

**Maria Pavesi and Elisa Ghia:  
Informal Contact with English  
A Case Study of Italian Postgraduate Students**

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Teachers and students alike cannot ignore the omnipresence of English in our daily lives. Using the Italian context as an example, authors Maria Pavesi and Elisa Ghia examine the role of informal contact with English among postgraduate students. This volume delivers a comprehensive look into language use and learning while exploring facets of informal contact with English, such as subtitling and sources of input. It simultaneously paints a picture of an Italian case study and contrasts the data with findings from other European countries. The book offers valuable insight into the changing context within Italy, as well as models of how surveys can be used to gather insight into informal exposure to English.

Chapter 1 describes the changes in attitude towards English and language learning. It goes on to discuss how the lines between English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) are changing and need further research and discussion. The authors elaborate on the popular belief that English is an easy language to learn, while ironically, many still struggle to gain proficiency in English, citing 97% percent of Italians who cannot understand European Union (EU) communications (Pavesi & Ghia, 2020). The chapter also draws conclusions regarding linguistic inequality across the EU (Piller, 2016) and uses data from surveys to depict the differences among countries.

Subsequently, Chapter 2 delves deeper into informal access to English and cites previous research that defined terms such as informal learning and incidental acquisition. A comprehensive evaluation of past research, ranging from the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) to Socket's (2014) model of Online Informal Learning of English (OILE), allows readers a deep look at the theories behind language acquisition and informal language learning. This chapter discusses the role of media in language acquisition, highlighting the contexts in various countries such as Iceland and Malta, where the benefits of informal exposure to TV series and the internet were shown through multiple studies (Caruana 2003, 2006; Brincat 2011, Arnbjörnsdóttir; Ingvarsdóttir, 2018). Additionally, an analysis of fourth graders in Iceland showed that exposure to extramural English contributed positively to vocabulary scores (Johannsdóttir, 2018). Building on the role of media, subtitling types and their benefits and role in informal learning are discussed. The rationale for the current study concludes the chapter and leads the reader to the following explanation of the Italian case study.

In Chapter 3, readers get an in-depth look at the study conducted on postgraduate students at the University of Pavia. The methodology and the design and procedure for administering the questionnaire are clearly spelled out. There are two major research questions presented. The first is “What is the extent of informal exposure to English within a sample of Italian postgraduate university students?” and the second is “What is the status of informal exposure to English through audiovisual input, especially subtitled telecinematic input, among Italian postgraduate university students?” (Pavesi & Ghia, 2020). Each research question has some additional sub-questions that clarify the aims further. While gathering information about the first research question, the questionnaire utilizes a Likert scale to allow participants to indicate the frequency with which they access English. The questionnaires that sought to answer the second research question offered multiple-choice options for participants to check, as well as open-ended questions to gather feedback. The authors wrap up the chapter by sharing background information on the participants, as well as the limitations of the questionnaire.

Chapter 4 details the sources of input of informal exposure to English and the frequency of exposure to each. The researchers categorized the types of online videos and the genres of blogs to which the participants were exposed. Participants also rated the frequency with which they were exposed to these inputs, rating on a 5-point scale that ranged from “very often” to “never.” The authors identified three factors: internet genres, telecinematic input, and personal contact, and ranked the loading of different inputs within each factor. Findings showed trends that indicated some students either preferred accessing online content or preferred watching TV series and films, and fewer students communicated in English face to face. High and low-frequency users could be found in the data, with most participants falling between the two extremes. Results show that most participants are engaged in activities that require reading or listening in English, while engaging in activities that require actual language produced are less frequent (Pavesi & Ghia, 2020).

Delving deeper into sources of input, Chapter 5 covers audiovisual input, with a focus on films, TV series, and subtitle types. From the questionnaire, 71% of those sampled indicated that they watched some form of telecinematic English (Pavesi & Ghia, 2020). The students were asked about their viewing modalities, whether they preferred original language or dubbed series and films, and why. Findings showed that most participants watched TV series and movies in English, with bimodal or interlingual subtitles being used to aid in comprehension (Pavesi & Ghia, 2020). The researchers also gathered data and compared preferences for subtitle use and language. General habits were also elicited by the questionnaire and detailed in this chapter, such as preferences as to where they watch films (home vs. the cinema), as well as preferred genres.

The general trends seen in the case study are examined in Chapter 6 and analyzed in terms of their relevance to the broader context of informal language learning. The researchers note the need for continued research on user profiles to more accurately identify the trends and corresponding learner characteristics that seemed to emerge from the data. Nonetheless, the data is compared and contrasted with other surveys and previous research completed in other European countries, notably Germany and France, where exposure to original language media occurs later due to dubbing (Kusyk 2017). The present case study showed that many students still seek to learn English as an L2 rather than viewing it as a lingua franca or necessary for communication (Pavesi & Ghia, 2020). Again, this brings to the forefront the relevance of the terms ESL, EFL, and ELF. The researchers conclude with a call for more research into the perceptions of learners toward English as they navigate these informal environments.

Summarizing the findings, the authors note the changes in informal exposure to English and the effects on formal education, learners' perspectives, and proficiency. Important questions are raised about the future of Italy's linguistic landscape and help to highlight the need for more qualitative and quantitative studies. The book goes on to reference the pandemic and the shifting attitudes towards accessing information online.

This book gives readers a thorough and detailed look at the case study conducted among university students in Italy. The contents of the book are laid out in a user-friendly way with chapters and subchapters to allow the reader to find exactly the piece of information that they are looking for. Moreover, the data presentation is clear and useful for researchers who seek to cite this book in their own book. The authors paint a clear picture of the current context in Italy and offer a well-researched overview of informal exposure to English. The comparisons of other countries allow the reader to get a general view of informal exposure to English across Western Europe. Undoubtedly, this book is a valuable resource for those in the field of language acquisition or for young researchers looking for examples of questionnaire-based studies.

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EMILY BLAIR CILLILER

University of Pannonia

[emilycilliler@gmail.com](mailto:emilycilliler@gmail.com)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-3712-3193>