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Social and training needs for the emancipation of migrant women in Second Language courses

Bisogni sociali e di formazione per l'emancipazione delle donne migranti dei corsi di Lingua Seconda

di

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Abstract:

The article examines the specific social and training needs of migrant women from the content analysis of 60 interviews carried out in Second Language (SL) schools in the city of Rome. The feminization of migratory flows has increasingly led us to reflect on the peculiarities of the experience of migrant women in the context of inclusion paths as bearers of needs related to gender belonging, as well as elements concerning the socio-economic and cultural condition. The educational environments of language learning in the country of immigration appear to be privileged spaces for the conquest of a voice, for the narration of the self, for the emergence of personal needs and for the encounter and construction of intercultural relations, useful to start paths of emancipation and empowerment, counteracting the risk of social exclusion.

Keywords: migrant women; intercultural education; Second Language; emancipation; social inclusion.

Abstract:

L'articolo approfondisce il tema inerente gli specifici bisogni sociali e di formazione delle donne migranti a partire dall'analisi del contenuto di 60 interviste svolte nelle scuole di Lingua Seconda (L2) nella città di Roma. La femminilizzazione dei flussi migratori ha portato sempre più a riflettere sulle peculiarità dell'esperienza delle donne migranti nell'ambito dei percorsi di inclusione in quanto portatrici di bisogni legati all'appartenenza di genere, oltre che ad elementi riguardanti la condizione socio-economica e culturale. Gli ambienti educativi di apprendimento linguistico del paese di immigrazione risultano essere spazi privilegiati per la conquista di una voce, per la narrazione del sé, per l'emersione di bisogni personali e per l'incontro e la costruzione di relazioni interculturali, utili ad avviare percorsi di emancipazione e di empowerment, contrastando il rischio di emarginazione sociale.

Parole chiave: donne migranti; educazione interculturale; Lingua Seconda; emancipazione; inclusione sociale.

1. The Feminisation of migration flows and learning possibilities

People have been on the move since the beginning of human history. There are many causes behind migration, determined both by the attractiveness of the country to which one decides to migrate and by other driving factors that contribute to the choice of individuals to resort to migration in response to problems that affect their life chances in their home country (Allievi, 2018). In the Italian context, immigration became a significant phenomenon from the 1970s onwards, and from the outset, the flows were characterised by a strong female presence. In particular, in this first phase, migratory chains were activated by religiously based contact networks established between the country of origin and the country of destination, also to help immigrant women enter the labour market. The first migrations were characterised by an emancipatory, self-empowering and individual project, given that the displacement was mainly for economic reasons. In the following decades, the self and work-based project of the first migrant women was also accompanied by family reunification, recognised by Articles 28, 29 and 29B of Legislative Decree 286/98, by the consolidation of care work as the main activity of migrant women, by female sex trafficking and, finally, by refugee women. The female protagonism of migration is still visible today: in Italy, immigrant women - 2,562,514 at the end of 2021 - represent just over half (50.9%) of the resident foreigners (5,003,716) (Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS, 2023), a number that has remained more or less stable since 2011. Despite this, migratory flows have hardly been analysed from a gender perspective, as can be seen from the media and information marginalisation of migrant women, which in turn is the result of forms of oppression and domination. Migrant women seem to be subject to the co-presence of many forms of oppression, and for this very reason, when talking about them, “we cannot limit our attention to a single factor (be it gender, race, class or heterosexism), but must attempt to examine the ways in which all these factors, in their plurality, intersect to consolidate and perpetuate women's inferiority”¹ (Bottici, 2021, p. 60). Taking gender identity into account when analysing migratory phenomena makes it possible to address all those variables that affect women's lives and that give rise to the discrimination, stereotyped roles and oppression that underlie the processes of social and political differentiation to

