Stereotypes and prejudices in the Italian L2 class. A conversation analysis of their emergence in teachers' talk

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Abstract
The paper explores teachers' interactional uses of stereotypes and prejudices in the Italian L2 classroom. Drawing from video-ethnographic research in a voluntary association, this study adopts a discursive approach to stereotypes and prejudices, analyzing their pragmatic uses during classroom activities. Even though previous literature has mostly argued against these social devices, the analysis illustrates that teachers make use of stereotypes and prejudices to pursue their local aims in the classroom. Specifically, teachers mobilize stereotyped talk to achieve specific social and didactic aims (e.g., to explain a lexical items or to prompt laughter). In the discussion, we critically consider the risks and opportunities of this kind of practice and advance few implications for teachers' professional practice, arguing for the relevance of video-based teacher training.
Keywords: Italian L2 class; classroom interaction; teacher talk; stereotypes; prejudices

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1. Introduction

In contemporary heterogeneous communities, people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds come into contact in a multiplicity of different contexts. This increasing diversity has been discussed by several scholars, who outlined the pedagogical challenges and opportunities of the co-presence of people with different backgrounds (Corsi, 2017; Rubini, 2022). Specifically, a perspicuous case of contemporary heterogeneous contexts are second language (L2) classes, which are attended by participants from various

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geographical areas, who try to learn the language of the host community. The diversity of these contexts questions individuals' normal, ordinary way of dealing with other people: taken-for-granted cultural assumptions, values, and practices are not necessarily shared with the other interlocutors. In order to make sense of this diversity, individuals resort thus to their previous lay knowledge, which is mobilized to interpret other people's behavior and to predict how they are likely to behave.

This article focuses on a specific aspect of this knowledge, namely *stereotyped categories* into which people are fitted according to some 'affordances' of their persona (e.g., phenotypical characteristics or dress codes). Specifically, the study considers an Italian L2 class in a voluntary association, highlighting the teacher's local deployment of stereotypes and prejudices during whole-class interactions: the analysis illustrates how teachers make use of stereotypes and prejudices to accomplish various social and didactic aims in the classroom. In previous literature, stereotypes and prejudices have been often approached in a theoretical fashion; there is a relative paucity of studies that consider how they are concretely used in sequences of social interaction (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Caronia, 2002). As a result of this lack of empirical research, these social devices are often seen as something to avoid by all means. For instance, several scholars have advocated the complete avoidance of stereotypes and prejudices in order to achieve an 'authentic' understanding of each unique student (Tran *et al.,* 1994; see below). However, the sequential analysis of this study offers a more nuanced understanding of these social devices, underlining their 'pragmatic' functions from the emic perspective of teachers and students. Setting out from the recognition that stereotypes and prejudices are also *resources* that participants make use of to pursue their local aims, the study highlights some of the possible bearings of this practice in the classroom, such as (a) the achievement of specific didactic purposes, but also (b) the silent ratification of a culturally-specific worldview, and (c) the ascription of a specific identity to some students.

The study has two main aims. First, it aims to provide a detailed description of how stereotypes and prejudices are linguistically deployed and interactionally used in the classroom, highlighting the various social aims that participants attempt to achieve through their use. Second, the study aims to consider the risks and opportunities of this kind of practice, outlining thereby some implications for teachers' professional practice. As regards the latter, it is argued that video-based training is a powerful tool to help teachers reflect on their own practices in the classroom (Fedeli and Rossi, 2017).

