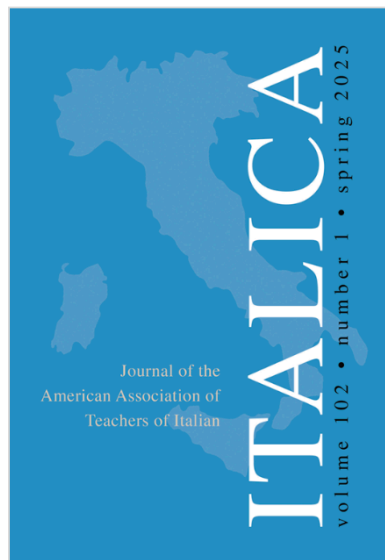


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Abstract

This article considers current educational perspectives related to experiential learning (EL) with reference to the concept of democratic linguistic education as laid out in the GISCEL *Ten Theses*, a foundational work in the area of linguistic and semiotic research. It looks at general educational processes as related to the dynamics of symbolic use through language and communication. Starting with an analysis of the semiotic and theoretical principles that underpin linguistic education, the article considers how the principles of democratic linguistic education are, in fact,

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Common Challenges, Shared Priorities: Experiential Learning and the GISCEL Ten Theses

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ABSTRACT: *This article considers current educational perspectives related to experiential learning (EL) with reference to the concept of democratic linguistic education as laid out in the GISCEL Ten Theses, a foundational work in the area of linguistic and semiotic research. It looks at general educational processes as related to the dynamics of symbolic use through language and communication. Starting with an analysis of the semiotic and theoretical principles that underpin linguistic education, the article considers how the principles of democratic linguistic education are, in fact, foundational to current EL theories. These principles are highly relevant to the field of language learning and to the overall development of literacy skills within populations, not just from a scholastic view of language education but also from a political perspective, where the goal of education is not the passing of an exam or attainment of a good course grade, but the growth of functional literacy skills necessary to be an active and informed member of contemporary society.*

KEYWORDS: linguistic education, GISCEL *Ten Theses*, creativity, experiential learning, plurilingualism, language policies

I. Introduction

In “In principio erat verbum?” (Casini), I proposed a reading of Tullio De Mauro’s works from a North American perspective. There I argued that North American educational theories and methodologies, including those of educational linguistics (Spolsky and Hult) and translanguaging (García and Wei), have roots in models of democratic linguistic education and linguistic space (De Mauro, *Guida*). Here I revisit those models through a reinterpretation of the GISCEL *Ten Theses* (*Dieci Tesi*) and propose their connection with experiential learning (EL).¹ In my view, one shared by other scholars (e.g., De Mauro, *Educazione*), there is a theoretical and epistemological link between this foundational framework of linguistic education in Italy and that adopted by North American pedagogy. This framework is not limited

to language teaching and learning but takes in the entire spectrum of education, extending to the hard sciences and to professional fields such as engineering, law, and medicine. By reexamining this framework, we are able to affirm its impact and its relevance in North American classrooms and universities. Despite being developed in 1975 within the Italian context, and for the promotion of standard Italian in a country where the majority of its population used local dialects for everyday communication (De Mauro, *Storia*), the *Ten Theses* is still a foundational document not only for language teaching worldwide but also for semiological study on the acquisition of literacy skills.

This article aims to be theoretical and speculative: it does not propose concrete lines of intervention, projects, or actions to be carried out in Italian second language (L2) classrooms. Its contribution falls within the scope of educational linguistics because it differs in approach and does not include language teaching methods and techniques: according to De Mauro, educational linguistics develops conceptual models and frameworks before positioning itself on a plane of applicability and establishing concrete actions for the classroom. As such, I believe that the link between the perspectives of the *Ten Theses* and EL must be found on a theoretical level before the application of models. The main objective of this contribution is therefore to seek this link, and indeed to see how the theoretical premises of EL are inherent in the reform of educational paradigms that the *Ten Theses*, in the Italian context, developed (or attempted to develop) in 1975. This article proposes (a) a reflection on the context of educational linguistics in North America, within which EL models have found space; (b) a literature review on EL and the *Ten Theses*; and (c) a theoretical consideration of the common structures of these two educational models, designed and applied in different contexts (that I do not consider), but which seem to have profound implications.

