

# Language Learning on Board: Vocational Training of Plurilingual Cruise Ship Crew

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This paper presents a recent educational project on vocational language training and linguistic phenomena of mobility workers, developed by the training department of Costa Crociere in collaboration with the Università per Stranieri di Siena. A fleet of 14 cruise ships, each with 400-1,000 crew members and 1,000-3,780 guests, is a unique plurilingual context. Most of the crew members come from the Philippines, Indonesia, India, and China; most of the guests are Italians or Europeans. The project refers to the educational procedures applied to the teaching of Italian and English to the crew members, in order to improve quality of service and of safety onboard.

*Keywords:* vocational training, cruise ship crew, language learning

## Introduction

Costa Cruise Company was founded in 1854 and named after its creator, Giacomo Costa (1836-1916), who had established a business trading fabrics and olive oil between Genoa and Sardinia. In the 1930s, the Costa fleet had eight boats and after the Second World War it added its first American destinations (Italy to Buenos Aires in 16 days) and in 1948, its first Mediterranean cruises. In the following decades, new Costa cruise ships were built and the company expanded to the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, devoting itself increasingly to amusement and luxury hospitality. In 2000, it was acquired by Carnival, an American corporation that maintained the tradition of Italian-style tourist cruises and continued to sail under the Italian flag. Since 2006, it has expanded to include Dubai, China, and the rest of Asia.

At present (2013), the total number of Costa cruise ships is 14. Each Costa cruise ship<sup>1</sup> is a microcosm of plurilingualism. English is only one of the numerous languages of communication shared by both guests and crew members. In a limited space and for a limited period of time, this incredible concentration of languages and cultures often creates linguistic and cultural misunderstandings in communication between crew and guests, and among the crew itself. Most of the officers on board are Italian and are used to speaking English, Italian, or an Italian dialect to a variety of international crew members (from the Philippines, Indonesia, India, China, Brazil, etc.) who are, for the most part, beginners in Italian and English. A kind of *koinè* has developed on board among the crew members, where English and Italian are often mixed with other languages (e.g., Tagalog, the official language of the Philippines) and Italian dialects (e.g., Neapolitan, spoken by most officers).

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<sup>1</sup> The company headquarters are still in Genoa. See [www.costacrociere.it](http://www.costacrociere.it).

A preliminary survey conducted on four Costa cruise ships (Victoria, Classica, Serena, and Fortuna) on June 26, 2011 demonstrated that each of these boats had between 25 and 35 nationalities on board, with the highest concentrations among Filipinos (165-314 crew members), Indonesians (85-204), Indians (69-103), and Italians (65-112), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Most Represented Nationalities (With More Than 10 Persons on Board) on Costa Victoria, Costa Classica, Costa Serena, and Costa Fortuna (Data Collected on June 26, 2011)*

Nationality	Costa Victoria 723 crew members 25 nationalities	Costa Classica 565 crew members 27 nationalities	Costa Serena 990 crew members 35 nationalities	Costa Fortuna 939 crew members 33 nationalities
Brazil <sup>2</sup>	83		93	100
Colombia	12		14	
China <sup>3</sup>		100		11
United Kingdom	11		15	
Honduras	19	11	22	21
India	69	71	103	103
Indonesia	163	85	204	192
Italy	108	65	112	107
Philippines	183	165	314	293
Peru		15	24	33
Romania	17		22	17
Other	58	153	381	62

These nationalities are often correlated to specific positions or to specific cruise destinations. Officers and department supervisors are generally Italians, while most people employed in the entertainment department come from Europe or South Africa. Technical positions are often covered by East Europeans, and the rest of the crew, working in service sectors such as bar, restaurant, galley, housekeeping, and storage, is prevalently from Asia or South America, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Most Represented Nationalities According to Positions (Costa Serena, June 26, 2011)*

Philippines	Indonesia	India	Brazil	Dom. Rep.	Peru	Honduras	Colombia	Italy	Other
Bar, restaurant, galley									
Bar (bar manager, assistant bar manager, barboy, bartender, crew bartender, bar waiter, cocktail waitress, etc.)									
42	9	7	6	1	6	-	1	1	2
Restaurant (maitre, waiter, assistant waiter, wine cellar keeper, snack steward, buffet supervisor, etc.)									
56	19	40	7	21	10	2	2	3	8
Galley (chef, butcher, pastry man, baker, pizza maker, garbage utility, dishwasher, pot washer, etc.)									
58	20	48	-	7	2	6	2	13	5

A significant percentage of crew members are able to speak with colleagues of the same linguistic origin, but have some difficulties in communicating in English or Italian with colleagues or guests of a different mother tongue.

<sup>2</sup> The high number of Brazilian crew members on Costa Serena, Fortuna, and Victoria is due to the fact that these ships were sailing on the Brazilian cruises during the period of November-April.

<sup>3</sup> Costa Classica, being positioned in the Far East, has a high percentage of Chinese crew members.

The resolution of this problem is central to customer satisfaction. Furthermore, it is crucial to ensure the safety of guests and staff in the event of an emergency. For these reasons, in 2004 the company launched an initiative to improve Italian and English language competence amongst employees, creating the “Crew Lecturer” position (now called CCT—Costa Campus Trainer). This person is responsible for ensuring that all crew members improve their competence in both Italian and English over the course of their six to eight months of their contract on board.

In a further attempt to “reach excellence”, a vocational training course for CCTs in teaching Italian as a second language was activated in 2011. The on-going project is the result of a partnership between Costa Cruise Company and the Certificazione di Competenza in Didattica dell’Italiano a Stranieri (DITALS) Centre of the Università per Stranieri di Siena<sup>4</sup>.

