

End-of-year Report

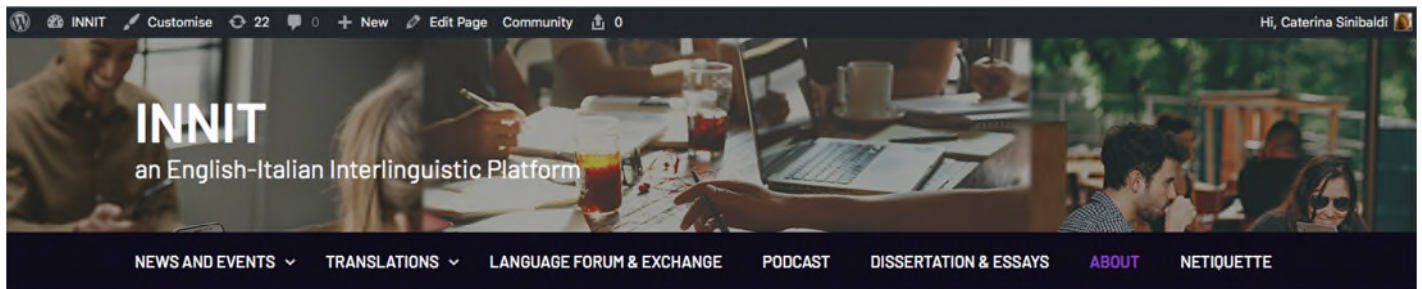
INNIT – an English-Italian interlinguistic platform

- **The INNIT Project: How and Why**

INNIT is a virtual English-Italian interlinguistic platform, which was created in October 2019 thanks to the generous support of IATL. Aiming to promote interaction and linguistic exchange between students of Italian at Warwick and students of English at the Università degli studi Internazionali di Roma (UNINT), INNIT was designed collaboratively by Modern Languages academics at Warwick and UNINT.

At a time when language students can access a wealth of resources freely available online, and can easily connect with other language learners around the globe, the question arises of what the value of this platform could be. However, the INNIT platform was conceived as much more than yet another revision tool. Whilst providing students with a forum for self-study and linguistic exchange, the platform was also meant to complement traditional teaching and offer an added value, as well as an opportunity to do things that cannot be done in the classroom but are important for language learning. The main objectives were to a) foster authentic interaction; b) motivate language students to explore topics independently; and c) strengthen the connection between language, communication and community. In this regard it's also relevant to point out that, following the implementation of this project, the Italian section at Warwick has established an Erasmus exchange with UNINT starting in 2019/2020.

Thanks to financial support from IATL, we were able to hire a web developer, who created a complex and multi-layered website using the WordPress platform, thus ensuring that students could enjoy a highly interactive yet safe environment. We were also able to hire three Warwick students of Italian, who acted as web managers and who provided crucial support as well as ongoing feedback on the project.



About

INNIT is a linguistic and cultural exchange platform connecting students of English at the [Università degli Studi Internazionali di Roma](#) (UNINT) with students of Italian at the [University of Warwick](#). Whether you are learning English or Italian, feel free to browse the different sections and join in the discussion. All levels welcome, from beginner to advanced!

INNIT is for students, by students. You are encouraged to share opinions, resources, materials and offer constructive feedback to other learners. We hope you enjoy being part of INNIT. If you have any comments or queries, please email us at innitproject@gmail.com.

INNIT is kindly sponsored by the [Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning](#) at the University of Warwick.

Search ...

Recent Posts

- Does English need a spelling reform?
- Interlingua machine translation
- Banksy a Venezia
- The Secret Garden

The INNIT platform features a number of sections, promoting different levels of interaction between students. The sections included:

1. News: students or staff published news items, in English and Italian, and commented on them in the 'comments' section. See an example below:

Che cosa sappiamo di noi e dell'Italia?

10th November 2018 [Caterina Sinibaldi](#) [News and events](#)

Un sondaggio interessante ha scoperto che la percezione dei cittadini italiani rispetto al proprio paese è ben lontana dalla realtà...

"Popolazione, immigrati, lavoro, criminalità, salute. Che cosa sappiamo della realtà italiana? Poco, a giudicare dal sondaggio internazionale condotto da Ipsos. Tra i 14 Paesi coinvolti dall'indagine annuale a partire dal 2014, l'Italia è quello in cui la percezione è più lontana dai fatti, seguita da Stati Uniti e Francia. I tedeschi, ma soprattutto gli svedesi, sono invece i più «realisti»: nelle loro risposte si avvicinano di più ai dati effettivi sul proprio Paese."

Provate a rispondere alle [domande](#) e scoprirete se la vostra percezione è vicina alla realtà, oppure no.

[Edit](#)

◀ How language shapes the way we think.