First, the points of contact between the two perspectives can be outlined as follows:

1. The language education of the *Ten Theses* and EL share a student-centered approach toward the activation of their experiences and the social context. Both frame learning as an active and reflective process: language education starts from the linguistic skills already possessed by students and from their lived experiences, promoting critical awareness and inclusivity, just as EL is based on concrete experiences that drive reflection, conceptualization, and application. Both reject transmissive and abstract teaching, instead favoring meaningful and contextualized learning that is capable of developing autonomy, participation in, and skills transferable to social reality.
2. From both perspectives, learning occurs in a more effective and meaningful way when it is rooted in concrete experiences that are contextualized and actively lived out by students: that is, with the student at the center of

the educational process. Democratic linguistic education starts from the linguistic skills already possessed by students, utilizing their cultural and linguistic experiences as the basis for new learning. EL, in the same way, is founded upon the idea that learning is derived from personal and direct experience, which is unique to each individual.

3. De Mauro emphasizes that language education must be anchored to real contexts and to the communicative needs of students. This is reflected in EL, where learning is structured over a cycle that begins with a concrete experience (such as the use of language in authentic contexts) and proceeds with self-reflection to build concepts and skills. Both approaches require students to actively reflect on their experiences. Democratic linguistic education aims to develop metalinguistic and critical awareness, helping students to understand how language influences and is influenced by society. Analogously, EL includes a reflection phase that encourages analyzing the experience and drawing broader lessons.

Democratic linguistic education aims to develop in students the capacity to use language as an instrument for democratic participation, autonomy, and social inclusion. This is fully in line with EL, which not only promotes active participation from students but also encourages them to put into practice what they have learned to solve real problems, thereby developing autonomy and applied skills.

Further in-depth analysis of both paradigms (section 5) reveals even more, still deeper considerations that support and justify the reasons for this parallelism.

2. The Context

In the North American context, the framework for linguistic education, formally labeled “educational linguistics,” was established in 1972 by Bernard Spolsky. However, it was not until 1978 that the discipline made inroads in the scientific community. It later became an autonomous field within the language sciences in 1994, largely thanks to a conference held at Georgetown University in Washington, DC (Spolsky and Hult). Educational linguistics originated and has developed within a didactic perspective that falls under applied linguistics. Its frame of reference, which outlines areas toward which linguistic education must move, is based on the following eight elements: (a) the object; (b) adherence to a social context; (c) reference to the learner; (d) the school as a privileged place for education; (e–f) first and second languages as elements of teaching; (g) the assessment of acquired competencies; and (h) the role of the teacher.

Educational linguistics as a discipline has outlined its own contours as a science, while the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has also inscribed a set of guidelines on the field (Casini, “In principio”). The

ACTFL, founded in 1967, is the largest association for foreign language teaching on the continent, with over fourteen thousand members as of 2023. Its aim is to support the educational needs of teachers and students through advocacy, strategies, models, methodologies, and frameworks that align with current research in the field.

The basic principles of educational linguistics—which stress the importance of concepts such as plurilingualism, identity, and community—are central to the ACTFL guidelines. These principles have led to the development of its *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Language*. In this document, the general goals of language teaching and learning are outlined: communication, culture, connection, comparison, community (the “5 Cs”).

Each objective is supported by specific functions (eleven in total), which are determined during the stages of educational planning and teaching. These functions are associated with the “standards,” which are qualitative and quantitative benchmarks. They sometimes evolve from individual teachers’ experiences, as part of the general process of competence development. The definition of these standards is derived from a long-term project involving K-12 education, initiated in 1993.

