

Body Language During Classes of Italian as L2: The Voice of the Students in Canada and in Italy

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Abstract: A questionnaire inquiring about the roles that the body assumes during Italian language classes was distributed to 224 students in Canada and in Italy, and to their 16 instructors. This article presents the answers that the students exhibited to our survey, and it compares the responses between the two countries. The results suggest that, in terms of attention to the body during class time, the pedagogy of Italian in Canada does not differ from the pedagogy of Italian in Italy. Both settings would benefit from a more systematic integration of the body into the teaching and learning of Italian as L2.

Keywords: Body language, Multimodality, Italian as L2, Canada, Italy

Introduction

During the academic year 2016-17, we carried out fieldwork in classes of Italian as a foreign or second language (L2) at the Italian Cultural Institute in Toronto and at two universities in Italy (i.e., Padua and Venice), to investigate the role that students and teachers attribute to body language (e.g., hand gestures, facial expressions, posture) during class. To this aim, we distributed a questionnaire to 224 students divided into three levels (i.e., beginners, intermediate, and advanced), and a questionnaire to their 16 instructors. We chose an Italian Cultural Institute outside Italy to create an opportunity for a rarely investigated educational setting to participate in a research study. We then compared views on the topic of our research between Canada and Italy.

Typically, students at an Italian Cultural Institute in Canada are professionals that travel to Italy for work reasons or people who have family and cultural interests in Italy. A minority attends university as well. The average student is aged 50 and up. Participants in the univer-

sity classes that we visited in Italy were, instead, international students who were spending a period of time in Italy on an exchange or needed to develop language proficiency before registering in a graduate level study program. The average student in these university courses was aged between 18 and 30. In both Canada and Italy, about 80% of the students that we surveyed were female. As for the instructors that participated in our study, all of them were native speakers of Italian: in Canada, they were from the North or Centre of Italy, only one was from Toronto but with Calabrian origins; in Italy, they all hailed from the North East. 10 out of 16 were women; all but two were aged above 30.

This study follows former research experiences that we completed on the interpretation of hand gestures in Italian language classes in Canada (Salvato, *Looking beyond Words*), which revealed that body language does not assume a significant position in the pedagogy of Italian even though this language avails itself of a rich repertoire of gestures ("a gesture-rich language" Kendon). We were intrigued by our findings and we wondered if different contexts of teaching and learning would yield comparable results.

We were interested in exploring the topic further considering the recent surge of studies supporting multimodality in L2 pedagogy, that is, methodologies that combine speech with other semiotic codes of communication such as body language (Streek, Goodwin, and Le Bron). Among the advantages that these studies relate to multimodality, the literature has highlighted enhancement of comprehension, memorization, and language learning (Goldin-Meadow and Alibali; Macedonia and Knösche, *Body in Mind*; Macedonia and Klimesch, *Long-Term Effects*). Studies have considered culturally defined body language (emblematic as defined in Ekman and Friesen) but also body language that instructors adopt to organize, carry out, and manage a class, or that students use to encode and decode meaning (Allen; Asher; Sime; Tellier). Our contribution to the scholarship was meant to examine whether the suggestions coming from theoretical and applied linguists had actually reached the classroom, specifically Italian language classes in two distinct geographical and academic contexts. To this aim, we formulated a survey that asked participants to reflect on the concept of body language in the pedagogy of Italian (Salvato, *Awareness of the Role of the Body*). The questionnaire for the students, whose responses we will examine in this article, was divided into four parts: 1. general information (i.e., mother tongue and other languages known; level of proficiency; age and gender); 2. recognition and interpretation of a selection of six Italian ges-

tures (reproduced from Diadori); 3. a matching exercise where the six Italian gestures needed to be combined with the most appropriate dialogue among a selection of six; 4. body language during the Italian class, its meaning and functions. At the end of the questionnaire, some space was left for individual comments on the characteristics of the study.