¹ The text in the original language is reported for all translated quotes: “non possiamo ridurre la nostra attenzione a un unico fattore (sia esso il genere, la razza, la classe o l'eterosessismo), ma dobbiamo tentare di indagare il modo in cui tutti quei fattori, nella loro pluralità, si intersecano fra loro al fine di rafforzare e riprodurre l'inferiorità delle donne”

which they are subjected (Hill Collins, 2022; Morrison, 2019). In the context of work, for example, migrant women often work in the domestic and care sectors and are forced to accept all-encompassing forms of employment that make it difficult for them to build a life outside working hours and lead them to associate mainly with fellow nationals working the same kind of job (D'Ignazi and Persi, 2004). Housework, among other things, is discussed in the context of gender inequalities because, on the one hand, since the end of the Second World War, Western women have rejected this as their only natural destiny (Federici, 2020) and, on the other hand, it has become one of the few areas of work accessible to migrant women. In *Women, Race and Class*, Angela Davis examines the transition from slavery to domestic work and notes that “during the post-slavery period, most Black women workers who did not toil in the fields were compelled to become domestic servants. Their predicament, no less than that of their sister who were sharecroppers or convict laborers, bore the familiar stamp of slavery” (Davis, 1983, p. 48). It is also more complex for migrant women to participate in education, since the process of inclusion is hindered by the double condition of subalternity that comes from being both a woman and a migrant. Therefore, it is possible to say that there is an educational inequality that affects migrant women and, from a pedagogical point of view, it is important to study the relations that promote or hinder the accessibility and implementation of educational programmes that are as equal as possible (Gross, 2022). As a result, the design and implementation of educational and inclusion programmes that take into account the particular vulnerabilities and specific needs of migrant women makes it possible to rethink migration as a possibility of “rewriting' one's personal life history and [of] the re-elaboration of cultural roots, starting from one's self projected into a new reality, which in turn can offer or deny a richer and more dynamic redefinition of identity”² (Muscarà, 2017, p. 105).

2. Research context and qualitative method

This research was carried out in Rome between October 2021 and September 2022 in the context of the Second language training services for adult migrants. Rome is characterised by a network of associations, the Rete Scuolemigranti, which plays a training, communication and relationship-building role with the territory that is crucial for this type of service. A qualitative methodology was used to obtain cognitive and experiential elements of the reality of schools and second language courses. The data collection tool used was the semi-structured interview, which, due to its conversational nature (Gianturco, 2005; Trincherò, 2002), allows a good degree of in-depth exploration of the topics discussed while leaving the interviewee free to interact. Furthermore, compared to other research tools, the semi-structured interview allows for a greater focus on the interviewee so that the centring pole (Mantovani, 1998; Trentini, 1980), i.e. how much relevance the two speakers assume in the interaction, pays attention to the interviewee's gaze and narrative. A total of 60 people from 8 different schools were involved. Of the 60 interviewees, 25 are teachers (18 volunteers, 2 operators and 5 CPIA teachers) and 35 are students, with very different individual characteristics, in terms of age and socio-economic situation in the country of immigration. In fact, the personal data show that the interviewees cover a very wide age range, from 16 to 65 years old; in terms of gender, however, there seems to be a certain balance, with 16 interviewees being male and 19 female. There is heterogeneity in terms of origin: El Salvador (1); Brazil (3); India (1); Venezuela

² “‘riscrittura’ della storia di vita per-sonale e [di] rielaborazione delle radici culturali, a partire dal proprio sé proiettato in una nuova realtà, la quale a sua volta può offrire o negare una più ricca e dinamica rideterminazione identitaria”

(1); Colombia (1); Egypt (1); Kenya (1); Bangladesh (9); Palestine (1); Argentina (1); Morocco (2); Iran (2); Sudan (1); Nigeria (2); Philippines (2); Ukraine (1); Spain (1); Czech Republic (1); Tanzania (1); Tunisia (1). As far as the transcription of the interviews is concerned, we took into account the validity of the interviewees' words and the value of the content expressed, regardless of the difficulties of conducting the interview in the second language, and for this reason, we decided to emphasise their efforts by opting for a literal transcription of the content. Consequently, if the language skills were insufficient to carry out the interaction in Italian, the interviewees were given the opportunity to use mediating languages, particularly English, French and Spanish, and extensive use was also made of intercomprehension (Doyé, 2005).