### **Preliminary Survey Among CCTs**

A fleet of 14 cruise ships, each employing one CCT, as well as between 400-1,000 crew members (and hosting between 1,000-3,780 guests), offers a unique opportunity to define the profiles of “language learner” and “language teacher” on board<sup>5</sup> through the examination of language needs, teaching materials, and learning methods. First-hand data, collected in 2011 to investigate this specific teaching environment, have been analyzed in order to create the basis for the production of new teaching materials and a specific teacher training format.

As Director of the DITALS Centre, in 2011 the author was asked to offer a preparatory course of Italian language teaching methodology to a group of 12 CCTs who were about to begin their first six-month contract on board. The company had decided to invest in CCT training to assure a reasonably rapid improvement of the competences in English and Italian of its international multilingual crew, whose members—generally recruited by local agents in Asia—are attracted by relatively high wages and no housing expenses.

Before submitting a wide range training proposal, it was necessary to perform a needs analysis. CCTs in service in June 2011<sup>6</sup>, with a minimum of six months experience on board, were asked to respond to a questionnaire with the aim of determining their personal profiles and teaching needs, learner motivation, and the teaching materials that would best suit them (see Appendix A).

The result of the analysis of the 11 questionnaires collected on July 8, 2011, provides an idea of who the CCTs are and of the conditions in which they work (with regards to their position as Italian language teachers<sup>7</sup>).

The profile that emerges from the initial questions (Q1-Q8) is that of a female CCT (only two were male), in her thirties (minimum age 27, maximum 50), competent in at least three languages (Italian mother tongue, plus

<sup>4</sup> The Università per Stranieri di Siena is a university specializing in the teaching of Italian as a foreign language and in linguistic and cultural mediation, with an emphasis on graduate and postgraduate courses in language teaching methodology. See [www.unistrasi.it](http://www.unistrasi.it).

<sup>5</sup> According to official data released by the company, in 2011 there were approximately 18,000 crew members from 70 different countries. 80% were under 40 years of age. In the same year, there were approximately 44,000 guests of 160 nationalities (77% emanating from the European Union, predominantly from Italy, especially on the Mediterranean cruises).

<sup>6</sup> The author was very grateful to the 11 CCTs (out of the 24 who were on board at the moment of the survey: five men and 19 women) who agreed to participate: Alberto Baglietto, Caterina Mirabella, Cinzia Monceli, Daniela Pellegrini, Emanuela Crugliano, Federica Di Blasi, Francesco Pollastro, Liliana Daino, Roberta Ferri, Tiziana Baeli, and especially Valentina Mannari, who introduced the author to the world of Costa Cruise training.

<sup>7</sup> Teaching Italian is only a part of their job description which also includes teaching American English to the crew and officers, organizing online tests, writing reports, as well as other kinds of crew training. As per their contract, they alternate six months on board and two months of rest.

English and another language among French, German, Spanish, and Portuguese<sup>8</sup>), with a university degree and some experience in teaching Italian and/or English as a second language but no specific teacher training. The author was asked to offer the course for this reason.

The next set of questions (Q9-Q11) provides a description of their working context. Each CCT is dealing with a number of crew members varying from 15 to 110 (50-60 on average). This means that during their six months aboard, they have a certain number of crew members attending their open lessons, held in the CCT office at various times of the day. Lessons are provided on an individual basis or to a small group, according to each employee's schedule. Amongst learners, the most widely represented nationalities are: Indonesian, Filipino, Indian, Peruvian, Brazilian, Chinese, Romanian, and Vietnamese. All of the CCTs agreed that the level of Italian of their students was basic (A1-A2).

The final set of open questions (Q12-Q22) investigates their perception of the teaching context in terms of learner profiles, methodology, and materials. Here is a synthesis of the extensive answers given in this section:

Q12: Learner motivation is based on: (1) duty (the company requests that employees improve their competence in Italian); (2) need (to be more efficient at work, to improve their communication with colleagues and guests); (3) desire for personal growth (better career possibilities, obtaining a position in contact with guests, spend free time in a useful way, profit from free language training); and (4) pleasure in learning (enjoy learning, take pleasure in social contacts, love of Italian culture, more contact with Italian guests).

Q13: The abilities that the learners need to develop are: (1) basic vocabulary and routines for interaction with guests and colleagues (oral comprehension and production at A1 level); (2) oral interaction skills, both in their working environment and in social activities with colleagues (at A2 level); and (3) oral mediation skills: The learners often need to act as interpreters and mediators between colleagues of the same mother tongue and others on board (at B1-B2 level).

Q14: Some students do not regularly attend the classes (at least two hours per week) because (1) they are overtired from work (in certain cases they work more than eight hour shifts), (2) they have little free time, (3) there are often shift changes, (4) they are not used to studying (low level of education), (5) they have low motivation, and (6) they receive little support from their managers.

Q15: The methods used to facilitate learning are: (1) personalized approach: games and conversation; at times a more traditional approach is used; (2) offering them help on the job when language is involved; (3) attracting them through rhymes and songs; (4) providing dialogues and simulations of their working environment, vocabulary useful for their job; (5) Total Physical Response method: moving around the cruise ship while teaching vocabulary, games based on movement; (6) priority to peer interaction, creating groups from different departments, stimulating sociality; (7) providing help with their computer activities; (8) few words and constructions to repeat and reuse during the lesson, memory games; (9) introducing pleasant themes that offer relief from work; and (10) role-play and conversation regarding their country and their families.