It is important to point out that the educational settings, the teachers and the students alike all welcomed our study because they interpreted it as integrative of their pedagogical objectives and in conformity with the guidelines of the Common European Framework of Reference. Moreover, participants appreciated the fact that the study was organized as a mini-class: we took the time to explain the meaning of nonverbal behaviour, including body language, and offered some examples that we can observe in any language (e.g., pointing at an object or a person by using the index finger). We then presented the study and explained how we would carry out the research work. The participants were given 20 minutes to complete the survey, during which time we monitored that they understood the meaning of all the questions. Participants were informed that the study had received Ethics approval and that they could skip any questions that they did not want to answer or that they could not answer. Once the questionnaires were completed and handed in, we organized a class discussion to give everyone an opportunity to comment on the overall experience and on the contents of the survey.

In the following section, we will present the voice of the students who participated in our study. Specifically, we will describe and comment on the answers that the three levels of proficiency exhibited to the questions focused on body language during the Italian class, its meanings and functions (section 4 of the questionnaire). The voice of the instructors and the characteristics of the survey distributed to them are described in a separate source (Salvato, *Il linguaggio del corpo*).

The voice of the students in Canada and in Italy

The Advanced Level

We surveyed a total of 28 advanced students in Canada and in Italy ($N=14$ respectively). Given the options *his or her words, hands, facial expression, posture, and eyes*, to describe the instructor's methodology in teaching the language, the first question of our study asks: *During your Italian class, what makes a difference in your teacher is/are: (one or more answers)*. Here are the options that the advanced students selected in

the two contexts:

Canada		Italy	
words	N=9	words	N=11
hands	N=7	facial expression	N=11
facial expression	N=7	hands	N=6
posture	N=4	posture	N=6
eyes	N=2	eyes	N=5

In Canada words and facial expressions ranked the same and were followed by hands whereas hands and facial expressions ranked the same in Italy after words. In both contexts, posture and eyes ranked last. The combination of verbal and nonverbal language, especially of words, face, and hands, is an important aspect that the advanced students noticed as making a difference for them in their evaluation of their instructors' teaching style. In addition, two students in Italy filled out the *other* option with *intonation* and *behavioral patterns*.

The advanced students were then asked whether their teacher uses body language in class. In Canada, 6 students answered *always* and 5 *sometimes*; in Italy, 7 students said *sometimes* and 2 *always*. A small group in both contexts did not provide an answer to this question. The layout of the question may have misled them to think that this was not a question as they did fill out the options that followed. Specifically, four options were given to define the functions of teachers' body language in class. Here is the ranking of choices that the advanced students made in the two contexts (*always* and *sometimes* responses lumped together):

Canada	Italy	
to emphasize words	N=18	to add to the meaning of words N=14
to add to the meaning of words; to emphasize words	N=17	to explain words; to explain words N=13
instead of words	N=12	instead of words N=7

The order is slightly different between contexts but the number of times the options were selected is not remarkably different compared to one another. We note, however, that *instead of words* was chosen to a greater extent in Canada than in Italy. This difference suggests that in Canada use of body language still plays a role in advanced classes. Being a foreign language, Italian teaching in Canada may require a more

prolonged use of teacher's body language in place of words compared to Italy, the target language setting.

In the following section, the survey prompted students' opinion on whether their teacher asks them *to observe*, *to use*, and *to reproduce* body language during class. In Canada, observation of body language was chosen more often than in Italy ($N=11$ vs. $N=8$). Students in Canada chose *never* for *to use* and *to reproduce* body language in class ($N=12$ and $N=9$) more frequently than students in Italy ($N=6$ and $N=5$). On the other hand, students in Italy selected *don't know* across the three options more frequently ($N=5, 5, 5$) than students in Canada ($N=2, 0, 0$). This difference suggests that students in Canada have a clearer mind on the distinction between verbal and nonverbal language. They seem to be able to tell whether class time is spent on use and reproduction of body language, compared to its observation only. In Italy, on the other hand, the answer *don't know* suggests that the distinction between verbal and nonverbal language may be less obvious to students. It is possible that learning Italian in the target language setting makes students gain a holistic view on the language and contributes to a less clear-cut separation between its verbal and nonverbal code. At the advanced level in Italy, meaning and language may be presented, examined, and practiced, as a whole rather than structured into componential verbal and nonverbal units.