3. Migrant Women and Second Language Learning

In the process of integrating migrants into the country of immigration, learning a second language is a fundamental step, and for this reason, EU countries have drawn up reception policies that provide for language training and assessment of the skills acquired by migrants in order to allow them to stay in the national territory. For example, the Integration Agreement between Foreign Nationals and the State (Presidential Decree 179/2011) is in force in Italy. Therefore, when proposing to launch second language teaching/learning courses in a country of immigration, it is important to create spaces/environments for adult migrants, so they (Beacco, Little, Hedges, 2014):

- learn the new language of the country of immigration;
- have their mother tongue valued;
- are encouraged to pass on their mother tongue and, if it is not the same as their first language, their first language to their children, as an enrichment for the individual and for the host society.

The language of the country of immigration has different meanings for the migrant, and these often change and develop during the process of learning and integration. In particular, the second language may be (Favaro, 2015; 2016):

- the language of survival, especially in the first phase of migration;
- the language of work for those who have been in Italy for a long time;
- the language of the residence permit, for which it is necessary to obtain a language certificate attesting to the minimum level of Second Language required by the host country;
- the language of the child, i.e. the language learnt by the children of permanent immigrant families;
- the language as a second mother tongue, in which case there is a coincidence of identity and belonging with the language and culture of the country of immigration;
- the language as a means to express one's own life experience.

Given the complexity of language learning and the meanings it takes on in migrants' lives, it is crucial to be aware of the linguistic and social needs that can arise in Second Language learning contexts, as well as the diversity of migrant populations, so that language teaching programmes in the country of immigration can be as personalised as possible. The places where Second Language learning takes place can thus be defined as contact areas where, through the clash and fusion of different cultures, every underclass can construct its own universe of meaning (Pratt, 1992) and where “language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance.” (hooks, 2015, p. 146).

The centrality of language in the rewriting of identity, among other things, is particularly relevant to the question of women's integration in immigrant societies since “when marginalised people speak, it is not only their words and thought that matter, but always also their fundamental belonging” (Gümüşay, 2022, p. 29).

3.1 Gender and vulnerability in the design of Second Language courses

Gender is one of the aspects to which more attention is being paid when adapting Second Language course provision to the lifetimes and characteristics of students. As a consequence, gender is recognised to be a factor of greater vulnerability within integration programmes for migrants. It emerged that female migrants have characteristics that are very different from those of their male counterparts and that are essentially linked to their being women. The main difference expressed by the interviewees is that, for the most part, they do not associate work with the female dimension of migration and residence in Italy. This means, for example, that the women who come into contact with these specific services are mostly unemployed, making them more vulnerable and requiring more attention when planning the education programme. In this respect, for example, one of the schools that took part in the survey is aimed exclusively at migrant women, a choice that seems to be due to two elements that contributed to its creation, namely the timetable:

“when we started with the adults, when we saw what the demand was... considering that the classes were in the morning, which is the most convenient time for them, we saw that they were Muslims and, in the beginning, they were accompanied by their husbands, at the end it became natural... we were all female teachers in the beginning. We often thought about opening it because the husbands wanted it, but the evening classes had to be opened, there wasn't even... I don't know. This is how we found our world”³ (A., 48 years old, Italian, volunteer teacher, March 2022).