Italy is my country – but it must face its racist history ▶

3 thoughts on "Che cosa sappiamo di noi e dell'Italia?"



2. Translations: students practised their translation skills by completing homework to be uploaded in this section for other students to view and comment on, in a non-judgmental environment. Language tutors at Warwick and UNINT frequently mentioned this opportunity in their language classes and sometimes gave homework to be completed on the platform. See an example below:

IT201 Translation Christmas homework. Translation commentary

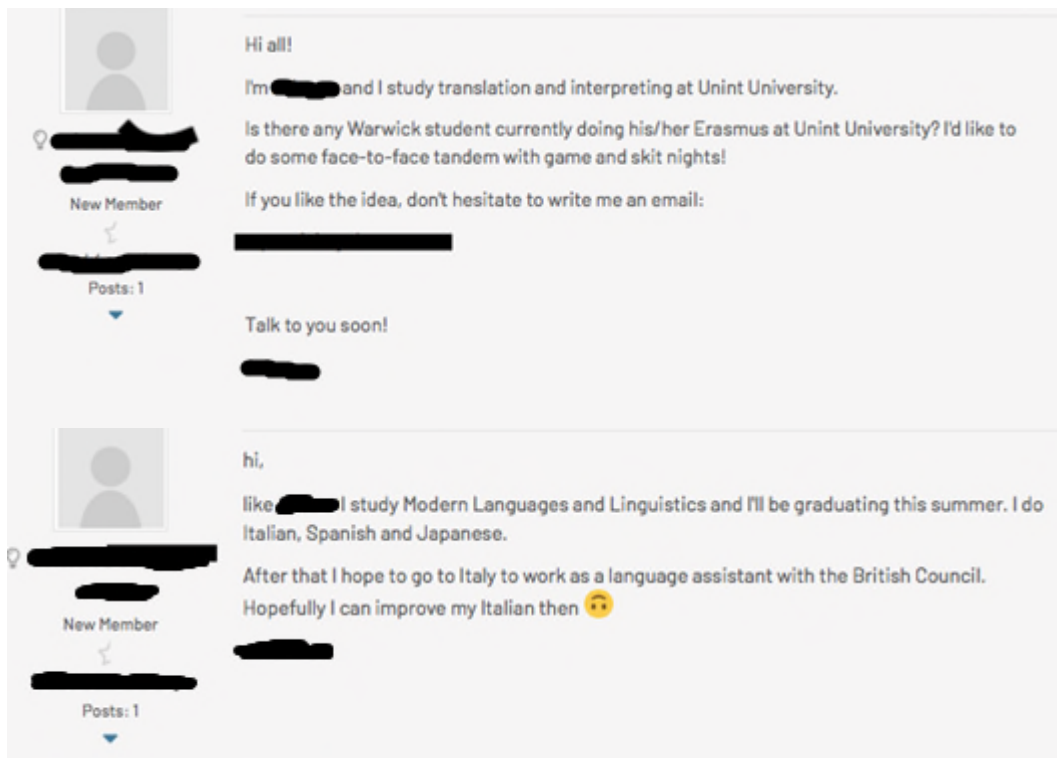
📅 15th December 2018 👤 Abbatelli 📁 Traduzioni IT-EN

Here you find an English translation of a Italian text on one of the most famous neighbourhood in Rome: Trastevere.

What do you think of the English translation? Are there any mistakes? Do you think it's idiomatic? Do you think it would require more explanation for some terms?

Share you ideas in the comments. Buon Natale!

3. Language Forum and exchange: students ask questions and explain grammar rules to each other. They can also connect with each other, by exchanging email or Skype contacts and arranging for conversations outside the platform, in order to practise the two languages. See examples below:



4. Podcasts: students register and upload audio content, to be used for listening practice and interpreting exercises, or share links to podcasts they are listening to in English or Italian.

As shown in the screenshot above, once students are logged in, they can click on one of the headings and access different sections and can choose from either posting a new item or commenting on an existing one. All new posts as well as comments are moderated by the web managers and students have to comply with a Netiquette:

NETIQUETTE

Please follow these rules when using the website:

1. Read these rules and guidelines before posting for the first time.
2. All posts are moderated to ensure a friendly and supportive environment. Any post considered to be offensive and/or inciting violence, hate or harassment will be deleted and the user banned.
3. Act in a give and take manner; help others as often as or more than you ask for help.
4. In order to be understood by most people, use correct spelling, grammar and avoid slang unless you know the word or phrase will be understood by other members.
5. Watch your sense of humour, posts may be read by people from a variety of backgrounds and ages.
6. Do not use all caps or SHOUT in your posts. One exclamation point is enough.
7. Do not post any information that you want private. Posts should not contain personal, identifiable information or content embarrassing to others.
8. Search the other posts to see if your topic is already covered and join the discussion if needed.
9. When opening a new thread, give it a meaningful and descriptive title.
10. Always stay on topic. If the discussion goes towards a direction which is far from the original topic, please consider opening a new thread.
11. Do not post new questions or topics on someone else's thread and interrupt a topic of discussion.
12. Do not post empty or useless responses. Only post responses when they contribute to the discussion.
13. Do not spam or double post.
14. Ignore spammers, respond to them personally and not through the board, or report them.
15. Any posts aimed at promoting products, services or businesses, will be deleted. In the case of repeat offences, the user could be temporarily or permanently banned.
16. Do not post content that violates copyright.
17. Do not use long signatures (these will be removed by moderators)

In addition, when posting a comment, students have to confirm that they are acting in a sensitive and respectful way:

Leave a Reply

Logged in as [Caterina Sinibaldi](#). [Log out?](#)

Comment

Subscribe to comment

MY COMMENT RESPECTS THE BLOG AND ITS READERS

Online communities, not dissimilarly to classroom spaces, can generate competitive or even toxic dynamics. In creating this platform, we wanted to provide students with a safe and inclusive space, and we made this very explicit when presenting the project to students at Warwick and UNINT.

- **Student and staff involvement and engagement**

The project was student-led, with language tutors providing ongoing training and support, and aimed to reverse the traditional learning environment through a ‘flipped classroom’ model where students could teach and learn from each other. One staff member from Warwick (Dr Sinibaldi) and one staff member from UNINT (Prof Boyd) were responsible for ensuring that the website was regularly updated with relevant resources, and that students on all language modules participated in the project. Other language tutors at Warwick and UNINT also gave significant contributions, through promoting the project in their language classes and uploading content to the platform.

Whilst tutors acted as facilitators, students were fully in charge of the content and it was important to us that they felt ownership over the platform. The project aimed to promote a more natural use of the target language, and gave students an opportunity to practise the skills of listening, speaking, writing and reading in a non-judgemental environment, while also fostering an independent and proactive approach to language learning. For this reason, we kept tutors’ contribution to a minimum and we encouraged students to see the platform as a space which was led by students, for students.

- **How was the platform used?**

The platform was regularly used by a core of students from Warwick and UNINT, who commented on each other’s posts and participated in all sections of the platform. This group included the Warwick web managers, who had the most involvement in the platform, but also some other students across year groups and proficiency levels. The majority of students used the platform occasionally, often fortnightly, e.g. to reply to comments, check the translation section for homework, or engage with the News section.

Initially, language tutors at Warwick and UNINT had lengthy conversations on how to avoid for the platform to be used mostly as a ‘proofreading service’ by students learning Italian and English. This is demonstrated, for instance, by the wording of the email that was sent to Warwick students when first advertising the platform:

Dear IT201 students,

I am writing to let you know that we have been awarded some funding to launch a language-exchange platform with an Italian University.

Please check out the website and register with your Warwick email at: <http://www.innit-exchange.com>

The website aims to connect Italian students of English at the Università degli studi Internazionali (Roma) with Warwick students of Italian. Once your registration has been approved, you can interact with Italian native speakers in the different sections of the website to exchange ideas, language tips, comment on each others’ translations and more... This isn’t a proofreading service but rather a learning resource aiming to foster linguistic and intercultural awareness so it’s in your interest to make good use of it!

However, we soon had to challenge our own assumptions. In reality, students seemed to be particularly drawn to the News section, and what they seemed to value the most about the platform was precisely the opportunity of exchanging ideas and opinion in a more natural and authentic way compared to what they normally experience in the classroom. Since this had been the main goal when conceiving INNIT, we were very pleased with this outcome and what we have observed will inform future developments of the platform.

- **Dissemination**

The project was disseminated through various channels, including institutional channels at Warwick (such as the Italian staff meeting; the SMLC Language Teachers Forum; and the Language Coordinators Forum) as well as social media platforms. The aim was twofold: to promote the project to current students of Italian and encourage them to join, both from the Italian Department and the University Language Centre, but also to advertise the project externally. Although the website only accepts registrations from current Warwick or UNINT students, we thought it was important to give visibility to the project as a way of fostering future collaborations, reaching out to language teachers and scholars, and maximise our impact on the field of language learning.

We had a very good response to the project, as shown for instance by some senior scholars in the field of language learning technology and virtual exchanges (e.g. Robert O'Dowd) reaching out to us and suggesting collaborations. We also established strong connections with our partner in the project, the Università degli studi internazionali in Rome, and advertised the INNIT platform through their networks. See, for instance, the flyers and subsequent webinar that our colleagues in Rome organised to promote the project (attachment 1 and 2).

