The washback effect of CILS examination on learners of Italian as second language at Università del Piemonte Orientale – Vercelli (Italy)

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In today’s scholarship researchers in language testing agree that the introduction of a test leads to intentional and/or unintentional changes in the curriculum (Cheng, 1997), especially in teaching and learning practices. This influence is called “the washback effect” (Alderson & Wall 1993). The aim of this presentation is to show how the washback effect influenced attitudes, motivation, and learners strategies in a sample of 65 students who took the CILS test at the Università del Piemonte Orientale.

CILS (Certificate of Italian as a Foreign Language) is awarded after what is defined as a proficiency test; that is, a test which assesses generic language competence and is not linked to a course or a syllabus. It was conceived by Università per Stranieri di Siena in the early 90s and since then it is one of the official certifications of Italian as a second language. It was introduced in Università del Piemonte Orientale in 2009 by an agreement between the Department of Humanities in Vercelli and Centro Cils of Università per Stranieri di Siena. Since the test is not linked to the academic curriculum, it is open to anyone and not only to university students.

The data I will be presenting are taken from real classroom interactions which took place at Università del Piemonte Orientale. The students who took the test were asked to fill in a detailed questionnaire aimed to assess their psychological attitude, their learning strategies and to reflect on the outcome of their learning processes. The washback effect was overall positive not only in relation to the CILS exam but also to the standard exams the students took. The washback effect was also observable in the teaching practice, as it was decided to organise special classes for the CILS exam alongside the ‘ordinary’ Italian classes.

**Keywords**: washback effect, CILS, motivation, learner strategies