BELIEFS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING:
RESEARCH ON JAPANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS STUDYING ITALIAN

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1. INTRODUCTION

The reason we decided to study the beliefs of Japanese students learning Italian is that we often encountered resistance when we tried "new things" in the classroom, especially when we lacked confidence and expertise in the new methodology. We frequently noticed a conservative attitude from students when it came to learning a foreign language.

In this study we will analize the formation of beliefs and the importance of beliefs in learning, followed by a discussion on some possible ways to deal with these beliefs. Then, we will present and analyze the results of a survey on beliefs[1] conducted at the beginning of 2016 and 2017, which will show some changes over time of beliefs of students who were attending an intensive Italian conversation course at Kyoto Sangyo University.

2. THE FORMATION OF BELIEFS

Mariani (2010: 261-262) divides the beliefs of foreign language students into four categories: language, culture, learning process and the learner himself. Williams et al. (2015: 68-73) in their work focus on three types of beliefs: beliefs about the meaning of knowledge and the way it is acquired ("epistemological beliefs"); deeply held beliefs, which people are not aware of or able to articulate ("mindsets"), such as students' belief that factors like innate talent and personality can influence language learning; and beliefs that learners develop in order to express their own personal successes and failures ("attributions"), that is students can *attribute* their success or failure to peer influence, task difficulty, ability, poor teaching, mood, circumstances, materials, use of the right strategies, the teacher, interest in the subject, liking the tasks and bad behaviour. For example, if students believe that they are doing badly because they are

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[1] The translation of the questionnaire from Japanese into English is available in the APPENDIX.

not good at languages, they will not make much effort because, in this mindset, their succes is not a factor within their control, so the results will be the same regardless of the degree of their effort.

Dilts (1999: 110) defines beliefs as "judgments and evaluations about ourselves, others and the world around us." Because beliefs act as a filter between us and the world, the same learning task "can be interpreted in a different way by different people" with "different belief systems"[2] (Mariani, 2000).

Beliefs can be empowering (useful) and limiting (useless). Therefore, people should only get rid of useless beliefs because they limit them and keep the useful beliefs that protect and support them (Katō, 2013: 154).

Torresan (2007: 3) suggests that beliefs can be based upon other people's judgments or personal experiences. This means, following Umemoto (2014: 201), that beliefs are not innate, but mutable in time because they develop in contact with various elements, such as the environment, people, and experiences we grew up with.

Similarly, Dilts (1999: 114-115) declares that plenty of beliefs "were installed in us when we were children by parents, teachers, social upbringing and the media, before we were aware of their impact or able to have a choice about them."

Concerning limiting beliefs, Dilts (1999: 117-120) observes that they often emerge to realize a positive intention, such as protection, and when we don't know how to perform something. Both kinds of beliefs – empowering and limiting – are frequently formed as a result of "feedback and reinforcement" from people who are important to us and are tied to our expectations about accomplishments and personal competencies.

Dweck (2006: 174-179) argues that our mindsets come from our parents and educators who provide messages of success, which implicitly can send other messages even if they are intended to encourage confidence and achievement. For instance, the message: "You learned that so quickly! You're so smart!" is understood to mean: "If I don't learn something quickly, I'm not smart." Or: "You're so brilliant, you got an A without even studying!" is understood to mean: "I'd better quit studying or they won't think I'm brilliant." This is why we should praise effort in-

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[2] All translations are ours.

stead of intelligence and talent. In doing so, we send the message that process and growth are more important than achievement.

For similar reasons, we should be aware of not sending messages about failure such as: "[I thought you were] the best." Instead, criticism should be constructive in order to help the student do a better job (Dweck, 2006: 180-183).

Dweck (2006: 6-7) divides the term "mindset" into two parts: 1) "fixed mindset," which is where people believe they cannot change their qualities no matter what they do, and 2) "growth mindset," which is where people believe they can improve if they devote themselves to doing so.

It's important to realize that even if people have a fixed mindset, they are not always in that mindset and that people can have different mindsets in different areas (for example, their personality can be in the fixed mindset, but their creativity can be in the growth mindset) (Dweck, 2008: 47).

