

The Relationship between Learner's Motivation and Italian Language Proficiency among Jordanian IFL Learners

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between the learners' motivation (integrative/instrumental) and Italian proficiency among Jordanian IFL learners at Alalbait University. It also sheds lights on the level of proficiency among Italian majors at Alalbait University. Two instruments are used in this study: the first is a five-point Likert scale questionnaire based on Gardner and MacIntyer (1990) to investigate students motivational/attitudinal orientations; the second is a proficiency test based on an official Italian language website. The test was evaluated and modified to suite the purpose of the study. The results show that there is no correlation between Motivation (integrative and instrumental)/ attitudes and proficiency among IFL learners in Jordan. Further, the results indicate that Italian majors have a fair level of proficiency in Italian as a foreign language at Alalbait University.

Keywords: Motivation, Proficiency, Italian, Foreign language learning, Attitudes

1. Introduction

Italian as a foreign-modern language in Jordan was adapted as an academic subject matter towards the beginning of the second millennium where the University of Jordan and Alalbayt University have started their B.A. programs in double major (Italian – English) in which 60% of the study plans consist of Italian literary, cultural and linguistics courses. Previously, Italian was taught as an elective foreign language course.

It was this adaption of Italian as a foreign language that evoked our previous published study on the attitudes and motivation for learning Italian as a foreign language in Jordan (Al-Oliemat, 2013), and In fact, it is the very same reason which motivated this study.

Researchers have long tried to explore the relationship between motivation and proficiency in foreign language. Studies concerned with second or foreign language (L2) learning have recognized that attitudes and motivation play a significant role in foreign language learning.

Dörnyei (2005, p. 65), states that all the factors involved in foreign language learning presuppose motivation to some extent. Studies revealed that some foreign language learners seem to be attracted only by the kind of benefits they can get and the advantages they may gain through learning a second / foreign language (Abdel Hafez, 1994 in Al-Oliemat A. 2013).

The interest in studying motivation and attitudes in psychology and education dates back to the early beginnings of the 20th century where many language teachers and researchers assumed that attitudes and motivation affect students' education success in general (Dörnyei, 2001, Gander, 2006).

Many models and theories were constructed to identify how motivation affects language learning; among these is Gardner's socio-educational model of second language acquisition which was and is still widely used to study motivation (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). This model assumes that the learners who have positive attitude to the target people and culture learn their language more easily than those who have negative attitude, and they are expected to become motivated to second language acquisition than others (Ushida, 2005).

According to Gardner's model; motivation is defined as: "the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction in the activity" (Gardner, 2006).

Motivation, essentially, is divided into two different domains of orientation. The first is instrumental motivation which refers to learners' desire to learn language to accomplish some non-interpersonal purposes such as meeting the requirements of graduation, applying for career and achieving higher social status (Ghanea et al., 2011). The second is integrative motivation which has been recognized as the learners orientation and desire to learn language for the purpose of becoming more integrated into the society of the targeted language, thus the learner tends to acquire the culture and values of the foreign language people (Tamimi and Shuib, 2009 in Al-Oliemat, 2013).

Evidence for the crucial role that motivation plays in foreign learning outcomes and proficiency has been accumulating. Thus, though most researchers seem to disagree on a

precise and concise definition of motivation, they still tend to indicate this significant role that it plays in foreign language proficiency.

To the best knowledge of the researcher, there were no previous studies conducted to investigate the relationship between learners' motivation and Italian language proficiency among IFL learners in Jordan.

Thus, this study aims to trace the relationship between motivation and proficiency in Italian language as a foreign language in Jordan among the Italian language majors at the University of Alalbayt.

2. Literature Review

Many studies were conducted to investigate the relationship between motivation and proficiency in foreign language.

In fact, most of the research was directed towards populations of second language learners and not to populations of foreign language learners.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) studied the effect of attitudinal and motivational factors on success in learning a second language among French language learners in different socio-linguistic contexts. They found that attitudinal/motivational factors play a great role in the dynamic of second language acquisition and use. They maintained that the relationship between attitudinal/motivational variables and language proficiency is evident in a second language context than in a foreign language context though it exists in both contexts.

