccardo, Berchoud, Cignatta, Mentz, Pamula, 2011; Piccardo, 2013a). A questionnaire

followed by discussion and focus groups were conducted, and results confirmed that (1) practitioners had partial knowledge of the CEFR and mostly identified it with its reference levels and global descriptor scale; (2) they struggled with translating the CEFR concepts in their classroom practices, partially due to the complexity of the document; (3) while most teachers had positive attitudes towards the CEFR and appreciated its potential for innovation, they were tentative in its implementation and some perceived it as a top-down instrument that was set to become a new norm, rather than a tool for reflection and improvement; (4) adequate CEFR-focused training and resources were often lacking.

The data of a context questionnaire administered to language teachers in 16 educational systems as part of the project SurveyLang (European Commission, 2012) show considerable variation in CEFR-focused teacher training among the different contexts, with percentages ranging from 20% to 80%, and confirm the limited classroom use of the CEFR.

These studies report fairly homogenous findings, despite the different research settings in which they were conducted. The picture that emerges is one where, over a decade since its publication, the CEFR has had limited impact in the micro-context of the language classroom, and that appears to be mostly related to a lack of knowledge and experience on the teachers' part, which in turn can be attributed to a lack of specific training and support.

From a methodological perspective, researchers have investigated the role of the CEFR on teaching and learning primarily by eliciting language instructors' opinions by means of questionnaires and interviews, and have attempted to give a global description of what participants reported. Although teachers' perspectives are essential, I would argue that there is a need to triangulate such data with other methods of data collection, such as classroom

observations, in order to verify whether their beliefs and assertions are actually mirrored in teaching practices and activities, and ultimately to reach more reliable conclusions.

The scarcity of recent written reports on the pedagogical role of the CEFR, while not necessarily implying a dearth of applications of the CEFR to language curricula and courses, which may be carried out without being documented and divulged, might suggest a lack of systematic reflections on the practitioners' part and possibly lack of awareness of the potential benefits of this document beyond the reference levels. This observation seems to be supported by the results of qualitative and quantitative studies on teachers' perceptions, and reinforces the position of many scholars who claim that the CEFR has yet to reach its full potential in terms of practitioners' knowledge and classroom practices.

## **Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Competence**

### **Models of Communicative Competence**

The second theoretical pillar of my study is the concept of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence (SPC). As this type of competence pertains to the broader construct of communicative competence, in this section I will illustrate how models of communicative competence were developed and evolved over time and how SPC is situated in such models.

The term "communicative competence" was first introduced by Hymes (1972), who, by combining linguistic theories with theories of communication and culture, added a sociocultural dimension to what was mainly seen as linguistic/grammatical competence. Hymes proposed the concept of "competence of use" (p. 279) which was described as the knowledge and ability to recognize the appropriateness of a sentence or utterance "in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated" (p. 281). In other words, he recognized the

need to introduce sociolinguistic elements to a theory of language competence that does not simply reflect grammatical knowledge, but also includes the ability of communicating appropriately. According to Hymes, communicative competence is thus the product of the interaction between grammatical competence and “competence of use”.

Another influential framework of communicative competence in which SPC plays a prominent role is that of Canale and Swain (1980). In their theory, the authors identified three components of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. For sociolinguistic competence a distinction was made between “sociocultural rules of use and rules of discourse” (p. 30). The first set of rules was drawn from Hymes’ theory of competence of use and refers to the appropriateness of utterances and communicative functions “within a certain sociocultural context depending on contextual factors such as topic, role of participants, setting and norms of interaction”, as well as “the appropriate attitude and register or style” (p. 30). Rules of discourse concerned the coherence and cohesion of speeches or texts. Canale (1983) later refined this framework by explicitly separating sociolinguistic competence from discourse competence.

Subsequent models were largely inspired by Hymes’ and Canale and Swain’s, but further elaborated the concepts of SPC by identifying more specific distinctions and assigning more precise roles to such competences.

Bachman (1990) proposed a framework of communicative language ability with a somewhat different and more complex categorization than Canale and Swain’s. First, within the language competence component he distinguished between organizational and pragmatic competence, with the former including textual competence, which corresponds to Canale’s discourse competence. Second, the term “pragmatic competence” was explicitly employed

and it refers to two types of competence: illocutionary and sociolinguistic. Bachman described illocutionary competence (later labelled “functional knowledge” by Bachman and Palmer, 1996) as the ability “to use language to express a wide range of functions and to interpret the illocutionary force of utterances or discourse” (p. 94), and sociolinguistic competence as “the sensitivity to, or control of the conventions of language use that are determined by the features of the specific language use context; it enables us to perform language functions in ways that are appropriate to that context” (p. 94). Third, as shown above, not only did Bachman clearly separate the concepts of pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence, but he also included the latter as a sub-component of the former.

Finally, the model presented by Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995) essentially echoes Bachman’s framework but employs a different terminology. The distinction between pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence is maintained under the labels “actional competence” and “sociocultural competence”. Actional competence corresponds to Bachman’s illocutionary competence / functional knowledge, and concerns the knowledge of the linguistic resources needed to perform and understand speech acts and functions; sociocultural competence corresponds to Bachman’s sociolinguistic competence and represents the ability to convey messages appropriately in relation to the specific social context and the broader cultural context. Unlike Bachman’s, however, in this model these two components of communicative competence are on the same level and they both interact with the other three competences (discourse, linguistic and strategic). In addition, in contrast to the previous theoretical approaches, Celce-Murcia *et al.* devised this framework with a pedagogical goal in mind, thereby clearly identifying and listing the specific elements of each competence that learners need to acquire in order to possess such competence. Such

blend of theoretical concepts and pedagogical indications is the basis upon which the CEFR's model of communicative competence was conceived, as will be shown in a later section ("Connecting the Dots").

This brief overview of communicative competence models shows the relevance that sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences have acquired in linguistic theories, which in turn reflects the increased awareness of the significant role such competences play – or should play – for language users and learners. It is evident that SPC – despite the multitude of different terms used to identify it – is a *sine qua non* that learners need to develop in order to successfully communicate in their L2, and it interacts with the other components of communicative competence (grammatical, discourse competence, etc.) rather than being subordinate to them (Kasper, 1997).

However, the development of these models and the definitions of SPC described thus far remain mainly theoretical and regard SPC as one of many components of language abilities. Therefore, in order to examine the concept of SPC more in depth, I will now turn to the field of pragmatics. In the following sections I will (1) reflect on how sociolinguistics and pragmatics have been defined, and (2) present a review of studies that have investigated the role of sociolinguistics and pragmatics instruction in language education.

### **Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics**

Taking a step back from the notion of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence, I will now examine the fields of sociolinguistics and pragmatics as sub-areas of linguistics and I will identify how and to what extent SPC relates to them.

Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationships between language and society. Sociolinguistic research investigates how language is used in different social groups and analyzes language variations in terms of register, pronunciation, lexical choices, etc. from a social perspective (Crystal, 2008; LoCastro, 2003). Pragmatics, on the other hand, is concerned with the way language is used in a specific context by a specific speaker and how such language is interpreted by a specific hearer. Crystal (2008) defines pragmatics as “the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on the other participants in an act of communication” (p. 379), or in more succinct terms, “the study of communicative action in its sociocultural context” (Kasper, 1997). Pragmatics research topics include speech acts (*e.g.*, requests, apologies, compliments), implicatures, deixis, discourse structure, presupposition. (Alcón Soler & Martínez-Flor, 2008; Crystal, 2008).

Pragmatics and sociolinguistics are clearly related fields that partially overlap, as the social context in which language is used is an object of study in both areas. However, while sociolinguistics focuses on broad social phenomena (macro context), in pragmatics such phenomena are considered as one of the elements that contribute to explain a particular instance of language use in a micro context.

The dual interest of pragmatics in the dimension of discrete language use and in the social dimension of such use was made explicit by Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983), who identified two subfields of pragmatics: pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics.

Pragmalinguistics refers to the linguistic resources at the speaker’s disposal to perform a communicative act and convey a certain meaning. Such resources include for instance the

use of direct or indirect language, formulaic speech, hedges and other linguistic structures “which can intensify or soften communicative acts” (Kasper, 1997). Sociopragmatics refers to the way the interlocutors interpret and use language according to their social perceptions. In other words, participants’ beliefs and values regarding social distance, social power, appropriateness, politeness, etc., affect the linguistic choices they make in a given circumstance. The interaction of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics is perfectly explained by Thomas (1983) who points out, “Pragmatics, 'language in use', is the place where a speaker's knowledge of grammar comes into contact with his/her knowledge of the world. But both systems of knowledge are filtered through systems of beliefs—beliefs about language and beliefs about the world” (p. 99).

For the present research, I primarily refer to the field of pragmatics as the main source of studies and theories that informed my own study. More specifically, I tap into Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP), a subfield of pragmatics that studies the development of pragmatic ability in second and foreign language learners. The reason for this choice is that what applied linguists and the CEFR itself have labelled functional, actional, sociolinguistic, illocutionary, sociocultural competences are essentially all objects of study of pragmatics and can be encompassed in the broader term “pragmatic competence”, which is generally employed in ILP. By drawing from the definition of pragmatic competence as “the ability to communicate and interpret meaning in social interactions” (Taguchi, 2011, p. 289), I will describe it as the ability (1) to communicate messages in a socially and contextually appropriate manner and (2) to understand such messages in relation to the specific context in which they are conveyed.

However, a terminological clarification is in order. As I have explained in Chapter 1,

although my research is situated within the field of ILP and pragmatic competence as described above is my object of study, I have decided to use the terms Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics (SP) and Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Competence (SPC), rather than simply Pragmatics and Pragmatic Competence. My rationale is that such terms respect the CEFR's distinction of the two competences (as it will be illustrated in detail in the section "Connecting the Dots"), but at the same time reflect pragmatists' and my own view of the two as one concept.

### **Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics Instruction – Research Perspective**

A central research topic of Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) is the role of instruction in learners' development and acquisition of SPC.

One of the first questions that have been investigated is whether SP should be taught. Drawing from the results of early cross-cultural studies that examined second and foreign language learners' SPC and/or compared it to native speakers' SPC (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1997; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1993; Bouton, 1988; Kasper, 1981), compelling arguments in favour of the necessity of SP instruction have been provided (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kasper, 1997; Kasper & Rose, 2002). First, although non-native speakers (NNS) possess SPC in their native languages, they often fail to transfer such abilities when communicating in their L2. Second, NNS who do not receive SP instruction differ significantly from native speakers (NS) in their performances of communicative acts, showing lower levels of SPC and awareness. Third, even highly advanced learners and/or learners who live in the target language community vary considerably in their SPC. These results demonstrate that SPC in the L1, general linguistic abilities in the L2 or exposure to

the L2 are often not sufficient to develop SPC in the target language, and suggest that a specific focus on SP in language teaching is necessary to foster learners' SP awareness and skills.

Over the last two decades, support for SP instruction has continued to be manifested and justified by a large number of observational, interventional and review studies, as illustrated below. Three issues in particular have been the focus of ILP research: (1) teachability of SP; (2) whether SP instruction leads to learning; and (3) what types of SP instruction are more conducive to the development of SPC.

(1) Kasper (1997), Kasper & Rose (2002) and Rose (2005) reported a variety of studies that showed that most SP features can successfully be taught at different proficiency levels. As general consensus was established over the teachability of SP, most studies started to address the effects of SP instruction on acquisition.

(2) The main findings of this line of research are that teaching SP has generally a positive impact on the development of SPC and it tends to lead to better learning outcomes than exposure alone (Alcón Soler, 2005; Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Riddiford, 2007; Rose, 2005; Taguchi, 2011, 2015). This type of research is predominantly informed by SLA cognition approaches, and more specifically by Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis, according to which SPC development takes place when learners consciously notice the target features. However, these results do not imply that learning does not happen through exposure, but rather that instruction is significantly more effective than no instruction. These findings are particularly relevant to foreign language (FL) contexts, where opportunities for exposure to the target language are limited, and the vast majority of input learners receive is during their language classrooms. In such contexts, SP instruction acquires

an essential role to develop learners' SPC and should therefore be incorporated in teaching practices (Alcón Soler, 2005; Alcón Soler & Martínez-Flor, 2008; Eslami & Eslami-Rasekh, 2008; Gómez Morón, Padilla Cruz, Fernández Amaya, & Hernández López, 2009; Kasper, 1997; Koike & Pearson, 2005).

(3) A further development in ILP studies has been the investigation of the effects of different types of SP instruction on learning to determine what teaching approaches and activities are better suited to help learners develop SPC, both in terms of awareness and production. Compared to the previous research foci, the results obtained so far have been mixed. The majority of studies compared explicit SP instruction and implicit SP instruction (for comprehensive reviews, see Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Rose, 2005; Taguchi, 2011, 2015). While both teaching approaches appear to be conducive to SPC development, many reported higher learning benefits from explicit instruction (Alcón Soler, 2005; Fordyce, 2014; Fukuya & Martinez Flor, 2008; House, 1996; Nguyen, Pham & Pham, 2012), suggesting that providing metapragmatic explanations is more effective than more implicit strategies such as input enhancement. However, detailed meta-analyses (Jeon & Kaya, 2006) and recent reviews (Taguchi, 2015; Takahashi, 2010a, 2010b) have critically analyzed the results and have identified factors that point to the complexity of the issue. First, Jeon & Kaya (2006) noticed that, while explicit instruction led to larger effect sizes overall, it was actually not possible to conclude that it was more conducive to learning than implicit approaches for three reasons: (1) explicit and implicit teaching were operationalized in different ways in the studies analyzed, which made fruitful comparisons difficult (also in Takahashi, 2010a); (2) most studies employed explicit instruction; (3) in many studies more than one type of instruction was provided (*e.g.*: metapragmatic explanation and corrective

feedback) and the different techniques were situated at different points of the explicit-implicit continuum, therefore it was not possible to discern which instructional method was more effective. Second, there are many variables that may intervene on the learning outcomes of different instructional methods, such as target features, length of treatment, learning contexts, learners' proficiency, age, target language, assessment measures, etc. Third, in some cases implicit instruction can be as or more effective than explicit instruction, provided that learners have the opportunity for noticing and processing the information (Li, 2012; Taguchi, 2015), which suggests that learning outcomes might depend more on the quality and depth of processing, rather than simply on explicit versus implicit instruction.

Overall, ILP research findings show the importance of providing SP instruction in the language classroom to develop SPC, and there is a tendency to favour teaching approaches that push learners to notice and consciously reflect on SP, whether to develop awareness, understanding or ability to produce socially and contextually appropriate speech. Such conclusions are supposed to be extremely relevant for language teachers and to have major implications in their curricula and teaching practices. Therefore, the next logical question is: have ILP research findings been linked to practice? To what extent have they had an impact on language teachers and teaching? This issue will be examined in the following section.

### **Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics Instruction – Pedagogical Perspective**

The relationship between ILP research and SP teaching will be explored from two perspectives: (1) Resources available for language teachers on SP instruction; (2) Studies and academic papers that explicitly address SP instruction from a pedagogical perspective.

(1) General academic agreement on the importance of SP instruction has led to numerous publications that translated research findings into recommendations for language practitioners and illustrate how to incorporate SP in language teaching. These resources include a collection of lesson plans focused on SP (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003); a book focused on practical suggestions to teach speech acts (Tatsuki & Houck, 2010); a guidebook for teachers with empirically based explanations of SP concepts, classroom applications and activities for reflection on teaching practices (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010); journal articles with examples of SP instruction (Brock & Nagasaka, 2005; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005); an article with a pedagogical framework to teach SP (Martinez-Flor & Uso-Juan, 2006); a website entirely dedicated to SP instruction with online resources for teachers (<http://www.carla.umn.edu/speechacts/index.html>) and two sections that specialize in teaching SP in Spanish (Sykes & Cohen, 2006) and Japanese (Ishihara & Cohen, n.d.).

The presence of these resources is relevant not only for the intrinsic value of the contents for language teachers, but also because it symbolizes the importance for language instructors to understand the concepts of SP and develop awareness and knowledge on the topic that will enable them to purposefully teach SP and lead their learners to SPC. However, information regarding pedagogical outcomes of ILP research and language practitioners' knowledge and practices of SP instruction is fairly scant and not very encouraging, as I will illustrate in my second point.

(2) One of the main steps to promote SP instruction among language teachers is through teacher education programs. However, questions have been raised regarding the amount and quality of preparation teacher candidates receive on this subject, and as a consequence it is unclear whether language teachers have adequate knowledge of SP and

how to teach it, and whether they actually teach it (Cohen, 2008; Eslami & Eslami-Rasekh, 2008; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Ishihara, 2010a).

A small number of studies have investigated the role of SP in teacher education and development to shed some light on this rather unexplored area. Vasquez & Sharpless (2009) conducted a nation-wide survey with 94 Master's TESOL programs in the United States to determine whether and to what extent SP has a place in the curricula. Their findings show that, while the majority of respondents reported covering SP to some degree, only 20% of the programs offered dedicated SP courses, and among these such courses were a requirement for a very small minority. In addition, it was found that in many cases SP is taught from a theoretical – rather than applied or pedagogical – perspective, which seems to deter students from taking these courses. These results suggest that, although there is a somewhat increasing awareness of the importance of teaching SP to language educators, a very large population of novice teachers start their professional careers without adequate – if any – preparation on how to teach SP. Other studies have focused on specific teacher education/teacher development courses in which SP was explicitly addressed and on teacher's cognition and practices in SP instruction. Eslami & Eslami-Rasekh (2008) conducted a quasi-experimental study to investigate EFL teacher candidates' SP learning after receiving SP instruction. Not surprisingly, positive effects were found on the participants' SP awareness and production, which lend support to the claim that SP instruction is not only paramount for language learners but also for their teachers, especially in a FL context. Ishihara (2011) investigated in-practice teachers' cognition and awareness development on SP instruction during a teacher development workshop in which SP was one of the topics discussed. While she found variability in practitioners' knowledge and beliefs

about SP instruction, she also noticed that peer discussion and a process of co-construction of knowledge among the participants helped a skeptical teacher think more critically about instructional SP issues, such as the quality of textbooks and materials and the importance of language authenticity. Finally, Farashaiyan, Tan, & Subakir (2014) reported on the teaching approaches Iranian EFL instructors employ to teach SP. By means of a survey and semi-structured interviews, it was found that implicit methods were preferred and implemented through the use of various techniques (*e.g.*: role-plays, pair work, etc.). In light of the research findings on the effects of distinct types of SP instruction and of the difficulties Iranian EFL learners have in developing SPC, the authors suggested that more explicit approaches to SP instruction should be adopted.

These studies suggest that SP needs to be explicitly addressed in teacher education and development programs, not only because language professionals should be provided with the theoretical and practical tools to incorporate SP instruction in their teaching practice, but also for two more reasons: (a) it is apparent that knowledge and awareness about SP are not something that even advanced native speakers or highly competent teachers naturally possess (Ishihara, 2010a); (b) teachers' beliefs and practices are often shaped by factors other than empirically-based research and theories of language acquisition (Borg, 2003; Ishihara, 2010b). Therefore, knowledge about instructional SP is the starting point to promote language professionals' reflection, enhance their cognition and ultimately contribute to improve their practices of teaching SP.

Despite these few attempts to gain insight on the pedagogical side of SP instruction, we are still left with more questions than answers. More specifically, an area that has not been sufficiently explored is the relationship between language teachers' knowledge of SP

and their actual practices. Such issues have partially been addressed by the above-mentioned studies (Farashaiyan *et al.*, 2014; Ishihara, 2011), but to my knowledge there are no studies that have investigated the reality of language classroom practices in depth, or collected data beyond participants' self reports. With my study I intend to address this research gap.

### **Connecting the Dots: The CEFR, SPC and SP Instruction**

In the previous sections I examined the three conceptual constructs of my study separately and provided an overview of each of them from a research and pedagogical perspective. In this section I will illustrate the link between the CEFR, Sociolinguistic & Pragmatic Competence (SPC) and Sociolinguistics & Pragmatics (SP) instruction, which constitutes the theoretical foundation of the present study.

As stated in the overview of the CEFR, this document provides a taxonomic scheme of competences that language learners need to develop to become effective language users. Among such competences is communicative language competence, which is subdivided into linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence. The CEFR describes and distinguishes (1) sociolinguistic competence and (2) pragmatic competence as follows:

1. "Sociolinguistic competence is concerned with the knowledge and skills required to deal with the social dimension of language use" and it specifically refers to:  
"linguistic markers of social relations;  
politeness conventions;  
expressions of folk-wisdom;  
register differences;  
and dialect and accent." (p. 118).

- (2) “Pragmatic competences are concerned with the user/learner’s knowledge of the principles according to which messages are:
- a) organised, structured and arranged (‘discourse competence’);
  - b) used to perform communicative functions (‘functional competence’);
  - c) sequenced according to interactional and transactional schemata (‘design competence’).” (p. 123).

The CEFR, therefore, recognizes sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence (SPC) as integral to language teaching and learning, and clearly reflects the models of communicative competence proposed by Canale and Swain (1980), Bachman (1990) and Celce-Murcia *et al.* (1995). However, while drawing from these theoretical constructs, the CEFR has produced its own pedagogy-oriented model in which sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence are separated, and discourse competence is part of pragmatic competence, rather than being a distinct category as in the previous models.

In addition, similarly to Celce-Murcia *et al.* (1995), it provides a detailed list of the language topics, features and functions that need to be addressed in order to develop each competence. For instance, within sociolinguistic competence, the “linguistic markers of social relations” refer to use and choice of greetings, use and choice of address forms, conventions for turn-taking, and use and choice of expletives (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 119).

The CEFR takes a step even further by creating scales of descriptors that clearly and briefly illustrate what learners need to be able to do at different proficiency levels with respect to a variety of aspects of SPC. For instance, turn-taking ability, which pertains to pragmatic competence, at a beginner level (A2) consists of using “simple techniques to start,

maintain, or end a short conversation” and “initiat[ing], maintain[ing] and clos[ing] simple, face-to-face conversation” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 124).

Finally, the CEFR presents sets of questions for each competence to help practitioners reflect on the approaches and techniques they deem appropriate to employ in their own contexts to develop learners’ SPC. In the case of sociolinguistic competence, the reflection points are the following: “Should the development of the learner’s sociolinguistic competence [...] be assumed to be transferable from the learner’s experience of social life or facilitated:

- a) by exposure to authentic language used appropriately in its social setting?
- b) by selecting or constructing texts that exemplify sociolinguistic contrasts between the society of origin and the target society?
- c) by drawing attention to sociolinguistic contrasts as they are encountered, explaining and discussing them?
- d) by waiting for errors to be made, then marking, analysing and explaining them and giving the correct usage?
- e) as part of the explicit teaching of a sociocultural component in the study of a modern language?” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 154).

In other words, the CEFR draws from ILP research and makes its findings pedagogically relevant for language practitioners by encouraging them to consider issues such as to what extent SP instruction is needed in their educational contexts, what types of instruction would best facilitate learners’ SPC, and what choices teachers can make in terms of material selection.

From this analysis of how the CEFR has included and described SPC in its model of

communicative language competence and the way it promotes SP instruction, I would argue that this document has significantly contributed to linking theoretical and applied linguistics constructs with language policies and teaching practices, thus making the concepts of SPC and SP instruction more accessible and relevant to language professionals.

Furthermore, what distinguishes the CEFR from other pedagogy-oriented resources on SP instruction (see my overview in the section “SP Instruction – Pedagogical Perspective”) is its status of official reference document for language policies, textbook and curriculum development, test design and teaching practices in many countries worldwide. It is this status that enables the CEFR to reach a wider audience on a larger scale at a faster pace, and thus this document is potentially positioned to promote the importance of SPC and SP instruction to all the spheres of second and foreign language education.

For such reasons I have decided to adopt the CEFR as the lens through which I investigate FL teachers’ knowledge of SP and their actual instructional practices that facilitate learners’ SPC. By doing so, the CEFR is concurrently part of my theoretical framework – together with SPC and instructional SP – and part of my object of study, as this research includes an examination of the impact of the CEFR on teaching practices about SP.

### **Research Gaps**

The overview of my conceptual tenets and of the research conducted to date has brought to light several questions that have yet to be thoroughly investigated. Therefore, in this section I will summarize the research gaps the present study seeks to address.

Although CEFR-focused research and ILP research are fields of inquiry with different orientations and objects of study – the former being often focused on macro policy

and education issues, the latter generally having a narrower, applied-linguistic oriented focus -, they show fairly similar patterns in terms of emerging and unresolved issues.

In both cases little attention has been paid to the reality of language classrooms, especially from the teachers' perspective. While there is general consensus on the potential value of the CEFR to foster a competence-based approach and encourage practitioners' reflections, and on the importance of teaching SP to develop learners' SPC, there is a dearth of studies that have examined whether these concepts have reached individual language teachers and had an impact on their pedagogical practices. In other words, research to date has mostly explored what can and should be done in the language classroom, not what is actually being done. For this reason, questions regarding (1) FL teachers' cognition and attitudes about the CEFR, SPC and SP instruction and (2) the relationship between these concepts and their current practices constitute the core of my study.

In addition, to my knowledge no previous studies have investigated SPC and SP instruction as an innovative component of the CEFR, nor have examined the pedagogical impact of the CEFR by focusing on SPC and SP instruction. While these constructs have been treated separately, I argue that the interaction between them is a new, applicable lens through which language teaching practices can be explored.

Finally, the reviewed research that has studied the CEFR and SP instruction from a teaching perspective has almost exclusively relied on self-report data collection tools, such as interviews, surveys and questionnaires (European Commission, 2012; Farashaiyan *et al.*, 2014; Hehl & Kruczek, 2011; Ishihara, 2011; Moonen *et al.*, 2013; Piccardo *et al.*, 2011; Piccardo, 2013a; Vasquez & Sharpless, 2009). For my study I have adopted a more complex methodology that includes document analysis and classroom observations, in order to

complement language practitioners' self-reported knowledge with findings about their actual teaching practices and ultimately obtain a more detailed and reliable picture.

**Chapter 3:**  
**Research Methodology**

**Basic Qualitative Research**

The present study is situated in the domain of “basic qualitative research” (Merriam, 2009, p. 22). Performing basic qualitative research involves interpreting the phenomenon under study to understand “the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved” (Merriam, 2009, p. 22).

Grounded in constructivism, a basic qualitative study seeks to understand “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences.” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23) In other words, the participants’ (emic) perspective and their experiences are the focus of the data collection, analysis and interpretive phase, as it is by observing and interpreting how people construct their realities that the researcher can, in turn, construct the meaning of the event being studied. As Merriam (2009) points out, “the overall interpretation will be the researcher’s understanding of the participants’ understanding of the phenomenon of interest” (pp. 23-24).

Basic qualitative research adheres to the naturalistic inquiry paradigm, which consists of a holistic, process-focused, context- and value-bound approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). By collecting and analyzing naturalistic data (Harklau, 2011), the researcher attempts to “establish plausible inferences” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 238) between the factors, processes and patterns that emerge from such data. This procedure requires an in-depth examination of the context in which the study takes place: the participants with their views and knowledge, the environment they operate in and its features, and the interaction between

participants and environment are not only to be taken into account, but are the very core of the research.