Learners with a fixed mindset tend to think that a test doesn't just measure their ability, but also their intelligence. Therefore, they feel despondent if they get a low test score. Meanwhile, students with a growth mindset tend to think that a test measures an ability and not their intelligenge. Consequently, they do not feel despondent and see possibilities to change their future (Dweck, 2006: 26-27). In this way, "[m]indsets change the meaning of failure" (Dweck, 2006: 32) and "the meaning of effort" (Dweck, 2006: 39).

Educators and curricula can send implied messages to students in other ways. For example:

1) If a teacher uses only (or mainly) textbooks during his[3] lessons, it（can）send the message that a language can be learned only (or mainly) using a textbook (Torresan, 2007: 7) and that learning a language means finishing a textbook.
2) If teachers don't use audio materials, students may think they can learn everything they need to know by listening to their teacher.
3) If teachers don't pair students to let them practice speaking to each other, students may think that they can improve their speaking abilities only by talking with the teacher, rather than with their peers.

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[3] In this work the masculine is adopted in reference to females, as well.

4) If language courses are divided into morphosyntax courses, conversation courses, and so on, students may believe that languages are learned only in watertight compartments. Furthermore, the eventual introductory study of grammar may teach them that they cannot speak or listen to a language until they have memorized all of the grammar rules.[4]

5) If morphosyntax courses and vocabulary/reading/writing courses are assigned to Japanese teachers, and conversation courses to native teachers, students may think that Japanese teachers cannot/don't need to speak the language they are teaching. Alternatively, the reason could be that even if Japanese teachers can speak Italian properly, they likely will not be able to pronounce it as well as a native teacher. This means they will not be able to teach correct pronunciation, which further confirms myth no. 2.

   Morphosyntax courses are usually assigned to Japanese teachers probably because these lessons usually include translation exercises. The same rationale is used to assign teachers to vocabulary/reading/writing courses. Students may also think that native teachers cannot explain how their language works or they cannot do it in Japanese. Therefore, students may think that a teacher's explanations in Japanese and translation exercises are fundamental to learning language forms.

6) If teachers do any of the following, students may think that they are dependent on teachers and have no autonomy: think that students' answers can be only right or wrong because they don't recognize answers as the best hypothesis a student has at that time, they never let students have the last word, they answer students' questions with more information than requested, never admit they don't know the answer and don't allow students to ask questions that don't have anything to do with the topic of the day. As a result, students may not involve themselves in the lessons (Humphris, 1997).

7) If teachers have a belief about a student, this belief could affect the student and his ability to learn. For example, the student will behave like a gifted student if their teacher thinks they are gifted. On the contrary, if a teacher thinks a student is a slow learner, the student will behave as such (Dilts, 1990: xii). Raffini (quoted in Dörnyei, 2001: 91) is of like mind: he affirms that if people you respect say you

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[4] In our opinion, to strengthen the belief in Japan that it's not possible to speak Italian if first learners don't have a good mastery of its grammar, there is also the *Jitsuyō itariago kentei*, the Japanese proficiency exam of Italian. It's composed of six levels. The lowest level is "level 5" and the highest is "level 1" (there's also a "pre level 2"). Indeed, the speaking test is only from "level 2", but it's possible to take it only after passing listening, morphosyntax-vocabulary (called "writing") and writing (called "composition") tests, held together in the same day. Another factor to highlight is that the composition test is only from level 3 (Itariago kentei shiken kyōkai).

can do it, you will think you can do it. In addition, Yūki (2015a: 40-41) argues that people change their attitudes according to the roles they are assigned. This confirms Humphris's point of view (in Diodato and Humphris, 2011), which is that teachers must believe in their students because if they see them as researchers – that is as autonomous individuals who ask what they want to know, make hypotheses and compare them with classmates (Humphris, 1997) – then students will likely behave as such. With this in mind, Murphey (in Dörnyei and Murphey, 2003: 127) suggests treating students as if they were "Einsteins" and reminds us that Einstein himself failed French, probably because his teachers didn't trust him.

