

# Approaches to English for Specific and Academic Purposes

**Perspectives on Teaching and Assessing  
in Tertiary and Adult Education**

Michael Joseph Ennis, Jemma Prior (eds.)

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# Introduction

**Jemma Prior & Michael Joseph Ennis**  
**Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy**

## 1. ESP and EAP – A Brief Overview

The teaching of English for specific purposes (ESP) is an activity within English language teaching (ELT) and can be traced back to the 1960s when unparalleled developments in the scientific, economic, and technological fields created a huge demand for English. This demand concerned a clear need for specific English and so the teaching and learning of English particularly to adults started to shift from general English for no particular purpose with a predominantly grammatical syllabus to a more functional syllabus providing language and skills training for specific professional and academic needs. This shift in focus towards ESP aimed “to help language learners cope with the features of language or to develop the competencies needed to function in a discipline, profession, or workplace” (Basturkmen, 2005, p. 6).

ESP has been defined as “an approach to language learning, which is based on learner need” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 19) and so needs analysis has commonly played a fundamental role in the development of ESP courses. Needs analysis has been described as “the process of determining the needs for which a learner or group of learners requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities” (Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992, p. 242). This process can comprise varying methods ranging from tests to interviews and observations, and various sources, which can comprise any of the various stakeholders involved in the course. However, it has been generally agreed that the opinions of the learners “compris[e] an essential element of the needs analysis” (Master, 2005, p. 101) and as such, the learners are often involved in the needs analysis process. This has been criticised, however, since learners



“tend to make inadequate sources of information for a needs analysis” (Long, 2005, p. 20) because although many can explain why they feel they want to learn a language, they are often unable to identify their actual language needs.

Although the focus on needs analysis in ESP is a significant feature that distinguishes it from general English, other characteristics have emerged, particularly in the work of Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), who identified three “absolute” characteristics of ESP, namely:

ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner;

ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves;

ESP is centred on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, pp. 4–5)

Consequently, although the significance of identifying and meeting learner needs is clear, ESP must also be flexible in its teaching approach(es), given the variety of disciplines in which it operates, and the vast array of language skills, texts, and other features that characterise ESP contexts.

The teaching of ESP, due mainly to its focus on the identifiable needs of learners, is often directed towards adult learners who are typically in a work context and whose English-language needs run concurrently with their professional activity. However, ESP is increasingly being taught in tertiary level institutions and can even be taught to learners at secondary school level (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998), although the language needs of younger learners can be less immediate.

English for academic purposes (EAP), in contrast, though typically regarded as a branch of ESP (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Jordan, 1997; Charles & Pecorari, 2016), was first identified as its own approach to teaching English as early as 1974, and soon afterwards, the term EAP was coined to refer to the teaching of English to overseas students at British universities (Jordan, 1997).

Since its inception, the range of settings in which EAP can be found has increased significantly and it is no longer confined to British universities; indeed, the teaching of EAP can be found in a vast number of higher and further education institutions globally whether in an English-speaking context or not (Jordan, 1997). Moreover, EAP has developed over time and has divided into two main sections, English for general academic purposes (EGAP) and English for specific academic purposes (ESAP). EGAP courses typically focus on common core skills or general study skills, such as critical thinking or note-taking, whereas ESAP courses concern subject-specific skills and language, and so will often focus on the specific language of a single discipline, such as economics or mechanical engineering. This focus on the specificity of different disciplines' language has led to various research approaches in EAP, including genre analysis and corpus linguistics. Genre analysis investigates genres, that is, specific types of texts from a disciplinary subject area that share similarities in content or form, for example, and the contexts in which they are present with the aim "to identify the common traits of academic language in different domains" (Thompson & Diani, 2015, p. 1). This aim is aided by advances in technology that have allowed researchers to analyse language corpora, where huge numbers of texts are collected so that their various discourse features can be investigated.