In order to get greater insight into the complexity of the processes that interact within and shape my study, I have adopted three data collection methods: classroom observations, interviews and document analysis.

These methods are particularly appropriate for a basic qualitative study, because they allow the researcher to study the phenomenon holistically by taking into account a variety of angles: (a) through direct observations, it is possible to see participants' behaviours; (b) interviews offer insight into their thoughts and interpretations of the phenomenon; and (c) documents might provide additional information that cannot be directly observed or extrapolated through interviews. In addition, these data collection procedures comply with the naturalistic element of this type of research, as they are embedded in the context of the phenomenon under study and contribute to acquire information about it.

Using multiple data sources has two main advantages:

1. At the data collection stage, each instrument interacts with the others and contributes to refine and improve them.
2. At the analysis stage, the data collected from different sources can be triangulated.

Triangulation entails an investigation of the research issue from different angles, which strengthens the validity of the results and allows for deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Yin, 2009). In my study, for instance, the combination of teachers' interviews and observations of their classes enabled me to provide a more in-depth picture of teachers' cognition of the CEFR, SPC and SP instruction in relation to their actual practices (Baker, 2014; Borg, 2006), instead of relying exclusively on their self-reports or on my outsider's

perspective. Further details about data collection measures and analysis are provided in the following sections.

## **Research Design**

### **Participant School**

The school I selected for my research study is a *Liceo*, the academic type of high school. Henceforth, I will refer to the participant school with the pseudonym “Liceo Hack”. My rationale for choosing this name is that Italian high schools are usually named after famous Italian scientists, scholars, authors, etc., therefore I wanted to respect this tradition, while at the same time avoiding names that have been used by other schools in the country; for that reason, I have chosen Margherita Hack, a prominent Italian astrophysicist of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Liceo Hack is a small-size, private school situated in the capital city of one of Italy’s Northern provinces. From a socio-economic perspective, the student population attending this school is typically from well-educated, middle-class and upper middle-class families with an Italian-only background. After graduation, over 90% of the students pursue university studies.

Liceo Hack offers two programs: *liceo linguistico* and *liceo scientifico*. *Liceo linguistico* (language studies program) specializes in foreign languages and liberal arts; at Liceo Hack, the core subjects of this program are: three foreign languages, Italian, Latin, History, Philosophy, and Art History. *Liceo scientifico* (scientific studies program) focuses on scientific subjects, such as Maths, Natural Sciences, Physics, and Computer Science. In

the academic year 2014-15, there were 423 enrolled students: 196 students enrolled in the language studies program and 227 students enrolled in the scientific studies program.

At Liceo Hack, FL teaching and learning play central roles in both programs. In the language studies program, learners study three languages during the five academic years: EFL, SFL and one language they select among French, German and Chinese. In addition to Language and Culture classes for each FL, some subjects are taught following the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology, which consists of teaching content other than languages by using a foreign language as the medium of instruction; for instance, Geography and History are taught in English, and History of Art in Spanish.

EFL is a core subject in the scientific studies program as well, and students enrolled in this program follow the same curriculum and have the same number of EFL classes as their peers in the language studies program, with English Language and Culture classes, and CLIL classes of Geography and History in English. Furthermore, some modules of scientific subjects such as Math, Physics and Natural Sciences are taught in English.

A variety of curricular and extra-curricular FL-related initiatives are undertaken by the school to enhance the students' language learning experience and improve their proficiency levels.

Curricular activities include the preparation for external language exams provided by world-renowned institutions, such as the Preliminary English Test (PET), First Certificate in English (FCE) and Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE) exams by Cambridge English Language Assessment, and the *Diploma de Español como Lengua Extranjera (DELE)* (Diploma of Spanish as a Foreign Language: DELE), a Spanish exam by *Instituto Cervantes*. School records show that over 95% of students at Liceo Hack take at least one of these

exams during their five academic years. Advanced English students are also offered the opportunity to prepare for and take the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) that enables them to apply for American universities.

Extra-curricular activities include class exchanges with schools from countries of the languages taught at Liceo Hack; out-of-school “language tandem” programs, during which an individual student spends one hour a week conversing with an English native-speaking university student in an informal setting; the opportunity to spend half or one academic year in a high school abroad.

The emphasis Liceo Hack places on foreign language education is also reflected in the FL teachers’ hiring process. Unlike Italian public schools, where prospective teachers take an open competitive exam and are then assigned to a school based on their exam score, Liceo Hack – a private school – implements a direct screening and selection process of the candidates, with the purpose of hiring the best-suited teachers for this specific school.

This process follows four steps. First, the teacher coordinator of a given language department selects the candidates that comply with the school’s basic requirements, such as (a) having a teaching license, (b) having spent a minimum of one year abroad immersed in the target language and culture, and (c) having a certified C1 proficiency level in this language. In addition, teachers need to be Italian native speakers (with high target language proficiency). The principal pointed out that experience has taught the administration that foreign language teaching is more successful if provided by someone who has gone through the process of learning a FL her/himself, as well as the fact that non native speaker teachers are often more knowledgeable in the target language rules and mechanisms than native speakers. Second, candidates sit in a job interview with the principal, the teacher coordinator

of the specific language department and a NS teaching assistant. During this interview, the candidate's language skills are assessed by the NS assistant and teacher coordinator, who, together with the principal, also evaluates the educational values and competences. Third, if the interview is successful, the candidate is hired for a trial period during which she/he has limited duties and responsibilities, such as replacing regular teachers for short substitutions or teaching afternoon tutoring classes, which allow her/his superiors to see this person in action and determine whether to assign her/him full-year courses. Finally, during the first year of practice, junior teachers are mentored by senior teachers, who counsel and evaluate them on all aspects of teaching, such as curriculum development, grading, teaching approaches, and who then report to the principal to make the final decision of hiring the trainee teachers permanently.

This overview of Liceo Hack's programs, initiatives and teachers' requirements shows that foreign language teaching and learning is a priority for the school, which holds high standards of quality in this field – both in terms of practitioners' competences and students' learning – and has a positive reputation for its cutting-edge FL programs and practices among similar schools in the area.

## **Participants**

Research participants include four language teachers (three EFL teachers and one SFL teacher), one school administrator (the school principal), two native-speaker (NS) teaching assistants (one for EFL and one for SFL), and 99 students divided into six different classes. In the present research report I have divided participants into two categories: primary participants and secondary participants.

Primary participants are the four language teachers and the school principal, as they were the main sources of information needed to answer my research questions and were therefore the main participants of my study.

The two NS teaching assistants and all the students are considered secondary participants because, although they were present during the data collection phase, their involvement in the research project was minimal. Teaching assistants were not treated as primary participants because I was not aware of the relevance of their roles until the data collection phase started; therefore, I was not able to include them in my interviewees list or closely shadow them as I did with the four participant teachers. Students were treated as participants only because they attended the classes I observed, but my main focus was on teachers' approaches and the types of activities administered, rather than on learners' performances or behaviour.

**Teachers.** All four teachers are native Italian speakers. While they pursued the majority of their language and teacher education in Italy, each of them also lived in English-speaking countries (EFL teachers) and Spanish-speaking countries (SFL teacher) for over a year, during which they completed part of their higher education and/or worked in language education. The teachers' age ranges between 27 and 35 years, and their average teaching experience is 4.75 years. Table 1 shows the teachers' bio-data.

**Principal.** She has been the head of the participant school for about 20 years and has a teaching background in high school history and philosophy.

**Teaching assistants.** Both teaching assistants are native speakers of the languages they teach (one EFL and one SFL). Data about their ages and years of teaching experience were not gathered, but from informal conversations it emerged that both of them had over 10

years of experience as language teachers and/or examiners of Cambridge English examinations and *Instituto Cervantes* Spanish examinations. The EFL assistant is in charge of teaching one period a week in every class I examined for the entire academic year. Her main role is to help the learners develop their speaking abilities with a twofold goal: (a) to improve their English proficiency in general and (b) to prepare the students for the speaking parts of the Cambridge English exams. The SFL assistant only teaches one of the two SFL classes I observed (Grade 12), one period a week for 20 weeks, from January to May. His role is to prepare the students for the *Instituto Cervantes* Spanish examination: He teaches them the exam methodology and techniques, administers exam simulations and assesses the learners according to the criteria of the exam. As my data collection at Liceo Hack took place during the three weeks prior to the English and Spanish examinations, some of the lessons I observed were conducted by the teaching assistants.

**Students.** As students were considered secondary participants in this study, detailed information about them was not needed. The only data collected are the number of students in each class I examined and the audio recordings of students' discourse during the classes I observed.

Table 1

*Teachers' and teaching assistants' bio-data*

Name	Gender	Language taught	Years of teaching experience	Lived abroad	Classes taught
Eric	Male	EFL	2	Over 1 year	Gr. 10 – Level 2 Gr. 12 – Level 2
Alex	Male	EFL	6	Over 1 year	Gr. 12 – Level 1
Sarah	Female	EFL	8	2 years	Gr. 10 – Level 1

Carmen	Female	SFL	3	2 years	Gr. 10 & 12
Mary	Female	EFL (TA)	n/a	n/a	Gr. 10 & 12 (all levels)
Ramon	Male	SFL (TA)	n/a	n/a	Gr. 12

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### **Preliminary Procedures**

I initially contacted the school principal by email, in which I introduced my study and inquired about her interest and feasibility issues. Upon her positive response, I then emailed all EFL and SFL teachers, who also demonstrated their intention to participate. Two face-to-face informative meetings followed, one with the principal and one with the teachers, to illustrate the research project more in detail, answer their questions and obtain their written consent. During such meetings and through several consultations with the teachers via email I also gathered information about the school context and types of classes, which enabled me to select the classes to observe during the data collection phase.

Upon selection of the six classes to observe, I sent the teachers of these classes an information letter addressed to the students. I asked them to introduce the students to the research project and informally inquire about their interest and willingness to participate. As we received a general consensus, during my next visit to the school I formally presented myself and my study to each class and obtained written consent from each student. All the students who were asked to participate gave their consent, except for one. Although most of the students involved were minors, parental consent was not sought for this specific study because parents had previously signed a waiver in which they agreed to allow research projects to be conducted at the school, including the presence of external researchers and the audio-recording of lessons. Information letters and informed consent for all participants

(principal, teachers, teaching assistants and students) as well as the parental consent form are in Appendices A to E.

Anonymity and confidentiality were stressed during all the information sessions, in the informative letters and reiterated orally throughout the data collection phases of the study. The anonymity of the participant institution was ensured through the use of a pseudonym and by the non provision of identifying information, such as the name of its geographical location. Pseudonyms are also used throughout the thesis for all the participant teachers, teaching assistants and the principal. EFL teachers were given English pseudonyms and SFL teachers were given Spanish pseudonyms, while I refer to the school principal as “Principal”. In addition, personally identifiable data about the participant teachers are not provided (*e.g.*, names of academic institutions attended, exact age of teachers), except for their gender and years of teaching experience. The issue of anonymity did not directly concern the participant students, as I did not collect any personal information on them (names, gender, age, background, etc.), and from my observations and recordings it is not possible to identify speakers.

### **Selection Criteria**

As this study is an in-depth investigation of the extent to which SPC is fostered in language classrooms and on the type of SP instruction employed by teachers, it was necessary to focus on a selected number of EFL and SFL classes and teachers. For such reason, in this section I will illustrate the criteria that guided my selection of classes to observe.

**EFL and SFL.** I selected EFL and SFL for two main reasons: (a) Examining two different language curricula, teaching materials, approaches and classes reduced the possibility that knowledge and use of the CEFR and SP instruction (or lack of thereof) were related to the instruction of one specific language. (b) The research topic and methodology adopted required an advanced knowledge of the target languages examined on the researcher's part; therefore, I chose English and Spanish because I have a high command of these two languages.

**Classes.** My first criterion for class selection was to focus on language-based classes in which English and Spanish were the primary object of instruction. Content-based classes were excluded on the grounds that the L2 is primarily the medium of instruction while the object is a different subject, such as literature, history, geography, or art history. The rationale for my choice was that the focus of this study is on SP instruction and on whether and how SPC is fostered in the language classroom. Therefore, I expected to observe more instances of language instruction – SP-oriented or not – in language-based classes rather than content-based classes.

Secondly, I chose to observe EFL and SFL classes in two grades: Grade 10 and Grade 12. There are three reasons for this selection:

First, Grade 10 is in the *primo biennio* and Grade 12<sup>3</sup> is in the *secondo biennio*, therefore it was possible to have a picture of the two main grade groups in which Italian high schools are divided, and to observe the differences in SP instruction and its evolution between lower and higher grades.

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<sup>3</sup> In the Italian school system, Grade 12 is the second-last high school year, with Grade 13 being the final year.

Second, at Liceo Hack, at the end of Grade 10 and 12 most learners take English language proficiency exams, namely, the Cambridge Preliminary English Test (PET) at the end of Grade 10, and the Cambridge First Certificate in English (FCE) at the end of Grade 12. For the academic year 2014-15, all the students but one in the participant Grade 10 classes and all students but two in the participant Grade 12 classes took the PET and FCE exams, respectively. Therefore, a considerable portion of Grade 10 and 12 EFL classes is usually focused on the preparation for these exams, which typically includes explanation and practice of the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) as well as grammar and vocabulary. In other words, the majority of class time tends to be devoted to language instruction and practice, which was the primary focus of my research. Similarly, Grade 12 SFL classes prepare for the Spanish language proficiency exam *Diploma de Español como Lengua Estranjera (DELE - Nivel Intermedio)* (Diploma of Spanish as a Foreign Language: DELE – Intermediate Level), and therefore follow a similar preparation to Grade 12 EFL classes. Grade 10 SFL classes do not prepare for a language exam, but lessons are nonetheless focused on the basic foundations of the Spanish language, and were therefore considered appropriate for my study.

Third, it was important that both types of language classes (EFL and SFL) were observed in the same grades in order to ensure consistency and facilitate comparisons between types of instruction while keeping other variables constant, such as learners' age.

A third criterion was devised for EFL classes only because in the participant school, which offers a specialized language program, EFL classes from Grade 9 to 12 are also divided into proficiency levels. At the beginning of the *primo biennio* (in Grade 9) and at the beginning of the *secondo biennio* (in Grade 11) learners take an English placement test to

determine their level of English. All learners are then divided into four levels (Level 1 - Beginners to Level 4 - Advanced). Therefore, for each grade there are four different EFL classes (*e.g.*, Grade 9 - Level 1, Grade 9 - Level 2, etc.). For this study, the EFL proficiency levels selected were Level 1 and Level 2 for both Grade 10 and 12. The rationale behind this choice was the following: As Liceo Hack is specialized in foreign language teaching, students' proficiency levels tend to be higher than the average high school students. For instance, in the *Decreto delle Indicazioni Nazionali per i Licei* (2010) (the Italian Ministry of Education's document with the curriculum guidelines for this type of high school) the English language competences learners are expected to develop by the end of Grade 13 correspond to level B2 of the CEFR. At Liceo Hack, however, most learners reach level B2 by Grade 12, as demonstrated by the language proficiency exam that Grade-12 learners take (Cambridge FCE exam), which corresponds to the level B2 of the CEFR. Therefore, by selecting the two lower proficiency levels of English, I intended to observe learners whose level was more comparable to average high school learners and therefore more representative for this population.

In conclusion, I observed four EFL classes:

- Gr. 10 - Level 1 - 24 students
- Gr. 10 - Level 2 - 24 students
- Gr. 12 - Level 1 - 12 students
- Gr. 12 - Level 2 - 13 students

Unlike EFL classes, SFL classes are only divided into grades, and not proficiency levels.

Therefore, I observed two SFL classes:

- Gr. 10 - 20 students

- Gr. 12 - 26 students

**Teachers.** As previously stated, this study involves four teachers: three EFL teachers and one SFL teacher. Before the beginning of the study, contact was made with all EFL and SFL teachers. The selection process for the participant teachers did not follow any criteria, but was indirectly determined by the class selection, as only the instructors who taught the six classes selected were asked to be involved in the research project.

### **Data Collection**

Three data collection instruments were employed: (1) Document analysis; (2) Classroom observations; (3) Semi-structured interviews. Such tools did not constitute three completely distinct steps from one another from a methodological or a chronological perspective, rather, they were deeply interrelated and complementary, in that each of them constantly contributed to inform and modify the others throughout the entire data collection. In the following sections each data collection measure will be described more in detail and a rationale will be provided in relation to the research questions of this study.

**Document analysis.** The documents I scrutinized included: the national guidelines for EFL and SFL curricula (*Decreto delle Indicazioni Nazionali per i Licei*, 2010), the EFL and SFL syllabi of the participant classes, teachers' lesson plans, textbooks employed in the participant classes, material used during the lessons I observed, samples of language tests administered to the EFL and SFL classes throughout the academic year, as well as samples of the external English and Spanish exams students were preparing (Cambridge PET and FCE for English and DELE for Spanish) and the teachers' handbooks of these exams.

The main goal of the document analysis was to answer Research Question 1 (“How and to what extent is sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence (SPC) as described in the CEFR addressed in EFL and SFL curricula and syllabi?”). Some documents, such as the teaching material employed in the observed classes and administered tests, contributed to partially answer Research Question 2 (“Beyond what is stated in the curricula and syllabi, how is SP addressed in the teaching approaches and practices in EFL and SFL language classrooms?”), as well as Research Question 3 (“Is SPC systematically assessed / evaluated? If so, does the CEFR have an impact on the assessment tools used?”).

More specifically, the analysis of EFL and SFL curricula, syllabi and teachers’ lesson plans served the purpose of investigating the role of the CEFR in the definition of learning objectives and outcomes, and whether the concept of SPC as a goal and the description of activities and methodologies related to SP instruction were explicitly described, or if only implicit referenced. The textbooks used by the participant teachers were examined to identify whether and how SP concepts are addressed and portrayed. Finally, a scrutiny of language tests administered to the participant classes was performed to verify whether SP elements were included and systematically tested and assessed.

Document analysis took place throughout the entire data collection phase. I started from broader policy documents, such as the national curriculum guidelines, and the school curricula and syllabi, which helped me gain a better understanding of the context of the Italian high school language curricula in general and of the Liceo Hack language curricula in particular. However, the majority of the documentary research and inspection happened concurrently with classroom observations, which provided new, more specific directions for the types of documents to analyze. For instance, I gathered some of the materials that were

employed during the classes I observed (*e.g.*, photocopies prepared by teachers, textbook extracts, sample tests), which enabled me to examine such classes more in detail. In addition, it was primarily through classroom observations and my field notes that I realized the relevance of the external language exams in classroom practices, which led me to collect and perform a more thorough analysis of the various parts of such exams and the practice tests students took in preparation for them. Finally, the information found in the documents examined contributed to define and refine interview questions.

**Classroom observations.** The main purpose of classroom observations was to answer Research Question 2 (“Beyond what is stated in the curricula and syllabi, how is SP reflected in the teaching approaches and practices in EFL and SFL language classrooms?”). As the focus of my observations was SP instruction, my attention was primarily directed towards the teachers and teaching assistants to examine whether and how they addressed SP concepts and whether and how they promoted learners’ SPC development. However, learners’ discourse was also treated as relevant data because teacher-learner and/or learner-learner interactions constitute fundamental opportunities for “teachable moments” during which SP instruction might occur.

As described in the Selection Criteria section, four EFL classes and two SFL classes were observed, for a total of six foreign language classes. The initial data collection plan envisaged that each class would be observed for one 55-minute period twice a week for three weeks. According to this plan, a total of 12 class periods (eight EFL periods and four SFL periods) would be observed every week. As observations were meant to take place for three weeks, the total amount of periods observed would be 36 (24 EFL periods and 12 SFL periods). However, it was not possible to observe every class twice a week for three weeks,

mostly due to teachers' scheduling issues and class cancelations for school events. For instance, one of the participant teachers' was absent for a couple of days because he accompanied a class on a school trip; on another occasion, two of the classes I was supposed to observe did not take place because at that time a guest speaker gave a lecture on the situation in the Middle East to the entire school. As a consequence, a total of 26 observation sessions were performed over the three-week data collection period, and they were divided as follows:

Table 2

*Classroom observations schedule*

Language	Grade	Level	Teacher	Number of periods
EFL	10	1	Sarah	6
EFL	10	2	Eric	4
EFL	12	1	Alex	3
EFL	12	2	Eric	3
SFL	10	n/a	Carmen	5
SFL	12	n/a	Carmen	5

Observations were designed to be naturalistic in order to capture the authentic classroom dynamics. Each class was intact (*i.e.*, with its original number and group of students) and the contents of each lesson were determined by the teacher according to her/his syllabus and plans, without any intervention on my part. In addition, my role was supposed to be that of a non-participatory observer: I was not going to take part in any aspect of the lessons and I was not going to interact with teachers and learners during class time. While this observation design was generally respected, in some occasions teachers involved me in the classroom discourse by asking me questions related to the lesson topics, and at times students asked me questions about vocabulary while they were performing pair or group

activities. However, my overall participation was very minimal and limited to very brief answers that did not alter the course of the lessons. In addition, I would argue that the fact that students spontaneously asked me questions demonstrates that they became accustomed to my presence and were comfortable with it, which reduces the chances of unnatural behaviours on their part.

During classroom observations I took extensive field notes and audio-recorded the lessons with three mini digital recorders that were usually placed near the teacher in the front part of the classroom or on students' desks during pair or group activities. As stated in the Document Analysis section, observations and document analysis were largely conducted concurrently, which allowed me to improve both data collection methods and focus on specific data. Similarly to document analysis, my observations and field notes also contributed to add new, relevant questions to my interview protocol.

**Semi-structured interviews.** The information obtained from the interviews contributed to answering all the research questions.

Five interviews were performed: four interviews with the instructors of the classes I observed and one interview with the school principal. All the interviews were conducted during the last week of data collection. Each participant was interviewed individually for about 45-60 minutes and our conversations were audio-recorded. Interviews with the EFL teachers were conducted almost exclusively in English, except for sporadic instances in which the interviewees felt more comfortable using Italian. Interviews with the SFL teacher and the principal were conducted entirely in Italian. Teachers' interviews were conducted after all classroom observations had been completed to avoid the risk that the content of the interviews could influence teachers' behaviour, methodologies and choice of topics in the

lessons I observed. The interview with the principal took place during the final phases of classroom observations. As the principal was not a participant in the observation phase, there was no real risk that this interview could compromise subsequent data collection measures, and therefore we scheduled the interview at her convenience.

The interviews represented a helpful tool to substantiate the findings from the document analysis and classroom observations, as they contributed to add the participants' (emic) perspective to my own (etic) perspective. The data from the principal's interview, combined with the analysis of policy documents (*e.g.*, national curriculum guidelines and the school's language curricula) allowed me to form a picture of the "official" policy context of the school and the administration's perspective on the role of the CEFR in foreign language curricula and instruction. Teacher interviews, together with and informed by classroom observations and analysis of pedagogy-related texts (lesson plans, textbooks, tests), enabled me to get a deeper understanding of the pedagogical context and the role that the CEFR and SP instruction play in the language classroom.

The teacher interview protocol design consisted in six sets of questions, each exploring a specific topic (see Appendix F):

1. Background and general information (education background; work experience; teaching approaches)
2. The CEFR (teachers' knowledge of the CEFR; their use of the CEFR)
3. Communicative competence (teachers' knowledge of communicative competence in general and sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence (SPC) in particular; how they incorporate SP in their teaching practices, how they foster learners' SPC development; assessment of SPC)

4. Textbooks and other materials (role of textbooks in the curriculum and teaching practices; teachers' opinions about textbooks and materials used; use of authentic materials)
5. External language exams (role of such exams in the curriculum and teaching practices; relationship between the CEFR and these exams; development of SPC through these exams)
6. Observation follow-up: this set of questions concerned salient aspects that emerged from my classroom observations and that I pointed out to the teachers to elicit their perspectives and verify the accuracy of my own observations.

The interview questions for the school principal were of a more general nature than those directed to the teachers and were divided into four sets (see Appendix G):

1. Background and general information (education background, work experience)
2. Liceo Hack's foreign language program (type of programs; curriculum objectives; types of activities organized; teachers' roles)
3. The CEFR (role of the CEFR at the policy and curriculum level)
4. External language exams (role of such exams in the curriculum).

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the research data was a complex, multi-stage process that consisted primarily of content analysis, which is described by Patton (2002) as “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453). While Patton (2002) states that content analysis typically concerns data directly obtained from the participants (*e.g.*, interview

transcripts and documents), I also employed my observation field notes to compare their contents with the findings from the other data sources (interviews, classroom discourse and documents) through a triangulation process. In this section I will describe the three stages of my data analysis and illustrate in detail how I proceeded at each stage. Such stages are (1) Preliminary Analysis; (2) Coding Phase; (3) Systematic Analysis.

**Preliminary analysis.** The first phase of data analysis took place throughout the data collection period. During this time I took field notes in which I recorded my impressions, thoughts, ideas regarding the information I was gathering through interviews, classroom observations and documentation, and I began to identify themes that I deemed relevant for my research questions. The advantage of this informal preliminary analysis is twofold: (1) As described above in the data collection section, it allowed me to modify and refine my instruments for gathering data, as I proceeded to re-calibrate them according to what emerged from the collected data and my own reflections. (2) My preliminary data analysis notes constituted the basis for the subsequent coding phase, as I selected and defined some of the coding categories based on the major themes identified in my notes.

**Coding phase.** Once the data collection phase was completed, the interviews and the recorded language classes were transcribed, and all the data gathered (scanned documents, interview and classes transcripts, field notes) were imported into NVivo 10, a computer-assisted qualitative analysis software (CAQDAS) that I employed to organize, code and analyze my data.

***Operationalization of instruction and SP.*** Since my object of study is the teaching of Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics (SP), my first step was to operationalize the concepts of “instruction” and of “SP”.

To define “instruction” I employed Bardovi-Harlig’s (2001) definition, in which instruction is described as “any action undertaken by a teacher to facilitate acquisition. This may be as subtle as engineering an input flood or bringing NSs into the classroom as interlocutors, or as direct as explicit instruction” (p. 31). This broad description was deemed particularly appropriate because of the descriptive and exploratory nature of my study: since my goal was to examine what teachers do when addressing certain SP features, a general definition of instruction allowed me to include in my analysis an ample variety of teaching practices, from specific activities to general approaches.