Also, the implementation of Second Language courses within the neighbourhood primary school (2 Second Language schools out of 8 interviewed) turned out to be the best choice for the use of Second Language schooling, especially for migrant women, as it made it possible to create a link between parenthood and personal learning needs:

“the women have a special relationship with the school and we really feel like a community. It's often the same mothers who take the children to school and then come here, and it seems more complete. That way, it really works as a community [...] The fact of being in a school changes a lot. We have made it colourful and welcoming, and it's also a safe place, institutionally recognised, even if we are something more! The fact that there is this a close link between children and adults makes you a known reality”⁴ (A., 48 years old, Italian, volunteer teacher,

³ “quando abbiamo iniziato con gli adulti, vedendo quale era la richiesta...anche perché le fasce erano la mattina che è l'orario più comodo per loro, abbiamo visto che erano musulmane e all'inizio venivano accompagnate dai mariti, alla fine è venuto da solo...poi anche noi insegnanti inizialmente eravamo tutte donne quindi è venuto così. Abbiamo pensato tante volte di aprirlo perché i mariti lo chiedevano, ma andavano aperti dei corsi serali, non c'è stato nemmeno...non lo so, abbiamo trovato il nostro mondo così”

⁴ “qui la cosa con le donne è anche la relazione con la scuola, ci sentiamo proprio una comunità, sono le stesse mamme, spesso, che prima portano i bambini a scuola e poi vengono qua, ci sembra più completo, che così funzioni veramente da comunità [...] Il fatto di essere in una scuola cambia tanto, poi noi l'abbiamo fatta colorata e accogliente, ma da una parte è un posto sicuro, istituzionalmente riconosciuto, anche se noi siamo altro eh! Però questo già ti porta, il fatto che c'è questa connessione continua tra bambini e adulti ti rende una realtà conosciutissima”

March 2022).

However, it should be emphasised that, besides the school that took part in the study and was exclusively dedicated to inclusive courses for women, the gender issue in terms of accessibility concerns all Second Language schools that took part in the research and that, in any case, had the need to dedicate specific spaces and time to migrant women by setting up courses in addition to the standard education programme:

“we decided to only include foreign women because we saw that many of them needed to attend a course just for themselves, given the difficulties they might have in attending mixed courses. Most of the women who attended the course were mothers, and since we ran it in a school in the Centocelle district, they were mostly mothers of children in primary school”⁵ (M., 29 years old, Italian, teacher/operator, September 2022).

The decision to dedicate an education programme to women, mostly mothers, is also part of the project to create a space that deals exclusively with women's issues, which would be more complex to explore in mixed courses:

“then there are specific courses for women that take place on Thursday mornings. These are only dedicated to women because there are some cultural settings where women cannot participate if men are present. So there are courses for women only where, in addition to teaching Italian, we try to deal with personal problems that affect women in certain cultures”⁶ (M., 67 years old, Italian, volunteer teacher, March 2022).

Therefore, Second Language learning and teaching schools are mostly informal spaces where women can learn Italian and engage in leisure activities to promote socialisation and integration. The possibility of dedicating spaces to women within these schools stems from a need: if immigrant women cannot/don't want to attend mixed courses - for cultural, religious or family reasons - it is necessary for them to have meeting places that can be considered safe and welcoming for migrants.

3.2 Social marginalisation and exclusion of migrant women from Second Language learning

One of the greatest risks for women who emigrate without a project of their own but who follow their partner's migration project is that they remain on the margins of the host society. In these cases, they often do not look for work but rather devote themselves to caring for the family so that they identify with the domestic environment and the role they play while at the same time fuelling the dynamics of exclusion and self-exclusion from the immigrant society. In these cases, children stabilise the family, leading to a spontaneous permanent settlement of the family. At the same time, the children's entry into school can help women break out of the exclusivity of the domestic and family sphere. In

⁵ “si è deciso di farlo solo per donne straniere perché si è vista la necessità di molte donne di frequentare un corso solo per loro date le difficoltà che potevano avere a frequentare corsi misti e la maggioranza di donne che hanno frequentato il corso erano madri e visto che lo abbiamo fatto in una scuola del quartiere di Centocelle erano più che altro le madri dei bambini che frequentavano la scuola primaria”