The advanced students were then asked in what ways they use body language in class. The options that received more positive answers were equivalent between contexts (*always* and *sometimes* responses lumped together; some options ranked equally):

Canada	Italy
to show that I have understood $N=14$	to show that I have understood; $N=14$ to express meaning more precisely; to help me speak
to help me speak; $N=13$ to interact with somebody; to express meaning more precisely	to interact with somebody $N=12$

A difference emerged with the following option instead. Although 3 students in Canada *never* do this, ten other students said that they use body language *to imitate the teacher or images or videos* ($N=2$ *always*, $N=8$ *sometimes*). This point is quite interesting: it suggests that advanced students in Canada interpret imitation of target body language as necessary to meet the expectations of their proficiency level. In Italy, on the

other hand, only 6 students stated to imitate body language *sometimes* and 6 said *never* to engage in this function of body language.

As for the least popular functions of body language, here is what the advanced students selected in the two contexts (*always* and *sometimes* responses lumped together):

Canada	Italy
to memorize and learn N=6 new words; to avoid using my L1	to memorize and learn N=6 new words; to imitate the teacher, images, and videos

The responses suggest that, in Canada more than in Italy, advanced students' L1 is present during class and it is a resource. This can be explained considering that in Canada, the majority of the students were speakers of the same language, English (i.e., 56 out of 100 students were native speakers of English). On the other hand, the fact that students do not generally avail themselves of body language to memorize and learn new language suggests that, in language learning, the body is not yet viewed as an instrument that can facilitate language recall and learning, in contrast with what the recent literature recommends (Macedonia and Klimesch, *Long-Term Effects*).

As for using body language *because Italian requires it*, advanced students in Canada were more frequently in agreement with this statement than students in Italy (N=10 vs. N=8). We cannot exclude that this response is influenced by stereotypical views. In any case, the predominant positive response suggests that students at the advanced level are aware of rich body language usage in Italian. The remaining options of this section (i.e., *to show that I have understood*; *to show that I have not understood*; *to help me understand*; *to indicate objects or people*; *to accompany the rhythm of words*; *because I am stressed*; *when I am thinking*) received similar positive responses across contexts.

When the advanced students were presented with the statements *I don't use body language because it is rude*, *or because it bothers me*, *or because it is ambiguous and less effective than words*, the negative responses stood out in both contexts with a couple of *yes* answers in Italy, and a couple of *don't know* answers in both contexts. In Italy only, we counted 2 *yes* for *it's rude* and *it bothers me*, and 3 unclear answers for the three statements. These are in any case too small numbers to suggest that body language is negatively viewed in class.

The survey ends with questions that require students to think about differences and similarities between their L1 and the Italian target language. It is interesting to note that in both contexts the majority of the advanced students said that *in using their L1, they rely on body language* ($N=9$ in Canada, $N=10$ in Italy). This response does not make Italian very different from the students' L1. Nevertheless, 13 students in Canada and 9 students in Italy also agreed that *Italian uses more body language than their L1*. Five students in Italy answered *no* and *don't know* to this question, whereas only one student in Canada chose *don't know*. In reading these results, we need to take into account that in Canada more students were native speakers of the same language and likely to share the same view on their L1 and on the Italian target language.

As a last point, the advanced students were asked whether they *observe typical Italian body language outside the class*. In Canada, 12 students said *yes* and 2 said *no*; in Italy, students unanimously said *yes*. These results are to be expected considering that students in Italy are immersed in the target language community after class. On the other hand, the positive response from the students in Canada reminds us that the Italian community in Toronto is large and students may be in contact with Italian speakers or they may live in neighborhoods where Italian speakers also live.