In order to operationalize SP, I identified which specific SP features addressed in the teaching practices would constitute my primary research focus. To do so, I followed both a deductive and an inductive analysis process (Patton, 2002). First, I adopted a deductive approach by referring to an existing framework and categories: the CEFR and its taxonomy of Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Competences (SPC). In the CEFR, SPC is concerned with: Linguistic markers of social relations; Politeness conventions; Expressions of folk-wisdom; Register differences; Dialect and accent; Discourse competence; Functional competence; Design competence. Second, with these categories in mind, I proceeded with an initial, exploratory reading of my data and conducted an inductive analysis by searching for emerging themes related to the SP features covered by the participant language teachers. I then checked what surfaced from the data against the CEFR categories of SPC and I identified two main SP features: (a) Communicative functions, and (b) Linguistic markers of social relations and Politeness conventions. (a) These functions represent the object of instruction that leads to the development of functional competence, one of the subcomponents of SPC in the CEFR. The CEFR distinguishes between macrofunctions and

microfunctions. Macrofunctions are “categories for the functional use of spoken discourse or written text consisting of a (sometimes extended) sequence of sentences” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 126). Microfunctions “are categories for the functional use of single (usually short) utterances, usually as turns in an interaction” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 125). Table 3 illustrates the types of macro- and microfunctions as described in the CEFR that represent the communicative functions that I focused on.

Table 3

*Types of macrofunctions and microfunctions (CEFR)*

Macrofunctions	Microfunctions
Description, Narration, Commentary, Exposition, Explanation, Demonstration	Imparting and seeking factual information ( <i>e.g.</i> , identifying, reporting, asking, answering)
Argumentation, Instruction	Expressing and finding out attitudes ( <i>e.g.</i> , agreement/disagreement, permission, wants, likes/dislikes, apologies)
Persuasion	Suasion ( <i>e.g.</i> , suggestions, requests, advice, asking for help, invitations, offers)
	Socializing ( <i>e.g.</i> , addressing, greetings)

(b) The second SP feature examined is Linguistic markers of social relations and Politeness conventions. These elements are described in the CEFR as components of sociolinguistic competence and include several sub-features. The types of markers and politeness conventions that I focused on are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4

*Linguistic markers of social relations and Politeness conventions (CEFR)*

Linguistic markers of social relations	Politeness conventions
Use and choice of greetings ( <i>e.g.</i> , on arrival, introduction, leave-taking)	Positive politeness ( <i>e.g.</i> , showing interest in a person’s well being, expressing gratitude)
Use and choice of address forms ( <i>e.g.</i> , formal, informal, familiar)	Negative politeness ( <i>e.g.</i> , expressing regret, apologizing)
Use and choice of expletives ( <i>e.g.</i> , “My God!”)	Appropriate use of “please” and “thank you”

To summarize, I operationalized SP in terms of target features that I extrapolated from the CEFR and my research data. Such features are: communicative functions, linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions. Once I determined the SP features, I created two coding categories (1. Communicative functions and 2. Social markers and politeness conventions) and I proceeded to code the instances in my data in which such elements were addressed in teaching practices.

*Definition of coding categories.* Five additional sets of coding categories were devised to specifically address my three research questions. This approach is described by Yin (2009) as the analytic strategy of relying on the research propositions as guidance. Such propositions are expressed in the form of research questions, and as they guide the research in all its phases – from determining the type of study to devising data collection instruments – they can also contribute to organizing the analysis phase. Similarly, Merriam (2009) suggests that the initial step of analysis consists of “identifying segments in your data set that are responsive to your research questions” (p. 176). Below I will describe the coding categories, explain the process employed to select them and relate them to their research questions. The entire coding scheme is summarized in Table 5.

My first research question is: “How and to what extent is SPC as described in the CEFR reflected in EFL and SFL curricula and syllabi?”. To answer this question, I created two coding categories named (1) “CEFR in Curricula and Syllabi” and (2) “SPC in Curricula and Syllabi”. These categories directly derive from my research question and allowed me to examine the presence of CEFR-related elements in general and SPC in particular in the documents collected. In addition, teachers’ and principal’s answers and comments during their interviews prompted me to devise a second set of coding categories related to their knowledge of the CEFR and SPC, both reported by the participants themselves and reflected in their syllabi. This inductively originated set of categories includes (1) “Knowledge of the CEFR” and (2) “Knowledge of SPC”.

My second research question is: “Beyond what is stated in the curricula and syllabi, how is SP addressed in the teaching approaches and practices in EFL and SFL language classrooms?”. In order to devise appropriate coding categories for this question, and with my

operational definition of “instruction”, I followed again a combination of inductive and deductive analysis. I first examined all the instances of SP instruction in my data that I had previously coded based on the SP feature addressed, and for each instance I recorded detailed information about a variety of factors that appeared interesting and relevant, such as the type of activity that took place (*e.g.*, role play, written composition, oral presentation), its stated overall purpose (*e.g.*, practice a certain grammar structure, explain and support one’s opinions), the approach adopted by the teacher (*e.g.*, use of the L2), the participants in the activity (individuals, peers, student-teacher).

After this preliminary coding, two patterns emerged: (a) In many instances teachers made use of activities that created the conditions for SP elements to emerge and be employed by the students, rather than addressing SP features explicitly; and (b) It appeared that during SP instruction the teachers’ focus was primarily on language structures. Because similar patterns were observed and reported in previous Interlanguage Pragmatics studies, I decided to further explore them by employing two concepts from ILP theory and research: (a) the constructs of implicit and explicit instruction, and (b) the concepts of pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics.

Therefore, the first set of coding categories addressed the theme “type of instruction,” and consisted of the categories “Explicit Instruction” and “Implicit Instruction.” The definitions of “explicit” and “implicit” instruction were drawn from Kasper’s (2001) and were then refined based on the data, as I scrutinized the activities employed by the participant teachers, and noticed that specific instructional strategies recurred, which could be identified along the explicit-implicit continuum. “Explicit instruction” refers to instances in which teachers explicitly addressed SP features through metapragmatic explanations,

and/or by supplying examples of expressions and language structures related to such SP features, and/or by providing corrective feedback. “Implicit instruction” indicates instances in which teachers did not explicitly refer to SP features, but rather created the conditions and opportunities for students to recognize them, and/or produce them, and/or reflect on SP rules.

The second set of coding categories addressed the theme, “teaching perspective,” and consisted of the categories “Pragmalinguistics” and “Sociopragmatics”. Also in this case definitions were informed by Leech and Thomas’ (1983) applied linguistics theories as well as by the information obtained from the data. The category “Pragmalinguistics” refers to instances in which SP instruction was focused on language structures, generally in terms of grammar rules or vocabulary items, and their correctness from a linguistic point of view. “Sociopragmatics” applies to instances of SP teaching in which the teachers’ focus was on contextual and/or social appropriateness of language use. Once I devised these two sets of categories to investigate SP instruction (“type of instruction” and “teaching perspective”), I proceeded with coding the instances of SP teaching according to these categories.

My third research question is: “Is SPC systematically assessed / evaluated? If so, does the CEFR have an impact on the assessment tools used?”. This question was primarily addressed by coding all the instances of reported and observed assessment of SPC and placing them in the category “SPC Assessment”. In addition, I created the category “CEFR-related Assessment” to form a clearer picture of the role of the CEFR on assessment practices in general; this category contains instances of reported and observed assessment that is influenced by or linked to the CEFR, including when SPC is not the focus of the assessment. For instance, situations in which teachers used the external exams’ assessment

rubrics to evaluate students' performances were coded in the category "CEFR-related Assessment".

Table 5

*Coding scheme*

Theme	Coding Category 1	Coding Category 2	Research Question
SP Features	Communicative Functions	Social Markers & Politeness Conventions	All
Curriculum	CEFR in Curricula & Syllabi	SPC in Curricula & Syllabi	RQ 1
Practitioners' Cognition	Knowledge of CEFR	Knowledge of SPC	RQ 1
Type of Instruction	Explicit	Implicit	RQ 2
Teaching Perspective	Pragmalinguistics	Sociopragmatics	RQ 2
Assessment	CEFR-related Assessment	SPC Assessment	RQ 3

**Systematic analysis.** After I coded all my data according to the themes and categories outlined in the previous section, for each research question I proceeded with a systematic analysis of the data coded in the individual categories, and I compared different categories as well as different data sources to find possible meaningful relationships among them and the data themselves.

In this section I will provide a brief overview of all the types of strategies I followed to perform my analysis (outlined below). Then, in the next chapter ("Findings"), before

presenting each finding, I will describe more in detail the specific analysis strategy I employed and will relate each strategy to the research questions and the results I obtained.

- Content analysis, which included (a) inductive analysis of emerging themes from the codes in specific categories, as well as (b) analysis of particular words and their occurrence in the data to examine their significance.
- Comparative analysis of sets of coding categories, which consisted in cross-referencing each category of one set with the categories of the second set, to determine possible relationships and connections between such categories.
- Comparative analysis of data sources in terms of languages, grades, levels, types of sources (documents, interviews, observations and class transcripts).

## **Chapter 4:**

### **Findings**

In this chapter I will report the findings of my study in relation to my three research questions. The overall goal of this study is to investigate the impact of the CEFR on SP instruction in EFL and SFL at Liceo Hack. The following research questions were formulated to explore this issue:

1. How and to what extent is SPC as described in the CEFR reflected in EFL and SFL curricula and syllabi?
2. Beyond what is stated in the curricula and syllabi, how is SP addressed in the teaching approaches and practices in EFL and SFL language classrooms?
3. Is SPC systematically assessed / evaluated? If so, does the CEFR have an impact on the assessment tools used?

### **Findings Related to RQ 1**

As previously described in the Methodology chapter, the primary sources of information employed to answer RQ 1 are documents and participants' interviews. In the coding phase, I coded these data sources focusing on the following two sets of categories:

- Curriculum: CEFR in Curricula & Syllabi  
SPC in Curricula & Syllabi
- Practitioners' Cognition: Knowledge of CEFR  
Knowledge of SPC

I will present the findings related to my first research question in two parts. In the first part I will show the results that refer to the CEFR in general, while in the second part I

will focus on the results related to Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Competence (SPC).

### **Role of the CEFR in Curricula and Syllabi**

Before delving into the specific issues of SPC, it is important to understand the extent to which the CEFR is known and employed by practitioners at Liceo Hack. In this section I will provide a picture of this matter.

During my preliminary analysis – concomitant with the data collection – two patterns emerged:

- Practitioners' knowledge of the CEFR seemed to be primarily concerned with its reference levels and its general descriptors;
- Knowledge and use of the CEFR appeared to be tightly linked to the external language proficiency exams that the school strongly encouraged and prepared the students to take.

Based on these observations, I reviewed all the codes included in the categories “CEFR in Curricula & Syllabi” and “Knowledge of CEFR”, and I performed content analysis. I searched for words like “reference level(s)”, “level(s)” and types of CEFR levels (“B1, B2,” etc.), as well as terms related to the external language exams, such as “exams”, “examinations”, “certifications” and specific types of exams (“PET”, “FCE”, “DELE”).

The results of this analysis confirm my two preliminary observations, but also show additional factors and relationships that affect what practitioners know about the CEFR and how they use it for curriculum development. For instance, when further analyzing my data, I realized that the relationship between the participant practitioners and the CEFR is influenced by the means through which they have come into contact with this document.

Therefore, I organized my findings into two themes that I will present in detail in the following sections. These themes are:

1. Knowledge and use of the CEFR
2. Sources of CEFR-related knowledge

**Knowledge and use of the CEFR.** Findings show that practitioners mainly associate the CEFR with (a) its reference levels of language proficiency and (b) its “can-do” approach whereby proficiency is described in terms of what learners can do with the language (abilities and competences).

When talking about the CEFR, practitioners frequently mentioned the reference levels, generally in relation to the course objectives that their students are expected to reach by the end of the year:

They [the students] need to reach this B1 level in all the skills. (Interview with Sarah, EFL, Gr. 10-1)

In the fourth year [Grade 12], they should be able to reach a higher level, that is between a B1 and B2, [...] being able to speak in a pertinent, cohesive manner about more difficult topics, like jobs, current affair topics, so being able to give opinions and defending them. (Interview with Carmen, SFL, Gr. 12)

The final goal for that class is to at least try to reach a B2 level, which is... this... We ask them... In our school we ask them to reach a B2 level at the end of the fourth year (Interview with Alex, EFL, Gr. 12-1)

As the above excerpts show, the CEFR levels have been adopted by Liceo Hack as the official labels that indicate the overall curriculum objectives, for both EFL and SFL courses. Therefore, it may be reasonable to assume that language teachers refer to the CEFR to define such objectives, as also suggested by the Principal:

The macro objectives are all related to the CEFR, so... Even before the reform of the Italian high school system that five years ago required to use language curricula that referred to the

CEFR... Even before these curricula, since 2000 – so for 15 years – we’ve had the CEFR as a reference framework. (Interview with the Principal)

However, while reference to the CEFR terminology was consistent among all the teachers, the individual syllabi and interviews showed some differences among the four practitioners in terms of the processes they follow to define the specific course objectives for their respective classes.

Two teachers, Carmen (SFL) and Sarah (EFL, Gr. 10-1) reported consulting the descriptions of the different CEFR levels and some of the illustrative descriptors that indicate what learners need to be able to do, and reported using such information to define the learning goals of their classes at the beginning of the year:

Carmen: I always consult it [the CEFR], at the beginning of the year when I work on the syllabus, I always read and refer to it.

Me: Where do these objectives come from?

Carmen: From the CEFR. I look at that, I read the textbooks and I look at the *Indicazioni Nazionali* [Ministerial curriculum guidelines], which tell you the objectives that you roughly need to reach. So the objectives are not just about the content, but also methodological, see if the students... develop the ability... an efficient and fruitful method of study, that is continuous, the relationship with external reality... So, competences that go beyond their writing or speaking competences. So I refer to both the CEFR and the *Indicazioni Nazionali*. (Interview with Carmen, SFL, Gr. 10 & 12)

Sarah: And then we use it for... We wrote the syllabi for the *biennio* [Gr. 9 & 10] last year, and I remember I went back to the PET level, only. So I took the CEFR and I basically did a copy and paste of all the...

Me: The description..?

Sarah: Yes.

Me: So you mean that you looked at the table with the...<sup>4</sup>

Sarah: Yes, exactly. [...] I just went to B1. [...] The horizontal [scale]. I translated it and I put it in this document where we say what we want our students at the end of the second year to reach. And that’s the only connection that I have. (Interview with Sarah, EFL, Gr. 10-1)

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<sup>4</sup> Sarah couldn’t find the CEFR-related terms in English, such as “descriptors” and “scale”, that is why I suggested some terms to help her continue with her explanation.

I then triangulated the interview data with the syllabi of Carmen's and Sarah's classes and found the documents to be consistent with their statements. The structure of their syllabi follows the CEFR "can-do statements" model, whereby learning objectives are described in terms of specific competences and abilities that students are expected to reach, as well as communicative functions. This is an extract from Sarah's Grade 10 – Level 1 EFL syllabus:

Can have a conversation with strangers and people they know; can introduce themselves; can have a discussion with classmates about everyday situations; can express agreement and disagreement; can describe things, people and places [...].

Carmen's SFL syllabi for Grade 10 & 12 reflect more closely the CEFR approach, as she not only defined learning objectives in terms of general abilities and competences, but she also explicitly divided such competences according to what the CEFR has labelled "communicative language activities" – oral and written reception, production, interaction, mediation –, thus showing knowledge of some elements of the horizontal dimension of the CEFR (its descriptive scheme), and not merely of its vertical dimension (the global scale of common reference levels). Below are some examples of communicative activities and related competences described in her syllabi:

Written Reception:

- Understanding both in general and in detail short written texts (personal letters, SMS, online messages) about everyday topics [...]

Interaction:

- Asking questions, answering, giving information about everyday personal and familiar topics [...] (Carmen's Gr.10 SFL syllabus)

On the other hand, Alex and Eric, the two other EFL teachers, stated that the CEFR plays a more indirect role in their definition of curriculum objectives, as these tend to be associated with the requirements of the external language exams (PET for Grade 10 and FCE for Grade 12). As such exams are aligned with the CEFR levels, the CEFR has an implied

value, but it is not employed as a reference tool at the course development stage. Eric explains:

I tend to rely heavily on... Since we structure our didactics on the requirements for the external exams, I do tend to rely heavily on that. So, of course, I want them to be able to express themselves in a correct, clear and complex way in the speaking. I want them to be familiar with many types of writing exercises using of course a proper vocabulary, proper grammar, proper linking words and understand it. I want them to be able to understand, to organize and manage the information they've taken out of listening exercises. So I'm really... I... in a sense, the external exams help me a lot in defining the macro objectives. (Interview with Eric, EFL, Gr. 10 & 12 – Level 2)

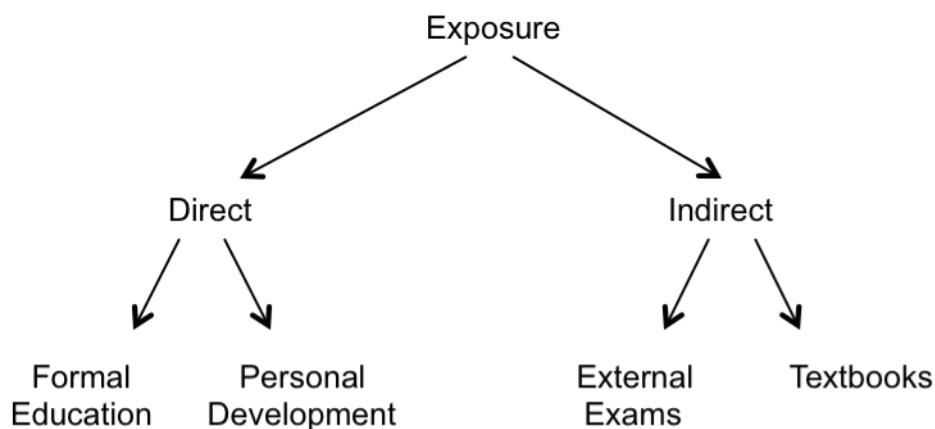
Alex acknowledged that external exams provide (a) support for the definition of clear objectives that can be shared among teachers, and (b) a precise structure practitioners can follow in their teaching:

I would say that our objectives are common objectives, which is quite easy because we use the external exams as marking steps, and so we know that after the first two years we've got B1 and after the other two years we've got B2. [...] I think that having the CEFR and the external exams gives you a precise objective and so gives you precise steps in terms of grammar, vocabulary, reading, listening... It makes more clear where you have to go. (Interview with Alex, EFL, Gr. 12-1)

In summary, the CEFR is best known by the participant teachers for its reference levels scale and its approach to illustrate language proficiency in terms of concrete abilities. Practitioners showed familiarity with the schematic and visual representations of levels and competences in tables and grids, and seemed to associate the CEFR with these reference instruments. In addition, the CEFR generally plays a role in the definition of learning objectives, although, while two teachers used it for consultation, for the other two practitioners it only affects their goals vicariously, through the implementation of external language exams. The impact of these examinations on the way the CEFR is perceived and employed at Liceo Hack will be discussed more in detail in the following section.

**Sources of CEFR-related knowledge.** In order to understand why practitioners at Liceo Hack view and use the CEFR as described above, I turned my attention to the type of exposure that teachers and principal have had to the CEFR, how they learned about it and what factors shape their relationship with it.

I identified two main types of exposure to the CEFR, that were either expressly mentioned by the participants or emerged from the documents analyzed (curriculum, syllabi, and textbooks): (a) Direct exposure, which refers to ways in which the participants have come directly into contact with the actual CEFR document and its contents, and (b) Indirect exposure, which includes sources that indirectly prompted practitioners to learn and/or employ some components of the CEFR. Figure 1 visually illustrates and summarizes all the sources of exposure to the CEFR that practitioners have experienced, which will be described in detail in the sections below.



*Figure 1.* Types of direct and indirect exposure to the CEFR.

**Direct exposure.** Findings show that participants have marginally come into direct contact with the CEFR and learned about it (a) through formal education, such as university programs, teacher training and development programs, and/or (b) have studied, consulted and gathered information about this document on their personal initiative.

From the interviews it has emerged that language practitioners of this school have limited knowledge of the CEFR. Teachers themselves reported minimal to zero formal exposure to this document in university and teacher education programs, as shown in the following interview extracts. Two teachers (Carmen and Alex) also mention consulting the CEFR out of their own desire to improve their understanding of parts of this document, such as objectives, abilities and competences (Carmen) and reference levels (Alex).

Me: So you haven't received formal teaching... professional development courses...the TFA [teacher training program] doesn't talk about it [the CEFR]?

Carmen: No, unknown. [...] I did the TFA, but the things that I've learned during the TFA, these famous competences, the means, objectives, abilities, we talked about competences all the time... they are there, but in the end no one really tells you what they are. So, I have to say that my professional development is very personal. (Interview with Carmen, SFL, Gr. 10 & 12)

What do I know about it [the CEFR]? I remember that I studied it [...] I studied it at the university for the exam "language pedagogy". I looked at it. I remember, with this big slide, we were reading through all of the voices, there are many. (Interview with Sarah, EFL, Gr. 10-1)

I did study it [the CEFR] a few years ago for an exam, for... teaching languages, language pedagogy but it was a marginal... they didn't interview me on that or they didn't ask me to produce anything on that. (Interview with Eric, EFL, Gr. 10 & 12 – Level 2)

Alex: I know something about it [the CEFR], because to prepare our students... especially when I started teaching I just wanted to understand what these terms meant, B1, B2, A1, A2, and I wanted to see what they corresponded to. So I read... I've never read the whole Framework, but only B1, B2, C1, just to see the difference, whether there were indications...

Me: Was that mostly your personal... self-learning?

Alex: Yeah, in my education no one ever asked me to read it. Not even in the TFA [teacher training program]. (Interview with Alex, EFL, Gr. 12-1)

Despite the lack of education and formal training about the CEFR, some of its concepts have nonetheless reached the participants teachers and are reflected in their syllabi, as it was shown in the section about knowledge and uses of the CEFR. The presence of CEFR-related elements can be explained by the indirect exposure factor.

*Indirect exposure.* This type of exposure to the CEFR resulted to be more frequent and has a bigger weight on the significance of this document for practitioners at Liceo Hack. First I will describe the impact of the external language exams and then the role of textbooks.

*External language exams.* The external language proficiency exams (PET and FCE for English; DELE for Spanish) play a prominent role in the definition of EFL and SFL curriculum objectives and course development at Liceo Hack. This view is equally shared by the principal and all the participant teachers.

In her interview, the principal pointed out that language practitioners' knowledge and implementation of the CEFR in Italian schools coincided with the advent of external language examinations. She reported that the first contact administrators and language teachers in Italy had with the CEFR was through these external exams, which in turn acquired importance when students' mobility within Europe increased and students needed to provide proof of their language proficiency:

With the Erasmus, [a European university exchange program] the virus of mobility and contact with real languages and other worlds started, and with it students started to think about the issue of external examinations of language competences, because some universities in some countries required evidence of their proficiency level. Then, this type of practice started to spread among the smartest and most capable language teachers, those who had done professional development courses, had been abroad, had started collaborating with the *British Council, Cambridge, Alliance Française*, with the foreign cultural institutes in Italy which have had a very important role in the diffusion of the CEFR through the external examinations of language competences. (Interview with the Principal)

The principal also explained that Liceo Hack started aligning language objectives to the CEFR when the external exams began to be administered as part of the school's curricular activities:

The macro objectives are all related to the CEFR, so... Even before the reform of the Italian high school system that five years ago required to use language curricula that referred to the CEFR... Even before these curricula, since 2000 – so for 15 years – [...] our teachers – within

the ordinary school curriculum and with the CEFR as a reference – they have prepared students for the external examinations of language competences. So, this is the context within which the specific curriculum development takes place. (Interview with the Principal)

Although the participant teachers did not take part in the introductory phase of the CEFR and external examinations of the early 2000s, as they were not yet in-practice teachers, they confirmed that these exams are the main filter through which the CEFR is known and employed. In other words, as one of the participant EFL and SFL teachers' main duties is to prepare their students for the external exams, their course objectives tend to be aligned with the exams goals, which in turn largely correspond to the CEFR descriptors of language proficiency in given activities (*e.g.*, spoken interaction), domains (*e.g.*, personal), and competences (*e.g.*, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence).

I look at the table [of the CEFR] with the macro objectives, then those for B1 and B2 I know them pretty well, cause these are the objectives that come back with the DELE, so like expressing oneself, making oneself understood, writing fluently and correctly, correct spelling... (Interview with Carmen, SFL, Gr. 10 & 12)

[The PET] is part of my path in order to reach that kind of objective, that kind of level of language at least. (Interview with Sarah, EFL, Gr. 10-1)

So I know that there is a framework [the CEFR] that sets the basic requirements for several levels of competence and skills, speaking... the ones that I use in Cambridge examinations. There's much more of course but... It is useful, I do use it for example when I correct writing exercises, but it's always mediated through Cambridge handouts. To be honest, I rely heavily on what... on the interpretation or the view that these examinations that we use have on the CEFR. (Interview with Eric, EFL, Gr. 10 & 12 – Level 2)

I certainly find that these exams are useful and they have a big impact on how we organize our didactics here. (Interview with Eric, EFL, Gr. 10 & 12 – Level 2)

At this point, a logical question is: “Do these external exams truly reflect the CEFR principles and levels, and assess proficiency following the CEFR scales?”. While this issue is beyond the scope of my research, I examined the official exam handbooks that contain the information about exam objectives, formats, contents, and assessment procedures, to check

whether – at least on paper – these exams are informed by the CEFR. I found that in all these publications there are explicit references to the CEFR level each exam targets (*e.g.*, B1) with explanations of what such level entails in terms of abilities, which are in turn described with Can-Do statements (Cambridge English Language Assessment, 2015; *Instituto Cervantes*, 2014). In addition, the sections where each task of the exam is described contain clear explanations of the objectives of such tasks and what candidates are expected to be able to do with the language to successfully perform them. For instance, in the collaborative task of the FCE speaking part

The focus is on sustaining an interaction; exchanging ideas, expressing and justifying opinions, agreeing and/or disagreeing, suggesting, speculating, evaluating, reaching a decision through negotiation, etc. [...] Candidates are expected to express and justify their opinions and speculate in order to have a conversation which answers the discussion question. The interlocutor will then ask candidates a second question designed to encourage them to summarise their discussion and to work towards a negotiated decision. Candidates [...] are assessed on their ability to hold a conversation, to turn-take appropriately, and to use the language of negotiation and collaboration while doing this. (Cambridge English Language Assessment, 2015, pp. 71-72)

However, a caveat is in order. While there is a strong link between the CEFR and these language examinations, this link is not necessarily the symbol of complete adherence to the CEFR content and principles, but is rather the product of how the CEFR has been interpreted by the testing agencies that design these exams. For instance, while the CEFR has abandoned the four-skill model (reading, writing, listening, speaking) and has proposed a more complex, encompassing model of communicative activities (oral and written reception, production, interaction and mediation), the format of all the exams analyzed continues to follow the traditional four-skill model.

This observation is particularly relevant when reflecting on the finding that at Liceo Hack the CEFR is mainly known and used indirectly through the external exams, and

prompts a clarification: What language practitioners know and associate with the CEFR is what is actually filtered by the exams, and may or may not correspond to what is stated and explained in the actual document. The extent to which this circumstance affects teachers' perspectives and experiences will be discussed more in detail in Chapter 5 ("Interpretation and Discussion").

*Textbooks.* In order to observe the relationship between the textbooks utilized by the teachers and their knowledge and use of the CEFR, first I ran a text query in which I searched for the words "book(s)" and "textbook(s)" in teachers' interviews and syllabi, and then I cross-referenced these codes with those included in the categories "Knowledge of the CEFR" and "CEFR in curricula & syllabi".