2. Theoretical background and previous research

The article draws from Vygotskyan approaches to learning and development, according to which learning processes are always mediated by semiotic resources, first and foremost language and its use in interaction (Vygotsky, 2012[1934]; Wertsch, 2007). Moreover, the study sets out from the idea that language and cultural schemata are inextricably intertwined: any language (or language variety) is imbued with the beliefs, ideologies, values, categories, motives, and representations of a specific community (Duranti, 1997), i.e. it encodes a polyphony of different 'voices' and perspectives. When individuals *use* language, they repeat and reproduce these various voices and perspectives without being necessarily conscious of them (Bakhtin, 1984). In this regard, sociocultural knowledge is reproduced and transmitted through language use. The very fact of using certain words 'presentifies' a world of meaning which is bound to a specific community. Notably, the cultural 'ladeness' of language use is a matter of continuous negotiation: in and through social interaction, participants might silently ratify these cultural schemata, but also challenge, resist, and transform their features. Therefore, by using language in specific contexts participants ratifies and re-construct a social world which is endowed with cultural meaning.

This is also true for social interactions that take place in institutional contexts devoted to language learning. In this respect, learning a language also means to be introduced to a specific social world, i.e. to a certain way of 'seeing things': together with *linguistic* knowledge, learners also acquire *cultural* knowledge. Setting out from this recognition, several authors have underlined how (L2) learning processes are strictly intertwined with participants' ideologies, cultural sense-making devices, values, and identities (Duff, 2012).

For instance, in the process of language learning, students are also introduced to specific ways of dividing and 'ordering' humans into social categories, and to the set of attributes that are (stereotypically) associated with them. The next section outlines previous research on stereotypes and prejudices and details the basic tenets of the theoretical framework adopted in this study: the discursive approach to stereotypes and prejudices, i.e. their being conceived of as socially molded and discursively deployed in interaction.

2.1 Stereotypes and prejudices in talk

'Classic' literature on stereotypes and prejudices has conceived them as cognitive phenomena that influence and shape our ways of approaching reality and dealing with other individuals. Broadly, these phenomena are bound to a process of *categorization*: surrounded by a chaotic flux of stimuli that hit our

perceptual systems, we use schemata and categories to make sense and reduce the complexity of an otherwise overwhelming environment. This process of categorization implies thus a certain degree of simplification, and allows us to be 'functional' in everyday life. Notably, this constant categorization applies to other humans as well, who are divided and 'ordered' according to some specific features of their persona. *Stereotypes* are inscribed in this constant categorization of the world 'out there', since they can be seen as shared beliefs regarding a specific social category (e.g., women, hunter-gatherers, bank clerks): we routinely associate specific attributes and characteristics to these categories, which are thus culturally- and often morally-laden (Tajfel 1982). Notably, we might also ascribe this set of characteristics to all individuals that are perceived to be part of a certain category: these *prejudices* are used to make sense of others' behaviors (e.g. a specific behavior will be 'explained' and understood in relation to a certain category) and to make predictions about how people are likely to behave (Allport, 1954).

This focus on the cognitive and interpretive role of stereotypes and prejudices was extended and re-specified by a parallel stream of research, which approached them as primarily *discursive* phenomena (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; van Dijk, 1984; Billig, 1985). These scholars contested a view of stereotypes and prejudices as fixed and enduring features of our way of approaching the world. Rather than on mechanical cognitive processes, they focused on how social categories are "actively constructed and drawn on for many different actions" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, 137). From this perspective, stereotypes and prejudices are thus *resources* that participants might variously deploy in interaction. Drawing from these clusters of potentially inconsistent features and expectations, individuals might select and make relevant specific elements that help them accomplish certain goals. Notably, a central way to indexically 'presentify' specific social categories (and the attributes that are associated with them) is *language*. For instance, lexical and grammatical structures might be indexical of specific categories and attributes, which can be made relevant by the very fact of using certain words. This might be evident in address terms (e.g., honorifics, Burdelski, 2013), in reference terms for specific categories (e.g., 'hotrodder' vs. 'teenager driver'; Sacks 1979), or in the attributes that are implicitly or explicitly made relevant in relation to a specific category (e.g., 'unwilling to learn', Cekaite, 2012). As Sacks (1992) pointed out when discussing membership categorization devices, even the choice between a range of available reference and address terms is meaningful as it indexes the speaker's stance toward the addressee or the referred person, accomplishing thereby *identity work*. In a few words, social category terms are condensed descriptions and, as any description, they are constitutive of what they are meant to merely denote.