Q16: The teaching materials used on board are: (1) computer activities for self-study (Costa CD-ROM); (2)

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<sup>8</sup> Only one declares to have a minimum knowledge of Arab (A1 level). The survey of the 12 participants in the third course for CCTs held in Genoa in September 2012, reveals a higher number of males and a lower average age (minimum 22, maximum 40). Some of them possess a very good knowledge of Chinese, Arab, and Japanese, as well as Italian and English, and teaching experience abroad.

video for self-study (Costa video broadcasted on crew channel board); (3) general purpose teaching manuals; (4) authentic materials (magazines, menus, etc.); (5) songs; and (6) flash cards.

Q17: Problems connected to teaching materials: (1) There is no syllabus and there are no job-specific handouts; (2) Costa videos for self-study are not motivating and are seldom used autonomously; (3) completion of Costa CD-ROM exercises is necessary for admittance to the final test, but these exercises are based on grammar and vocabulary and not on communication skills; (4) Costa CD-ROMs for self-study are too difficult and require a guide; (5) Costa CD-ROMs focus on certain positions (waiter, cabin steward, barman, etc.), but learners who belong to other categories may have different learning needs; and (6) bringing learners from A1 to A2 in 40 hours is a difficult task; more teaching materials would be helpful.

Q18: The core content of the first 10 lessons for their A1-level learners should be: (1) functions: greetings, introductions, asking for information, giving information, describing, and giving directions; (2) grammar aspects: verbs (*essere/avere/stare, indicativo presente, passato prossimo, imperativo*), nouns (masculine/feminine, singular/plural), articles, adjectives, pronouns, prepositions, simple sentence structure, etc.; (3) pragmatic aspects: courtesy forms (*Lei/tu*), cultural aspects, gestures, taboos, etc.; (4) pronunciation; and (5) vocabulary: numbers, safety, life on board, and technical vocabulary regarding different occupations.

Q19: Teaching needs: (1) better teaching environment (larger rooms, less noise, better computer connectivity); (2) better materials (more flexible, organized in modules according to different positions); and (3) ideas and tools for language games (students are generally tired and need to be attracted and motivated).

Q20: Strong points of teaching on board are: (1) the human factor: CCT as a guide and a tutor in case of need; (2) computer materials (they can compensate for the lack of time and are flexible for individual use); (3) multimedia approach (video, computer); (4) the time factor: Crew members can devote themselves to language learning at any time of day, there is always a CCT on board and a classroom at their disposal; (5) attention to quality and Italian-style hospitality by using Italian with guests on board; (6) better career opportunities and higher integration in the Italian community on board through the improvement of their Italian language skills; and (7) privileged learning environment: mother tongue teacher, mother tongue guests, colleagues, and managers provide many opportunities for interaction (as well as constant feedback and the possibility of self-correction).

Q21: Weak points of teaching on board are: (1) Costa videos are rarely used in self-access lab, (2) there are few opportunities for oral production for those who do not work in contact with Italian guests, and (3) classes can only be attended during free time.

Q22: Suggestions for improvement: (1) language classes as compulsory activity, bonus for the best students or exemption from a certain amount of work hours; (2) specific teaching materials that the learners might keep and use in their free time; (3) learning materials that take into consideration both the profession and the person (for social interaction on board and for “real life” interaction during excursions); (4) better facilities for Language Training Lab (larger, quieter); (5) new Italian videos on the crew channel; and (6) learning materials that go beyond A2 level (B1-B2).

### **Exploratory Survey Among Costa Crociere Crew Members**

The open answers of the CCT questionnaire were of crucial importance in the preparation of the second part of the survey intended for the learners. A questionnaire with 21 closed-ended questions, largely based on the

suggestions found in the CCT questionnaire, was prepared to further explore personal profiles, learning needs, motivation, desired teaching materials, and methods (see Appendix B). One copy of the questionnaire was distributed to each CCT, who made copies for 10 of their students<sup>9</sup>. There were approximately 10 informants for each of the 11 cruise ships involved in the survey<sup>10</sup>. Once the questionnaires (100 altogether) had been filled out, they were sent back to the author for analysis<sup>11</sup>.

According to the responses to Q11 in the CCT questionnaire, students were supposed to have a basic level of Italian. For this reason, each question was presented in both Italian and English. Most of the informants responded in English and those who answered in Italian confirmed the opinion of the CCTs, showing a linguistic competence in Italian corresponding to the A1-A2 level.

The answers to Q1 and Q2 indicate a higher percentage of men (63%) and an average age of 27 (minimum 19, maximum 50). The level of education (Q3) is surprisingly high, considering the occupations of the informants. Most of them indicated a bachelor's degree or a master's degree, in some cases even when their age and the time already spent on board made it improbable. Either the question was not clear, or they were not sincere in their responses. Only two Bulgarians (41 and 50 years old) declared having only a primary school education.

The most represented mother tongue (Q4) is Spanish (23%), followed by Hindi (10%), Tagalog and Indonesian (15% each), English (7%), Chinese and Romanian (5% each). The great majority indicated knowledge of one or more languages besides their mother tongue (Q5): Only five informants declared to be monolingual—an Indonesian, two Chinese, an Australian, and a British citizen (however, it is highly probable that the question was understood correctly only by these last two, as the questionnaire was written in Italian and English). Forty-four percent indicated English as their only second language (1% indicated Italian). Among those informants who declared more than one second language, 85% indicated English and 28% Italian. This is further proof of the multilingualism of the employees on board (though this multilingualism may not be accompanied by high competence in the languages involved).