The Intermediate Level

We surveyed 44 and 51 intermediate students, in Canada and in Italy respectively. Given the options *his or her words, hands, facial expression, posture, and eyes*, to describe the instructor's methodology in teaching the language, the first question of our study asks: *During your Italian class, what makes a difference in your teacher is/are: (one or more answers)*. Here is what the intermediate students selected in the two contexts:

Canada		Italy	
words	$N=38$	words	$N=37$
facial expression	$N=26$	facial expression	$N=32$
hands	$N=21$	hands	$N=29$
posture	$N=18$	posture	$N=10$
eyes	$N=12$	eyes	$N=9$

The ranking is exactly the same across countries. 5 students in Canada filled out the *other* option with *intonation, voice, and enthusiasm*.

3 students in Italy filled out the *other* option with *enunciation, voice*. In both contexts, and similarly to the advanced students, *words, face, and hands* are the most important aspects that intermediate students consider making a difference for them in evaluating their instructors' teaching style.

The intermediate students were then asked whether their teacher uses body language in class. Comparable responses were exhibited in both contexts: 33 out of 44 students in Canada and 32 out of 51 students in Italy answered *always* and *sometimes*. Only one student in Italy answered *don't know*. 10 students in Canada and 18 students in Italy did not answer this question or did not provide a clear answer. This may be due to the layout of the question in the survey.

The intermediate students were then given four options to define the functions of their teachers' body language in class. Here is the ranking of choices in the two contexts (*always* and *sometimes* responses lumped together):

Canada		Italy	
to explain words	N=42	to add to the meaning of words	N=47
to emphasize words	N=41	to explain words	N=45
to add to the meaning of words	N=39	to emphasize words	N=44
instead of words	N=28	instead of words	N=29

Although the options were chosen in equivalent amounts within contexts, we note the prevalence of *to add to the meaning of words* in Italy as opposed to Canada, where body language is viewed as a means *to explain words* before anything else. Unlike in the advanced groups, the intermediate students chose *instead of words* in approximately the same amount of times in both contexts. This result suggests that, in Canada and in Italy, body language plays an important role at the intermediate level in replacing words when speech is not a viable option for the students.

The following section of the survey prompted students' opinion on whether their teacher asks them *to observe, to use, and to reproduce* body language. In both contexts, *observation* of body language (N=20 in Canada and N=27 in Italy, *always* and *sometimes* together) was predominant over *use* (N=15 in both contexts) and *reproduction* (N=13 in Canada and N=12 in Italy). About half of the students in both contexts answered *never* for *use* and *reproduction* (N=22 and N=26 in Canada, N=25 and N=23 in Italy). These strong negative answers suggest that

intermediate students believe they do not engage in body language while learning Italian. We cannot exclude, however, that they may be unaware of their body language usage. It is interesting to note that in Italy, a larger group of students than in Canada selected *don't know* for the three options ($N=10, 11, 16$ vs. $N=5, 4, 3$). Similarly to the advanced groups, this difference suggests that in Canada students may know the difference between verbal and nonverbal language more clearly. They may have a better understanding of when class time is spent on use and reproduction of body language, as opposed to its observation only. In Italy, the answer *don't know* suggests a less clear mind on the matter as if the distinction between verbal and nonverbal language were less obvious to students. It is possible that in Italy less attention is put on the distinction between the verbal and the nonverbal code.