By variously using these reference and address terms, individuals steadily construct and negotiate their membership to specific social groups as well as that of the person they are talking to or about (Antaki and Widdiecombe, 1998). Stereotypes and prejudices are bound to this continuous interactional work of claiming and ascribing membership to various social groups: during their daily interactions, participants might orient to specific features of an individual (out of the many possible) that *construct* him/her as a member of a certain social group. The self or other ascription to specific social groups can possibly result in a heated negotiation around participants' local identity: together with an individual's claim regarding who herself or another person is (or not), crucial will be how this claim is acknowledged, negotiated, or challenged by the other interlocutors.

As it amounts to manage the presentation of self and other in the social scene, this negotiation around local identities might variously impact on the learning processes, given the unbreakable socio-cognitive entanglement at stake. Not surprisingly indeed, stereotypes and prejudices have also been analyzed in relation to (L2) classroom activities.

2.2 Stereotypes and prejudices in the (L2) classroom

In our contemporary societies, schools can be seen as *diverse environments* (Zoletto, 2012) which are attended by a multitude of individuals who are different in multiple and intersecting ways. In this regard, schools are perspicuous *loci* to observe the local construction and negotiation of stereotypes and prejudices based on supposed cultural and linguistic differences. This local construction often revolves around the teacher, who is the main responsible for classroom activities (Caronia and Nasi, 2021).

Faced with students' disparate cultural and linguistic backgrounds, teachers rely on their previous lay and professional knowledge to make sense of this diversity. Teachers' reliance on this lay knowledge has been variously labelled in previous literature (e.g., teachers' "subjective theories", Dann, 1990), which has highlighted its pedagogical significance and its bearing for the unfolding of classroom activities. First, by making relevant these cultural schemata, teachers silently ratify and reproduce them from their authoritative, institutionally-sanctioned position. Second, teachers' underlying cultural orientations shape and influence their local choices in the classroom (e.g., his/her interpretations and expectations regarding 'foreign' students).The latter point bears far-reaching consequences, as teachers' orientations to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds are also *constitutive* of diversity. For instance, by referring to a student in certain ways, by adopting specific ways of speaking, or by making relevant characteristics that are connected to his/her ethnic origin,

teachers discursively *construct* the student as different (Pugliese, 2005). In this regard, teachers oscillate at times between approaches that ignore students' disparate backgrounds and approaches that overexpose them.

Acknowledging these potential problems, several authors have variously promoted the avoidance of stereotypes and prejudices in the classroom. These studies have shown how students' ascription to fixed social categories might variously influence their academic achievements (Riley and Ungerleider, 2012; Rees, 2002) and have advanced the avoidance of stereotypes and prejudices in order to achieve an 'authentic' understanding of the Other (Gabrielli *et al.,* 2020, Tran, Young, Di Lella, 1994, McGrady and Reynolds, 2013). These studies have certainly enriched our understanding of the dangers of an acritical deployment of stereotyped talk in the classroom. Nevertheless, there is a relative paucity of studies that consider how stereotypes and prejudices might be also used as interactional resources to accomplish specific didactic aims in the classroom. For instance, it has been argued that cultural (or other kinds of) distinctions might be mobilized *when relevant to the pedagogical goal of a specific phase of the lesson* (Caronia and Bolognesi, 2015). This study in inscribed in this latter perspective: the analysis will show how teachers might use stereotypes and prejudices to achieve specific didactic aims in the L2 class, ratifying thereby a specific worldview and negotiating students' local identities in the classroom.

3. Setting and Methodology[2]

The sequences under scrutiny are part of a broader corpus of social interactions that were video-recorded in a voluntary association in a city in Northern Italy. The aim of this institution is to promote migrant people's social inclusion into the Italian society, and offers thus free Italian L2 courses. These courses are attended by migrant adults, who are divided according to their level of competence. Apart from that, the institution categorizes students according to their national origin: when they start attending the lessons, students fill in a form in which they are asked to state their country of origin.