Results show that the participant teachers rely heavily on the textbooks adopted when they develop the curricula for their classes. In their interviews, EFL teachers explicitly talked about this practice:

Me: How did you come up with those objectives? Specifically for that class, is it something that you discuss with the other teachers or...?

Sarah: This is probably bad but it's something that we take for granted a little, because we have these very good books and we follow the books. [...] Our base is the books that we have. (Interview with Sarah, EFL, Gr. 10-1)

I had time to organize my didactics on the book, for example, so that I could have three months at the end of the year to devote almost entirely to PET preparation. [...] I tend to use the textbook as much as I can. (Interview with Eric, EFL, Gr. 10 & 12 – Level 2)

In the case of the SFL teacher, her Grade 10 and 12 syllabi show that she organized the order and structure of teaching units around the textbooks, as each unit corresponded to one of the book chapters (see Appendix H for syllabus extracts).

After examining the textbooks employed by the teachers, I found that all of them are supposedly aligned to the CEFR levels, which means that the objectives and contents of book

units were devised in reference to the CEFR descriptors of abilities and knowledge that learners are expected to achieve in order to reach a certain level. In addition, some of the books used by the EFL teachers are specifically designed to prepare for the external language exams and include simulations of the different exam parts.

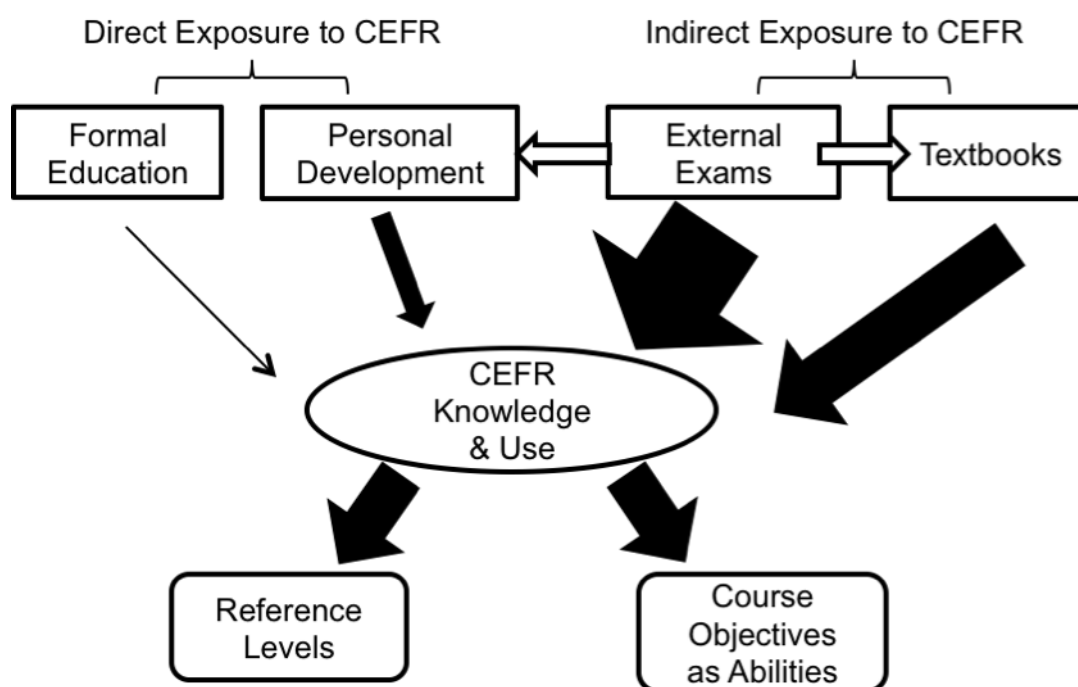
Therefore, as in the case of external exams, while a detailed analysis of the extent of the adherence of these textbooks to the CEFR is beyond the scope of my study, it can be stated that the textbooks examined have a connection to the CEFR (“In the textbooks there are these things: the CEFR, the levels” – Carmen, SFL, Gr. 10 & 12), but the nature and quality of this connection depend on how the authors have interpreted and employed the document. Thus, textbooks act as a filter, because teachers only indirectly know and use those aspects of the CEFR that have been translated by others into textbook contents.

**Summary of findings.** The role of the CEFR in EFL and SFL curricula at Liceo Hack, operationalized as practitioners’ knowledge and use of the CEFR, mostly concerns (a) the adoption of its reference levels (*e.g.*, B1, B2) to define learners’ language proficiency, and (b) the direct or indirect use of the descriptors of such levels to develop course learning objectives.

In addition, this partial knowledge and use of the CEFR is shaped by the exposure that practitioners have to it, which largely takes place via external language exams and textbooks adopted, while direct contact with the document itself is almost absent, as formal education about it was reported to be very minimal, and individual initiatives for personal interest appeared also limited.

Finally, some of the sources of practitioners’ contacts with the CEFR are connected to each other: (a) many textbooks are not only linked to the CEFR, but are also designed to

prepare learners to the external language exams, and (b) such exams with their objectives expressed in CEFR terminology have prompted teachers' self-study of the document. These relationships demonstrate once again the important function that external exams play on the role of the CEFR at Liceo Hack.

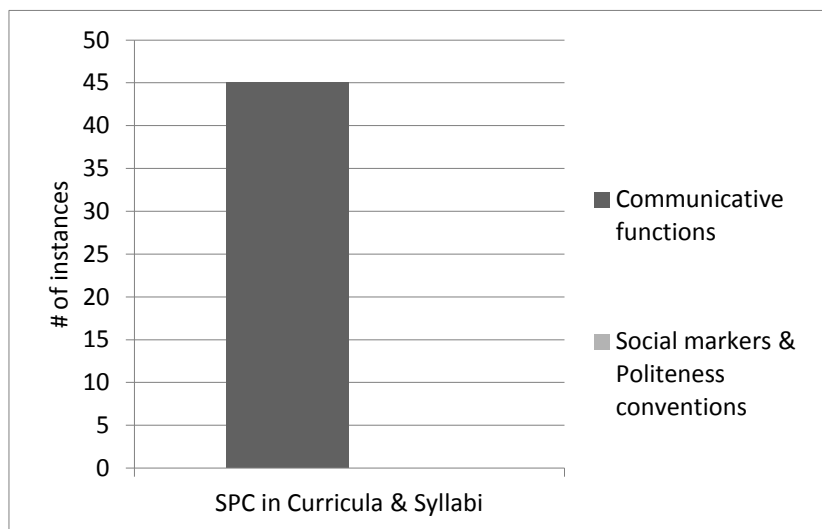


*Figure 2.* Model of factors that shape the role of the CEFR for language practitioners.

This figure visually shows (a) the sources of exposure to the CEFR, (b) the relationships among some of them (represented by the white arrows), (c) the different degrees of influence that such sources have on practitioners' knowledge and use of the CEFR (represented by the different sizes of the black arrows), and (d) the CEFR-related elements that represent what teachers know and use of this document (showed in the two rectangles at the bottom).

### **Role of SPC in Curricula and Syllabi**





*Figure 3.* Presence of SP features in EFL and SFL syllabi.

The graph clearly shows that only communicative functions were mentioned by teachers and expressly included in their curriculum goals, whereas linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions were not explicitly addressed among the main objectives.

SPC-related objectives were explicitly labeled by some of the teachers as “functional contents” or “communicative functions”, and were generally formulated as abilities and tasks that learners need to be able to perform, as it can be seen in the following syllabi extracts:

Functional contents: describing habits, customs and circumstances in the past; manage to argument and have a debate; [...] describing experiences and anecdotes; showing interest for the interlocutors’ experience; [...] giving advice [...] (Carmen’s Gr. 10 SFL syllabus)

We will examine the following communicative functions, in synergy with the work done by the native speaking assistant: interacting with peers, expressing one’s opinion by giving reasons; expressing agreement and disagreement; asking for someone’s opinion; giving advice; describing an image; identifying pros and cons of given situations [...] (Sarah’s Gr. 10-1 EFL syllabus)

Facilitating oral expositions in everyday situations, through presentations of work prepared in advance, and through text argumentation. Helping students not only to understand the meaning of a dialogue during listening activities, but also to distinguish interlocutors’ opinions, idiomatic expressions, etc. Introduce students to written literature-related compositions as well as narrative, descriptive and argumentative compositions. (Eric’s Gr.

12-2 EFL syllabus)

From the above examples it is apparent that the types of communicative functions listed fall into the categories of macrofunctions and microfunctions described in the CEFR as part of Functional Competence (which I defined in detail in the Coding Phase section, Chapter 3). In addition, as demonstrated in the first part of this chapter, the explanations of what learners can do with the language reflect the CEFR approach, which consists of providing detailed descriptions of specific tasks and activities that language users can perform at a certain level, and formulating them as can-do statements.

However, in the light of these findings my next reflection was: “SPC is present in the curriculum objectives, and seems to be related to the CEFR concepts. However, how do teachers perceive and experience this connection? Is this a product of a conscious effort on their part to refer to SPC elements as described in the CEFR? Or is this relationship mediated by other factors?” This issue is explored in the following section.

**Connection between SPC and CEFR.** I investigated whether and how the relationship between (a) SPC as presented in EFL and SFL learning objectives and (b) SPC as described in the CEFR was recognized by the participant teachers, and whether this connection was considered direct or indirect.

To this aim, I proceeded with a two-step analytical process:

- Inductive analysis of the codes in the categories “SPC in Curricula & Syllabi” and “Knowledge of SPC” to identify emerging themes, and deductive analysis of the same codes starting from the themes that emerged in the analysis of the CEFR (*i.e.*, influence of external exams and textbooks);
- Comparative analysis of the codes in the following four categories: “SPC in Curricula

& Syllabi”, “Knowledge of SPC”, CEFR in Curricula & Syllabi”, and “Knowledge of CEFR”, to explore what types of links exist between these categories. The relationships I examined are illustrated in Figure 4.

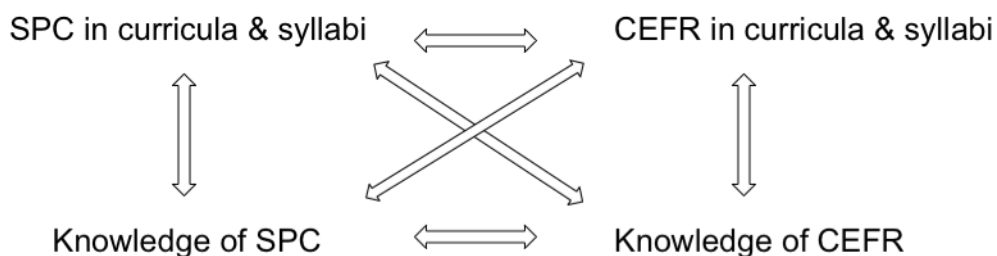


Figure 4. Analysis of relationships among SPC-related codes and CEFR-related codes.

Findings from this analysis are consistent with some of the results that refer to the general role of the CEFR, as shown by the presence of recurring themes, namely, the importance of external exams and textbooks. Their role is that of mediating factors between (a) the CEFR description of SPC and (b) the practitioners’ knowledge of SPC and implementation of objectives aimed at developing it in their students. In other words, what teachers know about SPC and include in their goals – mostly communicative functions – comes principally from the functions that learners are required to perform in the external exam tasks. Such functions can also be found in the textbooks adopted, as they are designed to prepare students to reach the CEFR level required by the exam (*e.g.*, B1), and/or specifically train them for the exam itself.

Therefore, the connection between the CEFR and the inclusion of SPC in EFL and SFL curricula is mostly experienced by the participant teachers as indirect, as they tend to make more explicit references to the link between their courses and the exams and textbooks, as shown in the following quotes:

The functions, exactly. Yes, and the books again are helping us with this. At the end of each unit there's one part called "functions" dedicated to that, connected to the vocabulary, the grammar that you're teaching. (Interview with Sarah, EFL, Gr. 10-1)

For example, in the handbook of teachers of the PET they have a list of vocabulary items that the students should know. (Interview with Alex, EFL, Gr. 12-1)

The objectives that come back with the DELE, so like expressing oneself, making oneself understood. (Interview with Carmen, SFL, Gr. 10 & 12)

After cross-referencing the codes in the categories shown in Figure 4 an additional theme emerged: the lack of practitioners' theoretical knowledge about SPC and communicative competence in general.

Data from their interviews reveal that academic and teacher-training programs did not provide the participant teachers with solid theoretical foundations regarding the construct of communicative competence or the concepts subsumed in it, such as sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence (SPC). In addition, from the findings of the CEFR-related analysis it emerged that in pre-service education information about the CEFR was also scant, therefore teachers were not familiar with the section of the CEFR in which communicative competence and its sub-competences are addressed and described in detail.

All the teachers provided definitions of communicative competence, which are reported below:

Communicative competence I think is being able to do something with a language. I mean, being able to communicate with the language. [...] It's being able to express oneself, presenting a topic, giving one's opinions and reasons, but also simply going to the cafe' and being able to order a coffee. (Interview with Carmen, SFL, Gr. 10 & 12)

I've heard about it [communicative competence] and it's about how you can communicate basically, how you can express yourself, understand the others and tell everybody what you want to say, so there is the survival point and then you get higher and higher. (Interview with Sarah, EFL, Gr. 10-1)

I think it's the ability to make yourself understood in a situation even if you don't have the linguistic tools to do that. (Interview with Alex, EFL, Gr. 12-1)

Rather than focusing on the students having a theoretical knowledge of language, they should be able to use the language to communicate, so the emphasis is on communication rather than on theoretical abstract knowledge of the language and its rules. So for example this also implies a certain leniency on certain mistakes, if communication is not impeded. (Interview with Eric, EFL, Gr. 10 & 12 Level 2)

These definitions share the idea that communicative competence concerns the ability to use the language in a way that allows users to convey meaning and get their messages across. In addition, Carmen seems to associate communicative competence with what the CEFR defines as functional competence (the ability to perform communicative functions); Alex and Eric tend to view it not as an encompassing concept that includes a variety of sub-competences (*e.g.*, grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competence), but rather as a separate ability, which can be in contrast with other competences, such as grammatical competence.

When asked about their knowledge of SPC, teachers declared that they only had vague ideas, which in some cases were related to what they knew about sociolinguistics and pragmatics as fields of study, or to different meanings attributed to these terms, and a connection with their teaching practices was not perceived:

I have heard of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, but not applied to what I could do with my students. I have friends studying pragmatics and I have friends writing dissertations on sociolinguistics – Italian immigration in Canada and consequences on language or that kind of stuff. Pragmatics I can relate it to how I teach or what I tell them, because pragmatics has to do with what you do and how you do it, I think. (Interview with Eric, EFL, Gr. 10 & 12 Level 2)

I remember about sociolinguistics. I remember there was one course at the university. And it's connected to your social class, your background, where you come from and the way you speak. And so we can say that we have... As human material in front of us, the same level and the same starting point from a sociolinguistic point of you, I'm saying. Since we have the levels, we have the entry test and we divide them in levels, and this is a private school, so

more or less the students that come here are from the same... backgrounds. And this is what helps you from a sociolinguistic point of you, when you arrive at high school level, your cultural and linguistic baggage is more or less the same as the other classmates. (Interview with Sarah, EFL, Gr. 10-)

Only Carmen, the SFL teacher, provided a definition of sociolinguistic competence that was also linked with language education and her instructional approach:

Sociolinguistics, I would say the differences connected to the social stratum, so different registers that you can... Sociolinguistics, but I could be wrong, are competences that change based on the different registers, social classes, if you speak in a formal or informal context, and this is also what I try to explain to my students, you know? When they see me in the hall and go: “*Buenas!*” [informal Spanish greeting] and I say: “No, *buenas*, no, because I’m not your friend”. So a formal or informal context. Are you talking to the principal, a teacher or with your friends? And so also the different language varieties out there. Pragmatics... I’m thinking of proxemics, but that’s not it. I can’t remember. (Interview with Carmen, SFL, Gr. 10 & 12)

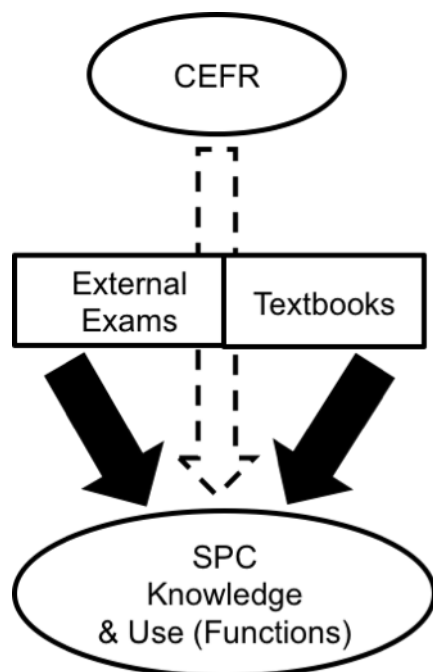
The lack of theoretical knowledge about SPC on the practitioners’ part corroborates the idea that the connection between the CEFR and the presence of SPC in language curricula is an indirect one, as these teachers reported having no direct exposure to these concepts from the CEFR or other sources of education.

However, a caveat is in order: although teachers were not familiar with the theory and terminology related to communicative competence and SPC, some elements that pertain to these constructs appear in their curricula (as demonstrated by the presence of communicative functions in their syllabi), as well as in their teaching practices (as will be shown in the results related to the second research question). The extent to which this lack of theoretical and terminological knowledge affects their understanding of SPC and, consequently, their curriculum planning and enactment, will be discussed in the following chapter (“Interpretation and Discussion”).

### **Summary of Findings Related to RQ 1**

The first Research Question is: “How and to what extent is SPC as described in the CEFR reflected in EFL and SFL curricula and syllabi?”.

Results show that SPC as a curriculum objective is explicitly defined by teachers in terms of communicative functions. While these functions correspond to the CEFR macro- and microfunctions included under the umbrella of pragmatic competence, practitioners do not consistently and directly refer to this document when developing their curricula. Their primary references are actually (a) the external exams requirements and objectives, and (b) the textbooks. As these elements are informed by the CEFR, an indirect connection exists between the CEFR and (a) practitioners’ knowledge and use of it, and (b) practitioners’ knowledge and use of SPC in their curricula. However, this connection is not perceived by the teachers as particularly meaningful, because it is overshadowed by the link between their courses and the external exams, and because of a general lack of knowledge and awareness of CEFR-related concepts, as well as the theory of communicative competence and SPC itself.



*Figure 5. Connection CEFR – SPC in EFL and SFL curricula and syllabi.*

### **Findings Related to RQ 2**

The second Research Question is: “Beyond what is stated in the curricula and syllabi, how is SP addressed in the teaching approaches and practices in EFL and SFL language classrooms?”

The purpose of this question is to further explore the issue of whether and how teachers facilitate the development of SPC by directly investigating their classroom practices. This part of the study was conducted by means of audio recordings of classes and observation notes I wrote during such classes; in addition, some of the materials used during the observed classes were collected.

Therefore, the data analyzed mainly consisted of transcripts of classroom discourse, observation notes, and copies of instructional material. Teachers’ interviews were also included in the analysis, as practitioners talked about their methodologies and provided



In addition, variables such as language taught, grade and individual differences among teachers were taken into consideration and explored for each point stated above, in order to provide a holistic picture of SP-related teaching practices at Liceo Hack.

I will report the analysis process and the findings connected to the four objectives above in four separate sections, then I will provide a summary of all the results and their relationships with each other.

### **SP Features in Teaching Practices**

During the data collection phase, I noticed that instances of instruction about communicative functions occurred more frequently than those related to linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions. This preliminary observation was later confirmed at the coding stage, as the number of codes included in the category “Communicative functions” far exceeded the number of codes in the other category. Even though this study did not primarily employ quantitative methods of analysis, a simple count of the number of instances of SP instruction that occurred in each class observed produced the following results:

Table 6

*Instances of SP instruction in relation to SP features*

Class	Communicative functions	Social markers & Politeness conventions
EFL Gr. 10-1	19	4
EFL Gr. 10-2	37	5

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EFL Gr. 12-1	17	2
EFL Gr. 12-2	14	1
SFL Gr. 10	31	6
SFL Gr. 12	38	10
Total	156	28

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These figures refer exclusively to the instances of SP instruction coded from the class transcripts, and do not include those coded from other sources (observation notes, materials, teachers' interviews), as the goal was to show the readers that the actual teaching practices related to SP observed during the three weeks of data collection were clearly more focused on communicative functions. This trend was consistent across languages and grades.

This finding is in line with the results regarding the presence of SP features in EFL and SFL curricula and syllabi, which showed that only communicative functions were explicitly addressed as course objectives and topics of instruction. It is therefore not surprising that linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions play a rather marginal role as objects of instruction, since they were not included as primary learning goals for the participant classes. Hypotheses about the reasons for the prevalence of instruction on communicative functions will be examined in the next chapter ("Interpretation and Discussion").

Even though communicative functions prevailed as the most taught SP feature, both SP features were treated as topics of instruction by the participant teachers in the classes I observed. Since my research question inquires about the ways in which SP is taught, I turned my attention to the types of instruction employed to teach these SP features.

### SP Features and Types of Instruction

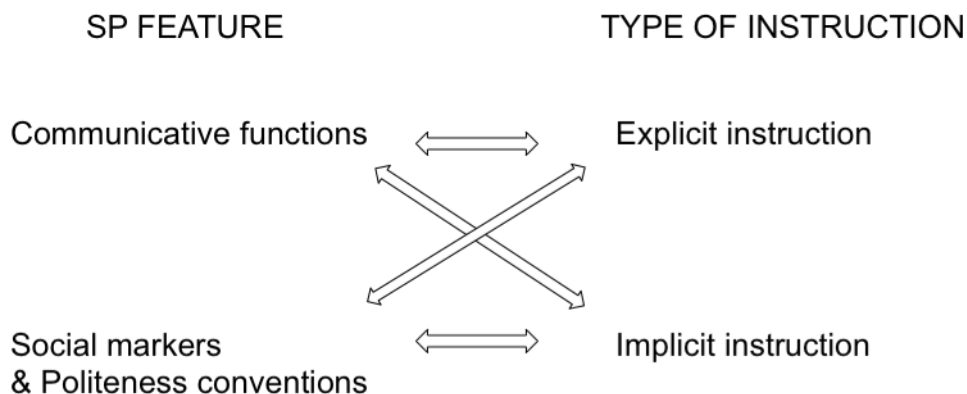
Before examining the relationships between these two elements, I will revisit the definitions of (a) instruction in general and (b) explicit and implicit instruction in particular that I have employed throughout this study.

Instruction refers to “any action undertaken by a teacher to facilitate acquisition. This may be as subtle as engineering an input flood or bringing NSs into the classroom as interlocutors, or as direct as explicit instruction” (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001, p. 31).

Explicit instruction concerns instances in which teachers explicitly address SP features through metapragmatic explanations, and/or by supplying examples of expressions and language structures related to such SP features, and/or through corrective feedback.

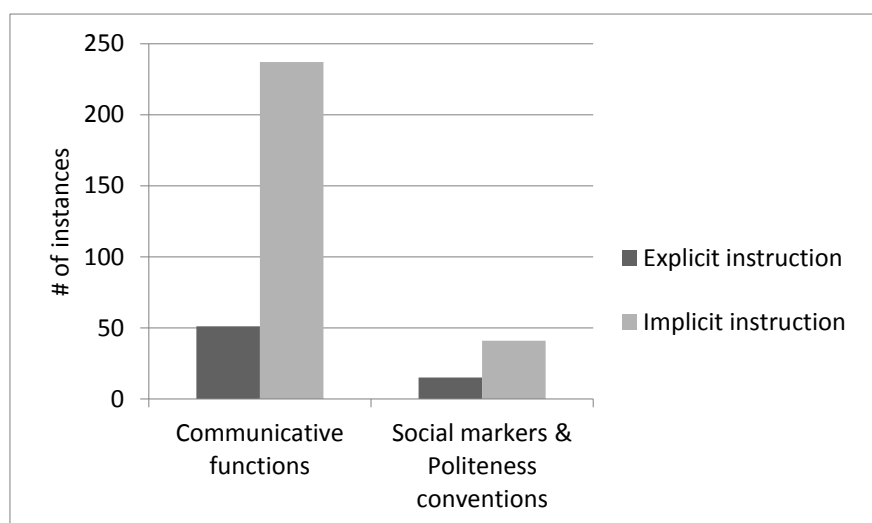
Implicit instruction indicates instances in which teachers do not explicitly refer to SP features, but rather create the conditions and opportunities for students to recognize them, and/or produce them, and/or reflect on SP rules.

In order to investigate whether the SP features taught were associated with particular types of instruction, I proceeded with a comparative analysis in which I cross-referenced the two coding sets, as showed in Figure 6.



*Figure 6. Comparison of SP features with types of instruction*

Results from this multiple comparison are illustrated in Figure 7. The graph shows that implicit instruction was preferred by practitioners when teaching both kinds of SP features. However, while this instructional type was primarily implemented for the teaching of communicative functions, the difference between explicit and implicit instruction appears less obvious in the case of markers of social relations and politeness conventions.



*Figure 7. Relationships between SP features and types of instruction*

In the following sections I will describe in detail each of the four relationships showed in Figure 7.

**Communicative functions & Explicit instruction.** Teaching of communicative functions was not strongly associated with explicit instruction. However, after analyzing all the instances of explicit teaching, I observed that when this type of instruction took place it was in the form of:

- Corrective feedback that specifically targeted students' language use when they produced oral or written texts in which they tried to communicate certain functions;

- Metalinguistic explanations of grammatical rules or structures that were connected to language use to perform a given communicative function;
- Teachers' supply of examples or lists of expressions and language structures to communicate certain functions.

*Corrective feedback.* Examples of corrective feedback include comments students received after they performed simulations of the speaking part of the external exams. For both EFL and SFL (all grades and levels examined), these simulations were primarily conducted by the two NS teaching assistants (Mary for EFL and Ramon for SFL), as they were specialized in training learners for the external exams, and could provide valuable feedback and suggestions regarding both students' performances and exam strategies. In the first extract, Mary encourages learners to use modal verbs in the picture description task, in which they are expected to make hypotheses and talk about possibilities regarding what they see in the picture. In the second example, she gives advice about a decision task in which two students talk about a situation and need to agree on a solution, and she points out the need to use a wider variety of structures and vocabulary to express certain communicative functions.

1.

Mary: The picture part was the weakest part because you played it safe. Yes? It was a very KET level [a lower level]. You're not using the structures that your teachers taught you all year. And in particular modals, yes? You have to say "might be, could be", "they could be in a classroom", even if you know they are in a classroom, you say "they could be", yes? Cause we don't know. You have the photocopy, do you remember? Of the squirrel. That is the photocopy that will help you with the picture test, yes? You have all the expressions... "It looks as if, it seems, they seem," etc. Even if you use two or three of those and a variety, it increases your level for the picture. (Transcript of Gr. 10-2 EFL class)

2.