8) If teachers devote more time to some activities rather than other activities or always relegate some activities (for instance, writing) to homework, then students may believe that these activities are less important than others.

In our opinion, some messages sent by teachers originate from their own beliefs, which mainly originate from the grammar-translation method. This method, as Danesi (2015[2]: 14) states, is still widespread because, even if the results are unsatisfactory, it's easier and less tiring for teachers. According to Richards and Rogers (quoted in Danesi, 2015[2]: 14) many university teachers still adopt this method because foreign language teachers are specialized in literary studies rather than applied linguistics or language teaching.

Milani (2014[2]: 67) reminds us that students are continuously watching their teachers, inside and outside the classroom, and that a teacher's behaviour conveys much more than their words. In short, teachers "are constant role models" (Gill, 2015: 9). Therefore, we think that if teachers feel ashamed after making a mistake, they teach their students that making mistakes is shameful. Moreover, if a teacher refuses to answer private questions from their students, they should not be surprised if students refuse to talk about their own lives during speaking tasks.[5]

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[5] We also believe that teachers should refrain from expressing opinions about colleagues and their methodologies in front of their students. Even non-verbal communication can negatively influence the relationship between these colleagues and the students. Furthermore, teachers should refrain from providing advices to students on study methods for courses taught by their colleagues, as those other teachers might not agree. Interference in colleagues' work could result in students' confusion.

3. BELIEFS, MOTIVATIONS, AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

"[B]eliefs can shape, effect or even determine our degree of intelligenge, health, relationships,[6] creativity, even our degree of happiness and personal success" (Dilts, 1999: 114).

We cannot understimate learners' beliefs because they can undermine their motivation[7] and, as Barcelos (in Kalaja and Barcelos, 2006: 14) observed, resting on previous studies (Abraham & Vann, 1987; Erlbaum, Berg, & Dodd, 1993; Riley, 1997; Yang, 1992), influence their learning strategies,. Yang (quoted in Barcelos, 2016: 14) believes, on the other hand, that adopted strategies can also form beliefs. Woods (in Kalaja e Barcelos, 2006: 219-220) uncovered an example of adopting the wrong strategy by interviewing a teacher who said that some students spend a lot of time doing things that don't help, such as memorizing whole lists of words, which further increases their frustration. In addition, these students don't blame their lack of success on their studying method, but on the course, even if they are not doing what they were asked to do.

Williams et al. (2015: 75) explain that, as some studies showed (for example, White, 1999; Loewen, 2007) the gap between teachers and learners' beliefs concerning language learning and teaching can undermine classroom management and the rapport between teachers and students.

4. CHANGING BELIEFS

Change in beliefs is possible (Dweck, 2006: 16), but we cannot change those belonging to other people: we "can only lead people to change their own beliefs" (Dilts, 1990: 23). Beliefs are not reality, but rather they replace reality. Therefore, people do not change their minds even if there is evidence to do so. This is the reason why changing beliefs through argumentation is a waste of time (Dilts, 1990: 9-10). Similarly, Frijda and Mesquita (in Frijda, Manstead e Bem, 2000: 45) declare that a belief may not change even if evidence is provided to contradict it because the belief just

[6] Beer (quoted in Dweck, 2008: 163) in a study found as follows: "Shyness harmed the social interactions of people with the fixed mindset but did not harm the social relations of people with the growth mindset."
[7] Mariani (2006: 22) notices that if a student believes he doesn't have a facility for a subject and then that that subject is too difficult, he will not be motivated to study it.

ignores or dismisses that evidence; therefore, arguing is useless. In addition, Luzi Catizone (2010) states: "We gain experience when we go through a situation, less when we just observe it from the outside and even less if someone describes it." Consequently, even if we explain the pedagogical reasons behind our method, it's difficult for students to change their minds. Furthermore, as Humphris (in Diodato and Humphris, 2011) states, a teacher who explains why students should do something looks insecure because it seems like he is trying to win their approval.