Teachers work on a voluntary basis and have disparate didactic experience and expertise; for instance, some teachers had taught Italians for several years in various institutions, whereas other teachers had never taught a second language before. The analysis considers two L2 classes (Class A and Class B; see Fig. 1 and 2). In Class A, a single teacher teaches Italian at an advanced

[2] Data were collected thanks to the great work of Elisa Sias.

level. In Class B, two co-present teachers teach Italian at a basic level; this class is exclusively attended by women. The lessons take place every two weeks.

Fig. 1 - Class A

Fig. 2 - Class B

3.1 Methodology

Data were collected during a video-ethnography that lasted several months and involved semi-participant observation, unstructured interviews with members, and video-recordings. Specifically, in the field the researcher managed to video-record 16 hours of social interactions in the classrooms; these interactions were then transcribed (Jefferson, 2004) and analyzed with an approach that combines the micro-analytic instruments of Conversation Analysis and the use of ethnographic information (Maynard, 2006). This combined approach has been extensively used for the analysis of classroom interaction and has proven fruitful to highlight the various interactional resources that participants make use of. The analysis proceeded inductively, as videos and transcripts were repeatedly viewed to identify relevant phenomena. All interactional occurrences of stereotypes and prejudices were selected and

analyzed with the local research team; the two excerpts presented in this article are emblematic of teachers' different ways of deploying stereotyped talk during the lesson. In particular, in the analysis we distinguish between 'implicit' and 'explicit' stereotypes and prejudices: the former regards participants' orientations to stereotypes and/or prejudices that are not explicitly formulated, but might be inferred from specific interactional cues (section 4.1); the latter regards participants' explicit reference to stereotypes and/or prejudices in interaction (section 4.2).

4. Analysis

The analytical part of the article consists in two excerpts in which the teacher deploys a stereotype or a prejudice in order to achieve her local aims in the classroom. The excerpts are divided according to the analytical distinction mentioned above (implicit vs. explicit) and according to their pragmatic and didactic function. As regards the latter, teachers make use of stereotypes in relation to two main didactic aims: first, they use stereotyped categories in an attempt to make students laugh, thereby engaging them and creating a relaxed atmosphere; second, they use stereotypes to support their lexical explanations, i.e. to explain difficult words and concepts in Italian.

4.1 Teachers' implicit orientation to stereotypes

Ex. 1 was recorded in Class B, which was attended by women with a basic competence in the L2. The interaction involves two teachers and Uma, a woman who comes from Iran. As we join the interaction, the teachers have been trying to explain an Italian word, *sdegnarsi* (i.e., 'take offense').

Excerpt 1

T1, T2 = teachers

1	T1	è un po' difficile eh
		it's a little bit difficult eh
2	T2	è un concetto [difficile
		it's a difficult [concept
3	T1	[però adesso bisogna che noi vi
		[but now we need to
4		(.) pressiamo un attimo perché se no:=
		(.) press you a little otherwise:=
5	T2	=tu sei religiosa. sei- credi in un dio tu?
		=you are religious. you are- do you believe in a god?
6	Uma	**ehm (.) muslim**
7	T2	mh (.) <se parlano male del tuo dio>
		mh (.) <if they talk bad about your god>
8		tu ti sdegni! non possono! (.)
		you take offense! they are not allowed! (.)
9		parlare male di dio (.) mh?
		to talk bad about god (.) mh?
10	Uma	°sì°=
		°yes°=
11	T2	=non possono (.) no? (.)e tu ti sdegni!
		=they are not allowed (.) right? (.) and you take offense!
12	T1,T2	(3) *((look at Uma))*
13	T2	no- non ti preoccupare andiamo adagio
		do- don't worry let's take it slow *((laughing))*
14		(.) tu sei religiosa e sei credente (.)
		(.) you are religious and you believe (.)
15		<se ti offendono se offendono la tua religione>
		<if they offend you if they offend your religion>
16		tu ti sdegni
		you take offense
17	Uma	sì=
		yes=
18	T2	=e dici no non è possibile
		=and you say no it's not possible
19		io mi offendo (.) e mi arrabbio vero?
		i take offense (.) i get angry right?
20	Uma	*((nods))*