Their hypothesis indicates that learners with a positive attitude and high level of motivation, whether being instrumental or integrative, are expected to be successful in developing proficiencies in foreign language.

Lukmani (1972) in a study conducted to investigate the effect of instrumental and integrative motivation on proficiency among English as a second language learners in Bombay, concluded that Marathi-speaking students are more instrumentally than integratively motivated and that "contrary to expectation and to the results of previous studies by Lambert and Spolsky, proficiency in English was significantly related to instrumental and not to integrative motivation" (Lukmani, 1972: 275 in Abdel Hafez, 1994).

Dörnyei (1994) indicates that motivation is one of the primary factors in second/ foreign language learning achievement and, consequently, the last three decades have witnessed a considerable amount of research that investigates the nature and role of motivation in L2 learning process.

Teitelbaum, et al. (1975) studied the influence of attitudes and motivation on the language proficiency of English-speaking students studying Spanish at the University of New Mexico. They indicate that integrative and instrumental motivation have failed to provide a reliable results of proficiency in foreign language.

Unexpectedly, their results show that a positive orientation toward the foreign language group may be negatively affect the acquisition of Spanish as a second language.

In response to such results, Gardner (1980), and Gardner and Glikzman (1982), and Gardner (1985) have provided empirical evidence connecting attitudes and motivation and language proficiency.

They indicate that there is a strong relationship between second/foreign language proficiency and attitudinal/motivational factors.

Saleh (1980) in Abdel Hafez (1994), traces the relationship between attitudes and proficiency in English as a foreign language among public school students in Amman. Results show that Jordanian school students are instrumentally motivated rather than integratively; further he indicates that the correlation between attitudes and foreign language proficiency is rather insignificant.

More recently, Inal. et al. (2003) in a study on the relationship between students attitudes toward foreign language and achievement found out that there is a significant relationship between students academic achievement and students attitudes toward a foreign language but they stated that there is no statistically significant relationship and achievement attributed to gender.

Ghanea et al. (2011) in a study conducted to trace the relationship between learners' motivation (integrative and instrumental) and English language proficiency among Iranian EFL, they indicate that there is a significant relationship between the integrative motivation and instrumental motivation and English language proficiency among Iranian English majors.

Other studies reveal that students' motivation for studying a foreign language is affected by many other factors, such as: students self-concept, goals, social environment, teacher's behavior, values, needs of the students and ethnic background (Chastain, 1988; Brohy, 2001, Tragant and Munoz, 2000).

Abdel Hafiz (1994) in a study focusing on attitudes and motivation on proficiency of English among English majors at Yamouk University in Jordan, indicate that students are integratively as well as instrumentally motivated. Further, results show that there is no significant correlation between students attitudes and motivation and their levels of oral proficiency in English. Also, results indicate that there is no positive relationship between subjects' attitudes and motivation and their achievement in English language.

These studies show contradictory results, and it seems that there is no common agreement on the nature of the relationship between attitudes/ motivations (instrumental and integrative) and second/ foreign language proficiency and achievements.

Further, to the best knowledge of the researcher none of the existing studies has traced the relationship between Italian as a foreign language and proficiency among its learners.

3. Research Questions:

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1- Are Jordanian Italian language majors at Alalbayt University instrumentally or integratively motivated and what attitudes do they have towards Italian as a foreign language?
- 2- To what extent Jordanian Italian majors at Alalbayt University are proficient in Italian language?
- 3- Is there any statistically significant relationship between motivation and the level of proficiency among IFL learners at Alalbayt University?

4. Objective of the Study

Recently, there has been an increasing demand and interest in learning foreign languages in Jordan and worldwide. This study is conducted to explore the relationship between learners' motivation and Italian language proficiency among Jordanian IFL learners. It, further, seeks to find out if Italian language majors at Alalbayt University integratively or instrumentally motivated.

5. Methodology

5.1 Sample

The sample consist of 28 students studying Italian as a foreign language within the B.A program of double major (Italian-English) at Alalbayt University. The Sample was randomly selected to represent second, third and fourth year students(eight male students and twenty female students). Subjects were selected according to the following criteria:

1. They have all studied at least twelve credit hours of Italian language which means that they should be at least in their second year in the B.A. program.
2. Their mother tongue is Arabic.