Yūki (2015b: 82) asserts that human beings tend to be cautious when they cannot predict what is going to happen. They will become less cautious if they have to deal with the same thing several times and the possibility will increase that they will like the new thing. As Humphris describes, it is helpful to announce the new activity to the students before it begins, so they can feel more confident (Humphris in Torresan and Derosas, 2009). We would add that by doing so learners can concentrate on the tasks rather than feel worried about what is going to happen.

In our opinion, it is also important to help students carry out new activities in a way that bypasses their presumed beliefs. In other words, it's fundamental to psychologically prepare learners to carry out an activity, and to do this we have to explain what we expect them to do and show them that what we are asking is feasible. This is very important because many students think that every outcome is "doing it perfectly"; so they become frustrated when they have to work with authentic materials or talk for long periods of time. By applying the NLP's[8] Sleight of Mouth[9]

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[8] The acronym stands for Neuro-linguistic Programming, "a method of programming the brain's actions, thoughts and feelings through the five senses and language" (Umemoto, 2014: 17). In other words, "NLP examines the influence that language has on our mental programming and the other functions of our nervous systems" and "the way in which our mental programming and nervous systems shape and are reflected in our language and language patterns" (Dilts, 1999: 8).

[9] Composed of 14 patterns, it's mainly the art of saying the right thing "at the right time" in order to create powerful and positive effects. Contrarily, the wrong thing "at the wrong time" may have negative effects (Dilts, 1999: 6). Its success also depends on the right tone of voice and the degree of rapport between the speaker and the listener (Dilts, 1999: 311).

The patterns were mainly modelled on the language patterns of influential people from the past, "such as Socrates, Karl Marx, Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Adolph Hitler, Milton Erickson and Jesus of Nazareth." These patterns mostly influence beliefs by "verbal reframes" (Dilts, 1999: back cover).

approach for "another outcome" pattern,[10] teachers can clarify for students what they are supposed to do. For example, a teacher can say: "When you read the text you don't have to understand it all. Just skip the parts you don't understand."[11] In other words, teachers need to switch students' presumed outcomes to "discovering something new," "learning," or "exploring," so what would have once been seen as a failure, in their views of previous outcomes, becomes a success with the new outcomes (Dilts, 1999: 26-27). We should remind students of these new outcomes the first few times we propose a new activity, and every time thereafter, as needed.

When a student says that an activity is difficult, we can use the pattern called "redefining" to find a word or phrase with a different effect (Dilts, 1999: 49-51). For example, the teacher can say to that student "I would say it's challenging." Or "It means that there is a lot of new things to learn." As an alternative, it becomes possible to use the "another outcome" pattern once again: when a student says, "It's difficult" he is implicitly saying, "I cannot do it!" The teacher might say to the student: "I know it is, just try!" In this case, it would be better to add words that clearly show the student that the teacher is acknowledging their opinion and their feeling. The sentence "Just try!" could be interpreted as: "It's not true. Shut up and try!" which would have a negative effect on the student. Finally, experience will show what pattern is most suitable for certain situations or people.

If the teacher adopts these strategies, students will think they can do the new activity after all, and with continued success they will reverse their earlier beliefs. The learner's new experiences will update or correct their old beliefs (Dilts, 1999: 209-210). However, teachers should not forget that "change isn't like surgery. Even when you change, the old beliefs aren't just removed like a worn-out hip or knee and replaced with better ones. Instead, the new beliefs take their place alongside the old ones, and as they become stronger, they give you a different way to think, feel, and act" (Dweck, 2006: 214). In other words, it's normal for students to talk and act incongruosly: it's their old beliefs peeking out.

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[10] Katō (2013: 152) states that, when it comes to changes in beliefs, it's valuable to understand the theory of Sleight of Mouth, but love and humour are important, too.

[11] This example is ours.

Before using the Sleight of Mouth technique and before every activity, it's fundamental that the teacher believes deeply in his method and that he acts coherently: a student can work profitably even if he doesn't agree with the teacher's method as long as his teacher is self confident (Humphris, in Diodato e Humphris, 2011). Therefore, teachers should always display a confident and relaxed attitude in the classroom. Furthermore if teachers, for example, really believe in the communicative approach then all their lessons, from the beginning to the end, should be oriented to the communicative approach. If they use the communicative approach only for some lessons or as part of a lesson, the learners will think that it is not essential.