Teachers have been trying to explain the expression 'take offense', but Uma seems to have difficulties in grasping the concept. After having acknowledged the complexity of the notion (line 1, 2), Teacher 2 tries another strategy to explain it: she starts referring to a specific topic, 'religion', as if it was a repertoire for possible clarifications, i.e. an 'experiential domain' that is

supposedly close to Uma's life-world and could help her understand.[3] The first declarative is clearly oriented to the stereotype according to which Iranian women are religious (*you are religious*., line 5; note the descending intonation and the emphasis on 'you'). After this first blunt declarative, the teacher performs a self-repair and asks Uma to confirm this assumption, which was previously taken for granted (*do you believe in a god?,* line 5). Uma answers positively, confirming the teacher's assumption (*muslim*, line 6). Having established a common referent, the two teachers keep on explaining the concept of 'taking offence' by making reference to religion (line 7 to 11). After this explanatory attempt, the teachers look at Uma waiting for a display of understanding (line 12; see Stivers and Rossano, 2010). However, Uma does not ostensibly answer.

In the following turns, the teacher keeps on referring to religion in order to explain the concept. As in the first part of the sequence, Uma's relationship with religion is mostly assumed by the teacher, who uses rhetorical questions (line 11) and declaratives (e.g. lines 14, 15, 16) to maintain that Uma would take offense if somebody would talk bad about her god (rather than, say, she would just ignore it). Again, the teacher seems here oriented to a characteristic that is stereotypically associated to Muslim people, i.e. that they get (easily) offended when it comes to religion (Jensen *et al.,* 2018). This stereotyped attribute is prejudicially associated to Uma as a member of that category. At the end of the sequence, the teacher reiterates Uma's assumed feelings (*i take offense i get angry right?,* line 19) and Uma confirms by nodding. Satisfied by Uma's displays of understanding (lines 17 and 20), the teacher changes topic and allocates the turn to another student.

Ex. 1 is a first example of the stereotypes that might implicitly inform teachers' interactional moves in the L2 class. Out of the many possible ways to explain a word, the teacher refers to something that she associates with Uma's life-world, namely religion and high sensitivity toward religious matters. Prejudicially assuming that those supposed cultural dimensions (Iranian people are religious and highly sensitive toward religious issues) concern her Iranian student, the teacher strategically mobilizes them to explain a complex lexical item. By mobilizing cultural stereotypes and by prejudicially projecting them on the pupil, the teacher anchors the explanation to what she treats as the student's experiential world. In doing so, she appears to follow a well-known didactic method: *referential anchoring*, i.e. establishing a common referential ground, connecting new information to already possessed knowledge, and

[3] Possibly, the teacher is here oriented to Uma's national origin, i.e. her being Iranian. As mentioned in section 3, at the beginning of their attendance students must fill in a form that includes a question about their country of origin. Broadly, teachers possibly orient to this 'affordance' when they make relevant stereotyped categories in the classroom.

disambiguating words by resorting to shared references. In a few words, stereotyped talk is here deployed to achieve a specific didactic aim.

4.2 Teachers' explicit formulation of stereotypes

In the corpus, teachers also explicitly formulate stereotypes during the lesson. Ex. 2 was recorded in the advanced L2 class and involves again Bassam and the teacher. As in the previous excerpt, the teacher jokes with Bassam in front of the other students in a rather relaxed phase of the lesson.