Mary: So just speed along and just say: "What about..., how about..., what do you think...", use a variety for asking for advice, suggestions and giving your opinions. Ok? "I totally

agree, I absolutely agree, well, I'm not really sure about that..." yes, use a variety. Ok?  
(Transcript of Gr. 10-2 EFL class)

Insistence regarding the use of a wide variety of expressions was common among teachers when they provided corrective feedback of students' performance, and it appeared to be connected to the external exams requirements, as showed in the following extract in which Alex (Gr. 12-1 EFL teacher) comments on a student's language use in a written composition:

Alex: You tried to use some linkers, which is good, even though you used only "On the one hand" and "On the other hand". You should try to use more. "Moreover, despite, although, however". Doing the FCE is a matter of showing off what you can do. So if you know more than two linking words, try to use them. (Transcript of Gr. 12-1 EFL class)

***Metalinguistic explanations.*** Explicit SP instruction was also delivered via teachers' grammar-focused, metalinguistic explanations which were beneficial for the realization of given communicative functions. For instance, during a grade 10 SFL period, Carmen taught a grammar lesson about the subjunctive mood and in her explanation she related the use of this mood to the function of expressing opinions.

*Vamos a ver. Entonces, quiero que escribais la regla que hemos explicado antes. Es decir, escribir "para expresar opiniones..." [...] Entonces, cuando es positivo, "Creo, opino, supongo" mas indicativo. Cuando es negativo, "No creo, no opino, no supongo, no pienso..." vale? Todos los verbos de expresiones, de ideas, mas subjuntivo. [...] Cuarta formula: "Me parece" mas adjetivo, mas subjuntivo. [...] Exemplo: "Me parece maravilloso" mas "que" mas subjuntivo. "Me parece maravilloso que la gente lea mucho". Vale? Entonces, "me parece" con "bonito, feo, interesante, util", cualquier adjetivo que expresa una opinion personal. (Transcript of Gr. 10 SFL class)*

Let's see. So, I want you to write the rule I explained before. That is, write "to express opinions"...[...] So, when it's positive, "I believe, I think, I suppose" plus indicative. When it's negative, "I don't believe, I don't think, I don't suppose"... ok? All verbs that indicate opinions, ideas, plus subjunctive. [...]

Fourth formula: "It seems" plus adjective, plus subjunctive. [...] Example: "It seems wonderful" plus "that" plus subjunctive. "It seems wonderful that people read a lot". Ok? So,

“it seems” with “good, bad, interesting, useful”... Any adjective that expresses a personal opinion. (Translation of transcript of Gr. 10 SFL class)

*Lists of language structures.* The third approach teachers employed when providing explicit instruction of functions was through lists of phrases and vocabulary items that express such functions. This method was particularly common in EFL classes and particularly in preparation for the PET and FCE exams. After triangulating the different sources of data collection, I noticed consistency, in that this theme emerged from what teachers stated in their interviews, what I observed during their classes and from some of the materials I analyzed.

Below it is shown how this type of explicit SP instruction appeared in different sources. First, during his interview, Eric (Gr. 10 & 12 Level 2 EFL teacher) talked about his way of teaching communicative functions:

I even have my lessons that I devote to vocabulary for apologizing, making requests, politeness forms, refusing a request, I don't know... Expressing opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, I do. I do cover a range of this kind of communicative areas because it's so important and... Because otherwise they have a very limited vocabulary that would allow them to survive in real life interaction, but that's not enough because if you don't expand the vocabulary bank of yours, you will never become a better speaker, so... One, I do organize lessons so they learn them explicitly. (Interview with Eric, EFL, Gr. 10 & 12 Level 2)

His statements prompted me to scrutinize the material he used to teach these functions, such as (a) the vocabulary-focused textbook *English Vocabulary in Use* (Redman, 2011) that he employs for his Grade 10 Level 2 class, (b) his own notes and (c) handouts provided by Mary, the NS assistant, to teach the functions that learners are required to perform in the external exams (*e.g.*, agreeing/disagreeing, making suggestions, making hypotheses). All these materials contain lists of language structures and phrases – often

devoid of context – that learners are expected to memorize to expand their linguistic resources (see Appendix I).

Finally, I observed this approach during one of Eric’s Grade 12-2 classes, in which the lesson goal was learning how to write a review (one of the FCE exam writing tasks). As one of the task components was to express one’s expectations, the teacher provided examples of phrases his students could use and wrote them on the whiteboard:

A couple of expressions to talk about expectations. [...] “I wasn’t expecting such high quality”, “I was disappointed by...”. But also there’s a couple of... [writing on the board] “As I expected,” and so forth, ok? Or another one: “Surprisingly,…” etc. Or you can have a sentence and then “though”: “The food was excellent, and the room was absolutely fantastic. Waiters were very rude, though”. Ok? To express... This is a bit informal, ok? But this is to express contrast, ok? (Transcript of Gr. 12-2 EFL class)

**Communicative functions & Implicit instruction.** The relationship between these two coding categories was found to be the strongest, which means that the participant practitioners often adopted implicit approaches when teaching communicative functions.

As in the case of explicit instruction, I scrutinized every occurrence of implicit function teaching, and through inductive analysis three major themes emerged in terms of types of activities and strategies employed by the teachers:

- Opportunities for production
- Opportunities for exposure
- Opportunities for students’ processing.

***Opportunities for production.*** Teachers used a wide variety of activities and instructional strategies that required students to actively use the target language to interact with interlocutors and/or produce oral or written texts in which communicative functions needed to be expressed.

Instructional devices include (a) specific activities and tasks that focus on the performance of communicative functions, as well as more general strategies that create opportunities for students to maximize their target language use, such as (b) the constant use of the L2 in the classroom (English or Spanish), and (c) the presence of NS teaching assistants and NS guests. These activities and strategies will now be examined separately.

*Oral and written tasks.* Production and interaction activities appeared in many forms. Oral tasks included: class discussions, role-plays, oral presentations, mock trials, external exam simulations (picture description, decision task, discussion task, interview task), games. Written tasks involved the production of different types of texts (*e.g.*, formal and informal letters or emails, essays, newsletter articles, reviews, summaries of movies and books), as well as class activities or tests in which students are required to accomplish specific communicative functions, such as give advice to someone or make wishes. The vast majority of these activities and tasks were directly observed during the classes I audited, while only two of them (role plays and mock trials) were mentioned by some practitioners in their interviews.

Below are examples of oral interaction and production activities. In the first extract, Carmen, the SFL teacher, conducted a class discussion in which she elicited students' opinions about various issues:

*Carmen: Vale, y una pregunta. Tú que opinas sobre los vegetarianos?*

*Student: Yo pienso que los vegetarianos... Yo los respeto pero yo no condivido su idea porque para mi los animales se pueden comer porque... porque... (Transcript of Gr. 10 SFL class)*

Carmen: Good, one question. What do you think about vegetarians?

Student: I think that vegetarians... I respect them but I don't share their idea because to me you can eat animals because... because... (Translation of transcript of Gr. 10 SFL class)

The second extract illustrates Sarah, an EFL teacher, giving instructions about a task in which students were asked to work in pairs and ask and answer personal questions regarding their families, interests, likes and dislikes, etc.:

Now in pairs, five minutes, I want you to ask each other all the questions. Then you answer your friend's questions exchanging the role, ok? So once E. starts he asks all the questions to C. and then they switch, ok? (Transcript of Gr. 10-1 EFL class)

The third example shows the instructions of a decision task that is part of the PET speaking test simulation, which requires two students to interact together and express their opinions, make suggestions, agree and disagree with each other:

Mary: I'm going to describe a situation to you. A student from another country is coming to study here. He asked you what he should bring. Talk together about the things he will need and say which will be the most useful. Here's a picture with some ideas to help you. Alright? Talk together. (Transcript of Gr. 10-2 EFL class)

In the fourth excerpt, a Grade 12 SFL student performs a picture description task which is part of the DELE speaking test simulation. She employs the language to communicate a variety of functions, such as describing people and situations, making hypothesis, expressing opinions and argumentation:

*Student: Sí, el chico, probablemente el hombre, está hablando con la mujer que tiene adelante. [...] Hay un documento y tiene sus informaciones y ella está leyendo y hablando con un hombre para... Muy probablemente para preguntar que... Si el trabajo le gustaría y lo que es muy bueno... En que es bueno a hacer.*

*Ramon: Quien está buscando trabajo?*

*Student: Segun yo, el hombre.*

*Ramon: Y tú opinas que se lo dan o no se lo dan?*

*Student: Podría ser que se lo dan porque parece que el hombre es muy serio y tambien la ropa es adapta al lugar y... (Transcript of Gr. 12 SFL class)*

Student: Yes, the boy, probably the man, is talking with the woman in front of him. [...] There's a document that contains his information and she is reading and talking with a man to... Probably to ask what... If he would like the job and what he would be good at.

Ramon: Who is looking for a job?

Student: I think the man.

Ramon: And you think he gets it or not?

Student: Maybe he gets it because it looks like the man is very serious and also his outfit is right for the place and... (Translation of transcript of Gr. 12 SFL class)

Examples of written production and interaction tasks are also provided. The first extract comes from a test administered to the Grade 10 SFL class, in which the activity required students to write suggestions and motivate their answers:

*Qué harías tú en estas situaciones? Dale un consejo a cada persona y justifica tu sugerencia (usa en cada frase una estructura diferente para aconsejar, mínimo tres líneas).*

1. María: *Le he cogido un jersey a mi hermana y se lo he manchado...*

Consejo: [student's answer] *Yo que tú lo diría a mi hermana y compraría otro nuevo. Le prestaría también un jersey así que si le sirve podría utilizar el mío.* (Test, Gr. 10 SFL class)

What would you do in the following situations? Give advice to each person and justify your suggestion (for each sentence, use a different structure to give advice, minimum three lines.)

1. Maria: I borrowed a shirt from my sister and I have stained it...

Suggestion: [student's answer] If I were you, I would tell my sister and I would buy her a new one. I would also lend her a shirt, so if she needs one she could use mine. (Translation of test, Gr. 10 SFL class)

The following examples are writing tasks that are part of the PET and FCE English exams and include an informal letter, an essay and a review. A variety of communicative functions is addressed in each task.

Sarah: Part two of the writing: "Invite Charlie to the picnic. Explain why the class is having a picnic. Suggest something Charlie could bring to the picnic." (Transcript of Gr. 10-1 EFL class)

Alex: [reads] "In your English class you have been talking about life in the past. Now your English teacher has asked you to write an essay. *Life in the past*. Write an essay using all the notes and give reasons for your point of view. Life is better today than it was 100 hundred years ago. Do you agree? Write about health, entertainment and your own ideas". (Transcript of Gr. 12-1 EFL class)

Eric: These are the basic purposes of FCE review. You're asked to describe something. You're asked to express your opinion on it or of it. And to recommend. So to tell if other

people for example should go to a restaurant or if they shouldn't, ok? (Transcript of Gr. 12-2 EFL)

*Use of the L2.* The exclusive use of the L2 in classroom discourse is a policy mandated by the school and is strongly supported by the principal and all the participant teachers. Teachers' quasi-constant use of the L2 in the classroom is meant to encourage students to also communicate in the target language as much as possible, not only during assigned tasks but also during genuine exchanges with the teacher and their classmates.

In their interviews, practitioners report that, while they are aware of students' initial resistance to speak in the L2, creating an environment in which the target language is the only vehicle of communication ultimately increases students' L2 use and learning:

If it is a class discussion I tend to stop them, if they speak in Italian I don't want to hear what they have to say. Ideally, again. Sometimes I encourage them if they speak in Italian or they ask for words, I give them the words or I help them formulate the sentence. But if they are obstinate in using Italian, I ask them to think about it and say it in English, otherwise they don't speak. Because I think they have to get over the fear of making mistakes. I make a lot of mistakes when I speak to them and I'm not ashamed. I don't know all the words, so very often when they ask me words I look them up on a dictionary in front of them, because I don't know all the Italian words, why should I know all the English words... (Interview with Alex, EFL, Gr. 12-1)

I do force them to speak English only. Some are unwilling to do so and some really resist and when they ask me, especially when we are doing simulations or I explain grammar and they don't understand the grammar topic and they start speaking to me in Italian, I say "stop", I interrupt them straight away and I ask them to switch to English and they sigh, they complain for a couple of seconds but then they do start speaking in English and that's so important. (Interview with Eric, EFL, Gr. 10 & 12 Level 2)

These statements were confirmed by classroom observations, as showed in the following examples. The first one is a conversation between Carmen, the SFL teacher, and her Grade 12 students about a scheduling issue for the date of an oral test:

*Student: El jueves?*

*Carmen: No, el jueves no sé si puedo... Vale, yo empiezo esta semana, aunque haya dos personas yo lo hago y evaluaré las pruebas, vale? Porque así os escucho. El jueves, qué tal? Porque el jueves? Me habeis dicho el miercoles la última vez... qué ha pasado?*

*Student: No, esta semana, porque tenemos un examen.*

*Carmen: El jueves teneis un examen...*

*Student: Pero a mí me da igual. (Transcript of Gr. 12 SFL class)*

Students: On Thursday?

Carmen: No, on Thursday I don't think I can... Well, I am going to start this week, even if there are only two people I'm going to do it and I will evaluate the assignments, ok? Because this way I can listen to you. Does Thursday work? Why Thursday? Last time you told me Wednesday... what happened?

Student: Not this week, because we have a test

Carmen: On Thursday you have a test...

Student: But it's fine to me. (Translation of transcript of Gr. 12 SFL class)

In the second example, the teacher prompts a student to switch from the L1 to the L2 and the exchange then continues in the L2:

*Student: [L1] Prof! Per il...*

*Carmen: En qué lengua me hablas, hija, que no te entiendo?*

*Student: Por el martes teníamos que hacer el...*

*Carmen: El número 8 del "Conde Lucanor"? No lo sé... lo he dado?*

*Student: Sí, pero después de hacer esto... (Transcript of Gr. 10 SFL class)*

Student [in L1]: Professor, for the...

Carmen [in L2]: In what language are you talking to me, dear? I don't understand you.

Student [in L2]: For Tuesday we need to do...

Carmen [in L2]: Number 8 of the story? I don't know... Did I assign that?

Student [in L2]: Yes, but after we're done with that... (Translation of transcript of Gr. 10 SFL class)

*Interaction with native speakers.* Other initiatives address the need to create opportunities for learners to interact with native speakers (NS) of English and Spanish, something that is perceived as particularly important in a foreign language context, in which students do not have many occasions to practice their L2 outside of school.

For this reason, NS teaching assistants play a central role in the curriculum and teaching practices, especially in the case of EFL classes, in which the NS assistant co-teaches one period a week for the entire academic year. On the other hand, in the SFL classes the NS assistant's main function is to prepare students for the external exam, therefore his presence is temporary (one hour a week for about four months) and only concerns Grade 12, as students in lower grades do not take any exams.

The principal and EFL teachers emphasize the NS assistant's contribution to facilitate and improve learners' speaking skills:

Native speaker teachers are not guest stars, they are assistants to the teachers for all intended purposes, and they are precious because they allow classes to be split into groups during teaching hours, the possibility of a personalized learning, of improving the space of language interaction, and the possibility for the students to have a direct contact with a native speaker without any opportunity of translation. (Interview with Principal)

[With the NS teacher] we read a book in the original language. We started to read books with her last year, so during the hour they came with the reading because then they had something to talk about, and for one hour they could practice the speaking with Mary's questions that she prepared in advanced. Her role is to have them speak as much as they can. (Interview with Sarah, EFL, Gr. 10-1)

The NS assistant plays a huge role in preparing them for the speaking, teaching them the techniques for the exam, or the expressions, the idiomatic expressions, linking words... this... She is mostly in charge of the speaking preparation. [...] But this is what they do together: they discuss a lot, she divides them into little groups and they have to discuss an issue. (Interview with Eric, EFL, Gr. 10 & 12 Level 2)

This year we started with Mary, my native speaker assistant. She brought to class newspaper articles or topics for discussion and they read the newspaper article, they read the news reports and then they had a class discussion on it. I think it's very useful because first of all it's always a value to have somebody who's not you in your class, for your students to see somebody different, especially to see somebody whose native language is English, so they can ask and interact, they can try and copy her accent, even... (Interview with Alex, EFL, Gr. 12-1)

Interaction with native speakers is further encouraged by means of other initiatives, such as (a) student exchanges, which consist of traveling to a country where the target language is spoken (*e.g.*, Spain) and being hosted by a student of that country in her/his school and home, and then hosting the same student in Italy, as well as (b) language tandems, described as follows:

We have this beautiful opportunity to have university students from Brown, John Hopkins, so 20 year olds, they're young. You can have either a language tandem with them, I have a list that every year the university gives me and I ask the parents, "Can you have your child one hour a week practicing?". For those who did it, it's very useful. They improved a lot. I can tell. But it's not connected, like... with what we're studying, I just say, "Go and have an ice-cream, take them around the city, show them the sights. One hour after school, spend it like that, without speaking about grammar, school or tests, just enjoy it." And then if they do it, after like six months, they did it once a week, you definitely can see it, even with these weak students. (Interview with Sarah, EFL, Gr. 10-1)

All the activities and strategies for L2 production and interaction described above clearly show that teachers create a wide variety of conditions that, by requiring learners to use the target language for different purposes, indirectly facilitate their development of communicative functions and their communicative competence overall.

***Opportunities for exposure.*** The second type of implicit instruction that contributes to develop learners' SPC concerns the opportunities that teachers create to maximize students' exposure to the target language and culture.

My data analysis shows that these opportunities are generated through (a) L2 input flood, (b) presence of NS assistants and (c) use of authentic materials. The approaches adopted largely overlap with those described in the "opportunities for production" section, as in many cases L2 exposure and interaction or production take place simultaneously and through the same activities.

*L2 input flood.* As previously explained, the L2-only school policy was consistently implemented by the participant teachers for the vast majority of their classroom discourse, including classroom management and routines (*e.g.*, calling the register, assigning homework, discussing scheduling issues), instructions and explanations, and interactions with students (*e.g.*, reprimanding or complimenting, telling jokes, asking genuine or display questions).

Teachers pointed out that the L2 input flood contributes to improve learners' comprehension skills:

Even like giving them the directions for the homework and repeating things [in the L2]... They understand everything, you know, you just get to their level. But it's definitely the most important thing, otherwise how could they learn it? From where? (Interview with Sarah, EFL, Gr. 10-1)

Because I think that... First of all they... [Using the L2] helps them in the listening, I think. Even if I'm not a native speaker and I don't speak at native speaker speed, I think it helps them... Some of the words, some of the expressions... I think it's more natural. (Interview with Alex, EFL, Gr. 12-1)

In the classes observed, I found that teachers spoke almost exclusively in the target language during all their classes, which not only exposed learners to a variety of communicative functions, such as greetings, orders, requests, giving/denying permission, giving advice, etc., but also allowed students to hear different language structures to express the same function. For instance, during one of the Grade 10-1 EFL classes, within the first two minutes Sarah employed four different ways to make requests and give instructions, such as the imperative mood, the modal verb "need to", and questions introduced by "can you" and "would you like":

Take out your cell phones. M., my technician, can you help me please? [...] T., would you like to take a walk and go and get my copies, please? [...] Ok, F., come here and take your cell phone. Now, everybody needs to take out a piece of paper from your notebook and write

down all the mistakes that you hear in order to help F. to do a bit better with his performance. [...] So, you had to record a list of questions, let's read them. A., would you like to start reading them please? [Student reads some questions] Read the whole list, so we can hear them. (Transcript of Gr. 10-1 EFL class)

*Presence of NS assistants.* The role of NS teaching assistants in EFL and SFL classrooms not only provided students with increased opportunities for L2 production and interaction, but also contributed to expose them to the target language used by people other than their teachers, and especially to the target culture. The Principal observed that in a foreign language context NS assistants represent a vehicle through which learners can perceive the target language and culture as something real, rather than viewing it merely as a subject with no connections to their lives. Teachers also stressed the importance of the cultural enrichment that NS bring to the class:

I think the presence of these assistants is very precious. We don't have other Spanish assistants. And apart from what the students perceive – cause they see them very little, just one hour a week – it is still an element for cultural enrichment: it gives you input that maybe I don't know, or a different word. (Interview with Carmen, SFL, Gr. 12)

Clearly you have this impact with a different culture. If the students are open-minded they immediately realize it's a huge contribution to their education. (Interview with Alex, EFL, Gr. 12-1)

*Authentic materials.* From teacher interviews, class observations and document analysis it emerged that all teachers make use of authentic materials to expose learners to realistic language use. This type of materials is generally employed for comprehension activities (reading and listening), and includes works of literature, movies, songs, newspapers, and YouTube videos. These materials as the basis for activities and tasks have the potential to lead students to notice and internalize how language is used in real life to express communicative functions, and can thus contribute to develop their SPC.

***Opportunities for students' processing.*** This theme refers to specific instructional activities designed to develop learners' SPC in terms of awareness – rather than production – by activating their ability to consciously process the input received.

Examples of such activities are (a) providing students with groups of phrases and expressions and asking them to assign a communicative function to each group, or conversely, (b) giving them a list of functions and instructing them to come up with different expressions that communicate those functions. In the following extract, Eric (Gr. 12-2 EFL teacher) assigned activity (a):

I want you to take a look at these expressions [on a photocopy], individually and very quickly. And I want you to put the correct title to each category. Advising or not, recommending, criticizing, praising. And then we'll focus on some of these structures that are useful. (Transcript of Gr. 12-2 EFL class)

**Summary of communicative functions & types of instruction.** To summarize the relationships that emerged between communicative functions (SP feature) and types of instruction, it was found that implicit instruction strategies were predominantly employed to develop students' abilities to understand and produce such functions.

Strategies largely consisted of maximizing learners' general exposure to and use of the target language to develop their communicative competence at large, but also included specific activities directly aimed at the development of communicative functions.

The different types of explicit and implicit instruction used by teachers are illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7

*Types of explicit and implicit instruction to teach communicative functions*

Explicit instruction	Implicit instruction
Opportunities for production (oral and written)	

Corrective feedback	tasks, use of L2, interaction with NSs)
Metalinguistic explanations	Opportunities for exposure (L2 input flood, NS assistants, authentic materials)
Lists of language structures	Opportunities for students' processing

**Social markers and politeness conventions & Explicit instruction.** As the graph in Figure 7 shows, the second SP feature – linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions – is also taught primarily through implicit instruction methods. However, the difference between the use of implicit and explicit teaching is not as great as in the case of communicative functions.

After analyzing the content of each instance of explicit instruction regarding this SP feature, I found that only one strategy was employed: corrective feedback. That means that markers of social relations and politeness conventions were explicitly addressed by teachers only (a) when students used them improperly during their L2 production and thus prompted teachers' corrections, or (b) when the topic was initiated by students' questions.

The first excerpt is an example of (a). At the end of a Grade 10 SFL class, Carmen made use of a Spanish leave-taking greeting and one of her students attempted to respond, but formulated his sentence with a negative L1 transfer, which prompted the teacher to correct him with a recast:

*Carmen: Pues, nada, nos vemos el martes, entonces. Que tengáis un buen fin de semana.*

*Student: A Usted también\*.*

*Carmen: "Igualmente". Tú has dicho "Usted también". "Igualmente".* (Transcript of Gr. 10 SFL class)

Carmen: Well, ok, I'll see you on Tuesday then. Have a nice weekend.

Student: Also to you\*

Carmen: “You too”. You said: “Also to you”. “You too”. (Translation of transcript of Gr. 10 SFL class)

The second extract illustrates (b). During the correction of an informal letter writing assignment, Grade 10 EFL students asked Sarah whether their use of politeness conventions was appropriate, and she provided brief feedback regarding their use of “please”:

Student 1: Is it ok if I say “Could you please”?

Sarah: “Could you please?” Yes, sure. As long as you say “please” and you’re nice. [...]

Student 2 [reading]: “If you come, please bring something to drink”.

Sarah: “If you come, please... bring something to drink”... Yes. “Please” is important, otherwise it’s very strong.

**Social markers and politeness conventions & Implicit instruction.** As explained above, markers of social relations and politeness conventions were usually not treated as the main topic on teachers’ agendas for the classes observed, nor were the object of extensive explanations, but rather they were addressed when something noteworthy emerged. It was mainly through implicit instruction that teachers created opportunities for this “something” to emerge.

Similarly to communicative functions, the main implicit activities and strategies adopted to teach social markers and politeness conventions can be grouped under (a) opportunities for production and interaction and (b) opportunities for exposure.

***Opportunities for production.*** This group includes oral or written production and interaction activities, such as writing emails and letters – which require the use of appropriate address forms, greetings, and politeness forms – as well as role plays and oral exam simulations, in which students need to engage in a conversation and therefore make use of the appropriate markers of social relations.

These activities overlap with those administered to teach communicative functions, mainly because these tasks were not designed to elicit one specific feature, but rather meant to enable learners to use a variety of skills and types of knowledge, of which these particular SP features are but one aspect.

The first extract shows the instructions for a decision task as part of the external exam simulation and the very first part of the conversation, which demonstrates how this type of task induced students to begin by greeting each other and employ markers of social relations:

Mary [reads]: “A teenager wants to give his grandma a present for her seventieth birthday. But he doesn’t know what to buy. Talk together about different things he could give her then say which would be the most suitable.” Here is a picture with some ideas to help you

Student 1: Can I start?

Student 2: Yes.

Student 1: Hi, M.

Student 2: Hi, A.

Student 1: How are you today?

Student 2: I’m fine, and you?

Student 1: I’m fine, thanks. (Transcript of Gr. 10-1 EFL class)

In the following excerpt, Alex (EFL teacher) explains how role-plays contribute to elicit a more natural, genuine production of markers of social relations and politeness conventions:

I try to create an environment in the class in which even role plays can be accepted without embarrassment. Because I think to learn basic communication skills, which are given sentences – “I beg your pardon” and stuff like this – you have to just create a context in which they could use it naturally. I did an activity in a class in which I ask two students to pretend they were having a phone call in which one was a business man and the other one was a manager and they had to arrange a meeting. So they had to ask for the other person’s arrangements. And so they had to use quite a variety of sentences, like, “Good morning, Mr Something speaking, would it be possible for you to meet..?”. (Interview with Alex, EFL, Gr. 12-1)

The extensive use of the L2 in classroom discourse also provided students with the opportunity to use greetings, address forms, expletives, as well as politeness forms. For instance, in all the classes observed greeting sequences typically took place in the target language. Some of these sequences were more routine-like and mostly consisted of the teacher greeting the class (*e.g.*, “Good morning”) and students responding (“Good morning”); others were more prolonged and impromptu, such as the following one:

*Carmen: F., qué tal?*

*Student: Bien.*

*Carmen: Bien? Me perfecta, que es mucho que no te veo, no? Nos vimos... No, porque, dónde estabas el jueves?*

*Student: Estaba enferma.*

*Carmen: Ay, la pobre! Te has recuperado?*

*Student: Sí, en parte. (Transcript of Gr. 10 SFL class)*

Carmen: F., how are you?