Furthermore, teachers should be more flexible with the activities at the beginning (Guastalla, 1999), can adapt them,[12] limit their use,[13] let students discuss their beliefs as a subject of a role play[14] in order to get the students to open up to this method and so on.[15]

Despite all of this, some students will still object to this method. If this happens, the teacher should just listen. The students will feel acknowledged if the teachers show that they understand what their students want

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[12] For examples see Humphris, C. (2006) "Adattamento o compromesso?", in *Bollettino Dilit*, Dilit International House, Rome, 2006/2: http://formazione.dilit.it/articoli/1206538521.AdattamentoOCompromesso.htm?height=400&width=600&keepThis=true&TB_iframe=true (website consulted on 2016/11/15), Humphris, C. (2003): "Perché portare un testo scritto in classe? Una critica all'articolo 'La classe monolingue'", in *Bollettino Dilit*, Dilit International House, Rome, 2003/1, http://formazione.dilit.it/articoli/PerchePortareUnTestoScrittoInClasse.htm?height=400&width=600&keepThis=true&TB_iframe=true (website consulted on 2016/11/15), Humphris, C. (1990) "Come insegnare una lingua straniera a principianti che studiano un'ora e mezzo la settimana?", in *Bollettino Dilit*, Dilit International House, Rome, 1990/1, http://formazione.dilit.it/articoli/ComeInsegnareUnaLinguaStranieraAPrincipianti.htm?height=400&width=600&keepThis=true&TB_iframe=true (website consulted on 2016/11/27) and Anzivino, F. (2016) "Educare alla revisione tra pari", in *Bollettino Dilit*, Dilit International House, Rome, 2016/2: 1-2.

[13] For an example see Humphris, quoted in Amoruso, M. (2009) "Una *Ricostruzione di conversazione* finita male. Quando al metodo dell'insegnante l'alunno non corrisponde", in: *Bollettino Dilit*, Dilit International House, Rome, 2009/1, http://formazione.dilit.it/articoli/1257257192.Marcello%20Amoruso%20-%20RC.htm?height=400&width=600&keepThis=true&TB_iframe=true (website consulted on 2016/11/25).

[14] For an example see Luzi Catizione, R. (2010).

[15] For other examples see Ota, M. (2017) "Luoghi comuni tra gli studenti e alcuni stratagemmi per fargli cambiare idea", in *Bollettino Dilit*, Dilit International House, Rome, 2017/1.

and it's possible that the acknowledgment will be enough for them (Dumonteil-Kremer, 2016: 39). According to Catizone (2003), in some cases, the real cause of their objections is not only their beliefs about language learning, but rather the stress that comes from other kinds of problems, such as family or economic problems. Once again, if teachers listen carefully to what their students have to say, the students will be at their ease and if the teacher can help them to solve their problems, their objections to the method will disappear, too.

5. COMPARISON OF SOME STUDENTS' BELIEFS OVER ONE YEAR

The aim of the survey was to show differences in students' beliefs according to the length of their experiences as university students studying Italian. In other words, the aim was to trace a change in beliefs.

The survey was carried out in late January 2016 and late January 2017 (in both cases, it was the penultimate lesson before the end of the academic year) with 13 students from an intensive Italian conversation class in the Faculty of Foreign Studies at Kyoto Sangyo University. The students studied in 2016 were the same as in 2017.

Question no. 1: *Do you think you have to be gifted in order to learn Italian?*

In 2016, 46.1% of students answered that it's important to be gifted, but other factors, such as as devotion and motivation have the same value. In 2017 although this is still the most popular answer (38.4%), there's an increase of students who think that talented people get better results than untalented people (from 23.1% to 30.8%). Only 7.7%, both in 2016 and 2017, said only talent was necessary. Meanwhile, 23.1%, both in 2016 and 2017, said anybody could learn Italian.