Over the past couple of decades, the need for ESP and EAP in tertiary-level institutions has grown dramatically, mainly due to the internationalisation of higher education, which, amongst other aspects, has prompted the establishment of study programmes taught wholly or partially in English. English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is "a global growing phenomenon" (Dearden, 2015, p. 2) and the challenges that students inevitably face when studying in a second language have led to a greater need for the provision of EAP and ESP in these institutions (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2010). This growth in EMI programmes has been a consequence of policies that have encouraged greater student mobility, thanks chiefly to the Erasmus (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) initiative and the Bologna Process in Europe (Coleman, 2006). As such, the importance of ESP and EAP in higher

education institutions in the second decade of the 21st century has never been felt so keenly.

## 2. About this Book

Against the background outlined above, a series of three symposia on ESP and EAP were held in 2014, 2015, and 2016 at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, a university where English serves as one of three mediums of instruction. This volume presents a selection of eight of the twenty papers presented at those symposia. Although the volume does not offer an exhaustive representation of the perspectives and experiences shared at the symposia, nor is it conceived as a conference proceedings per se, it does offer a representative sample of the diversity of approaches to teaching and assessing ESP and EAP which were shared on those occasions. Like the symposia, the bond that links all chapters published here is their application to English language teaching (ELT) and/or language assessment. Another common denominator is that all the authors present reflections and research carried out in higher education institutions and adult education contexts. Beyond these similarities, however, the contributions vary markedly in terms of teaching and research contexts: some report the results of meticulously planned research projects, while others describe in detail cases embedded in specific contexts; some analyse the specialised language of particular discourses or domains, while others reflect upon teaching methods and materials; some are set in broad EGAP contexts, while others operate in narrower spaces of ESP or ESAP.

From the diverse vantage points of the various contributors to the volume, there emerge decidedly heterogeneous, and even disparate teaching approaches, research methods, and writing styles. “Disparate circumstances” (Strevens, 1977) being the *raison d’être* of ESP, the editors hope that the reader welcomes this diversity as much as they do. However, they also recognize the necessity to justify the reasoning behind the structure of such an eclectic collection of scholarship. After much deliberation, it was decided to order the contributions in terms of focus, drawing upon Dudley-Evans and St. John’s

(1998) aforementioned three characteristics. Specifically, the first two chapters establish the identification of learner needs and the adoption of learner-centred approaches as the core of ESP research and practice; the middle four chapters—always keeping the learner in mind—present various approaches to analysing, teaching, and assessing the linguistic features of specialised genre and discourse; and the final two chapters demonstrate the necessity of basing teaching and assessment methods and content on the specific language and language skills which contemporary learners of ESP/EAP actually require for study, work, and life. Although each of these thematic strands, among several others, are encountered throughout, the reader will hopefully find that each chapter builds upon and/or responds to the theoretical and practical foundation of the previous.

Jemma Prior sets the stage with her account of a recent action research study undertaken with the participation of undergraduate economics students following her advanced ESAP course. Her research documents how classroom-based negotiation was introduced into the course syllabus to provide the students with greater decision-making powers with the intention of promoting learner autonomy. The fact that the learners were able to participate actively in the decision-making processes of the course also provided them with greater opportunities to practise some of the specific skills the course had been designed to foster, especially writing and speaking. She frames her account with reference to prior studies that had attempted to foster autonomy through providing learners with greater responsibility for their learning and as such, provides an up-to-date contribution to the work of other researchers. She concludes by presenting some of the findings from the evaluation phase of the project, demonstrating that the students were almost wholly positive about being able to negotiate aspects of their course, and that reports of increased motivation from the students had contributed to their achieving greater autonomy.

Next, Karoline Steckley describes the establishment of an English for refugees course at the *Associazione Italo Americana* in Trieste, Italy. Initiated as a well-intentioned community project to support the integration of asylum seekers,

Karoline and her colleagues quickly realised that the needs of refugees stood in stark contrast to the needs of the traditional adult students at their institution. Whereas most adults who come to the Association are Italian citizens seeking conversation courses to improve their oral communication skills for work or leisure, the asylum seekers had diverse national, educational, and professional backgrounds as well as abstract or vague motivations for attending the course. As a result, the teacher-centred approach to adult education employed by the Association proved ineffective. In response, the instructors applied a more student-centred approach which focused on the most immediate needs of the course participants and through a process of trial and error experimented with methods employed in their after-school program for Italian school children. The result was a course that applied experience-based learning principles for the purpose of developing life skills. The net effect was a valuable learning experience for both the course participants and the teachers.