Student: I'm good

Carmen: Good? I'm glad to hear that, because I haven't seen you in a while, right? We saw each other... No, because... Where were you on Thursday?

Student: I was sick.

Carmen: Oh, poor thing! Are you feeling better now?

Student: Yes, kind of. (Translation of transcript of Gr. 10 SFL class)

***Opportunities for exposure.*** Once again, the strategies employed overlap with those described for communicative functions, as it appeared that the overall goal was to develop learners' communicative competence in general, rather than skills related to specific SP features.

These strategies include (a) L2 input flood, (b) the presence of NS teaching assistants, and (c) the use of reading and listening activities often based on authentic texts, speeches and conversations. Interestingly, Sarah (EFL teacher) noticed in her interview how the English

input flood is a source of learning for her students, who notice and absorb expressions she uses, such as some expletives:

When something bad happens for example, I always say “Oh my Goodness”, they... I never taught them that this is... but they pick it up. (Interview with Sarah, EFL, Gr. 10-1).

Table 8 summarizes the instructional activities and strategies employed by teachers to develop learners’ abilities to understand and use linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions.

Table 8

*Types of explicit and implicit instruction to teach social markers and politeness conventions*

Explicit instruction	Implicit instruction
Corrective feedback	Opportunities for production (oral and written tasks, use of L2, interaction with NSs)
	Opportunities for exposure (L2 input flood, NS assistants, authentic materials)

**Summary of SP features and types of instruction.** To summarize, findings obtained from the comparative analysis of these two sets of categories show that implicit instruction was the preferred approach adopted to teach SP, both in terms of communicative functions and linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions. However, the prevalence of implicit instruction was more relevant in the case of communicative functions, whereas types of instruction appear to be more balanced for linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions.

In addition, the types of implicit and explicit instructional activities and strategies employed are for the most part the same for both SP features:

- L2 input flood, which is intended to enhance students' exposure to the L2 as well as its production.
- Comprehension, production and interaction tasks that were often part of the preparation for the external exams, and in some cases constituted the actual simulations of different parts of these exams.
- Presence of the NS teaching assistants to maximize exposure to and interaction with the target language and culture.
- Corrective feedback, which was the main explicit instructional strategy employed for communicative functions and the only one for linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions.

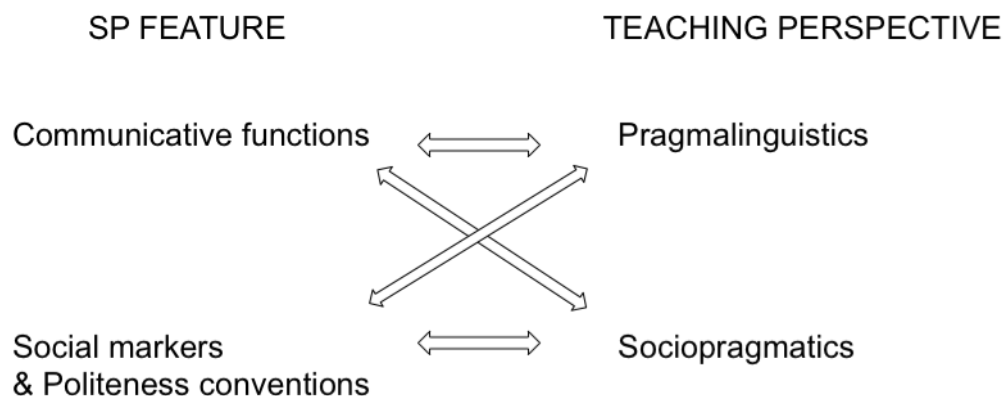
### **SP Features and Teaching Perspectives**

After identifying the nature of the relationships between SP features and types of instruction, I will now explore whether the two features under study were taught from different instructional perspective, and if so, what type of connection exists between these two elements.

The teaching perspectives examined are pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics. Teachers who adopt a pragmalinguistics perspective focus their instruction on language, and teach the linguistic resources and rules that students need to acquire in order to perform a communicative act and convey a certain meaning.

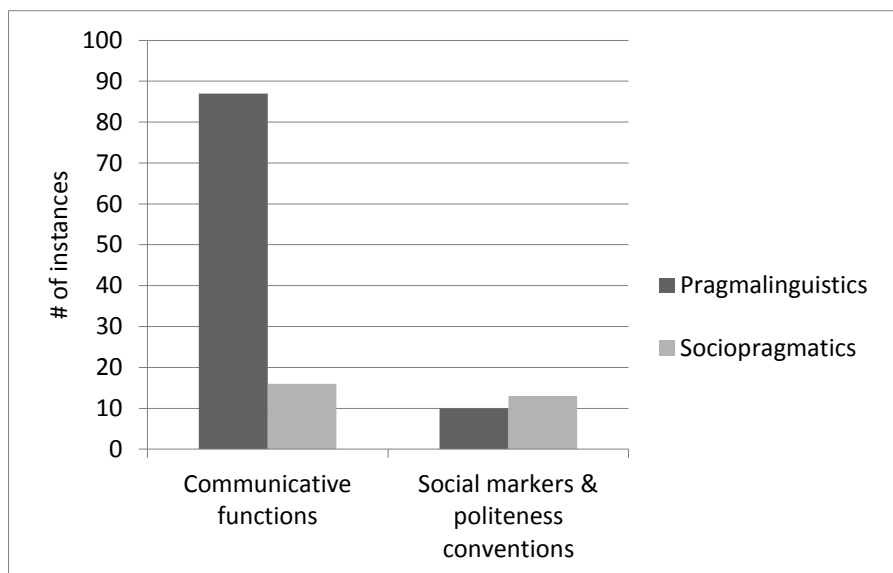
When SP features are taught from a sociopragmatics perspective it means that attention is given to the appropriateness of language use in terms of context, social distance and power, politeness, and to how these concepts tend to be perceived and interpreted by users of the target language.

A comparative analysis was performed between the two sets of coding categories as illustrated in Figure 8.



*Figure 8.* Comparison of SP features with teaching perspectives

Results from the comparison of the categories above are presented in Figure 9. The graph shows that (a) communicative functions were primarily taught from a pragmalinguistics perspective, whereas (b) the teaching of social markers and politeness conventions is not strongly associated with either perspective, as both were almost equally adopted by teachers.

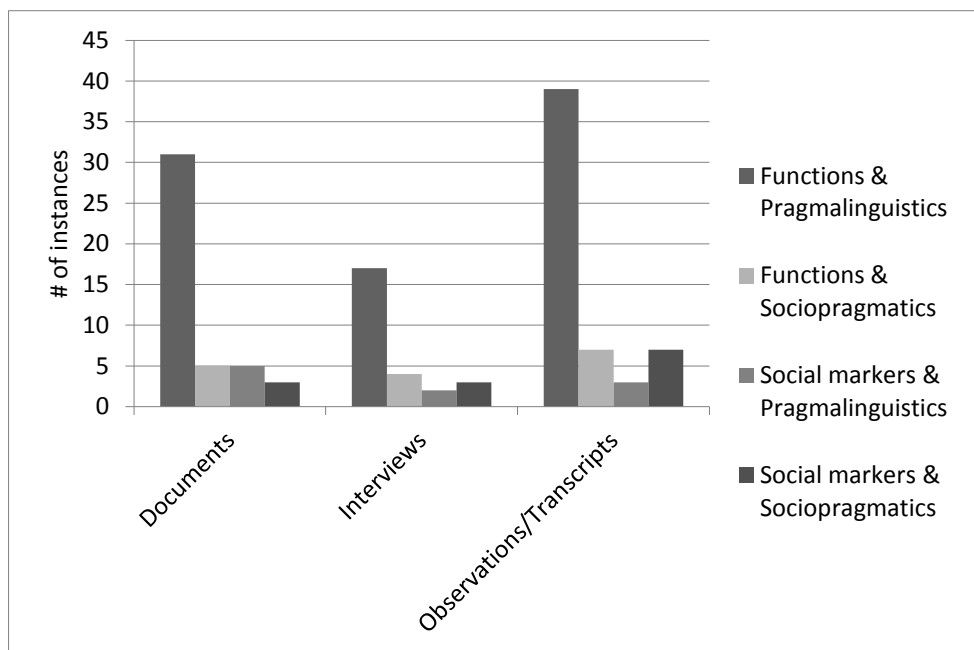


*Figure 9.* Relationships between SP features and teaching perspectives

In addition, I conducted the same comparative analysis for each data source separately (documents, interviews, observations/transcripts), in order to verify whether the relationships that emerged from the general comparison (Figure 9) were consistent across sources.

Results of this threefold comparison are illustrated in Figure 10, which confirms that the pattern of teaching communicative functions from a pragmalinguistics perspective is present in all data sources, and that both perspectives were adopted to teach social markers and politeness conventions, with a slight preference for sociopragmatics.

Therefore, this data source triangulation process shows that what teachers say about their approaches is consistent with what they do in class and aligns with the way SP topics are presented in the textbooks and materials that I have analyzed.



*Figure 10.* Relationships between SP features and teaching perspectives across data sources

In the following sections the relationships that emerged between SP features and teaching perspectives will be examined in detail.

**Communicative functions & pragmalinguistics.** Topics related to communicative functions were mostly taught from a pragmalinguistics perspective, which suggests that teachers focused on providing learners with the linguistic resources to perform such functions, while less attention was devoted to the social and contextual factors that determine the appropriateness of language choices.

For instance, Carmen, in her Grade 10 SFL class explained a variety of phrases to express opinions and focused on the verb moods such expressions require<sup>5</sup> (explicit instruction). After the explanation, the teacher initiated a class discussion in which she asked for students' opinions about a topic (implicit instruction). Her main goal was to elicit the specific structures and verbs she had explained, rather than encouraging students to express their opinions appropriately, as this extract shows:

*Carmen: Qué te parece?*

*Student: Me parece justo.*

*Carmen: Yo quiero una frase en subjuntivo.* (Transcript of Gr. 10 SFL class)

Carmen: What does it seem like to you?

Student: It seems fair to me.

Carmen: I want a sentence with the subjunctive (Translation of transcript of Gr. 10 SFL class)

The student produced a grammatically correct sentence that expressed her/his opinion in an appropriate way. However, Carmen was interested in the practice of a specific grammatical structure that required the subjunctive mood and was therefore not satisfied with the students' answer.

In another example, after the speaking test simulation for the PET exam in Grade 10-2 EFL class, the NS teaching assistant gave feedback to a student about her/his language use in a picture description task:

The picture part was the weakest part because you played it safe. Yes? It was a very KET level [the lower exam level]. You're not using the structures that your teachers taught you all year. And in particular modals, yes? You have to say "might be, could be", "they could be in a classroom"... Even if you know they are in a classroom, you say "they could be", yes? [...] You have all the expressions: "it looks as if, it seems, they seem", etc. Even if you use two or

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<sup>5</sup> In Spanish, verbs that express opinion in affirmative sentences (*e.g.*, I think that, I believe that) require the indicative mood. Verbs that express opinion in negative sentences (*e.g.*, I don't think that, I don't believe that) and the phrase "It seems + adjective + that" require the subjunctive mood.

three of those and a variety, it increases your level for the picture. (Transcript of Gr. 10-2 EFL class)

Her comment shows that students are encouraged to use specific types of linguistic resources to perform a communicative task, such as modal verbs to make inferences about what they see in a picture. The goal of the activity, therefore, is not only to convey the message appropriately, but to show the examiners that learners know and can use a variety of resources.

Practitioners' focus on the teaching of communicative functions from a pragmalinguistics perspective appears to be connected to their goal of expanding students' linguistic repertoire, both (a) to comply with the external exams requirements, as showed in the example above, and (b) to improve learners' overall proficiency, as explained by an EFL teacher:

I even have my lessons that I devote to vocabulary for apologizing, making requests, politeness forms, refusing a request, I don't know... Expressing opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, I do. I do cover a range of this kind of communicative areas because it's so important and... Because otherwise they have a very limited vocabulary that would allow them to survive in real life interaction, but that's not enough because if you don't expand the vocabulary bank of yours, you will never become a better speaker. (Interview with Eric, EFL, Gr. 10 & 12 Level 2)

**Social markers and politeness conventions & sociopragmatics.** These SP features are taught from both instructional perspectives more equally, although there is a trend towards sociopragmatics perspective. This tendency suggests that teachers are more prone to address context and social appropriateness when the topic is markers of social relations and politeness than when referring to communicative functions.

For instance, during the correction of an informal letter writing task, Sarah, the Gr. 10-1 EFL teacher, commented on the students' use of "please", and briefly focused on its appropriateness in the context of making a written request to a friend:

Student 1: Is it ok if I write “Could you please”?

Sarah: “Could you please”? Yes, sure. As long as you say “please” and you’re nice.

[...]

Student 2: [reading his/her letter]: “If you come, please bring something to drink”.

Sarah: “If you come, please bring something to drink”. Yes. “Please” important, otherwise it’s very strong. (Transcript of Gr. 10-1 EFL class)

Another example of sociopragmatics perspective is provided by Carmen, the SFL teacher, who in her interview reports of an instance in which she corrected her students’ inappropriate use of greetings because they did not take into account the type of social relationships and the social power dynamics between them and their interlocutor (their teacher):

When they see me in the hall and go: “Buenas!”<sup>6</sup> and I say: “No, ‘Buenas’ no, because I’m not your friend”. So a formal or informal context. Are you talking to the principal, a teacher or with your friends? (Interview with Carmen, SFL, Gr. 10 & 12)

In the Interpretation and Discussion chapter I will consider likely explanations for the different instructional perspectives that teachers tend to adopt depending on the SP feature addressed.

### **Teaching Perspectives and Types of Instruction**

The last comparison carried out was the cross-reference procedure between teaching perspectives (pragmalinguistics or sociopragmatics) and types of instruction (explicit or implicit), in order to see whether a specific perspective occurred with a specific instructional approach and thus explore possible meaningful relationships. Figure 11 shows the comparative analysis between these two sets of categories and Figure 12 illustrates the results of this comparison.

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<sup>6</sup> A very informal Spanish greeting, similar to “Hey” or “What’s up”.

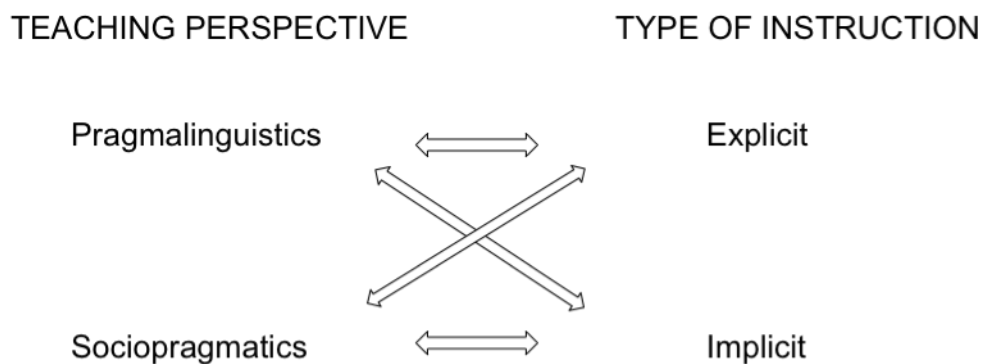


Figure 11. Comparison of types of instruction with teaching perspectives

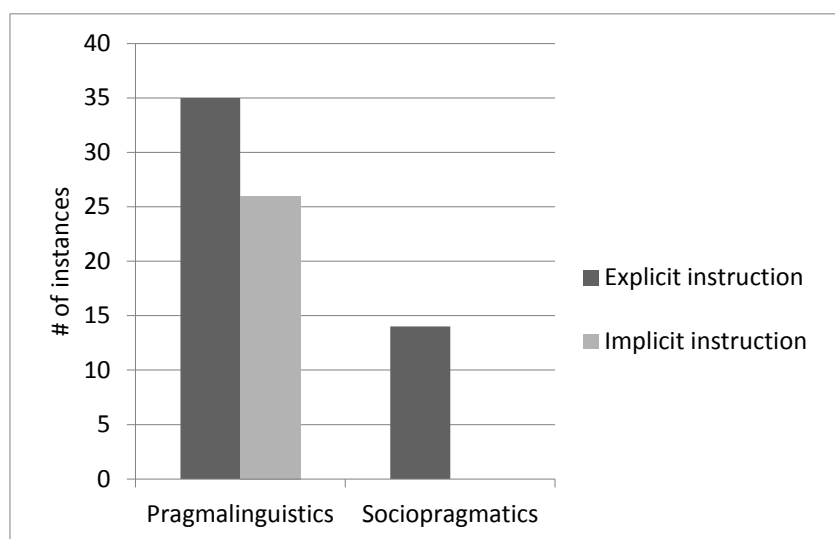


Figure 12. Relationships between types of instruction and teaching perspectives

**Pragmalinguistics & types of instruction.** The graph shows that the pragmalinguistics perspective is adopted both during explicit and implicit instructional activities. This is not surprising, as the previous findings demonstrated that practitioners prefer this teaching perspective, particularly when teaching communicative functions, which also happen to be the most taught SP feature of the two examined.

After obtaining this result, I scanned all the instances of explicit and implicit instruction in which teachers employed a pragmalinguistics perspective, and I noticed that for almost all of them the SP feature addressed was represented by communicative functions.

Therefore, there doesn't seem to be a strong relationship between pragmalinguistics perspective and type of instruction, but rather, this result is determined by the connection that exists between pragmalinguistics perspective and a specific SP feature, namely communicative functions.

**Sociopragmatics & explicit instruction.** Findings concerning sociopragmatics perspective and type of instruction are quite different. From the graph we can see that a sociopragmatics perspective was adopted only during explicit instructional activities, which suggests a strong relationship between these two elements.

In addition, when I examined all the occurrences of explicit activities in which a sociopragmatics perspective was employed, I noticed that the topics of instruction were both SP features. This analysis indicates that a connection exists between sociopragmatics perspective and explicit instruction regardless of the SP feature addressed.

### **Summary of Findings Related to RQ 2**

The second Research Question is: “Beyond what is stated in the curricula and syllabi, how is SP addressed in the teaching approaches and practices in EFL and SFL language classrooms?”

Findings show that the SP features examined are not taught equally nor in the same way. More attention is devoted to teach communicative functions, a result that is in line with the conspicuous presence of this SP feature in curricula and syllabi, while linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions are seldom addressed.

The different emphasis attributed to these two SP features is also reflected in the approaches adopted to teach them.

Social markers and politeness conventions were never the main topic of an activity, and were the object of explicit instruction only in instances of corrective feedback, which was prompted by students' mistakes or questions, rather than by the teachers. In addition, learners' use of this SP feature was elicited indirectly through implicit activities and strategies aimed at enhancing communicative competence more in general (*e.g.*, informal letter writing task, use of the L2 in the classroom).

Communicative functions were mostly taught implicitly through a variety of activities and tasks, and even when taught explicitly, included more strategies than corrective feedback, such as metalinguistic explanations and supply of lists of language structures. In addition, this SP feature was strongly associated with a pragmalinguistics perspective, which means that, when teaching communicative functions, teachers primarily focused on providing learners with the linguistic resources to perform such functions, either implicitly or explicitly.

Unlike functions, social markers and politeness conventions were also taught from a sociopragmatics perspective, which suggests that it was the type of feature that determined the perspective adopted.

Finally, a relationship was found between sociopragmatics perspective and explicit instruction, as this perspective was only employed during explicit instructional activities.

The relationships identified concerning SP features, types of instruction and teaching perspectives are visually represented in Figure 13.



### SPC assessment

- SP Features
  - Communicative functions
  - Social markers & Politeness conventions

After the coding phase, my analytical process consisted of:

- Content analysis for the codes contained in the categories “CEFR-related assessment” and “SPC assessment” separately, to look for possible patterns and themes;
- Cross-referencing of these two categories to examine whether and how the CEFR was related to the assessment of SPC;
- Comparative analysis between the category “SPC assessment” and both categories from the set “SP features”, to see how SP features were assessed and whether there was a relationship between type of SP feature and type of assessment.

Before explaining the findings, however, I would like to point out a limitation in the data collection and analysis related to RQ 3. Most of the available data contain fairly general information about the assessment procedures and evaluation methods teachers employ, which at times I deemed too vague to be coded into one category or another. As a consequence, the results of this analysis are only tentative, and the picture that follows is an approximation of the assessment issues explored.

Findings will be presented in two sections: (a) In the first section, I will describe the results regarding the role of the CEFR in assessment practices; (b) In the second section, I will talk about the results related to assessment of SPC and its relationships with both the CEFR and specific SP features.

### **CEFR-related Assessment**

The main finding that surfaced from the analysis of data coded in the category

“CEFR-related assessment” is that the CEFR indirectly affects teachers’ assessment parameters and practices through external exams.

From the interviews it emerged that, when assessing their own students’ competences, the participant teachers follow the parameters and/or evaluation rubrics used to assess candidates’ performance in the external exams (PET and FCE for English, DELE for Spanish).

Me: How do you assess their speaking skills and listening skills? What are your criteria?

Eric: Mostly I use the criteria that are given by the examination, the certifications, especially with the speaking. Of course I do have my opinion on how they speak even, you know, leaving FCE or PET activities, leaving them aside, but of course it is very convenient to use that set of evaluation criteria. (Interview with Eric, EFL, Gr. 10 & 12 Level 2)

This was evident also from syllabi and classroom observations, particularly when students were engaged in exam simulations or preparatory tasks. The value of these simulations was not only for exam purposes, but was also important for the summative assessment of students’ language competences that teachers performed at the end of the academic year and that determined students’ final grade in EFL or SFL. Practitioners stated that the evaluations students received on their simulations of the different parts of the exams (*e.g.*, speaking part, writing part, etc.) were considered official grades that would weigh on the final evaluation:

In the second part of the year, tests coincide with PET mock tests on all four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). (Sarah’s Gr. 10-1 EFL syllabus)

Their oral mark almost entirely depends on that, for example FCE speaking and listening simulations, mostly. Of course I have other criteria that come into play, but mostly what goes on the register is that. (Interview with Eric, EFL, Gr. 10 & 12 Level 2)

All exam simulations are worth 50% on my register and are official grades. There is one grade for listening, one for reading and use of English, one for writing. Evaluations of the speaking part are worth 100%. (Interview with Alex, EFL, Gr. 12-1)

In addition, from such observations it emerged that the external exams objectives and assessment criteria also influenced the evaluation of activities that were not directly related to the exams. For instance, in Grade 12 SFL classes students conducted a project in pairs in which they researched topics assigned by the teacher and then presented them to the class. Carmen, the SFL teacher, explained that she designed this activity following the DELE requirements about the ability of presenting a topic, expressing one's opinions about it and defending these opinions with valid arguments. Therefore, among her assessment criteria were also these DELE-inspired parameters.

While it could be assumed that teachers employ the exams assessment methods out of convenience and/or because they are mandated to teach for these exams, I would argue that their own beliefs about the validity of these external exams are also an important factor that shapes their assessment practices. Practitioners agree that these exams effectively assess learners' communicative skills, which may explain why they adopt objectives and assessment parameters that match or closely relate to the external examinations':

For our school, but it should be for all the schools, external examinations are the reference point for the work you've been doing, to see if you're going in the right direction, because it's easy to say that after five years you have a B1 or B2 level, but if it's not tested, you actually don't have a tangible sign of what you're doing. [...] [the speaking part of the test] reflects the competences. Because the speaking part is very rich, because it gives you a variety of cues: oral presentation – so they assess your expository and argumentative ability – then you have a conversation, often you need to find an agreement, so negotiating... The description, which is obviously different depending on the level: for a B1 it's a photo, for a B2 it's investigations. So, yeah, I think it reflects the competences. (Interview with Carmen, SFL, Gr. 10 & 12)

I do believe that they [external exams] are a fairly good way to assess the language competence of a student. (Interview with Eric, EFL, Gr. 10 & 12 Level 2)

Me: Do you think that the different parts of the exam are accurately, do accurately assess their skills? So the speaking test does assess if they're good at speaking...

Alex: I think so. The speaking and the listening... yeah, I think they're quite effective.  
(Interview with Alex, EFL, Gr. 12-1)

The finding that assessment is indirectly informed by the CEFR through external exams is not surprising, as it is in line with the results obtained regarding the role of the CEFR in language curricula. The correspondence of these results shows consistency in the participant teachers' pedagogical practices, as there is continuity and coherence between learning objectives, teaching practices and assessment procedures.

### **Assessment of SPC**

As stated in the introductory section, the information I was able to collect about assessment was of a rather generic nature, therefore data that specifically address assessment of SPC is scant and does not lead to conclusive findings.

The only relevant data comes from EFL class observations, and more specifically regards the assessment of exam simulations of the speaking parts. As explained above, teachers used the exams assessment criteria to correct and evaluate students' performances, and some of these criteria referred to SPC. For instance, the evaluation sheet of the PET and FCE speaking test consists of the following parameters:

1. Fluency (speed, rhythm, hesitation, connected speech).
2. Grammatical accuracy (complex structures, tenses, propositions, grammatical functions)
3. Pronunciation (individual sounds, stress, rhythm, intonation patterns, range of pitch within sentence).
4. Interactive communication (effective communication in everyday contexts + abstract topics)
5. Vocabulary resource (range of vocabulary for everyday tasks and abstract topics)

While there are no explicit references to specific sociolinguistic or pragmatic skills and features, SPC can be assessed through categories 2, 4, and 5 of this rubric.

In the speaking simulations that I observed, Mary, the NS teaching assistant, was in charge of evaluating the performances according to this rubric and providing students with feedback about their strengths and weaknesses. The vast majority of points she wrote down and explained to the students concerned grammar and pronunciation mistakes; only a minor portion was about SP features, and almost always had to do with the phrases and structures students used to express specific functions. In addition, her focus was usually on the range and variety of expressions employed, rather than on their appropriateness in context.

You tend to use modal verbs, probability a lot, which is very good. [...] The interaction... the strategy for interaction was really good: “I see your point,” very good. “To sum up”, good. (Transcript of Gr. 10-2 EFL class).

This SPC-related assessment observed was therefore strictly connected to the external exams, and only addressed communicative functions.

However, the scarcity of data does not allow me to find any meaningful relationships between assessment of SPC and specific SP features, nor with the CEFR, other than the major role of external examinations in EFL classes. Therefore, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the issue of whether SPC is systematically assessed and what approaches are employed to assess it.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **Interpretation and Discussion**

Interpretation, by definition, involves going beyond the descriptive data. Interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order on an unruly but surely patterned world. (Patton, 2002, p. 480)

With this definition in mind, in this chapter I will interpret the meanings of the results reported in Chapter 4, as well as propose likely explanations for the types of relationships that have been identified with the findings.

Results of this study will be discussed in light of previous research conducted about the CEFR, SPC and SP instruction illustrated in Chapter 2 (“Theoretical Framework”), and will be interpreted by taking into account the participants’ perspectives of the phenomena under study as well as the specific themes that have emerged from the data analysis.

In the following sections I will present the interpretation and discussion of my findings according to the study’s research questions. I will only refer to the first and second research question because, as I explained in the previous chapter, data and results related to RQ 3 were insufficient.