Question no. 2: *In order to learn Italian well, which one has more responsibility, the teacher or the student?*

In 2016, 30.8% of students said the teacher and the student are both responsible in the same way, and another 30.8% answered that the student has more responsibility. In 2017, 38.4% thought that they have equal responsibility and the percentage of those who believed that the student has more responsibility decreased to 23.1%. In 2016, accord-

ing to 23.1% of students, the teacher is especially responsible: we had the same result in 2017. In 2016, 0% of students said the teacher was completely responsible, but in 2017 the percentage increased (7.7%). Finally, in 2016, 15.3% of students said the students were completely responsible, but it decreased to 7.7% in 2017. The extreme positions received the lowest percentages in both years.

Question no. 3: *What kind of things should a teacher do?*

In 2016, the survey results show that students believe getting students interested in the course and making them feel at ease was the most important thing (26.6%) followed by teaching grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation and to be a language model that they can follow (both 17.6%). In 2017, most of them still said the teacher should encourage interest in the course and make them feel at ease (32.3%), followed by teaching grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation and being a language model (both 14.7%).

In 2016, students were less concerned with correcting mistakes (11.8%), stimulating students to use Italian as much as possible (11.8%), choosing materials and activities (8.8%), assigning homework (2.9%) and promoting autonomous study (2.9%). None of the students said the teacher should evaluate student achievement, train his students or added a different answer in the survey's free response area. In 2017, students gave less importance to choosing materials and activities (11.8%), promoting autonomous study (8.8%), correcting mistakes (5.9%), evaluating student achievement (5.9%) and encouraging students to use Italian as much as possible (5.9%). Nobody chose giving homework, training students or added a different answer in the survey's free response area.

The results were similar in both years, although one can see that after one year more students gave greater importance to autonomous study and choosing materials and activities, and fewer students chose teacher's correction.

One student's answers were excluded because, in 2016, he gave more than three answers when the maximum number of replies allowed was three (see APPENDIX).

Question no. 4: *What kind of things should a student do?*

In 2016 students said they should do a lot of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation exercises (27.2%), followed by studying regularly and hard (18.2%) and paying attention during lessons (15.2%). Looking for chances to have contact with Italian outside of lessons and using Italian as much as possible were both deemed important by 12.1% of students. Furthermore, 6.1% said participating in lessons actively was important and another 6.1% said learning autonomously was important. Only 3% said students should use their strong points to improve their weak points. No students chose self-evaluation, doing homework or gave any other suggestions. In 2017 the results were slightly different. Most of students chose having contact with Italian outside the classroom (20.8%), followed by grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation exercises (17.6%), using Italian as much as possible (17.6%) and participating in lessons actively (14.7%). Only a few students gave importance to paying attention (8.8%), using strong points to improve weak points (8.8%), studying regularly and hard (5.9%), self evaluating (2.9%) and studying autonomously (2.9%). Nobody chose doing homework or gave any other suggestions. Once again, in 2017 students have a more progressive vision than in 2016.

One student's answers were exluded because, in 2016, he gave more than three answers when the maximum number of replies allowed was three (see APPENDIX).

Question no. 5: *In order to learn Italian more effectively and faster, is it better to get through activities by oneself or with other students?*

In 2016 most of students said it depends on the activity (46.1%). A smaller but significant group of students chose to work all together with the teacher (23.1%) and another one in pairs or small groups (23.1%) , followed by working in groups (7.7%). Nobody chose to work alone.

In 2017, 69.2% said it depends on the activity. Only 15.4% chose to work all together with the teacher and another 15.4% chose to work in pairs or small groups. Nobody chose to work alone or in groups.

Question no. 6: *When should students start using Italian?*

In 2016, 53.8% of students chose "[a]s soon as possibile, considering the level," followed by "[a]fter learning fundamental grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation" (38.5%) and "[s]oon, even if they make mistakes, cannot understand or cannot be understood" (7.7%).

In 2017, 38.5% chose "[a]fter learning fundamental grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation" and another 38.5% chose "[s]oon, even if they make mistakes, cannot understand or cannot be understood." "As soon as possibile, considering the level" was chosen by 23%.