The countries with the most representatives among Costa crew in 2011 are the Philippines, Indonesia, and India. Among our informants (Q6), on the other hand, the first place is occupied by Peru (17%), followed by India (16%), Indonesia and the Philippines (15% each). The great majority of the informants indicated that the country where they were born was the same as the country in which they had lived before coming on board (Q7): This means that most of them had no travel experience, which explains their low level not only in Italian but also in English (with the exception of the employees from India and the Philippines).

The average length of work experience on board (Q8) is two and a half years. Only a few informants indicated a much longer period (a 41 year old Bulgarian plumber and a 50 year old Bulgarian hotel fitter, with 15 and 20 years, respectively). Many on-board occupations have frequent turnover due to the wearing effects of the job. The average age of the crew and the continuous recruitments performed both by the company and through

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<sup>9</sup> Among all of the Costa employees studying Italian as a second language, these particular informants were chosen by their CCTs to respond to the questionnaire because they were deemed representative of the crew members on board at the time of the survey in terms of occupation and nationality.

<sup>10</sup> The Costa cruise ships involved in the 2011 survey (followed by the number of informants) were: Concordia (10), Fortuna (10), Atlantica (10), Deliziosa (8), Favolosa (10), Luminosa (2), Mediterranea (10), Pacifica (10), Serena (11), Victoria (8), and Voyager (11).

<sup>11</sup> The author is particularly grateful to Rossella Beccarisi, former CCT and current director of CCT training. Without her constant help it would not have been possible to distribute the crew questionnaires on board, and to have them back in time for analysis.

various agencies in Asia and South America are indicative of this.

The informants listed a variety of positions, especially related to service in bars, restaurants, galley, housekeeping, entertainment, engine, and shops (Q9). Only a few informants gave details regarding their responsibilities: mostly for occupations concerning clean up (barboy, galley utility, pool attendant, housekeeping steward, etc.).

Their contact with guests, supervisors, and colleagues on board and the possibility of speaking to them in Italian are investigated in Q10 and Q11, respectively. Most informants engage in contact with supervisors, colleagues, and guests (52%) or with supervisors and colleagues (11%). Only a minority indicated only colleagues (11%) or supervisors (2%). Contact with supervisors, colleagues, and guests takes place in Italian for 37% of the informants. This response is coherent with the fact that most officers, chief staff, and guests (especially on the Mediterranean routes) come from Italy.

Another question (Q12), proposed in order to explore the inclination for multilingual communication on board, shows that 30% of the informants use their native language half of the time spent on board (see Figure 1). This demonstrates conflicting attitudes regarding the multilingual skills of most of the crew: on one hand an almost exclusive use of the native language (15% use their native tongue 70-90% of the time), and on the other hand, the extended use of languages other than one's own (10% use the mother tongue only 30% of the time, 16% use it 10% of the time).

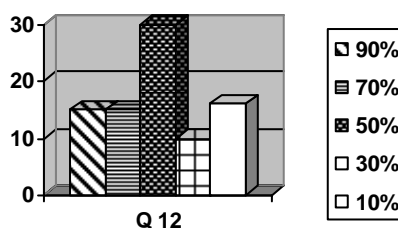


Figure 1. How much do you use your native language compared to Italian, English or other languages?

Only eight informants out of 100 had studied Italian before coming aboard (Q15) (three from the Philippines, two from Peru, two from Brazil and the rest from Japan, Indonesia, and Bolivia), but all responded affirmative to question Q14: *“If you could, would you use Italian during your free time on board?”* This desire to communicate with Italian colleagues and guests reflects a high personal motivation to study. This is confirmed by the various responses to Q13: *“In which contexts do you use or could you use Italian on board?”* Thirty-nine percent of the informants indicated three or more contexts in which they could use Italian on board. But an even higher number (49%) chose only their own sector of employment or a related one, in clear contradiction to the responses to Q14. The desire to communicate is high, but life on board and low language competencies prevent this from happening.

As to the questions regarding personal preferences in language learning (Q16-Q21)<sup>12</sup>, the first refers to the motivation of study (Q16, see Figure 2). Here, the most frequent answer was *“I want to learn to have other*

<sup>12</sup> This section of the questionnaire is taken and adapted from the needs analysis questionnaire used in the European project “Citizenship Language Pack for Migrants in Europe” ([www.l-pack.eu](http://www.l-pack.eu)), in which the author is involved as local coordinator.

*opportunities*” (67%). Very few indicated duty (9%), but where more than one answer was given, the most frequent combination was: *I need to use Italian for my activities on board/I want to learn to have other opportunities/I like to talk to Italians on board during my free time* (11%). The idea of seizing the opportunity to expand one’s skills, combined with the acknowledgment of the importance of improved linguistic competence in one’s professional life and the pleasure of socialization create a good mixture that often preludes successful learning.

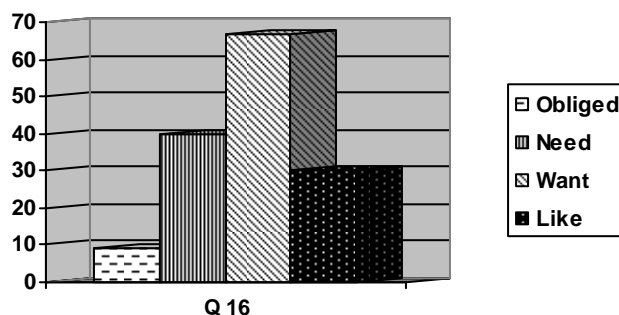


Figure 2. You learn Italian on board because...