Intermediate students were then asked about the ways they use body language in class. The options that received more positive answers were (*always* and *sometimes* responses lumped together):

Canada	Italy
to show that I have not understood $N=41$	to help me speak $N=48$
to show that I have understood; to express meaning more precisely $N=39$	to show that I have understood $N=47$
to help me speak $N=38$	to show that I have not understood $N=46$
	to express meaning more precisely $N=44$

It is interesting that *to help me speak* comes before any other option in Italy compared to Canada. It is possible that students in Italy realize that body language in the target language community is recurrent and they are not hesitant in using it to help themselves speak the target language. The least popular options were instead:

Canada	Italy
to imitate the teacher, images and videos $N=20$	to imitate the teacher, images and videos; to memorize and learn new words $N=6$
to memorize and learn new words $N=28$	to avoid using my L1 $N=8$

These results suggest that in Canada intermediate students are less concerned about avoiding the use of their L1 in class compared to the students in Italy. As for use of body language *because Italian requires it*, at the intermediate level, like at the advanced level, students exhibited a positive response: in Canada, 23 students selected *always* and *sometimes* vs. 6 students chose *never* and 11 *don't know*. In Italy, 32 students selected *always* and *sometimes* vs. 10 students chose *never* and 7 *don't know*. The remaining options in this section (i.e., *to help me understand; to indicate objects or people; to accompany the rhythm of words; because I am stressed; when I am thinking*) received equivalent positive responses in both contexts.

When the intermediate students were presented with the statements *I don't use body language because it is rude, or because it bothers me, or because it is ambiguous and less effective than words*, the negative responses were predominant in both contexts with very few *yes* answers. 13 students in Italy chose *don't know* as an answer to body language being *ambiguous* or *less effective than words*, whereas only 5 students in Canada stated the same. However small, these results suggest that intermediate students may sometimes find body language not as helpful as words are. In comparison, at the advanced level, students chose *no* more unanimously as the answer to this question.

The last three questions asked students to compare their L1 to the Italian target language. Fewer intermediate students in Italy than in Canada said that in *using* their L1, they *rely on body language* ($N=30$ in Italy, $N=35$ in Canada). In evaluating this difference, we need to take into account that we had a higher number of native speakers of the same language, English, in Canada compared to Italy. It is likely that more students in Canada shared the same view on this matter.

In both contexts, however, students were in agreement in saying that *Italian uses more body language than their L1* ($N=39$ in Canada, $N=45$ in Italy). Only a couple of students answered *no* and *don't know* to this question. As for observing typical *Italian body language outside the class*, 44 students in Italy and 31 students in Canada said *yes*; 2 students in Italy and 5 in Canada said *no*; and 5 students in Italy and 8 in Canada said *don't know*. Although it is to be expected that the Italian group select *yes* more frequently, it is interesting that the Canadian group predominantly answered *yes* to these two questions. As commented already, Toronto counts many Italian speakers as well as speakers of Italian descent. Consequently, students in Toronto are likely to be familiar with the characteristics of Italian regardless of their language background.

The Beginners' Level

We surveyed 42 and 59 beginners of Italian, in Canada and in Italy respectively. Given the options *his or her words, hands, facial expression, posture, and eyes*, to describe the instructor's methodology in teaching the language, the first question of our study asks: *During your Italian class, what makes a difference in your teacher is/are: (one or more answers)*. Here is what the beginner students selected in the two contexts:

Canada		Italy	
words	N=35	words	N=41
facial expression	N=28	facial expression	N=29
hands	N=22	hands	N=32
eyes	N=16	eyes	N=19
posture	N=11	posture	N=15

At the beginner's level, it is expected that words are important but, in these two groups, body language ranked quite high all the same. 8 students in Canada filled out the *other* option with *energy, intonation, patience, and enthusiasm*. 5 students in Italy filled out the *other* option with *humor, passion, and intonation*. Similarly to the upper level students, our beginners selected the same options (i.e., *words, face, and hands*) as making a difference for them in the evaluation of their instructors' teaching style. This result confirms that a combination of verbal and nonverbal language is indeed part of the methodological approach adopted to teach Italian across the proficiency levels in the two settings of our study.

The beginner students were then asked whether their teacher uses body language in class. In Canada, 32 out of 42 students answered *always* and *sometimes*; one only student said *never*; 9 students were unclear in their answer. In Italy, 46 out of 59 beginners said *always* and *sometimes* together; only one student said *never*; and 12 students were *not clear* in their answer. It is interesting to note that no one at this level of proficiency answered *don't know*. This point suggests that beginners notice body language in class and that, in order to be noticed, body language needs to be recurrent.