The “5 Cs,” as implemented in the North American context, represent framework indicators that allow us to make theoretical connections with issues that have been debated in the Italian, and subsequently the European, context since the 1970s. Competence in second languages was outlined in the ACTFL *Standards*, later to be systematized in the *Proficiency Guidelines* issued in 2012 (the first version was published in 1986). These reflect the horizontal and vertical conception of linguistic-communicative competence already formalized within the European framework (Piccardo and North; Vedovelli). This framework covers not only the increasing number of linguistic forms that the student acquires with the vertical increase in competence (i.e., from the basic to the advanced level), but also the wider range of textualities and domains that can be managed in keeping with greater linguistic competence.

The model delineates (or rather traces the open boundaries of) language as an instrument of interaction capable of bringing people together within specific linguistic contexts, which are essentially the contexts of social life. In the ACTFL *Proficiency Guidelines* document, a similar version of this model is expressed. Competence is defined by what an individual can or cannot do with the language: it is articulated in the four basic skills through a division into five macro-sectors (the “5 Cs”), each of which are applied to “real-world situations.”

The culture and connection macro-sectors (two of the five Cs) refer to the necessity of conceiving of a language to be learned as presupposing connections with other skills, both in terms of other languages and abilities. The document states: “Learning today is no longer restricted to a specific discipline: it has become interdisciplinary. Just as reading cannot be limited to a particular segment of the

school day but is central to all aspects of the school curriculum, so, too, can foreign language build upon the knowledge that students acquire in other subject areas” (qtd. in Cutshall 32).

In the late 1990s there emerged a trend in North America to embrace the plurilingual contexts within schools’ diverse semiotic conceptions (of languages and also nonverbal forms of communication). This contributed to greater understanding of both identity formation and linguistic development of students within a plurilingual environment.

3. EL as a Framework for Language Teaching

The context of study and research we have referred to does not constitute a model for developing teaching practices (nor are we looking for the best or worst methods for teaching a second language) but represents a starting point from which to base a definition of objectives. For our purposes, we need to focus on what a language is and what linguistic competence means in interactive contexts. In 2008, the Association of American Colleges and Universities outlined a list of high-impact educational practices. These practices, adopted by North American universities, are used to develop quality control and educational plans and have implications for the allocation of funds. The list includes three high-impact practices pertinent to languages: (1) diversity/global learning; (2) internships; and (3) community engagement.

Diversity/global learning (1) emphasizes courses and programs that encourage students to explore a variety of cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. This broadening of perspectives is often achieved through intercultural studies that are further enriched by community-based EL and study abroad opportunities. These experiences enable students to immerse themselves in diverse environments, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of global diversity. Internships (2) are a vital and increasingly popular form of EL. Many internships are designed to provide students with direct, hands-on experience in professional settings that align with their career interests. Through these internships, students gain practical skills and insights, while benefiting from the supervision and coaching of experienced professionals in their fields. This real-world exposure is invaluable in preparing students for future employment and professional success. Community engagement (3) involves a collaborative partnership between higher education institutions and their broader communities—local, regional/state, national, or global. This collaboration is characterized by the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources, fostering a context of partnership and reciprocity. Such engagement not only enhances the educational experience for students but also contributes to the betterment of the communities involved, creating a dynamic and supportive relationship between academia and society at large. These three high-impact practices,

while not explicitly focused on languages, share a common foundation within the concept of EL.

Simone Casini and Salvatore Bancheri (*What*), Casini (“Challenges”), and Michael Lettieri have repeatedly emphasized the connection between the quality of teaching and the alignment of teaching with contemporary global educational policies in order to make L2 courses more attractive to prospective students and to counter the negative trend in language and literature enrollment numbers (Lusin et al.; Casini, “Stiamo”). The EL framework that is emerging in North America today is inspiring a breakthrough in language learning. EL represents a novel development in education with its systematic integration of practical, real-life components into the learning process. I refer specifically to the Canadian context because, within the University of Toronto Mississauga, EL represents a model for the advancement of teaching that is at the center of its *Academic Plan 2017*, not just the languages. This does not mean that other institutions in North America do not have virtuous examples of EL; however, in their definition of EL as an approach and method, I make particular reference to the Canadian context as a world-class excellence.