What can be done to overcome objective learning problems that emerge in this peculiar vocational context? Q17-Q19 try to investigate the preferred learning styles of this particular group of learners. They are often over-worked and spend the little free time they have on an intellectual activity that requires concentration in order to understand, memorize, and practice new vocabulary and useful sentences in a language that is often typologically far from their own. Q17 (see Figure 3) reflects different intelligences in relation to the various occupations. It is no wonder that dancers prefer “*to do it first then talk about it or see it being done*”, while visual artists “*like to see something first, then do it*” and musicians like to “*try things out by talking them through before doing them*”. Among other professions, the preferences can also be tied to academic experiences as well as to cultural and individual differences. Teachers should be aware of this in order to propose learning activities that respond to individual learning styles. In our sample, the majority preferred to *listen and talk* (65%), followed by those who preferred to *see something first, then do it* (33%) and those who preferred to *do or manipulate things* (28%).

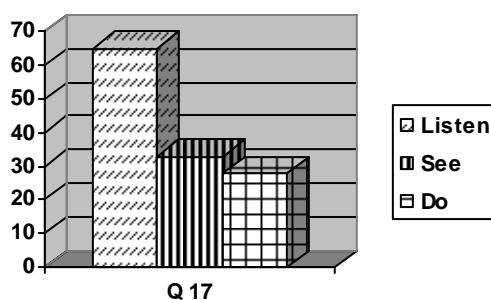


Figure 3. When learning a new language, you prefer...

Q18 further investigates personal learning styles (see Figure 4). The majority indicated a preference for

*practicing with a friend or native speaker* (57%) as informal learning and practice are most helpful when little time is available or when one is no longer accustomed to studying. The great human resource of Italian guests and colleagues aboard contributes to making this a preferred learning method, often indicated as the only one. A number of informants, on the other hand, prefer more formal self-learning methods, often chosen in combination with *organizing material* (45%), *writing the material many times* (20%), *making up one's own examples* (22%). A minority places high importance on memorisation through *rhymes* (10%), or *recording and listening to oneself* (13%).

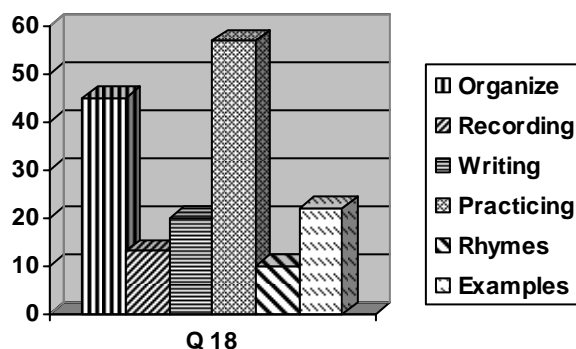


Figure 4. Which of these activities are you most likely to do when studying a foreign language?

As necessary components of language learning (Q19, see Figure 5), the informants recognize primarily *pronunciation* (68%), *interaction* (59%) and *learning words* (57%), followed by *reading* (50%), *grammar* (40%) and *writing* (35%). Only a few indicated *translating simple texts* (14%).

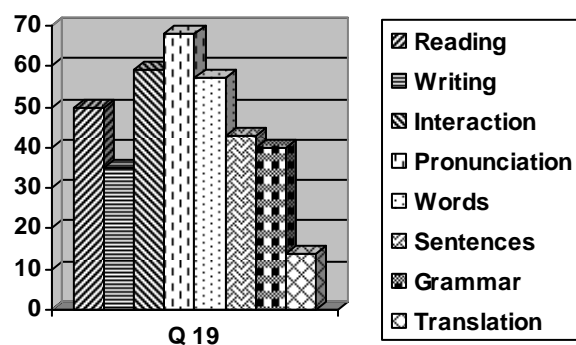


Figure 5. When learning a foreign language, what do you think is necessary?

The main enemies of successful language learning on board seem to be *lack of time* (78%) and *exhaustion resulting from work* (36%), which are recurring answers to Q20 (27%). This is the number one reason given by the majority of those working in housekeeping, bars, galley, restaurants, and the engine department due to the particularly difficult conditions of these occupations. Very few indicated the *quality of education material* (8%) and the *inappropriate teaching methods* option was not indicated at all (see Figure 6).

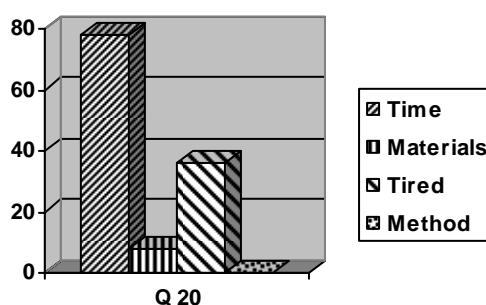


Figure 6. Which of these difficulties are most important to you when you learn Italian?

Q21 investigated suggestions for simplifying the study of Italian (see Figure 7). As for self-study tools, *computer exercises* (48%) are preferred to *video lessons* (20%), while *learning on the job* (48%) and *visual dictionaries* (30%) are the other most frequent suggestions.

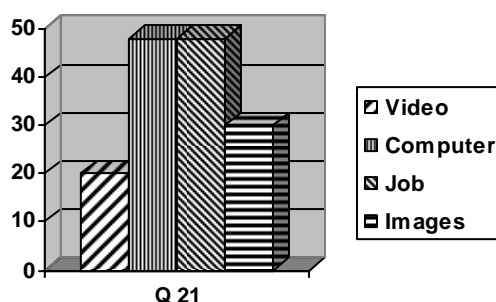


Figure 7. What makes it easier to learn Italian?