5.2 Instrument:

For the purpose of this study two instruments were developed and used. The first instrument is a five-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree) questionnaire based on Flaitz (1988), Gardner and MacIntyre (1991) and others. It was adopted and slightly modified to suite the objectives of the study.

The questionnaire consists of two sections: the first section includes the demographic variables of the sample of the study (gender, academic year, number of Italian language courses studied); the second section consists of fifteen items, ten reflecting the students' type of motivation (integrative vs. instrumental) and five reflecting their attitudes towards learning Italian language. The questionnaire along with the test instructions are written in English for comprehensive purposes.

To establish validity, the researcher asked experts in the field to read and rate the questionnaire; their recommendations were taken into consideration prior to the administration of the questionnaire. Further, the questionnaire achieved a high degree of reliability (Cronbach's Alpha, 0.84). Students were informed that there were no correct answers and their responses would remain confidential.

The second instrument is a proficiency test based on an Italian language website. This is a standardized test used to measure proficiency in Italian language. It includes four parts; a grammar section, a vocabulary section, and a spelling section, a fourth section was added to measure proficiency in pronunciation. In this last section respondents were asked to pronounce a number of Italian language words (assessment of the correct pronunciation was trusted to a native Italian professor).

All of the items were in the multiple choice format with the exception of the pronunciation test.

In the grammar section, students were asked to choose the correct form of the sentence or the correct form of the verb that best complete the sentence, there was only one correct answer. In the vocabulary questions, they selected the most appropriate word to complete a sentence. In the spelling questions students were asked to choose the correctly spelled word from four choices three are wrongly spelled and there was only one spelled correctly.

After finishing the written test which include the grammar, vocabulary and spelling, students were asked to proceed to another classroom where they were asked to pronounce the assigned words with the presence of an Italian language professor; assessment was immediately made and they were judged as being true or false.

While correcting the test unanswered questions were counted wrong. The final score was based on the number of correct answers. The reason why listening comprehension was not included in the test was that the IFL context in Jordan is mostly written literacy based.

6. Data Analysis

The data obtained in the questionnaire were processed using the SPSS package (version 21). In addition to frequencies and percentages which were used in the table concerned with the distribution of the respondents in terms of the demographic variables (see table 1). The researcher used the following statistical procedures to answer the questions of the study:

- 1- Means and standard deviations were used to answer research question number 1.
- 2- Percentages were used to assess the level of proficiency among IFL learners at Alalbait University; percentages were calculated according to their answers to the proficiency test. The data obtained answer research question number 2. (see table 2).
- 3- Pearson correlation coefficient was used to answer research question 3; the purpose is to find out if there is a significant statistical relationship between respondents' proficiency and their attitudes/motivation.

7. Results and Discussions

7.1 Distribution of the sample according to the demographic variables.

This study investigates mainly the relationship between motivation and proficiency in Italian among IFL learners.

The results of the study are presented and discussed according to the research questions stated above.

The first dimension of the analysis focuses on the distribution of the sample according to the demographic variables (gender, academic year, number of Italian language courses). Table 1 shows this distribution.

Table 1. Characteristics of the respondents (n=28)

Characteristics	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	8	28.6%
Female	20	71.4%
Academic Year		
2 nd year	1	3.6%
3 rd year	15	53.9%
4 th year	12	42.5%
Number of Italian courses that you studied		
6-7 courses	7	25%
8-9 course	11	39.3%
10 and above	10	35.7%

Table 1 includes the distribution of the respondents according to the demographic variables.

This table shows that (according to gender) 29% of the respondents are male students while 71% of the respondents are female students. This is probably due to the fact that foreign language learning is generally preferred by female students. Not to mention the fact that the number of female students at Alalbayt University is greater than the number of male students.

The table shows also that (according to Academic year) more than half of the respondents are in their 3rd year of the B.A. program about 54% and 42% of the respondents are enrolled in their 4th year of their program of double major (English-Italian) the rest of the sample 4% represents the second year students; this low percentage is due to the fact that student who have studied less than six Italian language courses were excluded. According to number of Italian courses studied, table 1 shows that 35.7% of the respondents have studied 10 or more courses and the least number of courses studied and totally completed is 6 (25%); the rest of the respondents have studied 8-9 Italian language courses (39%).