Turning to the features of scientific discourse, Michela Canepari makes a compelling argument in favour of the application of popular books, documentaries, and television series to the teaching and learning of the language of mathematics and physics in a university context. She details how such texts provide an intersemiotic or intralinguistic translation of mathematical theorems and scientific theories, and explains how analysing products of popular culture such as these in the classroom can make the specialised language of mathematicians and scientists more interesting and accessible to learners of languages for specific purposes (LSP), who may only have basic knowledge and minimal interest in these fields.

Framing his experience as an example of reflective practice, Michael Joseph Ennis recounts his efforts to perfect the teaching and assessing of academic writing skills for undergraduate students of tourism studies over a period of five years. Beginning with the triangulation of the needs of his students through personal observation, formal surveys, and a comprehensive literature review, he details the methods and process he employed to select and adapt authentic, relevant materials in the design of a customised course based on the

concepts of ESAP and task-based language teaching (TBLT). Facing common challenges with student engagement, he experimented with the use of various forms of extra credit to incentivise course attendance and the completion of collaborative writing tasks. He concludes by presenting excerpts from student compositions as evidence of the course's success in fostering the development of reading-for-writing skills and intercultural learning.

The next two chapters adopt corpus-based approaches to analyse specialised discourse and ESP learner interlanguage, respectively. Valeria Fiasco's corpus-based study employs mixed methods in an attempt to triangulate how and why Anglicisms are often used instead of their Italian equivalents in the reporting on Brexit found in three Italian newspapers. Analysing the frequency data, Fiasco reveals that numerous loanwords are used with their British English connotations within the Italian Brexit discourse, in particular proper nouns and specialised terms from the semantic fields of politics or business and economics. She also finds that many general English terms found in her Brexit corpus are not commonly used in Italian and/or only occur once in the entire corpus. The qualitative analysis reveals that newspapers employ divergent strategies based on assumptions about their respective readers. Some Anglicisms appear with an Italian equivalent or a brief gloss to assist non-specialist readers in comprehension, but most occur with no attempt to translate or define at all, when comprehension is assumed. Fiasco suggests that a corpus such as this could be applied to help learners understand specialised English words and phrases with the support of their L1s.

With more explicit attention paid to learners of ESP, Letizia Cirillo describes the construction, analysis, and application of a local learner corpus consisting of opinion articles written by undergraduate university students studying business studies. This particular corpus offers insights into the metadiscourse markers employed by students to fulfil various rhetorical and pragmatic functions. Cirillo argues that teachers could use similar customised learner corpora to inform syllabus design, lesson planning, and individualized feedback and instruction. In addition, students could be urged to exploit such corpora for

the purpose of peer and self-assessment, in this case of their overuse, underuse, or misuse of textual metadiscourse markers and their perhaps unreflective use of interpersonal metadiscourse markers. This learning strategy can be especially effective when students are given opportunities to compare their tendencies with data found in various reference corpora.

The final two chapters demonstrate the extent to which the specific needs of learners in different contexts can give rise to divergent perspectives on teaching and assessing ESP. Sharon Hartle reflects on English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and testing occurring at her Italian university in light of the position of English as a global *lingua franca*. These reflections are driving in the direction of teaching and testing to “realistic” norms which transcend the native-speaker model of English by focusing on the real-life communication needs of learners. Based on an open-ended questionnaire, students studying tourism management at her institution seem to be primarily motivated to learn English for the purpose of communicating with other non-native speakers in international contexts, rather than to achieve native-like proficiency. In light of this, Hartle argues that teaching advanced language courses and assessing advanced language proficiency should focus in particular on the complexity of grammar and lexis, rather than native-like accuracy and range. In this pursuit, she presents an analysis of a small corpus of learner texts to reveal the most common errors of her students, arguing that instruction should focus on those errors which might impede communication. The project is culminating, at the time of writing, in the explicit inclusion of *interactional competence* in the descriptors used for C1 oral proficiency exams at her institution, and the deemphasising of errors which may mark the test takers as non-native speakers, but do not impede communication.