### Updates and Future Steps

A further project was carried out in 2013 in order to develop: (1) learning materials (in Italian and English) specific to the various occupations and (2) a training package for future CCTs who need to focus on the specific needs of their learners while employing an adequate methodology and successful techniques.

The learning material will focus on A2 level and will consist in a core manual (with basic vocabulary to develop communicative skills unrelated to a specific profession) and 15 vocational modules<sup>13</sup>. The modules will focus special attention on lexicon and on routine dialogue with guests, colleagues, and supervisors. They will be organized in groups of three, according to the area of specialization, the degree of contact with guests, and the necessity of dealing with unexpected events: (1) information desk, cabins, guided tours; (2) bar, restaurant, galley; (3) beauty centre, fitness and sport, infirmary; (4) shopping and photo, entertainment, casino; and (5) security and safety, housekeeping and administration, technical positions.

The training package, on the other hand, is aimed at the DITALS certification (DITALS level 1, for hotel

<sup>13</sup> The experts of language teaching materials, working with the author on this project ("Buon lavoro!", by Loesher Publishing House, Turin), are: Stefania Semplici, Eleonora Spinosa, Sara Giovinnazzo, Benedetta Cinotti, and Mirella Pederzoli.

and tourist operators) and will combine theoretical knowledge (teaching adults, vocational training, language for specific purposes, error analysis and management, etc.) with practical competence (analysis of teaching materials, lesson plan, creating learning materials, etc.).

In 2013, this project was awarded with the European Language Label, an annual award given to projects where participants have found creative ways to improve the quality of language teaching, motivate students, and make the best of available resources.

### Conclusions

The preliminary survey described in this paper, based on the analysis of 11 questionnaires completed in June 2011 by CCTs and of 100 questionnaires completed in December 2011 by a representative sample of crew members of 11 Costa cruise ships, provides a picture of the plurilingual microcosm that can be found aboard, where the importance of improving language skills is crucial (as some months later, in January 2012, the disaster of Costa Concordia dramatically demonstrated).

From the point of view of the CCTs, mostly females in their 30s, native Italian speakers in possession of a degree and with language teaching experience both on land and at sea, the learning opportunities (provided by self-study computer and video materials and small group lessons) are a precious resource for most crew members who may never have had the chance to learn a foreign language in their own countries. In their experience, they have seen many learners profit from CCT presence on board. The most serious problems are the time restraints due to their minimal free time and lack of prior learning experience. According to the CCTs, the learning materials available are inadequate and are in constant need of being integrated and adapted to the needs and learning styles of the students. Flexibility, in terms of methodology, combined with empathy and support are the most important qualities for a CCT working as a language teacher. They are unanimous in the opinion that the efforts of the most successful learners should be taken into consideration. The company should grant them consequent career opportunities or other kinds of positive feedback as part of a human resource management that considers multilingualism on board a resource instead of a problem.

From the point of view of the crew members participating in courses of Italian and/or English at A1/A2 level, language learning is considered important not only to meet the requirements of the company but also in view of career progress and personal satisfaction. Memory games, visual aids, interaction with native speakers and learning on the job are the most appreciated learning techniques, while lack of time and tiredness due to long work hours are the main causes of the difficulties felt by the informants.

A variety of learning materials are available for the sectors of hotel, catering and tourism, both for secondary level professional education<sup>14</sup> and in the area of vocational training for adult migrants looking for their first employment<sup>15</sup> or trying to improve the quality of their professional performance in the workplace. This is the case of Costa cruise ships and other workplaces related to hotel, catering and entertainment, such as *Valtur* or

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<sup>14</sup> See “VIRTEX—Foreign Languages in Hotels and Catering Work Placements”, for English and German, which offers interactive videos and exercises on line: <http://www.worldenough.net/virtex/>.

<sup>15</sup> Community colleges, adult education organizations and trade unions in the USA offer “VESL (Vocational English as a Second Language)”—programs that assist immigrants and refugees in finding meaningful employment in the labor market by providing them with sufficient training in English as a Second Language (ESL) so that they are able to utilize their education and technical skills, which they bring from their native countries (Smith, 1986; Clevesy & Kremer, 1988; Botta & Montedoro, 2006; Cinotti, 2004).

*Club Med*, that export Italian and French hospitality, respectively. Teaching languages to staff employed in these contexts means taking into account the following principles (as demonstrated by the preliminary survey described in this paper): (1) needs assessment, as a starting point and as an on going process for the development of a learner-centred curriculum; (2) focus on workplace communication and social communication skills: Each learner is a person, not only a worker, and needs to improve communicative abilities both for professional and for personal reasons; (3) lexical approach and memory games: Adult workers often need help with memorization; vocabulary and routine sentences—useful in everyday life—are important components of successful vocational learning; (4) learning on the job: The activation of memory paths is facilitated when movement and other senses are stimulated (sight, hearing, touch, smell); (5) cross-cultural training: Pragmatic aspects of communication (such as gestures, proxemics, greetings, politeness, *étiquette*) are crucial in intercultural communication and should be part of a vocational training in order to avoid inappropriate behaviour and misunderstandings; and (6) last but not least, autonomy in learning: Adequate learning techniques and suggestions for using learning materials for self-study create the conditions for a combined effort, involving both the teacher as guide and the learner as decision-maker, capable of lifelong learning, self-evaluation, and self-promotion.