In the past, there have been some significant, albeit sporadic, examples of EL in Italian university courses (Casini and Bancheri, *Lingue*; Bancheri). However, these were informal teaching experiments confined to the pedagogical practices of a few forward-thinking instructors. Educational systems, in both Italy and North America, are called upon to fulfill their respective tasks on a fundamentally different level than they did in the past: universities must not only fulfill their essential epistemological function of knowledge creation but also must address the profound, yet often overlooked, connections between academia and civil society. These connections manifest when educators actively emphasize and engage with the tangible applications of diverse disciplines, such as applying chemistry in medical practice, philosophy in legal frameworks, or language study in public communication. This pragmatic approach not only mitigates disciplinary introspection but also nurtures a more ethically grounded pedagogy wherein students actively engage with the societal and practical dimensions of their learning experiences. Moreover, this approach facilitates real-time assessment of students’ comprehension and progress, offering invaluable insights into both the content assimilated and the efficacy of the learning methods employed. Consequently, such pedagogy sets in motion an experiential cycle—an enriching journey that not only enhances academic learning but also fosters a deeper understanding of societal needs and responsibilities.

Janet Eyler (31) describes experiential education, wherein students are immersed in community settings, as a way to bridge the divide between classroom instruction and real-world situations, converting theoretical knowledge into practical skills. According to Eyler, this approach can enhance academic learning significantly, create a more empowering educational environment, and foster greater civic

engagement. Moreover, it increases the probability that students will be able to apply throughout their lives the knowledge, critical thinking, and cognitive skills they acquire in their studies.

Linda H. Lewis and Carol J. Williams write, “In its simplest form, experiential learning means learning from experience or learning by doing. Experiential education first immerses adult learners in an experience and then encourages reflection about the experience to develop new skills, new attitudes, or new ways of thinking. During the last decade, experiential learning has moved from the periphery of education to the center. No longer supplemental to the acquisition of content, experiential approaches are considered fundamental to meaningful learning” (5–6).

EL encompasses three distinct applications in higher education: field-based experiences, prior learning assessment, and applications for both personal development and classroom-based learning. The first application comprises what are generally referred to as internships and work-study placements. This training is important because it emphasizes the acquisition of skills outside the academic context and connects them with the social and professional world. The second application concerns credentials and skills acquired outside of school, but which are also formally integrated with academic competencies and pathways (in terms of credits, for example). The third application involves activities carried out in the classroom that have relevance to the world outside the classroom: EL in the classroom emphasizes “active learning” as one of the key principles for achieving excellence in education. Active learning engages students in dynamic projects and prompts them to reflect on their actions. Role-play, games, case studies, critical incidents, simulations like “in box” exercises, socio-drama, and values clarification exercises are examples of common EL practices. These practices allow students to tackle real-life scenarios, experiment with new behaviors, and receive feedback in a supportive environment. EL assignments bridge the gap between theory and practice, enabling students to analyze real-world situations through the lens of course content.

As pointed out by Eyler, EL does not occur effortlessly or spontaneously; rather, it necessitates substantial faculty leadership and administrative support. Without such investment, experiential education is likely to remain on the fringes of academia, limiting its potential. Proactive engagement and commitment from both faculty and administrators are essential to fully harness the benefits of EL within educational settings.

The principles of EL highlighted by, for instance, Eyler, Lewis and Williams, Lettieri, Calvin Smith and Kate Worsford, Anne Rowe and Karsten E. Zegwaard, and Peggy Sattler and Julie Peters, as well as Tracey Bowen, Bowen and Maureen T. B. Drysdale, and Denise Jackson (“Contribution” and “Employability”), underscore and encapsulate the core paradigms of current North American educational policy.