Finally, Todd Marshall, who in contrast to Sharon Hartle works in the context of an American university, suggests that one area where his English language learners should become more native-like is their pronunciation, for the sake of mutual intelligibility. He suggests that pronunciation is too often neglected in university English as a second language (ESL) instruction in the United States, despite the fact that students are often required to pronounce English

words correctly, that is, similar to a native speaker, in order to excel academically during their studies and in the US labour market after graduation. Although he values the offering of standalone pronunciation courses, he proposes integrating the teaching of pronunciation across the language curriculum. Drawing on his personal experience teaching and from the established body of research and scholarship in the field, he offers his seven “secrets” to teaching pronunciation, including training students to use the International Phonetic Alphabet to increase their familiarity with English phonics, integrating mini pronunciation lessons into each lesson in response to commonly occurring errors, teaching memorisation techniques, drilling students on phonemes and minimal pairs they have already memorised, teaching students stress patterns, tailoring exercises to the practical needs of students, and, finally, finding ways to make all of the above fun for the students.

The strength of this volume is that the perspectives of the authors are rooted in practical experience and classroom research conducted while teaching ESP and EAP to adult learners in various contexts, which makes the book of particular interest to practitioners in analogous contexts. One possible limitation is that all but one of the authors are based at institutions in Italy. However, the editors and authors share the belief that despite its predominantly Italian perspective, the accounts in this volume will still serve as a valuable resource for colleagues teaching at universities and community programs in other parts of the world. Furthermore, as representatives of both the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and TESOL Italy, the editors sincerely hope that this modest contribution to the field will entice some readers—based in Italy or abroad—to share their own work at future editions of our ESP/EAP symposia and/or in future resulting publications.



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# Let's Negotiate: Learner Autonomy in Action in a University ESAP Course

**Jemma Prior – Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy**

## Abstract

Learner autonomy is often many different things to many people but Holec's early definition that it is "the ability to take charge of one's learning... to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning" (1981, p. 3) is still extremely influential today. "All aspects" include decisions about the objectives of a course, defining the course contents, and even evaluating what has been acquired. In the context of teaching English at Italian universities, however, this vision can be challenging or even impossible to implement, given the vast number of limitations imposed upon undergraduate programmes from all the different stakeholders involved. This chapter will present an action research project whose aim has been to actively include students in the decision-making processes of an advanced English for specific academic purposes (ESAP) syllabus for economics students at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano. Parts of the ESAP syllabus, including assessment means, are negotiated with the students in order to allow them to contribute directly to the course contents. In this way, not only does this approach promote learner autonomy as envisaged by Holec, but it also attempts to address the language needs of each individual learner, as each member of the class has the right and opportunity to contribute. The chapter will present the approach to the negotiated syllabus, problems encountered during the study and some of the results of the syllabus implemented, including evaluation from the students themselves.

## 1. Context and Background to Research

The context in which this action research study took place is the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano in Italy where English, German, and Italian are the languages of instruction in the majority of undergraduate programmes. Specifically, this study focused on students following undergraduate programmes at the Faculty of Economics and Management where this trilingual model is used, so students typically have to study economics in English, legal subjects in Italian, and business administration in German, for example. Generally speaking, the three languages are distributed evenly across the subjects studied on the undergraduate programmes at the Faculty. This study model makes the University one of the very few universities in Europe that require undergraduate students to follow programmes using three languages of instruction.<sup>1</sup>

As the University has three official teaching languages, all students have to be classified as having one of the three as their first language (L1) even if their actual L1 does not match one of the three. In such a case, their official L1 for the purposes of the University will normally be the language in which they have achieved the highest proficiency. This categorisation is done to help regulate language choices that students have to make, including choosing which second and third language courses they have to attend. The students at the Faculty of Economics predominantly have Italian or German as their official L1, and current data show that 57.8% have German as their L1 and 40.5% have Italian. Only 1.5% have English as their L1.<sup>2</sup>

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1 According to the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano's website, the trilingual model of the university is "unique in Europe". (see <https://www.unibz.it/en/services/language-centre/study-in-three-languages/>)

2 These figures were provided by the Student Secretariat at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano on 1 August 2018.