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### Appendix A: Questionario per i Costa Campus Trainer

#### *Questionnaire for Costa Campus Trainers*

La preghiamo di completare questo questionario di rilevazione dei bisogni di insegnamento/apprendimento dell'italiano L2 a bordo delle navi Costa. *You are kindly requested to fill this questionnaire on teaching/learning needs of Italian as a second language on Costa cruise ships.*

#### © INFORMAZIONI PERSONALI *PERSONAL DETAILS*

Q1 Quanti anni ha? *How old are you?*

Q2 Indichi se è maschio o femmina. *Male or female?*

Q3 Qual è la sua nazionalità? *Which is your nationality?*

Q4 Qual è il suo titolo di studio? *Which is your highest level of education?*

Q5 Quali lingue conosce (indichi il livello usando la scala del QCER)? *Which other languages do you speak (please indicate the competence level according to CEFR)?*

Q6 Ha seguito corsi o ottenuto certificazioni specifiche in didattica dell'italiano L2? Se sì indichi quali e in che anno. *Have you attended courses or obtained specific certifications on teaching Italian as a second language? If you have, please indicate name and year.*

Q7 Ha già insegnato una lingua straniera (italiano o altro) prima di imbarcarsi? In caso affermativo, dove e per quanto tempo. *Did you already teach a foreign language (Italian or other) before going onboard? If you have, please indicate when and for how long.*

Q8 Da quanto tempo insegna italiano L2 sulle navi Costa? *How long have you been teaching Italian as a second language on Costa Cruise ships?*

#### © CARATTERISTICHE DEGLI APPRENDENTI *LEARNERS PROFILES*

Q9 Qual è approssimativamente il numero di persone dello staff che partecipano alle Sue lezioni in un contratto? *Which is the approximate number of staff members that take part in your lessons?*

Q10 Le persone dello staff che partecipano in questo periodo alle Sue lezioni di che madrelingua sono? *Which is the mothertongue of the staff members who take part in your lessons at the moment?*

Q11 Le persone dello staff che partecipano in questo periodo alle Sue lezioni con quale livello di italiano hanno iniziato a seguire il Suo corso? *Which was the level of Italian of the staff members who take part in your lessons at the moment when they started to follow your classes?*

Q12 Quali sono le principali motivazioni che li spingono a seguire le Sue lezioni (da 1 a 3, dalla più rilevante alla meno rilevante)? *Which are the main motivations who drive them to follow your lessons (from 1 to 3, from the most relevant to the less relevant)?*

Q13 Quali ritiene siano le abilità delle quali i Suoi destinatari hanno maggiore necessità? *Which are the most relevant skills that your students need?*

Q14 I suoi destinatari seguono le lezioni con continuità? In caso negativo, quali sono secondo Lei le cause (da 1 a 3, dalla più rilevante alla meno rilevante)? *Do your students come to lesson with regularity? If not, which are the reasons according to you (from 1 to 3, from the most relevant to the less relevant)?*

☉ **METODOLOGIA e MATERIALI DIDATTICI** *METHODOLOGY AND TEACHING MATERIALS*

Q15 Quali metodi, strategie e tecniche utilizza per motivare e facilitare l'apprendimento dei Suoi destinatari? *Which methodology, strategies and techniques do you use to motivate and facilitate your students' learning?*

Q16 Quali materiali didattici sta utilizzando durante le lezioni a bordo? *Which teaching materials are you using during the lessons onboard?*

Q17 Ha riscontrato problemi o difficoltà nell'uso dei materiali didattici durante le lezioni a bordo? Se sì, quali? *Did you have problems or difficulties in the use of teaching materials during the lessons onboard? If you did, which were these problems?*

Q18 Quali sono i primi 10 argomenti che inserirebbe in un manuale per gli studenti che frequentano attualmente le Sue lezioni a bordo? *Which are the first 10 themes that you would introduce in a handbook for the students that are following your lessons onboard at the moment?*

Q19 Di quali strumenti avrebbe bisogno per insegnare con più successo? *Which tools would you need to teach more successfully?*

Q20 Punti di forza dell'insegnamento a bordo. *Strong points of teaching on board.*

Q21 Punti di debolezza dell'insegnamento a bordo. *Weak points of teaching on board.*

Q22 Suggerimenti per migliorare. *Suggestions for improvement.*

**Appendix B: Questionario di rilevazione dei bisogni linguistico-comunicativi del personale straniero a bordo (livello A2)**

***Questionnaire Regarding Language Needs of Foreign Staff on Board (Level A2)***

Si prega di segnare con una X la risposta corretta o comunque più vicina alla vostra realtà, oppure di dare la risposta richiesta. *Please put either a tick or a cross in the box corresponding to the answer that comes closest to your own opinion or experience.*

☉ **INFORMAZIONI PERSONALI** *PERSONAL DETAILS*

Q1 Quanti anni hai? *How old are you?*

Q2 Sei maschio o femmina? *Are you male or female?*

☐ Maschio *Male*

☐ Femmina *Female*

Q3 Qual è il tuo titolo di studio? *What is your highest level of education?*

☐ scuola primaria *primary school*

☐ scuola secondaria *secondary school*

☐ laurea *bachelor's degree*

☐ Laurea Magistrale *master's degree*

☐ Altri titoli *Other*

Q4 Qual è la tua lingua madre? *What is your native language?*

Q5 Parli altre lingue oltre la tua lingua madre? Quale/i? *Do you speak any other languages?*

☐ Sì *Yes*: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ No *No*

Q6 Indica il paese dove sei nato/a? *Which country is your birthplace?*

Q7 Dove hai abitato prima di salire a bordo? *Where did you live before coming on board?*

Q8 Quanti mesi/anni hai lavorato finora a bordo? *How many months/years have you worked on board up to now?*