Excerpt 2

1	Teacher	qui vinci tu però:: (.) alicia
		here you win (.) alicia
2	Alicia	*((laughs))*
3	Teacher	vinci tu mi sa. bas[sam
		i think you win. bas[sam
4	Bassam	[s:o- solo: uno (.) una sorella
		[ju:- ju:st one (.) one sister
5	Teacher	sì è vero=
		yes it's true=
6	Bassam	=ades- (.) abita [in (age-)
		=now (.) she lives [in (age-)
7	Teacher	[tu sei un pakis- (.)
		[you are a pakis- (.)
8		comunque tu Bassam sei un pakistano strano eh
		bassam you are a strange pakistani eh (.)
9		tu ↑sei un pakistano strano vero?
		you ↑are a strange pakistani aren't you?
10	Bassam	*((nods))*
11	Students	*((laugh))*
	((4 lines))	
16	Teacher	sì:: perché: di solito i pakistani hanno: (.) tanti,
		ye:s becau:se usually pakistani have: (.) many,
17	Bassam	a mio: madre=
		my: mother=
18	Teacher	**=mhmh**
19	Bassam	que- em: (.) tre sorelle (.) cinque fratelli
		que- em: (.) three sisters (.) five brothers
20	Teacher	m: bè=
		m: well=
21	Bassam	solo uno mamma e uno papà=
		just one mum and one dad=
22	Teacher	=con solo una mamma e un papà!
		=with just one mum and one dad! *((laughing))*

As we join the interaction, the teacher is discussing with the students about the topic 'family', which is the central theme of the lesson. Specifically, the teacher is asking all students if they have any brothers or sisters. In order to

engage students, the teacher has promoted a sort of competition around who has the highest number of siblings; until now, Alicia is winning.

In line 3, the teacher allocates the turn to Bassam, who answers that he has just one sister (line 4). Bassam tries to expand his turn by providing some more information (*now she lives in*, line 6), but the teacher overlaps his talk and interrupts him (line 7). Referring to Bassam's previous answer, she questions his identity as a 'real' Pakistani: the teacher first issues a declarative (*you are a strange pakistani eh*, line 8) and then a rhetorical question (*you are a strange pakistani aren't you?,* line 9) to underline the strangeness of his answer. Notably, the prosodic features of these moves and their performance in front of the whole class construct them as "laughables" (Glenn, 2003), which attempt to engage the students in a joking event. Indeed, all students laugh and Bassam nods to confirm the teacher's assertion. Since all participants laugh, the referent of the joke seems clear (i.e. the inferable stereotype that it is strange to have just one sister in Pakistan). Nevertheless, the teacher provides an account of her previous move, explicitly formulating the stereotype that was previously just evoked (*because usually pakistani have many*, line 16).

At this point, Bassam mobilizes a member of his family who has many siblings (*my mother three sisters five brothers*, lines 17, 19). The move is ambiguous and could be interpreted in different ways. For instance, Bassam could be (a) *resisting* the teacher's assertion by showing that he is a legitimate member of his social group (i.e. Pakistani people), since his close relatives have many siblings, or (b) *confirming* the teacher's assertion by showing that he is indeed 'atypical', since other Pakistani have many siblings. Be that as it may, with his move Bassam ratifies the stereotype, which is not questioned (for instance, Bassam could have said that it is perfectly normal for Pakistani to have few siblings). Afterwards, Bassam makes a joke, aligning thereby with the humorous "frame" (Goffman, 1974) introduced by the teacher (*just one mum and one dad*, line 21). The teacher laughs at Bassam's joke and repeats his words, recognizing the appropriateness of his turn in that context (line 22).[4]

Ex. 2 is an example of how teachers can use an explicit stereotype to achieve specific social and didactic aims. Shared laughter is a good strategy to create affiliative relationships in the classroom (Petitjean and González-Martínez, 2015), and the teacher uses here a stereotype to construct an affiliative relationship with the students. Moreover, the joking event contributes to create a serene classroom atmosphere, possibly resulting in students' increased willingness to actively participate in the activity.

[4] Notably, with this reformulation the teacher also performs a small 'embedded' correction of Bassam's turn, as she adds the preposition 'with' and changes the two indefinite articles.