7.2 Discussion of the Results

7.2.1 Motivation and Attitudes towards Italian Language

The first research question: Are Jordanian Italian language majors at Alalbayt University instrumentally or integratively motivated for learning Italian as a foreign language and what attitudes do they have towards learning Italian as a foreign language?

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Items Concerned with Respondent's Motivation (instrumental vs. integrative) and Their Attitudes towards Learning Italian as a Foreign Language

Variable	Mean	St. Deviation	Degree
Instrumental motivation	3.79	0.48	Positive / high
Integrative motivation	4.01	0.63	Positive / high
Overall motivation	3.90	0.47	Positive / high
Overall attitude	3.83	0.53	Positive / high

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of the total sum for items concerned with respondents' instrumental, integrative and general attitudes. Reviewing table 2 above, one finds that Jordanian Italian majors at Alalbayt University are instrumentally as well as integratively motivated for learning Italian as a foreign language in Jordan (means 3.79 and 4.02 respectively). Further, results revealed in this table indicates beyond doubt that Italian majors at Alalbayt University possess a strong positive attitude towards learning Italian as a foreign language (mean score: 3.83).

However, results revealed in table 2 shows that respondents are slightly more integratively motivated than being instrumentally motivated; this means that they perceive learning Italian as a means at understanding Italian culture and Italian people and their way of life. Further, they perceive learning Italian language as a means of making contact with Italian people and acquiring more friends in Italy. Moreover, it is worth mentioning here that respondents indicate that Italian language will help them to enjoy films and books written in Italian language, with a mean score of 3.79. Respondents, also reveal the instrumental nature of motivation they have for studying Italian, for, they seem to be aware of the utilitarian orientation of Italian as a foreign-modern language. They, also tend to be aware of the benefits they may gain through studying it. In this regard, respondents indicate that they learn Italian in order to accomplish some personal benefits such as to graduate and to have better career in the future.

These results lend support to the findings of studies conducted on English as a foreign language such as Harison et al (1975) and Saleh (1980) among others.

Table 2, further, shows that Italian majors at Alalbayt University have a strong positive attitudes towards learning Italian as a foreign language (mean = 3.83).

7.2.2 Jordanian Italian Majors Proficiency in Italian Language

Research question 2: to what extent Jordanian Italian majors at Alalbayt University are proficient in Italian language.

Table 3. Respondents' Proficiency in Italian Language

Variable	Proficiency (%)	Degree
Grammar	67.9%	Fair
Vocabulary	53.6%	Poor
Spelling	62.5%	Fair
Pronunciation	73.2%	Good
Overall proficiency	64.3%	Fair

Table 3 presents the percentages of respondents correct answers to the proficiency test which include the following sections: grammar, vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation; further, the table shows the degree of proficiency which the respondents achieved.

Table 3 shows that Jordanian Italian majors at Alalbayt University achieved a good level of proficiency in pronunciation (73.2%). The reason behind this good level of proficiency is attributed to the fact that Italian language pronunciation system is very much similar to that of Arabic language which follows a general rule which indicates a general correspondence between the written form and pronunciation. Not to mention the fact that most of sounds in Italian are pronounced similarly to their counterparts in Arabic (with the exception of very few). Further, the table shows that Italian majors at Alalbayt University achieved a fair level of proficiency in grammar and spelling; they scored 67.9% and 62.5% respectively. This modest level of proficiency reflects the fact that Italian language is not taught at the school level, and the first steps of learning Italian as a foreign language begin at the university level. This means that their learning experience with the grammatical system as well as the spelling system of Italian is still developing; this, in fact, is evident in their poor level (53.6%) of proficiency in vocabulary use. Respondents overall proficiency score is 64.3% which is a fair level of proficiency. This degree of proficiency among Italian language majors is rather modest and is less than being good.

7.2.3 Relationship between Motivation and the Level of Proficiency

Research question 3: is there any statistically significant relationship between motivation and the level of proficiency among IFL learners?

Table 4. Correlation between Motivational/attitudinal Variables and Proficiency in Italian.