The beginners were given four options to define the functions of their teachers' body language in class. Here are the choices that they made in the two contexts (*always* and *sometimes* responses lumped together):

Canada	Italy
to emphasize words N=41	to emphasize words N=55
to add to the meaning of words N=34	to add to the meaning of words N=51
to explain words N=33	to explain words N=49
instead of words N=26	instead of words N=40

The ranking of the options is exactly the same across countries. We note a difference with *instead of words*, which in comparison with the upper levels was selected in higher numbers. This response is significant in suggesting that beginners recognize body language in place of words when it serves to facilitate understanding of meaning. In Italy, body language in place of words is more extensively used than at the two upper levels, probably because in Italy students' mother tongues varied more compared to Canada. On the other hand, a greater number of beginners in both countries and in comparison to the upper levels chose *never* and *don't know* across the four options. Although awareness of teacher's body language takes place, it may be more difficult for beginners than for the other levels to associate a function to it.

The following section of the survey prompted the students' opinion on whether their teacher asks them *to observe*, *to use*, and *to reproduce* body language at all. The options that received more positive answers were *observation* and *use* in Canada (N=26 and N=17) vs. *use* and *observation* in Italy (N=23 and N=22). *Reproduction* of body language followed (N=11 in Canada, N=8 in Italy). It is true, however, that about half of the students in both contexts answered *never* to each option (N=21, 23, 25 in Canada; N=28, 25, 33 in Italy). These negative answers suggest that beginner students believe they do not engage in body language while learning Italian, although they may be unaware of their body language usage. A small group of beginners in both contexts answered *don't know* to this question (N=4, 2, 4 in Canada; N=7, 10, 16 in Italy).

Beginners were then asked in what ways they use body language in class. The options that received more positive answers were (*always* and *sometimes* responses lumped together):

Canada	Italy
to help me speak N=37	to help me speak N=56
to interact with somebody; N=36 to show that I have not understood	to show that I have understood N=51

to show that I have understood	N=33	to express meaning more precisely	N=50
to indicate objects and people	N=32	to show that I have not understood	N=48

We note that, even at the beginner level, students are able to recognize and give importance to the body in helping them produce speech (Goldin-Meadow, Alibali; McNeill). We also note that, in Canada, beginner students adopt body language to facilitate their interaction with somebody whereas in Italy they use body language to express meaning more precisely. In Canada, indicating objects or people is also considered an important body language function. The two least popular options were instead:

Canada		Italy	
to memorize and learn new words	N=21	to memorize and learn new words	N=30
to avoid using my L1	N=17	to imitate the teacher, images	N=26

It is interesting that *to avoid using my L1* received only 17 positive answers in Canada vs. 40 in Italy. This difference suggests that whenever a language problem arises, beginners in Canada resort to their mother tongue more likely than to body language. English is the mother tongue of more than half of the Canadian participants in this study. Most beginners in Italy, on the other hand, do not share their mother tongue and cannot use it to the same extent in class. Beginners in Italy, then, are less concerned with imitating the teacher or images or videos. About half of the students in both contexts were in agreement with the statement concerning use of body language *because Italian requires it*.

When beginners were presented with the statements *I don't use body language because it is rude, or because it bothers me, or because it is ambiguous and less effective than words*, the negative responses were predominant in both contexts. There were very few *yes* answers and *don't know* was chosen more often in Italy (N=10, 7, 11) than in Canada (N=3, 2, 3). There were also a few unclear answers in both contexts, which could be due to the students interpreting the question as not applying to them.