☉ **ITALIANO A BORDO** *ITALIAN ON BOARD*

Q9 Qual è in questo momento la tua occupazione a bordo? *What is your position on board?*

Ruolo *Position*: \_\_\_\_\_

Mansioni Activities: \_\_\_\_\_

Q10 Con chi hai contatti a bordo? *On board you have contacts:*

- ☐ con gli Ospiti *with Guests*      ☐ con i superiori *with supervisors*      ☐ con i colleghi *with colleagues*

Q11 Con chi parli o potresti parlare italiano a bordo? *On board you speak or could speak Italian:*

- ☐ con gli ospiti *with guests*      ☐ con i superiori *with supervisors*      ☐ con i colleghi *with colleagues*

Q12 Quanto usi a bordo la tua lingua madre in confronto all'italiano, all'inglese o altre lingue? *How much do you use your native language compared to Italian, English or other languages?*

circa il *about* 90% lingua madre *native language* + 10%

circa il *about* 70% lingua madre *native language* + 30%

circa il *about* 50% lingua madre *native language* + 50%

circa il *about* 30% lingua madre *native language* + 70%

circa il *about* 10% lingua madre *native language* + 90%

Q13 In quali contesti usi o potresti usare l'italiano a bordo? *In which contexts do you use or could you use Italian on board?*

- |                                |                          |                              |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| (1) <i>information desk</i>    | <i>cabins</i>            | <i>tour department</i>       |
| (2) <i>bar</i>                 | <i>restaurant</i>        | <i>galley</i>                |
| (3) <i>beauty centre</i>       | <i>fitness and sport</i> | <i>medical centre</i>        |
| (4) <i>shopping and foto</i>   | <i>entertainment</i>     | <i>casinò</i>                |
| (5) <i>security and safety</i> | <i>housekeeping</i>      | <i>technical professions</i> |

Q14 Se potessi, useresti l'italiano anche nel tempo libero a bordo? *If you could, would you use Italian during your free time on board?*

Sì *yes*      No *no*

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Q15 Hai già studiato l'italiano? *Have you studied Italian before?*

- ☐ Sì, prima dell'imbarco *Yes, before coming on board*      ☐ No, solo a bordo *No, only on board*

Q16 Segui le lezioni di italiano a bordo perché *You learn Italian on board because*

- ☐ sono obbligato *I am obligated*
- ☐ ho bisogno di usare l'italiano per il lavoro a bordo *I need to use Italian for my activities on board*
- ☐ voglio imparare per avere altre opportunità *I want to learn to have other opportunities*
- ☐ mi piace parlare con gli italiani a bordo nel tempo libero *I like to talk to Italians on board during my free time*
- ☐ altro *other*: \_\_\_\_\_

Q17 Per imparare una lingua straniera preferisci *When learning a new language, you prefer:*

ascoltare, parlando con gli altri, parlando mentalmente da solo. Penso a cosa devo dire prima di dirlo *To listen talking to others and talking to yourself in your head. I try things out by talking them through before doing them.*

guardare. Ho bisogno di una visione globale e di uno scopo. Preferisco parlare solo quando sono sicuro. Prima di agire preferisco vedere. *To see, I need an overall view and purpose. I am cautious until mentally clear. I like to see something first, then do it.*

agire, toccando. Preferisco l'esperienza diretta. Prima agisco, faccio le cose e poi ne parlo o guardo altri che le fanno. *To do or manipulate things. I like "hands-on" experience. I do it first, then talk about it or see it being done.*

- ☐ altro *other*: \_\_\_\_\_

Q18 Quali fra le seguenti attività preferisci fare mentre studi una lingua straniera? *Which of these activities are you most likely to do when studying a foreign language?*

organizzare i materiali; ad esempio il vocabolario, la grammatica, ecc. scrivendo i vocaboli e le regole in una rubrica.

*Organizing material; i.e. vocabulary, grammar, etc., and writing it on index cards.*

registrando e riascoltando la mia voce *Recording myself and listening to the cassette*

trascrivendo più volte i materiali di studio *Writing the material many times*

esercitandoti con un amico o un parlante nativo *Practicing what I have learned with a friend or native speaker*

mettendo in rima quello che devi ricordare *Remembering by making up rhymes*

creando modelli/esempi e poi controllando la tua produzione *Making up my own examples and testing myself*

☐ altro/other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q19 Cosa è necessario (massimo 4 risposte) per imparare una lingua straniera? *When learning a foreign language, what do you think is necessary? (maximum 4 answers)?*

imparare a leggere *reading*      imparare a scrivere *writing*      imparare a dialogare *interaction*

imparare la pronuncia *learning pronunciation*

imparare molti vocaboli *learning many words*

imparare le frasi semplici necessarie per la conversazione *learning simple sentences for conversations*

imparare le regole grammaticali di base *having general grammar notions*

tradurre testi semplici *translating simple texts*

☐ altro other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q20 Cosa rende più difficile imparare l'italiano? *Which of these difficulties are most important to you when you learn Italian?*

☐ poco tempo *lack of time*      ☐ materiali didattici *quality of education material*

sono stanco per il lavoro *I am tired from work*      ☐ metodologie didattiche non adeguate *inappropriate teaching methods*

altro other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q21 Cosa rende più facile imparare l'italiano? *What makes it easier to learn Italian?*

☐ filmati *video sequences*      ☐ esercizi al computer *exercises on PC*

☐ apprendimento sul posto di lavoro *training on the job*

☐ dizionario con immagini *visual dictionary*

☐ altro other \_\_\_\_\_