⁶ “poi ci sono dei corsi specifici per le donne che si svolgono il giovedì mattina, dedicati solamente alle donne perché ci sono appunto delle situazioni culturali, per persone provenienti da determinati paesi, per cui le donne non possono seguire se ci sono uomini, e quindi ci sono dei corsi dedicati alle sole donne, destinati alle sole donne dove oltre all'insegnamento dell'italiano si tenta anche di affrontare i problemi personali che, in certe culture, coinvolgono le donne”

fact, to continue to follow their children's education, immigrant women must deal with the school and interact with local services. What has been said so far about integrating foreign women into the society to which they migrated is further supported by other data that emerged from the interviews, namely the duration/years of their stay in Italy. This aspect of migrants integration and education path is very important for understanding the gender differences in their ability to participate in Second Language courses. Considering the Integration Agreement's legal requirements, which must be fulfilled within two years of arrival in Italy, it is obvious that one of the main motivations for attending Second Language courses is the acquisition of an A2-level language certificate. One would, therefore, expect the respondents to have a relatively short stay in Italy, or at least a stay corresponding to the two years, as provided for in the Integration Agreement. As a matter of fact, however, there is a great diversity, so that in the language courses, there are people who have been in Italy for less than a month (4), people who have been in Italy for less than a year (8), people who have been in Italy for less than two years (7) and people who have been in Italy for more than two years (13). It is interesting to note that among those who have been in Italy for more than 2 years, most of them have been living there permanently, even for more than 10 years, and in the specific case of the interviewees, most of them are women who have migrated to Italy for family reunification, mostly from Bangladesh. In fact, of the total number of students interviewed, 13 have been in Italy for more than 2 years, and of these, 8 are women who have been in Italy for 10 years or more, while the other respondents (5) have been in Italy for less than 5 years and are men. This relationship between length of stay and gender supports the trend that there is a greater segregation of foreign women residing in Italy, who tend to enrol in language courses long after their migration, compared to their male counterparts, with negative consequences for women's social integration. Therefore, despite the fact that some interviewees did not attend language courses for a long time after migration, at some point in their stay in Italy, they felt the need to approach Second Language learning, and this moment often coincided with their children's entry into school. For migrant women, it is confirmed that the need to learn Italian arises at the moment when their parental role is called into question, hence the need and desire to continue to be an 'effective' parent:

“I work in my husband's office and my childs, my bambino, because they go to school. Also when I go to the doctor I can't say the disease, this is why I want to learn italian [...] si teacher say something in english to understand me about activity, but i'm not understand fully” (M., 44 years old, Bengali, student level A2, March 2022).

Like the upbringing of their children, interaction with school services seems to be more the responsibility of women:

“you need it when you go to the hospital, and when you go to school to talk to the teachers. Not speaking Italian is not good. I annoy them, and it's tedious for them. I don't understand, and they can't help me, and they've told me many times that it's not good. My son and daughter study here. As a mother, I have to learn this language because I am ashamed that my son goes to high school and I can't speak it properly, I am ashamed. It's not good”⁷ (S., 44 years old,

⁷ “serve, quando vai ospedale, quando vai scuola parlare con maestra, questo non è bene che io non parlo italiano, disturbo, è noioso per loro. Io no capisce e loro non può aiutare e poi loro quante volte dire non è bello. Poi mio figlio e figlia studia qua io mamma e serve imparare questa lingua, imparare serve perché vergogna per noi che mio figlio va a scuola

Bengali, student level A2, March 2022).

3.3 *Self-determination, empowerment and Second Language learning*

Since Second Language learning sites are such diverse and multifaceted spaces, starting from the subjects that make them up, their origins, their educational backgrounds and even their own level of competence in the language of the country of immigration when they join such courses, it would be superficial and reductive to think that migrant women belong to a single category and are driven by a single motivation to learn. On the contrary, what emerged from the interviews and in terms of motivations for learning reveals a crucial diversification of motivations. With reference to the theory of self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 1985), it is possible to identify three innate and universal psychological needs: (1) the need for competence, i.e. the need to learn and acquire skills, in the specific case of this study it is possible to identify this need in learning Second Language; (2) the need for relationships, i.e. the need to acquire a sense of belonging and to build meaningful relationships with other people, or the need to socialise and to feel and be included in the new context of life; (3) the need for autonomy. After what has been said so far, a first reflection on the emancipatory potential linked to the acquisition of Second Language concerns, once again, women who are also mothers, but who, when their children start school and their husbands are busy working, see an increase in the daily tasks which allow them to gain more autonomy:

“my husband too, he doesn't have time for office work, meetings, and accompanying the children, he doesn't have time. It is important to learn Italian. If I don't understand, I can't make myself clear to other people”⁸ (A., 36 years old, Bengali, student level A1, November 2021).