#### **Discussion of RQ 1 Findings**

Findings related to the first research question concern the presence of SPC among the curriculum objectives that teachers set for their EFL and SFL classes, and the possible role that the CEFR plays in this process.

In the following sections I will discuss the results illustrated in Chapter 4 (“Findings”) and explain them by focusing on how practitioners’ construct and understand

their relationships with the CEFR and SPC. Their cognition on this topic will in turn be explored in relation to (a) teacher education and (b) external exams and textbooks, which I have identified as the main critical factors that affect teachers' knowledge and applications of the CEFR and SPC.

### **Practitioners' Cognition and Teacher Education**

From the analysis it was found that practitioners' knowledge of the CEFR is mostly limited to its reference levels and some of its descriptors scales, and it does not include knowledge of the communicative competence model provided in the document in which SPC is defined and described.

Participants attributed this lack of theoretical knowledge about both the CEFR and applied linguistics concepts (communicative competence, and sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence) to their university degree programs (Foreign Languages and Literatures) and teacher education programs, in which these topics were very marginally addressed.

This finding corroborates the results of both (a) previous research conducted on practitioners' knowledge and uses of the CEFR (Hehl & Kruczek, 2011; Moonen *et al.*, 2013; Piccardo *et al.*, 2011; Piccardo, 2013a) and (b) studies about teachers' education and knowledge of SP (Cohen, 2008; Eslami & Eslami-Rasekh, 2008; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Ishihara, 2010a; Vasquez & Sharpless, 2009).

Teacher education emerges as an important factor that shapes practitioners' knowledge and applications of the CEFR and SPC, and, in this particular study, it affects such knowledge and use negatively. What appears as particularly problematic with regard to the CEFR is that all participant teachers have completed their academic education fairly recently (within the last eight years) and all of them attended the newly reformed teacher-

training program within the last five years, as it has been active in Italy since 2010. This means that the CEFR does not receive ample attention in current language teacher education.

At first, this lack of training about the CEFR seems surprising, given that this document has had direct influence in the development of the 2010 ministerial guidelines for high school curricula (*Decreto delle Indicazioni Nazionali per i Licei*), not to mention its major reference function for the development of language examinations and textbooks. However, it is possible that this apparent disregard for the CEFR comes in fact from the perception that this document is already a consolidated reality in language education policy and pedagogy, and that its reference levels and competence-based approach are commonly known and regularly used by practitioners, therefore the need to treat the CEFR and its concepts as an explicit object of study may not be viewed as a priority.

This attitude contributes to perpetuate what I would define as the “impasse of the CEFR”, which indicates the situation that has developed around the CEFR whereby the majority of language stakeholders know and employ only some of its elements (*e.g.*, reference levels) and, as a consequence, with time, the CEFR has come to be identified exclusively with such elements, while other aspects that would be particularly relevant for language teachers – such as the model of communicative competence and the taxonomy of communicative activities<sup>7</sup> – continue to be largely ignored.

### **Practitioners’ Cognition and External Exams & Textbooks**

Despite the limited theoretical knowledge reported by the participants about SPC – whether as explained in the CEFR or not – data showed that teachers do include some

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<sup>7</sup> Communicative activities are oral/written reception, production, interaction and mediation, as opposed to the four skills model of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

sociolinguistics and pragmatics elements among their curriculum objectives, and more specifically, communicative functions, as they describe some of the learning goals in terms of functions that students can perform with the language (*e.g.*, being able to explain a story, making requests).

The presence of SP elements in the curricula and syllabi is perceived by the participants as related to the external language proficiency exams and the textbooks, as both are employed by the teachers as reference tools to develop their language curricula and learning objectives. Therefore, it emerges that external exams and textbooks are the primary sources of knowledge about both the CEFR and SPC for these teachers. In addition, as these exams and textbooks are informed by and aligned to the CEFR, this document appears to have an indirect impact on curriculum development practices, including the incorporation of SP aspects.

While this finding can be considered as a positive impact that these two factors have on teachers' cognition and practices, I would also argue that the lack of a solid, first-hand contact between participants and the CEFR and SPC makes teachers' understanding and use of these concepts overly dependent on external exams and textbooks. In addition, practitioners receive a filtered, "mediated" version of what the CEFR in general and SPC in particular entail, one that has been constructed by exam and textbook designers. As a result teachers might be prevented from examining and reflecting on topics such SPC more in depth, forming their own views about them, and thus exploiting them as they see fit for their instructional contexts.

A number of reasons that might account for the reliance on external exams and textbooks have been identified based on the contextual factors that affect this particular

setting and its participants. First, as discussed in the previous section, is the lack of practitioners' theoretical knowledge – principally attributed to the academic and teacher education they received. Second, all the participant teachers are fairly young and don't have extensive in-service experience, which might prompt them to rely on instructional tools that provide a clear structure. Third, the considerable emphasis placed by the school on the external language exams might make practitioners feel pressured to conform to the requirements, contents and structure of such exams.

As teacher's cognition and beliefs regarding the CEFR, SPC and their experiences with these concepts constitute the basis for their instructional practices, the three factors that shape their knowledge and understanding (teacher education, external exams and textbooks) also play an important role in shaping their practices, as it will be further discussed in the next section.

### **Discussion of RQ 2 Findings**

Results for the second research question regard how practitioners teach SP elements and develop SPC in their students. Interpretation and discussion of the findings will be presented according to the three elements of SP teaching practices that were considered during the analysis: (a) SP features, (b) Teaching perspectives and (c) Types of instruction.

#### **SP Features and Teaching Perspectives**

Findings show that, of the two SP features examined (communicative functions and linguistic markers of social relations & politeness conventions) the majority of SP instruction

is devoted to communicative functions. In addition, this feature is primarily taught from a pragmalinguistics perspective with very minimal attention to sociopragmatics aspects.

This result confirms Alcón Soler and Martínez-Flor's (2008) claim that "when pragmatics is the focus of attention in FL classrooms, the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competences suggested by Leech (1983) and Thomas (1983) are not viewed in interaction. In other words, the relationship between routines and forms of particular speech acts are not considered together with the contextual factors in particular situations" (p. 5).

On the other hand, linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions appeared to be associated to a sociopragmatics perspective, which suggests that a relationship exists between type of SP feature and teaching perspective.

Why do communicative functions prevail over social markers and politeness conventions as topics of SP instruction? And why teachers mainly adopt a pragmalinguistics perspective when teaching such functions, while they employ a sociopragmatics perspective for social markers and politeness conventions?

Before I provide explanations for this phenomenon, a clarification is in order. The category "communicative functions" encompasses a wider range of elements than that of "social markers and politeness conventions", which – as described in the CEFR – mostly refers to the appropriate use of single words or phrases to address people, greet them, and engage in social exchanges with them (*e.g.*, expressing admiration, regret, complaint). Therefore, it is not surprising to see that the amount of communicative functions being addressed in the classroom is higher; what is interesting, however, is the little attention devoted to social and contextual appropriateness of language use, as demonstrated by (a) the

few teaching instances involving social markers and politeness conventions, and (b) the emphasis placed on pragmalinguistics when teaching communicative functions, rather than sociopragmatics.

Possible reasons that explain this result are connected with participants' experiences and beliefs regarding their instructional practices, as well as previous research findings in ILP.

First, teachers favor a pragmalinguistics approach to teach communicative functions because they view acquisition of a wide variety of vocabulary and use of expressions as a sign of increased language proficiency, therefore their priority is to expand students' linguistic repertoire. This belief is also shaped by the requirements of the external language exams, which include learners' ability to use a broad range of linguistic resources to show what they know in the target language.

Second, SP instruction that focuses on sociolinguistic features of language use and/or addresses any SP features from a sociopragmatics perspective tends to be perceived as too advanced, particularly because of students' age. Teachers believe that students may not be cognitively mature enough to understand, appreciate and properly use different levels of formality, registers, and language that is socially and contextually appropriate. The hypothesis that students' age is an intervening factor in the dearth of sociolinguistics and sociopragmatics instruction is illustrated by the following example: In a Gr. 12 SFL class, I observed a speaking test simulation during which the teaching assistant asked a student if he wanted to be treated with the informal you (*tú*) or the formal you (*Usted*). The student seemed to be taken aback and confused by the question, and was not able to reply. At the time, I found this reaction surprising for two reasons: (a) SFL students typically learn the

existence and difference between *tú* and *Usted* in their first year of Spanish instruction, and (b) Italian – the students’ L1 – presents the same distinction, and in Italy – similarly to Spanish-speaking countries – it is quite common in certain social interactions to ask interlocutors we do not know well if they want to be treated with the informal or formal way of address. Therefore, during the interview with Carmen, the SFL teacher, I asked her what she thought about this episode, and she replied:

No one ever told them: “Do you want me to use *tú* or *Usted*?” I mean, we have never even thought about this issue, because I go in and I always use *tú*. [...] It’s not part of our culture asking a 17-year-old student... It’s not part of their culture, the students’ culture, this is totally sociolinguistics. The teacher who’s older than you who asks you if you want him to use *tú* or *Usted* with you... it takes you by surprise. (Interview with Carmen, SFL, Gr. 10 & 12)

Her explanation suggests that, even though students might know the difference between *tú* and *Usted* from a pragmalinguistics perspective, they usually don’t engage in interactions where they are required to choose between the two, because people of their age are typically addressed with *tú*, both in Spanish and Italian cultures. Therefore, the teacher’s choice to use the casual address form *tú* for classroom discourse and generally not to focus on the differences in levels of formality seems based on the perception that young students may not be fully ready for – or even need – this type of instruction.

Classroom discourse is also at the core of my third hypothesis. The exposure to and production of sociolinguistics elements such as linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions are strictly related to a social dimension of discourse that typically takes place during everyday interactions in which language is used for genuine communication purposes. As previous research in ILP has showed (Alcón Soler, 2005; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1996; Kasper, 1997; Lörcher & Schulze, 1988), classroom settings typically do not afford many opportunities for authentic discourse with a strong

social dimension, and the range of SP realization strategies in the target language tends to be limited to the communicative functions (*e.g.*, providing and receiving instructions) and dependent on social dynamics (*e.g.*, the superiority of teachers' status) that are typical of a classroom context. Therefore, as many of the social situations that require an appropriate use of linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions (a) do not naturally take place in the classroom, and (b) were not frequently recreated or specifically analyzed through instructional activities (*e.g.*, role-plays, authentic dialogues in movies and books) during the observation period, instances of sociolinguistics and sociopragmatics instruction were rather limited.

As mentioned in the above point, the types of activities and teaching strategies employed by practitioners also play an important role to better understand the development of SPC in relation to teaching practices, and are the third main factor that was analyzed to answer RQ 2. In the following section, results related to types of instruction will be discussed more in detail.

### **Types of Instruction**

The preferred types of SP instruction were found to pertain to the implicit side of the implicit-explicit continuum. That means that SP features were not often addressed directly through explanations or awareness-raising activities, but rather, practitioners created the conditions for learners to produce or be exposed to such features. However, linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions were also the object of a considerable amount of explicit instruction, which always consisted of corrective feedback.

The vast majority of implicit teaching activities and strategies employed consisted of opportunities for language production or exposure in a broad sense, which means that in most cases SP features were not the only or main target of instruction, but were rather part of more general objectives, such as encouraging speaking productions or maximizing exposure to the language. This was evident during activities because teachers often provided feedback that addressed a variety of topics and competences (*e.g.*, grammar, vocabulary, discourse competence, pronunciation), but rarely focused on SPC, especially in terms of appropriateness of language use (as discussed in the previous section). Therefore, this type of teaching, while not specifically targeting SPC, might nonetheless lead to incidental SPC development, which is usually in conjunction with the development of other communication skills.

Why does this type of implicit instruction appear to be the prevailing approach adopted by teachers to teach SP? I would argue that the participants' lack of theoretical knowledge about communicative competence and SPC is an intervening factor that may explain why teachers do not explicitly focus on certain SP elements, and do not single them out in specific exercises, but rather such elements are embedded in activities that aim at developing several skills all together. In addition, as it was found that teachers closely follow the external exams' and textbooks' format and contents, the extent to which they target SP features depends on whether such features are highlighted in the exams and textbook materials.

Although the effectiveness of different types of SP instruction on SPC development is beyond the scope of this study, several actions that participant teachers take with regards to SP features appear in ILP research as suggested methods to teach SP. For instance, the

extensive use of the L2 in the classroom as a means for communication, the presence of NS speakers who interact with students, and the use of authentic materials are widely supported as effective approaches (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan Taylor, 2003; Kasper, 1997; Tateyama & Kasper, 2008).

However, several studies have shown that SPC development has higher chances to occur when students are given the opportunity to consciously notice the target features (Schmidt's noticing hypothesis) and process the information they are exposed to (Alcón Soler, 2005; Jeon & Kaya, 2006; Li, 2012; Taguchi, 2015). By interpreting the findings of this study in relation to the results of previous research, I would argue that the majority of implicit instruction observed did not afford students sufficient opportunities for noticing and processing because that presupposes the intention on the teachers' part to focus on specific SP features. As explained above, practitioners' awareness of SPC and the importance of SP instruction was rather limited, therefore their attention – and consequently the students' – was not particularly drawn to SP.

The sociolinguistics elements under study (linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions) were also addressed mainly through implicit instruction, but in a number of instances the explicit strategy of corrective feedback was employed.

This finding suggests that teachers tend to facilitate the development of this SP feature “by waiting for errors to be made, then marking, analysing and explaining them and giving the correct usage” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 154). As social markers and politeness conventions are not primary curriculum objectives, nor were treated as the main learning target during the activities observed, the instances in which corrective feedback occurred were all related to situations where authentic language use was taking place in the classroom,

either thanks to the L2 only policy or instructional activities that focused on oral or written interaction. In other words, explicit instruction of sociolinguistics features was dependent on implicit instructional strategies and activities, which once again prove to be the main sources for SPC development in the observed classes.

However, although implicit instruction provided the opportunity for explicit instruction of SP elements to take place, the instances of corrective feedback regarding social markers and politeness conventions were still very rare and brief, which points again to the need for practitioners to take additional, more conscious actions if SP is to be taught more consistently and effectively.

## **Chapter 6:**

### **Conclusion**

In this final chapter I will (a) provide a brief summary of my study, (b) acknowledge its limitations, (c) discuss the implications of my findings for language pedagogy, and (d) suggest possible avenues for future research in this field.

### **Summary**

This basic qualitative study has explored the role of the CEFR in sociolinguistics and pragmatics instruction in EFL and SFL classes. The investigation took place in a high school in Italy and involved several participants: the school principal, four language teachers (three for EFL and one for SFL), two native speaker teaching assistants (one for each language) and six classes of Grade 10 and 12 students. Data collection consisted of three weeks of classroom observations, interviews with the principal and the teachers, and analysis of relevant documents, such as the school language curriculum, course syllabi, instructional materials, and exam samples.

Findings have revealed that the CEFR plays mostly an indirect role in shaping teachers' curriculum development and instructional practices, both for SP teaching as well as for other topics of instruction. Teachers' knowledge of the CEFR and its presence in their practices are partial and largely dependent on the external language examinations and textbooks employed in the participant school, which officially refer to this document.

SP teaching occurred in all of the classes examined, particularly in terms of instruction of communicative functions, and it generally focused on providing linguistic resources and structures (pragmalinguistics perspective), rather than on contextual and social

appropriateness (sociopragmatics perspective). In addition, SP features were predominantly taught implicitly, usually by means of activities that provided opportunities for exposure and production of the target language in general and did not necessarily have SPC as the main focus. When SP instruction was explicit it usually involved corrective feedback, which was not part of planned instruction, but was prompted by student-initiated discourse or questions.

Possible explanations for the role of the CEFR and the approaches to SP instruction in EFL and SFL at Liceo Hack were found by exploring practitioners' cognition and perspectives. First, teachers' first-hand knowledge of the CEFR and the theoretical constructs of communicative competence, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence was limited, due to a lack of education that specifically targeted these concepts. As a consequence, practitioners did not view the CEFR as a particularly valuable pedagogical tool to promote SPC, nor engaged in systematic and complex SP instruction beyond what was required by the external exams or presented in textbooks. Second, a shared belief among practitioners was that the main need for high school students with high-beginner to intermediate language proficiency levels who study and live in a target language-removed context is to acquire the basic linguistic tools (usually identified in terms of grammar structures and vocabulary items) that will help them communicate, while other elements (*e.g.*, registers, contextual and social appropriateness) are considered advanced, supplementary features that learners will acquire with time and exposure, rather than through instruction. This attitude accounts for the teaching of SP mostly by means of implicit activities and from a pragmalinguistics perspective.

In conclusion, although language teaching and learning are prioritized in the participant school and students' communicative skills are developed in a variety of ways,

SPC development is perceived to have marginal weight, and, therefore, SP instruction does not play a prominent role in the classroom. Implications of these findings for language pedagogy are discussed in the following section.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

As this study focused on language teachers' instructional practices, findings and their interpretation bear implications that are particularly relevant for language education.

A factor that emerged is the need for teacher education and professional development programs that specifically focus on the CEFR as a pedagogical instrument as well as on the concepts of communicative competence and sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence (SPC), both from an applied linguistics perspective and a language teaching perspective. The participant teachers are well-educated and highly competent language practitioners and users, who successfully completed the academic requirements to become foreign language teachers in the Italian school system, namely, a graduate degree in Foreign Languages and Literatures followed by a one-year teacher training program (*Tirocinio Formativo Attivo*). Although it is not possible to make generalizations, given the small sample of participants, it is nonetheless noticeable that the lack of theoretical knowledge about the CEFR and SPC was consistent among all participating practitioners, and it is therefore reasonable to attribute it to curriculum gaps within the current teacher education programs in Italy, rather than to individual characteristics. A recommendation for the participant school and possibly other institutions in similar contexts would be to provide or encourage in-service teachers' development programs that bridge such gaps. This type of education would enhance practitioners' knowledge, which would in turn affect their beliefs and practices. While

increased knowledge about the CEFR and SPC may not necessarily change what is taught in the classroom and how, it will encourage reflections on learning objectives, teaching topics and instructional practices, and enable teachers to make better informed decisions that are not only based on exam requirements and textbooks.

A second pedagogical recommendation concerns SP instruction and how it is implemented in the classroom. Participant teachers took a variety of measures to promote exposure to and production of the target language, which also (potentially) contributed to develop SPC, although mostly indirectly or incidentally (*e.g.*, through simple exposure). However, as previous research shows, it would also be advisable to include SPC development-focused activities that require learners to notice specific SP features and consciously reflect on them (*e.g.*, awareness-raising and input-enhancement tasks). These techniques have been proven to lead more effectively to learning than simple input flood or general language production without a specific focus.

Another suggestion for language educators is to consider the inclusion of (a) sociolinguistics elements (as labelled by the CEFR) into their course curricula and teaching practices, and (b) a sociopragmatics perspective to SP teaching. Focus on the social dimension of language did not appear to be a priority among the participant teachers, in some cases because it was deemed as too advanced for their learners' levels and age, and/or because of the teachers' limited knowledge of SPC. Practitioners would benefit from increased awareness of the importance of teaching social and contextual appropriateness, even to lower proficiency level and young students. Sociopragmatics is an integral component of SP instruction that complements pragmalinguistics, as successful communication in the target language not only requires syntactic and semantic correctness

but also social and contextual appropriateness. Since in the participant classes teachers made ample use of authentic materials and provided many opportunities for genuine interactions in the target language (*e.g.*, through the L2-only policy and NS presence), the contents of such resources and instructional strategies could be exploited to make SP features salient from a sociopragmatics perspective.

### **Limitations**

A major limitation of this study was the timing of the data collection. Classroom observations and participant interviews occurred towards the end of the school year (second half of April and first half of May), which also corresponded to the three weeks preceding the English and Spanish external exams. Not surprisingly, at that time teachers were particularly focused on preparing their students for their exams, which may have amplified my perception of the central role that the external exams play in their teaching practices. In addition, as the academic year was coming to an end, most curriculum topics had already been covered during the previous months; therefore, there were more instances of activities focused on students practicing what they had already learned, rather than teachers introducing new topics by means of explanations or other instructional devices. This factor may have inflated the relevance I attributed to implicit over explicit instruction.

A second limitation regarding the data collection is that it was not possible to observe all of the participant teachers and classes for the same amount of time, and I did not have access to the same types and amount of documents (*e.g.*, teachers' notes, instructional materials) for all the classes. While this disparity in the data collected may have partially influenced my findings, I would argue that the homogenous picture I obtained across

languages, teachers and grades indicates that such disparity did not have a major impact on the results.

Another possible limitation involves the choices I made when I operationalized (a) SP as well as (b) implicit and explicit instruction. First, one of my selected SP features (communicative functions) was broader than the other (linguistic markers of social relations and politeness conventions), which might have influenced my findings; second, a focus on different SP features might produce different results. Similarly, based on how implicit and explicit instruction were defined, implicit instruction encompassed a wider variety of activities, which might explain why this type of teaching was found to occur more frequently.

Finally, as a researcher and language teacher I hold a favourable position in relation to the pedagogical value of the CEFR and the need for SP topics to be included and taught more systematically in language classes. Although my stance may be considered a bias for the interpretation of the data, I would also argue that my beliefs and reasoning skills formed an integral part of the research instruments employed in this qualitative study, and while they need to be acknowledged, do not necessarily constitute a limitation.

### **Suggestions For Future Research**

This study has been, to my knowledge, the first attempt to explore the role of the CEFR as a pedagogical tool for the development of SPC, and at the same time to employ this document as the lens through which to investigate SPC development in teaching practices. More research is needed to examine the pedagogical impact of the CEFR on SPC as well as on other aspects of language teaching. In order to verify the strength of my findings,

replication studies and/or comparative studies could be conducted and could focus on different settings (*e.g.*, different geographical locations, types of school, grades), other languages, and a higher number of participants.

In addition, as the findings of my descriptive study have confirmed previous results regarding the issue of language practitioners' partial knowledge and use of the CEFR in their classroom practices, this issue could be further investigated through pilot projects that aim at providing practitioners with information about the pedagogical value of the CEFR and then monitoring possible changes in their instructional practices. Furthermore, future studies on the role of the CEFR for language practitioners could focus on experienced teachers who have participated in the shift from the pre-CEFR to the post-CEFR era, and possibly compare their understanding, beliefs and practices to those of younger teachers who have only operated in the post-CEFR era, such as the participants of the present study.

Finally, more naturalistic, qualitative research is needed in the field of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), to further investigate the actual SP instructional practices that are implemented in intact classrooms and to explore teachers' cognition and attitudes regarding SP and SPC. While quasi-experimental studies have focused on which teaching strategies are more effective to promote SPC development, these results often remain within research circles and may not always be applicable to real educational contexts. In order for SP learning to improve in real classrooms, it is necessary for researchers to enter such classrooms and collaborate with language teachers, observe and take into account their understanding, beliefs and practices as determining factors, investigate such aspects in relation to their contexts, and combine and compare them with research findings on the effectiveness of SP instruction.

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## Appendix A – Information Email and Informed Consent for School Principal

Dear Principal,

My name is Eleonora Maldina. I am a Master of Arts student in the Language and Literacies Education program in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at OISE/University of Toronto. I am writing to see if you would be interested in participating in a research project related to questions about the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the development of language learners' communicative competence. After reading the detailed information below, if you wish to participate in the research study, please complete and return the consent form attached to this document to me. Thank you very much.

**Title of Research Project:** The Impact of the *Common European Framework of Reference* on Foreign Language Instruction on Teaching Practices: The Case of Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Competence

**Principal Investigator:** Eleonora Maldina, MA Candidate, Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

**Purpose of the Study:** My study seeks to determine what influence the CEFR has had in the teaching of English and Spanish, particularly when it comes to promote learners' communicative competence. My ultimate goal is to help researchers and teachers (1) understand the CEFR better; (2) Reflect and find effective ways to teach learners how to successfully communicate and interact in a foreign language.

**Participants:** I would be recruiting **you and 4 teachers (3 teachers of English and 1 teacher of Spanish)** from your school. Among the teachers of English, one would be the Grade 10 – level 1 instructor, one would be the Grade 10 – level 2 and Grade 12 – level 2 instructor, and one would be the Grade 12 – level 1 instructor. For Spanish, I would recruit the Grade 10 and 12 instructor. Also, as I explain more in detail below, I would like to observe some of these teachers' classes. Therefore, the students of those classes would also be considered research participants, although they wouldn't be required to do anything different from what they normally do during their lessons.

**What I would like to do:** Upon your, teachers' and students' consent, I would:

1. Collect some documents from your school (English and Spanish curricula, English and Spanish syllabi, lesson plans, names of textbooks employed by the participating teachers, samples of language tests and examinations), read them and search for useful information regarding my research.
2. Observe some lessons taught by the 4 participant teachers. Specifically, I would like to observe:  
Grade 10 – English: Two periods per week in level 1; two periods per week in level 2.  
Grade 10 – Spanish: Two periods per week in the class X.  
Grade 12 – English: Two periods per week in level 1 and one period per week in level 2.  
Grade 12 – Spanish: Two periods per week in the class Y.

I would observe a total of 11 periods per week. I would observe classes for 3 weeks. Therefore, I would observe a total of 33 class periods.

I would be a non-participatory observer: I would simply sit in a corner of the classroom and take notes, without interacting with the students or the teacher. I would not alter the contents of the lessons. Each teacher would conduct their lessons as per their plans. Because it wouldn't be feasible for me to manually record all the information I hear during classes, I would ask your permission to audio record the lessons by using some portable audio-recorders.

3. Interview the 4 teachers and you. I would like to ask you and the participant teachers some questions regarding your school's use of the CEFR. I would meet with each of you individually for about 1 hour. Upon your consent and the teachers', I would audio record each interview with a portable audio-recorder. I will provide refreshments (e.g., coffee and snacks) to all interviewees.

My presence at your school and the collection of all the information with the above methods would last for approximately 4 weeks.

**Benefits:** My study would foster teachers' reflections on their practices and on the use of the CEFR to promote communicative competence. In addition, after the observations and interviews I will prepare a written report with the results of my research that I will send you and the teachers. In addition, depending on your and the teachers' interest and availability, I will organize an informative session during which I will share my findings with you and the teachers, answer your questions and provide suggestions.

**The next steps:** I kindly ask you if you would like to give me your permission to conduct this study. If so, I would ask you to send me the 4 teachers' email addresses. I would then contact the 4 teachers by email to inform them about my study and ask them if they would be interested in participating. In my email I would also include a consent form for them to sign if they accept to participate. If you and the teachers give me your consent, I will ask for the students' consent as well, by sending the teachers an invitation letter and consent form to submit to the students.