Finally, it is interesting to note that in both contexts the majority of the beginners said that *in using their L1, they rely on body language* (N=33 in Canada, N=41 in Italy). This response makes Italian not very different from the students' L1. However, 38 beginners in Canada and 41 in Italy agreed that *Italian uses more body language than their L1*. This

response confirms the general view on the statement expressed across the three proficiency levels in our study. 9 beginners in Italy, but none in Canada, answered *no* to this question; 9 other beginners in Italy and 4 in Canada selected *don't know*. Although minor, the difference can be explained by taking into account that in Italy the variety of mother tongues was wider than in Canada. Some students' mother tongue may make a comparable use of body language to Italian.

As a last point, beginners were asked whether they *observe typical Italian body language outside the class*. In Italy, 38 students said *yes* vs. 7 who said *no* and 14 said *don't know*. In Canada, 31 students said *yes* vs. 8 said *no*, 2 said *don't know*, and 1 was *not clear*. The similar positive results between contexts suggest that beginners immersed in the target community do not necessarily notice Italian body language to a greater extent than beginners in Canada. On the other hand, beginners in Canada may be more aware of the distinction between Italian body language vs. non-Italian body language. This would explain the fewer number of *don't know* answers in Canada compared to Italy.

Conclusions

This study created an opportunity for 224 students of Italian in Canada and in Italy to reflect on a topic that is not sufficiently integrated in the pedagogy of second languages, that is, the role of the body in the teaching and learning of Italian as an L2. Although more and more theoretical and applied linguists are including nonverbal behavior in their studies to understand the way languages are learned and used (Abner, Cooperrider, and Goldin-Meadow), educational settings still find it challenging to put into practice the suggestions coming from the latest scientific research in a systematic manner. Verbal language occupies a dominant role in language pedagogy at the expense of multimodal approaches (Streeck, Goodwin, and LeBaron) that would not only facilitate the work in class, promote language learning, memorization and recall (Goldin-Meadow and Alibali; Kendon; McNeill). They would also make language teaching and learning reflect the natural process of language acquisition (Lantolf; Vygotsky), where people experience meaning encoding and decoding via a variety of semiotic modalities (Macedonia, Knösche; Macedonia, Klimesch, *Long-Term Effects*).

Overall, the descriptive analysis of the responses in this article shows equivalent results: learners of Italian in Canada and in Italy experience body language in class in similar ways, where a greater inte-

gration of nonverbal structures in the syllabus as well as in the acknowledgement of their role in the learning process itself would be beneficial to students (Salvato, *Awareness of the Role of the Body*). Generally, our results suggest that, in language classes, the body is kept separate from speech in contrast with the way language development occurs in naturalistic settings (Lantolf; Vygotsky). In the best scenario, the body is used to complement the limits of speech when L2 learners cannot convey or interpret meaning verbally. However present, other roles such as helping students produce speech or memorize and learn new language (Goldin-Meadow, Alibali) do not sufficiently emerge from the analysis of the data. Consequently, we claim that there is room for improvement by starting with granting to the body a position in the syllabus with verbal language.

It is a positive result to have found that, however reduced the topic of our study is in Italian L2 pedagogy, the students that we surveyed could actually identify and relate to body language functions in class. One other result was to find that the Canadian and the Italian context are not very different from one another in terms of roles attributed to body language. Learning Italian at an Italian Cultural Institute in Canada does not entail a less authentic experience than learning Italian at the university level in Italy (Salvato, *Awareness of the Role of the Body*).

The most important difference that we found between the two contexts was the fact that being immersed in the Italian language community may facilitate observation of target uses of body language. We believe that, nonetheless, students can make better observations if they are guided and prepared for this task. For example, class discussion on nonverbal behavior and the characteristics that it assumes in specific languages would help them notice more easily types, functions and meanings. On the other hand, learning Italian from a distance, in Canada in our study, may help students keep an objective view while evaluating the characteristics of a target language, alone and in comparison with other languages, including from a nonverbal point of view.