We can notice that after one year, although the percentage of students who believe that they should start using Italian "[a]fter learning fundamental grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation" didn't change at all, many students chose the more challenging "[s]oon, even if they make mistakes, cannot understand or cannot be understood." It's interesting that, except in one case, the students who chose "[a]fter learning fundamental grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation" were the same one year later. It means that for students who held the less drastic belief "[a]s soon as possibile, considering the level" the change was easier.

Question no. 7: *What is a mistake?*

In 2016, 46.2% of students said a mistake means they need to do the exercises and review the lessons and the same percentage of students said mistakes are natural and impossible to avoid. Only 7.6% said mistakes reveal a lack of studying and nobody was so pessimistic to think of mistakes as a sign of failure.

In 2017, 53.8% said mistakes are inevitable and 38.5% said mistakes mean they need to do the exercises and revise the lessons. Finally, 7.7% said mistakes mean failure and nobody said that mistakes reveal a lack of studying.

Question no. 8: *Should the teacher correct mistakes?*

To begin, 46.1% of students in 2016 said that mistakes should be corrected by the teacher but at the right time. 38.5% said teachers should

always and promptly correct mistakes. Only 7.7% said teachers should make no corrections but should instead call the student's attention to the mistake. Another 7.7% said that calling the student's attention to the mistake is unnecessary because someday they will be able to use Italian with no mistakes naturally. Nobody said it depends on the activity.

In 2017 most of students said teachers should correct mistakes but at the right time (84.6%). Meanwhile, 7.7% said teachers should make no corrections but should instead call the student's attention to the mistake. Another 7.7% said it depends on the activity. Nobody said teachers should correct mistakes always and promptly or they should not correct mistakes because eventually they will be able to use Italian correctly.

Overall, it seems that in 2017 students are less conservative than in 2016 in some respects. When it comes to the methods and roles of teachers and students, they are still conservative; however, they said, since 2016, having fun during lessons is an overriding factor. Students' vision of the teacher is anchored to tradition; therefore, it is a deeply rooted belief that will require a significant amount of time to change. This means that beliefs are not all the same. Some beliefs are less susceptible to change than others and confirms Williams et al.'s point of view (2015: 63): "It is more accurate to think of beliefs as existing on a continuum from 'slight hunch' to 'firm conviction'."

The surveys showed that some beliefs are more popular than others, but it is also clear that students of the same class don't have the same beliefs. Furthermore, looking at the answers given by each student, we can see that in some cases there is a regression of the beliefs (see Mariani, n.d.: 6-7).

6. CONCLUSIONS

A teacher could be tempted to betray his methodology and satisfy the students' requests especially if he is novice and insecure about his methodology. This should be avoided because it's unprofessional and shows that the teacher has failed to lead students along the path that he consid-

ers to be the best, even if it goes against students' beliefs. Furthermore, as Milani (2014[2]: 22) pointed out, to gain and keep students' respect, a teacher should be consistent. This is why we think that if the teacher gives in to this temptation, he will show his insecurity and lose his students' trust. The best thing to do is to follow the method that the teacher trusts and adopt the strategies described in this work in order to engage the students in the activities, thus bypassing their beliefs.

One more important element to think about is the preparation of the standard questionnaires usually handed out to students by the institution at the end of the course. In the author's experience, there are some questions to avoid because students will answer according to their beliefs, which provide unreliable information.[16] Questions such as *Do you think the teacher's method was suitable for you?*; *Do you think the teaching materials were suitable for you?*; *Was the course difficult?*;[17] and *Was the engagement suitable for you?* could send the following messages:

1. There is no need for any language teaching knowledge in order to choose the right method, teaching materials etc. and
2. If a student does not agree with a teacher's method or does not like the teaching materials, he can ask to change it because they have paid for the course and has the right to get what he wants.