Presenting the project at the Warwick Education conference 2019 (see screenshot below) also allowed me to connect with colleagues within the Warwick community who share similar interests in technology and virtual exchanges as a way of engaging students through a collaborative and inclusive pedagogy.

B1 13:45 – 15:15

R0.03

B1.1 Using Moodle forums to develop undergraduate student collaboration and critical thinking skills

Sarah Dahl, Senior Teaching Fellow, Centre for Education

This session outlines a technology enhanced learning project conducted within a first year module. The asynchronous discussion forum facility within Moodle was used to provide students with additional and alternative opportunities to work collaboratively and practice their critical thinking skills; skills useful for both their studies and future employment aspirations. Students noted benefits to this additional and alternative opportunity that developed their learning and supported group working. Evaluation and consultation with students highlighted considerations needed regarding tutor role, how to scaffold student learning and how to encourage engagement. Finally, implications for assessment practices are discussed.

B1.2 Student-centred language learning: an English-Italian online platform

Caterina Sinibaldi, Teaching Fellow, School of Modern Languages and Cultures

This paper is a critical reflection on an IATL-funded project involving the creation of an online platform to promote an English-Italian exchange. The project is student-led, with academics acting as facilitators, and its main objective is to foster interlinguistic and intercultural communication between Warwick and an Italian partner university. I will examine the pedagogical reasons behind the creation of the platform, with a focus on student agency in language learning, and I will evaluate the impact of this project on the student community. Finally, I will discuss the future directions and broader implications of student exchanges for other disciplines beyond languages.

B1.3 The use of an online extended classroom tool to enhance student engagement and learning in the laboratory environment

Natalie Wride, Postgraduate Researcher and Sessional Teacher, School of Engineering

Laboratory sessions are an important part of the engineering curriculum, allowing students to condense taught lecture material and explore mathematical concepts visually and kinaesthetically. Often, sessions involve using unfamiliar or complex equipment whilst building upon previously taught lecture theory, which can result in students focussing on equipment procedures rather than understanding the concepts demonstrated by the experiment. This can lead to intended learning outcomes not being fully achieved. This paper summarises the outcomes of a WIHEA funded student engagement project to develop an extended classroom tool to enhance student laboratory briefing sessions and improve their attainment of proposed learning outcomes.

- **Challenges and possible solutions**

The main challenges are: a) continuing to foster and maintain student engagement with the platform and b) developing the project while also ensuring that it continues to be student-led and student-centred.

After the Christmas break, and at various points during the academic year, student engagement has fallen, and especially after the long Summer break (and with many users of the platform graduating) there is a risk of losing students. For this reason, a presentation of the platform will be incorporated in the Welcome Week activities and students from all years will be encouraged to engage with INNIT from Week 1. Tutors from Warwick and UNINT who are responsible for the platform will also continue to ensure that the various sections are active, by posting content and promoting engagement in their language classes.

In order to ensure that students continue to take ownership of INNIT, language tutors from the two universities will also design a series of collaborative and cooperation tasks between students at Warwick and UNINT. These tasks will be designed to further promote interaction between the two groups of students, and will involve video activities and live chats. Although the activities will be facilitated by tutors, we will appoint students across different year groups to shape their formats and oversee them.

- **Evaluating the project and future directions**

We will circulate a survey to all UG students who used the platform over this academic year and will use the results to inform our future developments of the project. One direction in which we would like to expand the platform involves the creation of collaborative podcasts between Warwick and UNINT students. We would also like to expand our platform in order to incorporate languages beyond Italian, with the goal of creating a broader exchange between the School of Modern Languages at Warwick and the Languages Department at UNINT.

We are also planning further collaborations with UNINT. This is one of the few universities certified by the European Commission as offering “quality master's level training for translators in line with the EMT standards.” ([link](#)). Following the recent growth of Translation Studies at Warwick (both through undergraduate pathways in translation theories and the MA in Translation and Cultures launched in Autumn 2018) we believe that collaborations between the two universities would be very beneficial.

In conclusion, thanks to the support of IATL we were able to deliver an excellent product to our Italian language students, and to create a real sense of community and engagement around language learning which can be expanded to other languages. The INNIT platform was a springboard for further collaborations and networking between language teaching professionals, as well as other scholars and practitioners who believe in the pedagogical benefits of virtual communities on learners and teachers alike. Students benefitted from the platform, as a way of connecting with other learners, and they experienced a sense of independence and agency over their language learning process. They also acquired valuable skills in managing the platform and interacting with its various sections. We are looking forward to the future developments of INNIT and we are very grateful to IATL for their support, which has enabled us to create this project.

Caterina Sinibaldi