Variable	Correlation Coefficient ®	Sig.
Instrumental Motivation	-0.075	0.706
Integrative Motivation	-0.024	0.902
Overall Motivation	-0.054	0.786
Overall attitude	-0.188	0.339

Contrary to many previous studies conducted to investigate the relationship between motivation (instrumental and integrative) and proficiency in foreign language (Lambart and Gardner, 1985), the results of the correlational analysis in table 4 reveal that there is no significant correlation neither between instrumental/integrative motivation, nor between attitudes and proficiency in Italian as a foreign language among IFL learners at Alalbayt University.

These results do not support the prevailing idea that foreign language learners' integrative/instrumental motivations and their positive attitude towards learning a foreign language strengthen their proficiency in the foreign language.

The absence of a significant correlation between motivational/attitudinal orientations and foreign language proficiency could be attributed to many reasons; among these is the fact that though the IFL learners are found to be instrumentally/ integratively motivated to learn Italian as a foreign language, but they start to study it at the university level. This late starting point of studying Italian as a foreign language did not give them the chance (time wise) to reach an adequate level of proficiency.

Further, Abdel Hafez (1994), reported that most of the studies that revealed significant correlation between attitudinal/motivational orientations and proficiency in English, including those conducted by Gardner and Lambert, have focused on populations of second language learners studying English in an American environment. This second interpretation of the lack of correlation between attitudes / motivation and proficiency in foreign language could be projected to our study on Italian as a foreign language in a non-native environment. In fact, the absence of native environment prevents, consequently, an extensive language use, i.e, there is “a lack of actual interaction with the target group” (ibid). In this regard, Oller, Baco and Vigil (1977: 174) indicate that “attitudes would probably have a closer relationship to attainment of proficiency in a target language when the context of learning was an SL setting than a FL setting”.

These results, on the other hand, lend support to other previous studies conducted on the relationship between motivational /attitudinal orientation and proficiency in English. Among these, Saleh (1980) in a study investigating the relationship between attitudes and proficiency in English among public third-secondary school students in Jordan, he reveals that there is an insignificant correlation between students' motivation/attitudes and their proficiency in English in Jordan. Further, results seem to agree with Tietelbaum et al. (1975). their results indicate that integrative/ instrumental orientations do not produce reliable results with regard to proficiency in second language.

Also, results are in accord with those of Abdel Hafez (1974) who indicates that there is no statistical significant correlation between motivational/ attitudinal orientations and proficiency in English among English as a foreign language learners in Jordan.

8. Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations:

This study investigates the relationship between motivation (instrumental and integrative) and proficiency among IFL learners at Alalbayt University/ Jordan. A minor aim of the study was

to investigate the instrumental/ integrative motivation for learning Italian and the level of proficiency among IFL learners.

The results indicate that Jordanian Italian majors at Alalbayt University are instrumentally as well as integratively motivated for learning Italian as a foreign language and that they have strong positive attitudes towards Italian language, people and culture.

Results, also, show that Jordanian Italian majors' level of proficiency is less than being good (fair).

The study, further, concluded that there is no correlation between proficiency and motivation/attitudes among IFL learners.

The results of this study lend support to some other studies of the type (Saleh, (1980), Abdel Hafez (1994), Oller, et al. (1977) among others). On the other hand, these findings contradict other studies which indicate the strong relationship between motivation/attitudes and proficiency in second language (Gardner, and Lamber, 1984, among others).

These results have significant implications for instructors and syllabus designers to improve teaching/learning Italian language in foreign context. This study could help building new curriculum for foreign learners of Italian taking in consideration these findings.

Further studies are needed with a greater number of participants and from different universities to further assess the results concluded in this study.

In fact, this study is one of the recommendation of our previous studies conducted to trace attitudes towards learning Italian as a foreign language (Al-Oliemat, A. 2013).