Although often linked to the dynamics of family life, migrant women's autonomy grows along with Second Language skills acquired, thus becoming an element of emancipation expressed in the growing desire to be able to carry out daily tasks alone, without depending on others, and this also responds to the need for competence:

“because I'm in a country I hardly know, I don't speak Italian, I don't know any place and it's important for me to do something, to do it alone, without asking anyone, to be independent, without relying on my spouse”⁹ (J., 32 years old, Brazilian, student level A1, November 2021).

Second Language acquisition is also experienced as a kind of personal responsibility to be able to interact with local authorities and services in the country of immigration, thus defining the communicative element within the need for effectiveness:

“I live here, my children study here, I eat here, I get everything from Italy, why don't I learn Italian? You need it when you go to the hospital or when you go to school to talk to the teachers. Not speaking Italian is not good. I annoy them, and it's tedious for them. I don't understand, and they can't help me, and they've told me many times that it's not good”¹⁰ (S., 44 years old, Bengali,

superiore, io mamma non parlare bene, vergogno, non va bene”

⁸ “pure mio marito, non c'ha tempo per cose di ufficio, appuntamento, accompagnare bambini, non c'ha tempo lui. Importante imparare italiano, non capire io non spiegare alle altre persone”

⁹ “perché sono in un paese che non conosco, non parlo italiano, non conosco luogo e è importante perché per me per fare qualche cosa, farlo da sola senza chiedere a uno, essere indipendente, senza dipendenza dal mio sposo”

¹⁰ “io stare qua, miei figli studia qua, io mangio qua, tutto io prendere da Italia perché io non imparare italiano? Serve, quando vai ospedale, quando vai scuola parlare con maestra, questo non è bene che io non parlo italiano, disturbo, è

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student level A2, March 2022).

For women who are also mothers, stabilising migrant families in the country is a driving force that can motivate them to integrate their children rather than themselves. Although, on the women's side, the maternal role emerges prominently as a driving factor for learning, the teacher's view of what motivates migrant women to learn is broader and deeper: the need to learn Italian is actually part of a path of self-determination and self-expression, of which language is only a part:

“as far as the ladies are concerned, there is a personal motivation, which is to do something, maybe not intentionally, but in my opinion, they want to do something for themselves, to leave home, even if they don't make it explicit”¹¹ (M., 67 years old, Italian, volunteer teacher, March 2022).

Moreover, teachers of language courses for women acknowledge that there is a motivation linked to personal self-determination, which is not present in the case of men. One of the teachers interviewed, in addition to underlining what has been said so far, also reports another interesting element, which is that, when it comes to finding educational opportunities for women, women seem to be more motivated and numerically more consistent in attending courses than men:

“the number of women among the participants is much higher than the number of men. Perhaps they have more time? No, in my opinion, there is also a desire to know more, whereas men are content to know just enough to be able to do the job they want or need to do, and for these reasons, they may be less inclined to say 'I want to improve', also in terms of communication. Perhaps this need is more evident in women”¹² (V., 56 years old, Italian, volunteer teacher, November 2021)

Another motivational element that is considered specific to women enrolled in Second Language courses concerns a greater need for spaces for socialisation. By meeting this need, schools become places for relationships, in addition to the acquisition of language skills, thus counteracting the risks of social isolation and marginalisation to which migrant women seem to be more exposed:

“in short, for many women, this is also a chance to get out of this situation and to be able to interact a bit with the rest of the world, so I think there is also a need for socialisation [...] They really need to get out of the house and come here”¹³ (V., 56, volunteer teacher, November 2021).