5. Concluding discussion

Stereotypes are ubiquitous to human communities, representing a crucial social device that allows us to be functional in our social life-world. It is thus not surprising to see their emergence in the heterogenous classroom at the center of this study. The stereotypes highlighted in the analysis bear some of the typical features of these cognitive as well as social devices. For instance, they entail a certain degree of simplification and essentialism, as they construct homogeneous categories on which basis a multifaceted and complex 'reality' is interpreted and understood: the diversity of single individuals is reduced to broad social categories (Iranian women, Ex. 1, or Pakistani, Ex. 2).

In previous literature, this kind of reductionism has brought several scholars to advocate for the avoidance of stereotypes and prejudices in the classroom, in order to achieve a supposedly 'authentic' understanding of each individual, approached in its uniqueness (see section 2.2). However, this proposal is often based on a theoretical understanding of the concept of stereotype and prejudice, which disregard their 'pragmatic' use in concrete contexts of social interaction. In this regard, an interactional analysis of individuals' local *use* of these social devices might provide a more nuanced understanding, avoiding static and pre-conceived assumptions on the social meaning of stereotypes and prejudices. As this study illustrates, teachers might deploy stereotyped talk to pursue their local agenda in the classroom. Be it through an implicit orientation or an explicit formulation, stereotyped categories are made locally relevant to achieve specific social and didactic aims. First, stereotypes and prejudices can be mobilized to facilitate students' understanding of specific academic contents (see Ex. 1). As we illustrated, teachers resort to stereotyped categories as a mean to accomplish referential anchoring and pursue the understanding of the meaning of unknown lexical items. For instance, in our corpus teachers (a) refer to semantic areas (e.g. 'religion', Ex. 1) and attributes (e.g. 'sensitivity towards religious matters', Ex. 1) that are prejudicially associated with the members of a certain social group ('Iranian women') or (b) explicitly formulate a stereotype to provide a description of a certain word ('mama's boy'; not shown in the analysis). Second, stereotypes can be mobilized to construct affiliative social relationships and thereby a relaxed classroom atmosphere: in this case, teachers formulate them with prosodic cues that construct them as a laughable, attempting thereby to prompt shared laughter in the classroom. When successful, these attempts strengthen participants' social bonds and possibly construct a classroom environment in which students feel at ease and are encouraged to actively participate in everyday activities. In turn, students' active participation is beneficial for learning (a second language), as extensively shown by previous literature (see among others Gardner 2019).

Moreover, stereotyped jokes and shared laughter provide a time off from task-related activities, allowing the teacher to efficiently manage students' fluctuating levels of cognitive effort. Therefore, teachers seem to use stereotypes and prejudices (also) to pursue their local agenda. In this regard, the local use of these devices represents an opportunity for L2 teaching and learning in the classroom.

Clearly, the fact that participants make use of stereotypes and prejudices to achieve their social aims does not mean that we should uncritically accept them in light of an 'emic' understanding of social phenomena. In fact, participants' local use of these devices interrogates us on the meaning that we assign them. To what extent are stereotypes and prejudices legitimate within a heterogeneous classroom? Which risks and opportunities emerge from the micro-analysis of their local uses? Indeed, despite its didactic and social potential, this kind of practice is possibly problematic.

First, by making use of stereotyped categories teachers ratify and re-produce a certain worldview, which is bound to their specific sociocultural milieu. Surreptitiously, teachers make relevant a specific way of dealing with the world 'out there', which becomes taken-for-granted: culturally-shaped stereotyped categories are ratified as valid knowledge to approach, describe and understand human diversity. Thus, in the process of learning the second language students are (also) introduced to a culturally-laden perspective on our social world: teachers' beliefs, ideologies, values, categories, and representations influence and shape their everyday practice in the classroom, possibly resulting in a taken-for-granted stereotyped perspective on human matters. Second, teachers' deployment of stereotypes and prejudices is relevant in relation to students' local identities. For instance, by adopting a stereotyped view of a specific student, the teacher ascribes him/her to a social category regardless of his/her opinion on the matter: the student might not feel at ease with this categorization and with the identity that is 'imposed' on him/her. Moreover, the assumption that membership to a social group implies a fixed set of characteristics is risky, as these social categories (e.g., students' national origin) might then be seen as mechanically determining students' ways of acting, thinking, and feeling. The obvious risk of this mindset is thus to make sense of students' behavior only in relation to these stereotyped categories, disregarding other potentially relevant attributes of students' identity, students' possible motives, or the characteristics of the specific situation (e.g., xxx behave so, *because* xxx is Pakistani; see Caronia 2002). Furthermore, the use of stereotyped categories *to talk about non-present people* is also possibly problematic. Even though this practice is less 'risky' than prejudicially ascribing some attributes to a present person, it might bear long-lasting consequences. As a matter of fact, the teacher's deployment of stereotyped categories legitimizes their use in front of the