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Questionnaire

The relationship between learners' attitudes and motivation and Italian language proficiency among IFL learners

By:

Dr. Ahmed Al-Oliemat

Please fill out the first section, 'Biographical data', then for the following... statements, show the extent of your agreement or disagreement using 5-point scale (write X);

Biographical data

1. Gender: Male Female
2. Academic year: 2nd year 3rd year 4th year
3. How many Italian language courses did you study up till now? Specify ()

#	Degree Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I am studying Italian because it is useful in everyday life					
2	I am studying Italian because it will offer me a better job opportunity when I graduate					
3	I gain more respect and social recognition when I speak Italian					
4	I prefer to work in Italy than in					

	any other country in the world					
5	I am studying Italian because it will make me a better educated person					
6	Studying Italian will help me to understand Italian culture					
7	Studying Italian will help me to understand Italian people and their way of life					
8	Studying Italian is important to me because I will be able to enjoy films and books of the Italian.					
9	Studying Italian will help me to have more friends.					
10	Studying Italian allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people					
11	Italians have produced outstanding artists and writers					
12	People who speak one language think less clearly than those who speak two or more					
13	People who speak one language are less open-minded than people who speak two or more language					
14	I think that Italian should be taught at the secondary school level					
15	I would feel less confident person if I spoke one foreign language than if I spoke two or more					

Test: Dear students you are kindly requested to choose the correct answer that best complete the sentences below. The results of this test will be used for the purpose a scientific study. The results will not be considered, by any means, as part of your academic achievement.

1. Prova di Grammatica

1. comincia / finisce / chi / non / non
 - a- finisce chi comincia non non
 - b- chi non comincia non finisce
 - c- non chi finisce non comicia
2. mattino / ha / in / l'oro / bocca / il
 - a- il mattino ha l'oro in bocca
 - b- boca in l'oro ha mattino
 - c- Il l'oro ha in bocca mattino
3. va /s'infarina / chi / al / mulino
 - a- chi va al mulino s'infarina
 - b- mulino al chi s'infarina
 - c- va Chi al mulino s'infarina
4. E'buona, brava e gentile _____ ha qualcosa che non va.
 - a- Tuttavia
 - b- Mentre
 - c- Infatti
5. Carlos è allegro, gentile _____generoso.
 - a- chi
 - b- e
 - c- ha
6. Lo lavoro, lui, _____, se ne sta a casa.
 - a- Vicino
 - b- Perchè
 - c- Invece
7. Se _____ricca, farei il giro del mondo.
 - a- Amassero
 - b- Andato
 - c- Fossi
8. "lentamente", "velocemente", ""purtroppo" sono:
 - a- Preposizioni
 - b- Verbi
 - c- Avverbi
1. "camminare", "correre", "mangiare" sono:
 - a- Verbi
 - b- Nomi
 - c- Aggettivi

2. Prova Di Vocabolario

- Scegliete la risposta giusta.
1. _____ vai per Natale?
 - a. Cosa
 - b. Quale
 - c. Dove
 2. L'autobus arriva, _____ in ritardo durante l'inverno.
 - a. Stamattina
 - b. Sempre
 - c. Ora
 3. Voglio _____ a parlare l'italiano.
 - a. Imparare
 - b. Fare
 - c. Frequentare
 4. Pietro dice che non puo' _____ il nostro invite.
 - a. Accettare
 - b. Accertare
 - c. Accennare
 5. La parola spiaggia vuole dire
 - a. Mare
 - b. Marina
 - c. Costa
 6. Non ti preoccupare, ti aiuteremo (sicuramente)
 - a. Tra l'altro
 - b. Senza altro
 - c. Affatto
 7. La parola che vuol dire fare passaggiata e'
 - a. Camminare

B .Salire

C .Correre

8. L'estate e l'inverno sono...

- a. Messi
- b. Settimane
- c. Stagioni

3. Prova di ortografia

* Quale parola e' scritta in manieracorretta.

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| 1. | 2. |
| a. senza | a. sufficiente |
| b. Usciere | b. sufficiente |
| c. sciegliere | c. suficiente |
| 3. | 4. |
| a. bell'uomo | a. Aotomezzo |
| b. bel'uomo | b. automezzo |
| c. belluomo | c. automezo |
| 5. | 6. |
| a. pronusciare | a. Giurisprudenza |
| b. pronunciare | b. Gerureprudenza |
| c. pronuncere | c. Giruesprodenza |
| 7. | 8. |
| a. Mintere | a. Consiglio |
| b. Menti | b. Cunsilio |
| c. Mentre | c. consileo |

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