Lettieri, for instance, considers EL within the context of global educational policy, with reference to the innovative and wide-ranging EL programs in the humanities and social sciences offered at the University of Toronto Mississauga. However, the present contribution, building upon previous analyses in Casini and Bancheri (“Italiano”), focuses specifically on language education. The educational value of EL generally, and particularly in the field of language education, lies in the development of:

1. Skills to be implemented in a broader social context, not limited to the classroom. Real-life situations outside the classroom and formal settings serve as testing grounds for educational possibilities in which the learner engages in creative problem-solving, first in social and then in educational contexts.
2. Multifaceted skills. Teaching and learning are constantly redefined in practice because they are connected to countless stimuli, including nonverbal language.
3. New skills. These are built by leveraging the learner’s prior competencies, acquired both inside and outside of the classroom.
4. Teacher training. This requires deliberate yet innovative approaches within the development of the new global educational framework.

These four summary points are key to projecting the future implications of EL for language education.

4. The GISCEL *Ten Theses* for Democratic Linguistic Education and EL

As shown in the previous section, EL underscores the importance of learning a language (and, more generally, the content of other disciplines) through direct experience, which occurs in different phases, including (a) concrete experience: active participation in a real experience; (b) reflective observation: analysis of the lived experience; (c) abstract conceptualization: formulation of concepts and generalizations; and (d) active experimentation: practical application of knowledge.

Growing out of a political, educational, and cultural movement dating back to 1975, the GISCEL *Ten Theses* laid out a proposal for teaching Italian in Italy. Because of its breadth and innovativeness, it remains a foundational document for educators involved in teaching L2 literacy skills, both in Italy and abroad. The *Ten Theses* revolutionized the teaching of Italian in Italy, introducing theoretical and applied dimensions that are supported by semiotic and sociolinguistic research. The *Ten Theses*, therefore, are not merely a reaction to the basic requirements of teaching methods and models. They address the intersection of language, school, linguistic activity, and the social fabric of a community, extending their influence beyond the

specific subject for which they were conceived (the Italian language) and the historical moment (Italy in the 1970s) to the present global world (Sobrero).

As we will see in our in-depth analysis in section 5, the *Ten Theses* and EL share common implications that are revealed only after succinctly defining and contextualizing the *Ten Theses*, in particular for the epistemological contribution it has made to the Italian educational context.

4.1 The GISCEL Ten Theses

The text is not a didactic manual, a teacher's guide, or a textbook supplement. It is a brief document that outlines a series of creative principles, emphasizing theoretical openness and expansion of educational perspectives to embrace a linguistic pedagogy that goes beyond strict grammatical, lexical, syntactic, and morphological rules.

The text of the *Ten Theses* can be roughly divided into four major parts: general theses (theses 1–4); *pars destruens*, analysis and critique of traditional linguistic pedagogy (theses 5–8); *pars construens*, principles of democratic linguistic education (theses 8–9); and conclusions (thesis 10). The general theses focus on the materiality of language and its relevance to the biological, intellectual, and social life of humans, but we will concentrate our attention on the *pars destruens* and the *pars construens*.

Traditional linguistic pedagogy focuses on imitation, or, rather, training in the imitation of linguistic models of the past, often involving socially approved or prescriptive practices. These teaching models and visions of language are linked to evaluative processes and social norms as criteria.

The teaching methodologies associated with this model reflect these criteria: their goal is to teach the functions and the rules of the language, and to facilitate the student's ability to form appropriate sentences. When following this model, teachers adopt a binary system of correctness versus incorrectness (Simone).

They allow only predetermined possibilities; they do not allow for any creativity in form and structure; even if a creative solution could serve the communicative intent, they do not encourage creativity, in terms of variation and movement in linguistic space, as a viable alternative.