We would like to point out that besides investigating similarities and differences in the role of the body in classes of Italian in Canada and in Italy, the intent of our study was to showcase an example of class activity that is inclusive of modalities other than speech and written texts (Streeck, Goodwin and LeBaron). Although it can be challenging and novel to reflect on the contribution of the body to meaning making during an L2 class, none of the participants in our study withdrew and the majority completed the questionnaire for the most part. Some stu-

dents were more eager to participate and vocalized their interest before or after the study was completed. These students may have been more sensitive to the topic proposed. Other students may have found the task of explaining nonverbal meanings quite difficult instead. In any case, the activity proved that it is possible to bring multimodality to the classroom and that once time is allocated to it, participants are willing to explore meanings and functions of the nonverbal kind. On a number of cases, we witnessed meaningful discussions on the contents of our study.

It is our hope that the survey in our study contributed to making students become aware of the functions that the body can assume during a language class. In particular, we hope that students could see a valuable contribution of the body to their learning, that the body is an instrument that can create and, at the same time, reflect meaning (McNeill; Kendon). Moreover, we hope that participants appreciated the fact that the activity in our study established a connection between communication inside and outside the classroom. By using different codes, multimodality reduces hard boundaries between the way languages are learned in class, where attention is predominantly on verbal language, and the way languages are used outside the class, where a variety of means combine to formulate and interpret meaning.

In addition, we believe that our study promoted students' reference to their overall linguistic repertoire by inviting them to consider their language knowledge and background in the evaluation of the contents of our research. This practice is becoming more and more appreciated in applied linguistics because of the diverse linguistic profile that defines language learners in today's classes all over the world. Such a practice often takes the name of translanguaging (Cenoz, Gorter), whose pedagogical idea is to recognize, accept, and reinforce the link between languages during class time and create softer divisions between them.

We conclude this article by reporting verbatim the comments that some students contributed at the end of their questionnaire. All of them are positive in nature and hint at the interest that participants developed for the subject matter of our study. Starting with the students at the University of Padua, these are their comments:

University of Padua <i>Beginner students</i>	Comments – verbatim Per me il linguaggio del corpo è molto importante per sapere, corpo=memoria corporal visiva; parola=memoria auditiva corporal. Introduce some body language to class.
<i>Intermediate students</i>	Non è chiaro questo punto. Molto buono li altri.
	Questa è la mia prima lezione, quindi non so l'insegnante abbastanza bene.
	Questo è vero. Credo che l'italiano richiedi dei gesti, e io ho visto che quando parlo in italiano faccio più gesti che quando parlo in spagnolo o inglese.
	Era divertente, grazie.

Here follow the students' comments at the University of Venice:

University of Venice	Comments – verbatim
<i>Beginner students</i>	I think there is a language barrier that creates maybe a scientific pb. (mostly in part 2).
	Interessante.
	I have not attended this class long enough (today is only lesson 2) to be able to say with any kind of certainty.
	Grazie!
<i>Intermediate students</i>	Non ho ancora imparato niente di linguaggio del corpo in italiano.
	Informazione è molto interessante, grazie!
<i>Advanced students</i>	Questa ricerca è molto interessante secondo me. Per me è stato difficile identificare i gesti e saper in quale lingua le utilizzano. A volte quando parlo francese, uso gesti italiani e vice versa. Sono multilingue.

Finally, the comments from students at the Italian Cultural Institute in Toronto are:

Italian Cultural Institute in Toronto	Comments – verbatim
<i>Beginner students</i>	Have Italian grandparents, so even though I don't speak Italian (yet) I use body language in my L1.
	XX is a great professoressa.

	Should be after class not during our class.
	Would like to know more! Thanks.
	Very interesting!
<i>Intermediate students</i>	Grazie! Era molto interessante!
	Parlo spagnolo quindi non so qual lingua usa più linguaggio del corpo!
	Io penso che linguaggio del corpo molto importante per imparare un'altra lingua.
	Buona ricerca!
<i>Advanced students</i>	Divertente e interessante – grazie.
	Grazie.

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