### **Participants' Rights**

- **To Confidentiality:** All participants' identities will be kept strictly anonymous and confidential through the use of pseudonyms in both the analysis of the data and the oral and written reporting of the findings. Only my supervisor, Dr. Enrica Piccardo, and I will have access to these recordings. All electronic information will be kept on a secure server environment. All non-electronic information will be kept on a password protected external hard drive in my home that will be locked in a cabinet and all data will be destroyed no later than five years from now.
- **To Ask Questions about the Research:** If you would like to ask questions about this research project, you may do so at any time. Please contact me (Eleonora Maldina) at xxxxxxx or eleonora.maldina@xxxxx. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Enrica Piccardo, regarding questions at xxxxxx or enrica.piccardo@xxxxxxx. The University of Toronto also has an office specialized in research ethics if you want more information about your rights as a research participant, or to verify the authenticity of this research. You may contact the Office of Research Ethics at 416-

946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca

- **To Withdraw at Any Time:** You may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting me. You may decide not to participate to some or all of the activities of my study. For instance, you may participate in the interview, but decide not to answer some questions. Students, teachers, and administrators alike may decide to end their participation in this study at any time for any reason and any information collected on them will be destroyed. **However, once my research findings are reported or published, you CANNOT withdraw.**

**Risks:** There are no potential risks in your decision to participate in this study.

Please read and sign the attached consent form if you are willing to participate in this study.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you again for considering my request.

Sincerely,  
Eleonora Maldina

PLEASE KEEP A COPY OF THIS LETTER FOR YOUR RECORDS

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I have read Eleonora Maldina's letter describing the goals of the research project and I understand that my participation will involve the following activities and conditions:

Activities

- Give my permission for Eleonora Maldina to contact the teachers and give her their email addresses to invite them to her study
- Provide Eleonora Maldina with the documentation listed in her letter (e.g., English and Spanish curricula)
- Be interviewed by Eleonora Maldina for about one hour

Conditions

- Any information gathered on me, students and teachers, including their willingness to participate, will be kept strictly confidential and all participants' identities will be kept anonymous during the collection, analysis, and reporting of the research data; no identifying information will be used in the reporting of the data either in presentations or in written research reports

- I understand that data collected on me, teachers and students may be used in academic publications or presentations. However, no identifiable information related to participants will be included whatsoever.
- I will receive a copy of the research report summarizing the findings of the study.
- **I may withdraw before the study is reported or published at any time with no penalty. However, once the study is reported or published, I may NOT withdraw.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **YES**, I agree to participate in the research

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **NO**, I do not agree to participate in the research

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B - Information Email and Informed Consent for Teachers

Dear Teacher,

My name is Eleonora Maldina. I am a Master of Arts student in the Language and Literacies Education program in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at OISE/University of Toronto.

I received your email contact from the school principal. I am writing to see if you would be interested in participating in a research project related to questions about the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR) and the development of language learners' communicative competence.

After reading the detailed information below, if you wish to participate in the research study, please complete and return the consent form attached to this document to me. Thank you very much.

**Title of Research Project:** The Impact of the *Common European Framework of Reference* on Foreign Language Instruction on Teaching Practices: The Case of Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Competence

**Principal Investigator:** Eleonora Maldina, MA Candidate, Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

**Purpose of the Study:** My study seeks to determine what influence the CEFR has had in the teaching of English and Spanish, particularly when it comes to promote learners' communicative competence. My ultimate goal is to help researchers and teachers (1) understand the CEFR better; (2) Reflect and find effective ways to teach learners how to successfully communicate and interact in a foreign language.

**What I would like to do:** Upon your consent, I would:

1. Collect some documents, such as the language curriculum you use, your syllabi, lesson plans, names of textbooks you employ, samples of language tests and examinations you give to your students. I would read them and search for useful information regarding my research.

2. Observe some lessons that you teach. Specifically, I would like to observe:

Grade 10 – Spanish: Two periods per week in the class X.

Grade 12 – Spanish: Two periods per week in the class Y.

I would observe a total of 4 periods per week. I would observe classes for 3 weeks.

Therefore, I would observe a total of 12 class periods.

I would be a non-participatory observer: I would simply sit in a corner of the classroom and take notes, without interacting with you or your students. I would not alter the contents of the lessons. You would conduct your lessons as per your plans. Because it wouldn't be feasible for me to manually record all the information I hear during classes, I would ask your permission to audio record the lessons by using some portable audio-recorders.

3. Interview you. I would like to ask you some questions regarding your use of the CEFR. I would meet with you for about 1 hour. Upon your consent, I would audio record the interview with a portable audio-recorder. I will provide you with refreshments (e.g., coffee and snacks).

**Benefits:** My study would foster teachers' reflections on their practices and on the use of the CEFR to promote communicative competence. In addition, after the observations and interviews I will prepare a written report with the results of my research that I will send you and the other teachers. In addition, depending on your interest and availability, I will organize an informative session during which I will share my findings with all the participant teachers, answer your questions and provide suggestions.

**The next steps:** I kindly ask you if you would like to give me your permission to conduct this study. Upon your consent, I will email you an invitation letter and a consent form for your students to read and sign. I kindly ask you if you could give them the letter and collect their signed consent forms.

Also, I will contact you to set up a schedule for the classroom observations I will perform and the interview.

### **Participants' Rights**

- **To Confidentiality:** Your identity will be kept strictly anonymous and confidential through the use of pseudonyms in both the analysis of the data and the oral and written reporting of the findings. Only my supervisor, Dr. Enrica Piccardo, and I will have access to these recordings. All electronic information will be kept on a secure server environment. All non-electronic information will be kept on a password protected external hard drive in my home that will be locked in a cabinet and all data will be destroyed no later than five years from now.
- **To Ask Questions about the Research:** If you would like to ask questions about this research project, you may do so at any time. Please contact me (Eleonora Maldina) at xxxxx or [eleonora.maldina@xxxxx](mailto:eleonora.maldina@xxxxx). You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Enrica Piccardo, regarding questions at xxxxx or [enrica.piccardo@xxxxx](mailto:enrica.piccardo@xxxxx). The University of Toronto also has an office specialized in research ethics if you want more information about your rights as a research participant, or to verify the authenticity of this research. You may contact the Office of Research Ethics at 1-416-946-3273 or [ethics.review@utoronto.ca](mailto:ethics.review@utoronto.ca)
- **To Withdraw at Any Time:** You may decide not to participate to some or all of the activities of my study. For instance, you may participate in the interview, but decide not to answer some questions. You may also agree to my presence in your classes, but only for some of the classes I suggested, instead of all of them. In addition, you may withdraw from the entire study at any time by contacting me. You may decide to end your participation in this study at any time for any reason and any information collected on you will be destroyed. **However, once my research findings are reported or published, you CANNOT withdraw.**

**Risks:** You might feel uncomfortable answering questions during the interview. Should any question make you feel uncomfortable, you can decide not to answer. You and the students might also feel uncomfortable during your classes because of my presence and the presence of audio-recorders. Generally, after a couple of classes, participants tend to get used to the presence of the observer and the recording devices, so this possible initial sense of

discomfort is usually temporary. In any event, I will do my best not to interfere with your classes in any way and I am open to cooperate with you in any way you consider appropriate to keep classroom procedures as regular as possible.

Please read and sign the attached consent form if you are willing to participate in this study.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you again for considering my request.

Sincerely,  
Eleonora Maldina

PLEASE KEEP A COPY OF THIS LETTER FOR YOUR RECORDS

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I have read Eleonora Maldina's letter describing the goals of the research project and I understand that my participation will involve the following activities and conditions:

#### Activities

- Provide Eleonora Maldina with the documentation listed in her letter (e.g., my lesson plans, textbooks I use, samples of tests and examinations I use)
- Allow Eleonora Maldina to sit in 12 of my classes during which she will audio-record the lessons and take notes silently
- Submit an invitation letter and consent forms to my students and collect their signed consent forms.
- Be interviewed by Eleonora Maldina for about one hour

#### Conditions

- Any information gathered on me and my students, including our willingness to participate, will be kept strictly confidential and all participants' identities will be kept anonymous during the collection, analysis, and reporting of the research data; no identifying information will be used in the reporting of the data either in presentations or in written research reports
- I understand that data collected on me and my students may be used in academic publications or presentations. However, no identifiable information related to participants will be included whatsoever.
- I will receive a copy of the research report summarizing the findings of the study

- **I may withdraw before the study is reported or published at any time with no penalty. However, once the study is reported or published, I may NOT withdraw.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **YES**, I agree to participate in the research

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **NO**, I do not agree to participate in the research

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C - Information Letter and Informed Consent for Teaching Assistants**

Dear Teaching Assistant,

My name is Eleonora Maldina. I am a Master of Arts student in the Language and Literacies Education program in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at OISE/University of Toronto.

I am writing to see if you would be interested in participating in a research project related to questions about the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR) and the development of language learners' communicative competence.

After reading the detailed information below, if you wish to participate in the research study, please complete and return the consent form attached to this document to me. Thank you very much.

**Title of Research Project:** The Impact of the *Common European Framework of Reference* on Foreign Language Instruction on Teaching Practices: The Case of Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Competence

**Principal Investigator:** Eleonora Maldina, MA Candidate, Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

**Purpose of the Study:** My study seeks to determine what influence the CEFR has had in the teaching of English and Spanish, particularly when it comes to promote learners' communicative competence. My ultimate goal is to help researchers and teachers (1) understand the CEFR better; (2) Reflect and find effective ways to teach learners how to successfully communicate and interact in a foreign language.

**What I would like to do:** I was informed by (teacher's name) that you will co-teach some of the classes I wish to observe. Therefore, upon your consent, I would:

Observe some lessons that you teach. Specifically, I would like to observe:

Grade 10 – Spanish: Two periods per week in the class X.

Grade 12 – Spanish: Two periods per week in the class Y.

I would observe a total of 4 periods per week. I would observe classes for 3 weeks.

Therefore, I would observe a total of 12 class periods.

I would be a non-participatory observer: I would simply sit in a corner of the classroom and take notes, without interacting with you or your students. I would not alter the contents of the lessons. You would conduct your lessons as per your plans. Because it wouldn't be feasible

for me to manually record all the information I hear during classes, I would ask your permission to audio record the lessons by using some portable audio-recorders.

**Benefits:** My study would foster teachers' reflections on their practices and on the use of the CEFR to promote communicative competence. In addition, after the observations and interviews I will prepare a written report with the results of my research that I will send you and the other teachers. In addition, depending on your interest and availability, I will organize an informative session during which I will share my findings with all the participant teachers, answer your questions and provide suggestions.

**The next steps:** I kindly ask you if you would like to give me your permission to observe the classes in which you take part and audio-record the lessons.

If you agree, I will contact (teacher's name) and we will set up a precise schedule for me to observe these classes.

### **Participants' Rights**

- **To Confidentiality:** Your identity will be kept strictly anonymous and confidential through the use of pseudonyms in both the analysis of the data and the oral and written reporting of the findings. Only my supervisor, Dr. Enrica Piccardo, and I will have access to these recordings. All electronic information will be kept on a secure server environment. All non-electronic information will be kept on a password protected external hard drive in my home that will be locked in a cabinet and all data will be destroyed no later than five years from now.
- **To Ask Questions about the Research:** If you would like to ask questions about this research project, you may do so at any time. Please contact me (Eleonora Maldina) at xxxxxx or [eleonora.maldina@xxxxx](mailto:eleonora.maldina@xxxxx). You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Enrica Piccardo, regarding questions at xxxxxxxx or [enrica.piccardo@xxxxx](mailto:enrica.piccardo@xxxxx). The University of Toronto also has an office specialized in research ethics if you want more information about your rights as a research participant, or to verify the authenticity of this research. You may contact the Office of Research Ethics at 1-416-946-3273 or [ethics.review@utoronto.ca](mailto:ethics.review@utoronto.ca)
- **To Withdraw at Any Time:** You may decide not to participate to some or all of the activities of my study. For instance, you may agree to my presence in your classes, but only for some of the classes I suggested, instead of all of them. In addition, you may withdraw from the entire study at any time by contacting me. You may decide to end your participation in this study at any time for any reason and any information collected on you will be destroyed. **However, once my research findings are reported or published, you CANNOT withdraw.**

**Risks:** You and the students might feel uncomfortable during the classes because of my presence and the presence of audio-recorders. Generally, after a couple of classes, participants tend to get used to the presence of the observer and the recording devices, so this

possible initial sense of discomfort is usually temporary. In any event, I will do my best not to interfere with your classes in any way and I am open to cooperate with you in any way you consider appropriate to keep classroom procedures as regular as possible.

Please read and sign the attached consent form if you are willing to participate in this study.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you again for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Eleonora Maldina

PLEASE KEEP A COPY OF THIS LETTER FOR YOUR RECORDS

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I have read Eleonora Maldina’s letter describing the goals of the research project and I understand that my participation will involve the following activities and conditions:

Activities

- Allow Eleonora Maldina to sit in some of my classes during which she will audio-record the lessons and take notes silently

Conditions

- Any information gathered on me, including my willingness to participate, will be kept strictly confidential and all participants’ identities will be kept anonymous during the collection, analysis, and reporting of the research data; no identifying information will be used in the reporting of the data either in presentations or in written research reports
- I understand that data collected on me and my students may be used in academic publications or presentations. However, no identifiable information related to participants will be included whatsoever.
- I will receive a copy of the research report summarizing the findings of the study
- **I may withdraw before the study is reported or published at any time with no penalty. However, once the study is reported or published, I may NOT withdraw.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **YES**, I agree to participate in the research

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D - Information Letter and Informed Consent for Students

Dear Student,

My name is Eleonora Maldina. I am a Master of Arts student in the Language and Literacies Education program in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at OISE/University of Toronto.

I am writing to ask for your participation in a research project about how foreign languages are taught. I am interested in studying the different teaching methodologies that teachers use during foreign language classes.

Please read the information below. Then, if you want to participate in the research study, please complete and return the consent form (agreement form) attached to this document to your teacher. Thank you very much.

**What I would like to do:** I am working with your Spanish and English teachers to find good ways to teach foreign languages. To do so, I would like to observe some of their classes to see how they teach. I would come to your school for 3 weeks and observe some Spanish and English classes. I would sit in the back of the classroom and take notes about the lesson. In addition, I would audio record the lesson with small audio-recorders.

**Your participation:** You would be in some of the classes I would like to observe. However, **you wouldn't need to do anything different from what you normally do when you are in class.** My observations would be on your teacher, not on you. **I will not judge what you do in class** or report it to your parents, teachers and school administrators. **What I observe and write down will have no impact on your grades** or on your teacher's evaluation of your work.

However, because you are going to be in class, what you say will be recorded. I will use those recordings only to remember better how your teacher teaches and to write down some examples of what your teachers says and how students reply. My professor and I will be the only people who listen to those recordings and we will not give them to anyone.

I am asking for your permission to record what you say. Below you can see your rights, if you decide to participate in my study.

### Your Rights

- **To Confidentiality:** I will not use your real name in my study. I will use a fake name if I write down something you say from the recordings and I will only use it for my research. Only my supervisor, Dr. Enrica Piccardo, and I can listen to these recordings. I will keep all information on a safe university server as well as on a password protected external hard drive in my home in a locked drawer, and I will erase the data after 5 years. No teachers, administrators or parents will hear your recording. This means that you do not need to worry about your other teachers or administrators hearing what you say during these classes

- **To Ask Questions about the Research:** If you would like to ask questions about this research project, you may do so at any time. Please contact me (Eleonora Maldina) at xxxxxxx or [eleonora.maldina@xxxxx](mailto:eleonora.maldina@xxxxx). You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Enrica Piccardo, regarding questions at xxxxxx or [enrica.piccardo@xxxxx](mailto:enrica.piccardo@xxxxx). The University of Toronto also has an office that is in charge of ethics if you want more information about your rights as a research participant, or to check the connection of this research with the University of Toronto. You may contact the Office of Research Ethics at 1- 416-946-3273 or [ethics.review@utoronto.ca](mailto:ethics.review@utoronto.ca). You may also contact the school principal, Mrs. (name) at (phone number) and (email address).
- **To Leave the study at Any Time:** You may decide that you don't want to participate to my study at any time for any reason. If you tell me that you don't want to participate **before the beginning of the class**, I will not write down anything you say or do in my notes and I will not put any audio-recorder near you, so what you say will not be recorded.  
 If you tell me that you don't want to participate **during the class**, I will move the audio-recorder away from you, so what you say will not be recorded. Also, I will not use anything about you that was already recorded.  
 If you tell me that you don't want to participate **after the class**, I will destroy any information that I collected in my notes and I will not use anything you said or did for my study. **However, once my research findings are reported or published, you CANNOT leave the study.**

**Risk:** There are no risks for you. However, if you feel very uncomfortable because you are being recorded, and if you decide that you don't want to be recorded, just let me know and I will move the recorder away from you.

Please remember that you will do all the usual activities that you normally do in class, and that I am not there to judge you, but I am there to observe how your teachers work.

Please read and sign the attached consent form if you agree to participate in my study

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you again for all your help.

Sincerely,  
Eleonora Maldina

PLEASE KEEP A COPY OF THIS LETTER FOR YOUR RECORDS

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

I have read Eleonora Maldina's letter describing the research project and I understand that my participation will involve the following activities and conditions:

Activities

- Go to my regular English and Spanish classes for 3 weeks during which Eleonora Maldina will be present in the classroom to observe the lessons and audio-record the teacher and the students, including myself

Conditions

- Eleonora Maldina will keep any information about me private from everyone, including my teachers and my parents
- I understand that Eleonora may use some data about me in academic publications or presentations. However, my identity will be kept private
- **I may leave the study before it is reported or published at any time with no penalty. However, once the study is reported or published, I may NOT withdraw.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **YES**, I agree to participate in the research

My Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **NO**, I do not agree to participate in the research

My Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix E – Waiver and Parental Consent**

LICEO “HACK”

The undersigned \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent of the student \_\_\_\_\_  
Enrolled in the class \_\_\_\_\_,

GRANTS PERMISSION:

To photograph, videotape and/or make audio or digital recordings of the students during school activities, for research purposes and/or to better evaluate the work carried out by the school.

To use videos / images for pedagogical and research purposes.

In the event that videos / images are to be released to other academic institutions, publications or media, the school will request parental consent for each specific case.

(City and Date)

PARENT’S SIGNATURE

## Appendix F – Teachers’ Interview Protocol

### Background and General Information

1. How many years of teaching experience do you have?
2. For how many years have you taught in this school? This class / level?
3. What is your education background?
4. What class(es) do you teach?
5. How would you define your teaching approach / method?
  - a. Can you give some examples?
  - b. When did you start employing this approach / Where did you learn it?
6. What are the curriculum objectives and your objectives for this / these class(es)?
7. Are learning objectives discussed and defined together with the other English/Spanish teachers and / or other language teachers? Or is it an independent work?
8. How do you determine the learning objectives? Do you set long-term goals or not? How do you plan your lessons?
9. L2-only policy. Can you tell me more about that? Is that a departmental decision? What’s your opinion about this? What’s your attitude towards students not using the L2 when interacting with you and/or with each other? For instance when talking about classroom management, asking questions, etc.

### The CEFR

1. Do you know the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR)?
  - a. How well do you know it? (Very well / well / some parts / basic knowledge / don’t know it)
  - b. Which parts do you know? (e.g., Reference levels / Descriptors / Pedagogical approach / ELP)
  - c. How did you learn about the CEFR? (e.g., from Teacher development sessions / teacher training / official documents from my school or the Ministry of Education / formal meetings with colleagues or administrators / informal meetings / Internet research / self- development / study groups)
2. Do you use the CEFR?
  - a. What parts do you use?
  - b. For what purposes? (e.g.: define proficiency levels, curriculum objectives, teaching approach, assessment procedures, materials used, etc)
  - c. How do you use it?
3. What proficiency levels are learners in your class expected to achieve at the end of the year?
  - a. Are learners’ proficiency levels compared to / based on the CEFR levels?
    - i. Why / Why not?
  - b. Who determines the proficiency levels that students need to achieve? (Ministry of Education’s official guidelines / school’s guidelines / research findings / external examinations, etc.

4. In your opinion, does the CEFR influence your way of teaching / approach? If so, how?
  - a. Why / Why not?
  - b. Can you give some examples?

### Communicative Competence

1. (If they don't mention CC): Did you learn CC somewhere?
2. (If they mention CC): How would you define "communicative competence"?
  - a. Can you give examples?
  - b. How and where did you learn about it? (e.g., teacher training, teacher development sessions, self-development, etc)
  - c. Is "communicative competence" important in your teaching practice?
  - d. Do you try to foster it in your classes?
  - e. What kind of activities do you use to foster it?
  - f. What kind of speaking activities and tests do your students perform?
3. How do you assess them? What do you look for in those activities?
4. Since the CEFR uses this term, what does "sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence" (SPC) mean to you?
  - a. Can you give examples?
  - b. How and where did you learn about it? (e.g., teacher training, teacher development sessions, self-development, etc)
  - c. Is SPC important in your teaching practice?
  - d. Do you try to foster it in your classes?
  - e. What kind of activities do you use to foster it?
  - f. Do you use authentic materials? (movies, newspaper articles, songs, etc)
  - g. Do you explicitly teach expressions to make requests, compliments, apologies, etc.?
  - h. How do you make sure your students learn "realistic" ways to express such things?
  - i. Do you incorporate the instruction of such expressions in your lesson plans or do they usually come up more spontaneously?
  - j. Do you prepare and conduct activities that elicit students' spontaneous talk?
  - k. Does the textbook you use include the instruction of common expressions of interaction (politeness conventions, requests, apologies, etc)?
5. Do you assess communicative competence and SPC?
  - g. How?
  - h. Do you assess them systematically?
  - i. What type of assessment criteria do you use? What kind of assessment tools?
  - j. What type of activities do you use to assess such competences?

- k. Are you expected to assess such competences by your school / the curriculum you follow?
  - i. If yes, how are you expected to assess them?
    1. Do you follow such guidelines? Why / Why not?
  - ii. If no, do you still assess them?
    1. Why / Why not?
    2. How?

#### Textbooks & Other Materials

1. How do you use the textbook? (depending on how they answer, ask: “How closely?”)
2. How is it connected to the curriculum?
  - a. What kind of activities do you use from the textbook?
  - b. Do you use other activities from the teacher’s resource book? If so, what approach do you use to integrate them?
3. Are you satisfied with the textbooks that you are using? Why / Why not?
4. What do you like and what don’t you like about the textbook?
5. In your opinion, does the textbook promotes communicative competence? How?
6. A part from the textbook, do you use other materials / resources?
  - a. If so, what do you use? (e.g.: websites, videos, music, artifacts, teacher-made activities, books, etc.)
  - b. What are you objectives when using different types of materials / resources?
  - c. How do you make the selection? / How do you create the materials?

#### External Language Exams

1. What kind of weight do language examinations have on your curriculum and teaching practices?
2. What do you think of the influence that these examinations have on your curriculum and teaching practices?
3. How accurately do you think these examinations assess students’ proficiency?
4. To what extent is SPC (communicative) competence/skills assessed in these examinations?
5. How accurately do you think these examinations assess students’ communicative skills?
6. What do you think of the Listening and Speaking parts of these tests?
7. (For English teachers): How do you prepare your students to Part 3 and 4 of the Speaking test in the FCE & PET?
8. (For Spanish teacher): How do you prepare your students to the Listening and Speaking parts of the DELE?
9. Role of the native speaker instructors in class. Their roles, what they do, how often, why? Your opinion about that.

## Appendix G – Principal’s Interview Protocol

### Background And General Information

1. How many years of experience as a school principal do you have?
2. For how long have you worked in this school?
3. What kind of teaching experience did you have before becoming a principal?
4. What is your educational background?

### School’s foreign language program

1. What are the learning objectives of the English language curriculum in your school?
2. What are the learning objectives of the Spanish language curriculum in your school?
3. How are the objectives determined and defined? And by whom?
4. Is there collaboration within and among language departments?
5. What is the language teacher hiring process / screening in this school?
6. What is the rationale for hiring native speaker teaching assistants? What are their roles?

### The CEFR

1. Do you know the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR)?
  - a. How well do you know it? (Very well / well / some parts / basic knowledge / don’t know it)
  - b. Which parts do you know? (e.g., Reference levels / Descriptors / Pedagogical approach / ELP)
  - c. How did you learn about the CEFR? (e.g., from Teacher development sessions / teacher training / official documents from my school or the Ministry of Education / institutional training or information sessions for school administrators / formal meetings with colleagues or administrators / informal meetings / Internet research / self- development / study groups)
2. Are the English and Spanish curricula of your school informed by the CEFR?
  - a. If so, for how long?
  - b. Why / Why not?
  - c. What parts of the curriculum are influenced by the CEFR? (e.g.: objectives, teaching approach, assessment procedures, materials used, etc)
3. If so, how as the CEFR influenced the English and Spanish curricula, teaching practices and assessment documents / procedures?
  - a. Can you provide an historical overview of the impact of the CEFR on language pedagogy in your school?
4. What proficiency levels are learners expected to achieve at the end of every Grade?
  - a. Are learners’ proficiency levels compared to / based on the CEFR levels?
  - b. Why / Why not

- c. What did you base the selection of such proficiency levels on? (Ministry of Education's official guidelines / school's guidelines / research findings, etc)
5. In your opinion, has the CEFR improved language curricula and teaching?
  - a. Why / Why not?
  - b. Can you give some examples?

#### External Language Exams

1. What is the role of the external language exams on the language curricula of your school?
2. What is your opinion about these exams?
3. How have things changed after these exams have been implemented? What is your opinion about this?

## Appendix H – Extracts of Grade 10 SFL Syllabus

Unit 1 from Chapter “*Volver a empezar*” (Starting again) of textbook *En clase 2* (Corpas *et al.*, 2009)

- **Grammar:** use of past tenses; verb periphrasis; structures with *hace, desde*.
- **Vocabulary:** vocabulary about personal information: family, profession, studies.
- **Functions:** talking about experiences and anecdotes; showing interest for the interlocutor’s experience; explaining a biography; talking about the beginning and duration of an action; locate an action in time.

Unit 2 from Chapter “*Estamos muy bien*”(We are very good) of textbook *En clase 2* (Corpas *et al.*, 2009)

- **Grammar:** some uses of the verbs *ser* and *estar*
- **Vocabulary:** vocabulary about pain, aches and symptoms
- **Functions:** giving advice; talking about moods; talking about health and body.

**Appendix I – Samples of Teaching Materials About Communicative Functions  
(Grade 10-2 EFL)**

Extract from vocabulary-focused textbook *English Vocabulary in Use* (Redman, 2011, p. 138)

Agreeing and disagreeing (with someone)  
I totally agree (with you) [agree completely, 100%]  
I partly agree (with you) [agree but not completely]  
I agree (with you) to a certain extent [partly agree]

Extract from Eric's teaching notes (Grade 10-2 EFL teacher)

Agreeing and disagreeing  
I totally/completely agree with you  
I partly agree with you  
I agree to a certain extent  
You are absolutely right/wrong  
I disagree completely / I don't agree at all

Extract from Mary's handouts (Grade 10-2 EFL teaching assistant)

Agreeing/ Disagreeing with an opinion  
That's true / right / correct  
I definitely agree with... / couldn't agree more  
Mm... I understand what you mean, but...  
Yes, but on the other hand...  
I agree with you, but don't you think...?  
Well, I see what you mean, but you shouldn't forget...