Linguistic education is, in fact, an education in language in the Saussurean sense: it is an education in the multiple and diverse ways through which to give form to the thoughts and experiences of individuals.² In other words, linguistic learning in relation to its communicative functionality, whether a spoken or written text, or any linguistic sign (even nonverbal), relies on the actual interlocutors for whom it is truly intended. The objective of language teaching is to facilitate communication while respecting linguistic diversity. The revolution in the field of language teaching is centered around this concept of communicative functionality. It is a response to a fundamental question: What is the purpose of communication and of linguistic education? By addressing the question with De Mauro, we can grasp the guiding

principle of linguistic education as education toward creativity (and thus toward variety and diversity):

We can express something by drawing, singing, miming, acting, winking, pointing, and with words; we can say it in English, Chinese, Turkish, French, Greek, Piedmontese, Sicilian, Viterbese, Romanesco, Trasteverino, and Italian; we can convey it with simple syntax, by juxtaposing propositions, or with complex and subordinating syntax; with old or new words, noble or common, common or specialized; we can say it like a scientist or a policeman, a speaker or a reporter, a rocker or a country priest; we can shout it, write it in large letters or in hurried notes—we can say it in silence as long as we truly want to say it and as long as we are allowed to say it. (De Mauro, *Educazione* 84; author's translation)

5. The *Ten Theses*: A Theoretical Paradigm for EL

The *Ten Theses* lays the basis for a democratic linguistic education, founded upon principles of equality, inclusivity, and the development of linguistic skills as an instrument for active participation in society. The key points of the theses include the centrality of the pupil and their linguistic context; a recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity; learning the language as a practical and contextualized experience; and the promotion of communicative and critical autonomy. Both EL and the *Ten Theses* recognize the value of concrete experience as a starting point for learning, beginning with the utilization of personal and social linguistic experiences, a principle similar to the phase of concrete experience in EL.

Additionally, students are encouraged to reflect on their own linguistic expressions and on those of others. Both models reject decontextualized teaching. GISCEL insists on the importance of connecting language learning to real life, while EL relies on authentic experiences to construct knowledge.

The *Ten Theses* promote interactive teaching, in which students become the protagonists of the learning process. In the same way, EL asks students to actively participate, experiment, and apply what they have learned. The utilization of linguistic diversity in the *Ten Theses* is reflected in the importance that EL attributes to the plurality of experiences. Both approaches recognize that every student brings with them a unique wealth of experiences and skills that enrich the learning process.³

If the connections between the two educational paradigms are already evident in just these preliminary observations, then diving into the details of both perspectives reveals additional and even more fundamental points of contact: the connection between thesis 1 and EL falls precisely within the framework of semiotic creativity. Like Silvana Loiero and Maria Antonietta Marchese, I believe that the *Ten Theses* represent the starting and ending points of variation, variability, and movement within linguistic space. The *Ten Theses* (particularly theses 3, 7, and 8) suggest that

language teaching should not focus so much on mastery of the language (a concept more theoretical than practical) but rather on movement within the linguistic space, which exists by virtue of diamesic, diastatic, diatopic, and diaphasic variations, and that schools must address this diversity.

The issue of linguistic variation and movement is at the heart of De Mauro's notion of semiotic creativity. This theme has likewise been addressed in earlier research, most notably by Noam Chomsky in his discussion of the dichotomy between "rule-changing" and "rule-governed" creativity. The kind of creativity that draws on the analogy between languages and games, frequently used by Saussure (particularly with reference to the game of chess), approaches a true theory on the use of languages and the negotiation of meaning. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein argues that historical-natural language is not governed by rigid rules like those applied in ciphers or in logic: no "algebraic" rule, whether specific or general, can reliably be applied to linguistic activity because it is constantly shifting. Thus, we *make up the rules as we go along* in the negotiation of shared meaning.

In modeling creativity, De Mauro (*Lezioni*) deliberately navigates various weights and counterweights to balance and substantiate the comprehension process. He identifies the factors and properties that affect language, including the creative process of *making up the rules as we go along*. On the surface some of these elements may appear to undermine comprehension, but, through their mutual substantiation and reciprocal self-determination, they enable users to establish a semiotic understanding. This understanding in communication is repeatedly reconfirmed, thereby enabling mutual comprehension among people.