Language, learning opportunities and relationships play a central role in the emancipation of migrant women, showing how educational environments are places of self-determination, cultural exchange and empowerment:

noioso per loro. Io no capisce e loro non può aiutare e poi loro quante volte dire non è bello”

¹¹ “per quanto riguarda le signore c'è proprio una motivazione personale, che è quella di fare qualcosa, magari non consapevolmente, ma di fare qualcosa per sé stesse, uscire di casa e fare qualcosa per sé stesse, anche se non lo esplicitano ma secondo me c'è”

¹² “il numero di donne è di molto maggiore rispetto agli uomini tra quelli che frequentano. Forse hanno più tempo? No, secondo me c'è anche una voglia di sapere di più, mentre gli uomini si accontentano di sapere quel tanto che gli permette di svolgere quel lavoro che vuole o deve svolgere e per queste ragioni magari è meno spinto a dire ‘voglio migliorarmi’, anche a livello di comunicazione. Forse nella donna emerge di più questa esigenza”

¹³ “insomma, per molte donne questa è anche una possibilità per uscire da questa situazione e riuscire ad interfacciarsi un po' con il resto del mondo, a interagire, quindi penso ci sia anche una necessità di socializzazione [...] Hanno proprio bisogno di uscire di casa e venire qua”

“[you need language] for everything, I think, not just for work, but for integration. As I said, communication is everything. Learning Italian means living well in Italy because you have to be sociable, be with people, make yourself understood, go to the doctor and explain your illness without depending on others. If you don't speak Italian in Italy, you are very dependent on others. Learning Italian is also about studying first and then immersing yourself in the culture. Italian is a beautiful language, but it's also about the need to be seen and participate, do you understand?”¹⁴ (D., 42 years old, Brazilian, student level B1, March 2022).

Conclusion

When conceived from an intercultural perspective, educational places recognise the tendency to change, triggered by encounters between different cultures (Lorenzini and Cardellini, 2018). They impose leaving behind a closed and unambiguous approach to relations between cultures by raising the need to be open to exchange with other traditions (Silva, 2008). Such an attitude is conducive to change and, above all, implies a possibility of emancipation and redefinition of the self, which in turn, is promoted by the educational process. From the gender perspective of migration and the analysis of the situation of migrant women, Second Language educational environments, apart from being necessary for the acquisition of documents to stay in Italy, represent welcoming spaces that can easily adapt to women's needs and at the same time respond to linguistic and social needs. Spaces dedicated to Second Language learning, in this way, make it possible to “making the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute is a central goal of transformative pedagogy” (hooks, 1994, p. 39). The creation of community in educational spaces proves to be a means of resistance to the systemic violence that produces inequalities and marginalisation and enables mutual learning (Borghi, 2020). The educational experience thus becomes a collective action characterised by accessibility beyond inequalities or differences (Susi, 2012), creating, even within the course itself, tailor-made approaches, an inclusive and diverse programme that, at the same time, offers shared learning opportunities and diversified paths (Favaro, 2015). Creating a positive and safe environment, paying attention to the needs of each participant, even beyond language acquisition, and building social and emotional relationships are extremely important elements for students, stimulating and motivating them to continue with the courses and to engage with the host community.

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¹⁴ “[la lingua serve] per tutto, penso non solo per lavoro, ma integrarse, come ho detto prima la comunicazione è tutto. Imparare all'italiano è vivere bene in Italia, anche perché bisogna essere socievoli, stare con le persone, farsi capire, andare dal dottore e esplicare la sua malattia, senza dipendere dagli altri. Quando non si parla la lingua italiano in Italia si è molto dipendenti dagli altri. Imparare l'italiano è anche studiare, prima cosa, poi integrarti totalmente nella cultura, è anche una bella lingua l'italiano, per me è bellissimo, però è anche la necessità di essere visti, partecipare capito?”

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