students: if stereotypes and prejudices are institutionally sanctioned, students might feel entitled to reproduce this approach to human diversity in their social life (in and out of school).

5.1 Some implications for teachers' practice

As mentioned above, stereotyped categories can be seen as a resource to achieve various social and didactic aims in the (L2) class. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned risks point to a certain professional caution in regard to their use in front of the students. In this regard, a program based on video-recorded classroom interactions could help pre-service or in-service teachers to critically reflect on their own practices and on the risks and opportunities of the discursive use of stereotypes and prejudices in the classroom (Fedeli and Rossi 2017). But what should teachers pay attention to?

A first point regards teachers' *reflexivity* and awareness of the role of their ways of speaking in the classroom. An attention to the discursive resources that they choose out of the range of the available ones allows teachers to calibrate their stereotyped talk. For instance, teachers should be aware that through their interactional practices and stances, (a) they silently ratify and reproduce a specific cultural worldview and (b) they might construct some students as different with respect to the other classroom members, attributing them a prepackaged social identity that they might experience as arbitrary, (locally) irrelevant or even unsuitable. In relation to the latter, a second point regards the necessary *negotiation* of these local representations with other participants. In the classroom, this means to negotiate with students their membership to specific social categories, taking seriously how *they* interpret their identity, membership, and background in the specific social occasion, frame of activity or didactic task they are involved in. Being addressed or referred to as a member of a given (socially stereotyped) category can be unpredictably perceived by the addressee (or the referred person) as suitable and relevant for the practical purposes at hand, or not. Notably, in this study teachers' uses of the stereotype were not resisted by the students, who seemed aligned to the social categories that the teachers first made relevant. The absence of resistance might be due to teachers' authority, but also to students' understanding of the specific frame in which the interaction takes place (e.g., a humorous frame). Anyway, at least in this case, students seem fine with these stereotyped views of human social groups, possibly pointing to teachers' ability in constructing a *shared* perspective on the matter. Apart from the instances presented in this study, the teacher should be generally attentive to students' displayed orientations to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds: starting from this interpretation of students' 'signals', the teacher will make situated choices regarding students'

ascription to specific social groups. Clearly, these choices are eminently local and always up for re-thinking and re-negotiation, since nobody can be entirely sure of the righteousness of his/her interpretation of the other's displayed actions (see the concept of *insecuritas*, i.e. uncertainty, in education, Caronia, 2011). Eventually, a third point regards teachers' awareness of their *pedagogical and deontological mandate* in the classroom. As representatives of an institution, teachers bear a certain responsibility toward the students, which involve socializing them to a certain way of 'seeing' the world. In this regard, teachers' displayed orientation to diversity is crucial, since it socializes students to appropriate ways of dealing with social groups that differ from their own. Thus, the introduction of a stereotype should be possibly counterbalanced by discourses about the heterogeneity of our contemporary communities and about the risks inherent in attributing specific characteristics to broad social groups. Broadly, teacher should make students aware of the fact that stereotypes are indeed useful (and fun!), but they are no absolute 'truth'. According to the specificity of a certain classroom, the teacher will find a meaningful balance between the social and didactic use of stereotypes and their critical problematization.

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