The only use for such questions is probably that students have the chance to express their opinions, which is important because if students know the teacher is listening carefully they can change their attitudes (see

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[16] Depending on the circumstances, the students' answers to the questionnaire cannot be completely reliable because, in addition to their beliefs, they also depend on their motivations to study, personal likes or dislikes for the teacher, personality, diplomacy and revenge (for example if the student got a bad mark). A student could even persuade other students to write similar opinions in order to achieve his goal.

Another issue to consider is if students are required to write their names on questionnaires. If questionnaires are anonymous, on the one hand students will feel free to express their opinions with no hesitation, but on the other hand , as Saitō (2015: 240) notices, anonimity could generate a drop in responsibility.

Furthermore, in order to overcome shock if they receive a bad grade, they may blame the course and/or the teacher beforehand so that it will not be their fault (Yūki, 2015b: 62-63). Finally, students sometimes do not fill in the questionnaire accurately just because they consider it a nuisance.

[17] We believe that the distinction between "difficult things" and "easy things" does not exist because it is not objective; there are simply some things a person is or is not able to perform.

supra 4). In this case, the questionnaire should not be handed out at the end of the course when it is too late to help the student. Nevertheless, Benson and Lor (quoted in Ryan and Mercer, 2012: 80) stated, regarding the use of questionnaires in beliefs research within applied linguistics, there is a danger that questionnaires make students think about matters that actually are not meaningful to them. In our opinion, this could not only be the case of questionnaires used in research, but also occur with questionnaires handed out at the end of a course.

It is important to decide the aim of the questionnaire and then an expert in language teaching should choose the questions carefully according to that aim. In any case, an institution should not use the answers to these questions to evaluate its teachers because, as we saw, students answer according to their beliefs and other factors. Even if they say they do not like something it doesn't mean that it is wrong or useless, or, worse, that their teacher is incompetent.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire for a study on beliefs related to learning Italian[18]

Date: _____

Subject: _____

1. D*o you think you have to be gifted in order to learn Italian?*

a. Yes, it's a special talent

b. Yes, talented people get better results than untalented people

c. Yes, but other factors have the same importance (for example, zeal and motivation)

d. No, everybody can become skilled at Italian

2. *In order to learn Italian well, which one has more responsibility, the teacher or the student?*

a. The teacher

b. Both, but especially the teacher

c. Both, in the same way

d. Both, but especially the student

e. The student

3. *What kinds of things should a teacher do?* (Please, choose three answers at the most)

a. Choose teaching materials and activities for students

b. Teach grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation

c. Correct mistakes

d. Evaluate student achievements

e. Give homework

f. Be a good Italian language model

g. Motivate students and make them feel at ease

h. Encourage students to use Italian as much as possibile

i. Train students

j. Promote autonomous study

k. Other (please specify: _____)

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[18] Adapted from Mariani, L., (n.d.: 12-13).

4. *What kind of things should a student do?* (Please, choose three answers at the most)

a. Have contact with Italian outside the classroom

b. Study grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation exercises

c. Study regularly and hard

d. Concentrate during lessons

e. Participate in lessons actively

f. Use Italian as much as possible

g. Self evaluate

h. Do homework

i. Use strong points to improve weak points

j. Study autonomously

k. Other (please specify: _____)

5. *In order to learn Italian more effectively and faster, is it better to get through activities by oneself or with other students?*

a. By oneself

b. With the whole class, teacher included

c. It depends on the activity

d. It's fine to work with other students, but only in pairs or small groups

e. In groups

6. *When should students start to use Italian?*

a. After learning fundamental grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation

b. As soon as possible, considering the level

c. Soon, even if they make mistakes, cannot understand or cannot be understood

7. *What is a mistake?*

a. Proof of failure

b. Proof that the student hasn't studied enough

c. Proof that further exercises and review are needed

d. Something normal and unavoidable

8. *Should the teacher correct mistakes?*

a. Yes, always and promptly

b. Yes, but the method of correcting mistakes should change according to the activity (for example, the teacher shouldn't stop students when they are talking to correct their mistakes)

c. No, but the teacher should call the student's attention to their mistakes so they make improvements

d. No, as time goes by the students will learn to use Italian correctly

e. It depends on the activity

Thank you for your cooperation.