Creativity entails variability, the openness of systems, unpredictability, and the incalculability of meaning through formal algorithms alone. Creativity thus entails the ability to step outside the established rules of language as an autonomous entity, but also of language as a communicative problem, to change the parameters of the problem in order to solve it. This creativity is related to the ability to switch from one code to another, from one system to another; it draws on the individual's abilities as a person (and not just as a learner), developed over the course of their life and through all the experiences they have processed.

In this sense, learning experiences become tools for solving problems, and EL, in being open to the social and global context, contributes to creative learning. Democratic education therefore means an education with respect for all kinds of linguistic diversity and the use of all kinds of linguistic creativity (De Mauro, *Educazione*) accessible to all learners.

Today, the semiological and linguistic sciences allow us to clarify the foundations of creative paradigms with respect to linguistic education. Linguistic education is education in a variety of languages and symbolic forms, from codes, including graphic, chromatic, and general artistic modes of expression, to historical-natural

languages, used to regulate the production and reception of signs: that is, semiosis, with which users classify and communicate experience. If verbal languages, as only one of the many forms of semiosis, are the most “powerful” and “special” (De Mauro, *Lezioni*), it is because they accumulate within themselves characteristics, properties, and forms that are found separately in other forms of semiosis. Linguistic education is education in the variety of languages, thus requiring an openness to a plurality of languages and dialects. Linguistic education is education in a variety of sentences and vocabulary, style and syntax; it entails the ability to move within a linguistic space where words, structures, and signs of the standard language or regional and dialectal varieties, whether formal, informal, or formalized, are afforded equal dignity and respect. It makes room for incalculable linguistic innovations, resulting from shared use and the exercise of creativity.

From the perspective of EL, creativity allows for the assimilation and management of different languages and encourages the individual to explore and adapt. This leads us to the second and third precepts common to the *Ten Theses* (theses 2–3) and EL: the discourse on language becomes a discourse with and about the users. Linguistic education offers an invitation to human and civil participation, and to the realization of social and political conditions that allow such participation and make linguistic creativity a tool of democratic solidarity.

In linguistic education, there has been a recent shift from considering language as a “logical form,” based on purely formal rules and relationships, to viewing language as a “functional form” that serves to navigate within a creative linguistic space and to perform tasks of a communicative, and even noncommunicative, nature (Renzi 18).

If this trend leads us to abandon the idea of language as a monolithic system, there are certain ramifications in terms of designing educational tools to support competence development. In practical terms, this means that we must assess the legacy of the *Ten Theses* in current international language policies. First, we must reexamine what the *Ten Theses* expressed, back in 1975, about the “leap in quality and quantity” in knowledge and skills regarding language and education. Second, we must reassess the auxiliary tools for competence development (such as grammar guides, exercise books, textbooks); this means moving beyond the fixation on right or wrong answers, to embrace a much broader variety of communicative solutions, each linked to varying degrees of acceptability, according to social, cultural, or practical objectives.

A fundamental consequence arises from this: since the formal-grammatical structure of a language primarily serves (as Aristotle had intuited) to determine the concrete meaning of an utterance, grammar *in nuce* and its teaching must take into account variety, creativity, and social norms. Thus, we have before us a daunting task. The role of language teaching today is far more complex than in the past.

It entails developing teaching methods that strive to anchor the content expressed by words and sentences not only to the here and now but also to the elsewhere and the different, to achieve a goal that is primarily communicative and social. In this sense, it cannot be dissociated from the dimension of the experiential, practical, and social dimensions of life, and to overall learning. Thus, the *Ten Theses* and EL enjoy continued relevancy for domestic and international educational policy today.

If there is no definitive model of “good speech,” then linguistic competence must transcend formal knowledge and embrace a range of skills that ensure effective communication in a variety of contexts and life situations. Now more than ever, linguistic education must be able to negotiate both the formal and the vernacular planes of a language.

