

Translate into Italian:

The popularity of language-learning apps has boomed around the world during the coronavirus lockdowns, and the UK has, somewhat surprisingly, led the way. Although the country is not renowned for its population's skill or enthusiasm at learning a foreign language, the Covid-19 pandemic appears to have seen many more Britons try their hand at becoming at least a bit more bilingual.

US firm Duolingo says that its new user numbers soared in 2020, especially in the UK. It says that globally they were up 67% compared with 2019, while in the UK they shot up by 132%, almost double the worldwide average. "The UK has really embraced language learning during the pandemic," says Duolingo's Colin Watkins. Other language apps have also seen big growth. London-based Busuu says that while its active global user numbers tripled last year, numbers in the UK rose more than fourfold (312%).

Duolingo and Busuu both offer free and paid-for premium versions, and have put a lot of work into their software to try to make the learning process as effective as possible. But are they actually any good? How proficient can people get in another language by using them?

Renowned linguist Stephen Krashen, of the University of Southern California, is not very complimentary. "My analyses of their outcomes show that they achieve the same somewhat mediocre results as traditional methods do in regular classrooms, and produce the same lack of enthusiasm from students," he says. "Generally, the ability to speak and write fluently and accurately is the result of language acquisition via comprehensible input, such as good books, movies and interesting stories."