An important fourth matter to consider is that of teacher training (thesis 4). As highlighted by Lettieri, EL is not something that can be improvised; it requires significant administrative and logistical support for its implementation. The teacher is called upon to renew their skill set, in line with that leap in quality and quantity of competencies identified in the *Ten Theses*. Training in semiotics is invaluable for teachers. Language is not the only form of codification: symbolic representations, numerical codifications, musical notes, and even bodily signals are semiotic forms that serve not only as means of communication but also as tools for knowledge and sharing among people. Acquiring understanding of these codes, under the guidance of trained experts in semiotics, should be an integral part of the teacher’s education, by which progressively more sophisticated concepts and applications are introduced. Similarly, EL cannot be improvised. The development and introduction of new educational modes is an art. The act of mediating knowledge, an enterprise that every teacher, from kindergarten to university, trains and takes responsibility for, is difficult and demanding. Sometimes, the teacher needs to step aside and give the student the centrality they need and deserve. The student is thereby empowered to learn by working with peers, interacting, recognizing, and respecting the teacher’s professionalism, and being open to transforming their prior knowledge in light of a new understanding gained through direct and reflective experience in school activities.

6. Conclusion

As De Mauro (*Educazione* 9) states:

Ha ancora senso, e quale senso, parlare oggi di educazione linguistica considerando che le questioni sociolinguistiche di oggi sono molto diverse da quelle dei primi anni Settanta?

Ora mi state chiedendo, in sostanza: ma le *Dieci tesi* sono attuali? E io vi dico: altroché se sono attuali! È attuale Lombardo Radice di settant'anni prima.

Does it still make sense to talk about linguistic education today, and what is its relevance, considering that today's sociolinguistic issues are very different from those of the early 1970s?

Now you are essentially asking me: but are the *Ten Theses* still relevant? And I tell you: they are absolutely relevant! Lombardo Radice from seventy years ago is still relevant.

De Mauro reflects on the relevance of a document from 1975, conceived and written in a historical moment radically different from ours today. At that time, Italy and its schools were grappling with a vigorous Italianization project, aimed at banning any teaching that was not in the “official Italian language,” within a didactic framework that was “prescriptive, imitative, and dictatorial.”

The current global educational context is no doubt different from that of Italy in the 1970s. In Italy, the process of Italianization has essentially been completed. However, we should not relegate to the scrapheap of history the reflections and cultural models of past linguistic research. Nor should we dismiss models, like those offered by the Italian framework, as irrelevant.

By focusing on the creative forms of language, that labyrinth of streets in the city that Wittgenstein described as the essence of language, we are able to orient ourselves, and navigate our way—by looking at various sides of the theoretical lessons, methodological approaches, and semiotic reflections on linguistic education, as offered to us by De Mauro in Italy over the course of several decades.

Likewise, with the advantage of hindsight, and looking at the issue from the ground up, we can see how the linguistic foundations of our contemporary world were foreshadowed in the *Ten Theses*, and how they have inspired the core principles of EL that now inform the methodological and theoretical framework of North American linguistic education.

Notes

1. For more information about GISCEL, see <https://giscel.it/>.
2. The teaching process, as seen through the lens of De Mauro's intuitions—which are based on semiotic creativity—depends on a renewed linguistic education, one that is more challenging, open, and inclusive: “*come si possa dire così*, e anche così e anche questo che pare errore o stranezza può dirsi e si dice; e questo è il risultato che *si ottiene* nel dire così o così” (“*how one can say it this way*, and also that way, and even this—which seems like an error or oddity—can be said and is said; and this is the result *obtained* by saying it this way or that way”; thesis 10; italics added).
3. To propose a specific teaching activity in a scholastic context, one might suggest that students work on a real project, such as interviewing members of the local community

on a topic of interest (concrete experience). The students then reflect on the linguistic modes used in the interviews (reflective observation) and analyze how context and linguistic registers influence communication (abstract conceptualization). Finally, they apply this knowledge through the writing of an article or presenting the results (active experimentation).

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