## 1.1 The ESAP Course

As well as having to follow the subjects that make up their degree in German, Italian and English, students also have to follow two compulsory English for specific academic purposes (ESAP) courses in their second and third languages, and these courses, and their exams provide credit points like all the other subjects in their degree. Currently all undergraduate economics students that have German and Italian as their L1 have to attend two ESAP courses, one in the first year of their studies, which is pitched at the B2/B2+ level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and a 30-hour advanced (equivalent to the CEFR C1 level) ESAP course in the second year, which I teach and which is the focus of this study.

Before the study commenced, the ESAP course had been designed to provide students with an advanced language course that would provide them with some of the specific academic language and skills that could assist them when studying the subjects that use English as a medium of instruction (EMI) at the Faculty. However, because no recent needs analysis had been undertaken, it was unclear as to whether the skills and language in the course were still relevant for the students. Further, although the students were attending the same undergraduate programme, their overall English-language proficiency tended to be relatively heterogeneous due to their different learning and cultural backgrounds and the fact there were no real language prerequisites to attend the course. Therefore, an assessment of the students' language needs and an examination of the course contents were needed to establish whether the course was effectively addressing students' needs and, if it transpired that the course was not as relevant as it could be, the syllabus could then be modified accordingly.

The existing syllabus had a skills-based approach, due to the fact that the Faculty's specific language model requires students to use English regularly because of the number of subjects where English is the language of instruction. A skills-based approach to language learning "is organized around the different underlying abilities that are involved in using a language for purposes such as reading, writing, listening, or speaking" (Richards, 2001, p. 159) and

aims to improve language proficiency and fluency through a focus on improving some or all of the four skills and their subskills. This approach to syllabus design had therefore been chosen for this particular course due to students' concurrent use of these skills in their studies<sup>3</sup>.

## 1.2 Approach to Course Design

Although it has been stated that the "student as an active learner is not very welcome in most sectors of universities" (Levin & Greenwood, 2001, p. 104), I believe students should be allowed to contribute more to their education than is often the case. If they are allowed a voice, "more effective, efficient, and democratic modes of classroom work" (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000b, p. 1) can be achieved. Optimising what and how work is undertaken in the classroom is a key element in my teaching since "the number of classroom hours and opportunities for interaction in university language courses are seldom if ever sufficient to provide students with even a fraction of the language that they might need for their studies and life" (Prior, 2018, p. 772). Therefore, a more learner-centred focus to the design of the syllabus, where content and procedures would be negotiated with the students, needed to be integrated into the existing skills-focused syllabus. A learner-centred focus is when "learners are closely involved in the decision-making process regarding the content... and how it is taught" (Nunan, 1988, p. 2). One of the advantages of a learner-centred approach to syllabus design, rather than an approach driven by the teacher or institution, is that because the learners play an active role in the decision-making, their direct involvement should lead to the design of a syllabus that is more relevant to their needs.

In order to address this learner-centred perspective, therefore, I chose to use negotiation in the classroom with the students when designing the syllabus.

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3 This section has been adapted from Prior (2018).

Negotiation can be defined as “discussion between all members of the classroom to decide how learning and teaching are to be organised” (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000b, p. 1). The negotiated syllabus therefore

provides the framework within which either a predesigned content syllabus would be publicly analysed and evaluated by the classroom group, or an emerging content syllabus would be designed (and similarly evaluated) in an ongoing way. (Breen, 1984, p. 55)

As many language learners often only have contact with the target language in a classroom environment, if they are given the opportunity to engage in negotiation regarding the syllabus and the learning process, this will allow them to engage in authentic communication with both the teacher and the other learners so that they will acquire some of the fundamental skills and language that will be needed in other situations where negotiation is required (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000c, p. 19). It is therefore through this negotiation that language learning can occur because negotiation is itself a communicative activity. Although it must be recognised that in this context my students do have contact with the target language, given the fact that they are studying at a university and using English as a medium of instruction, it is still important to emphasise that “the classroom is a key context where learner autonomy can be stimulated” (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017, p. 7).

Furthermore, engaging in negotiation would provide students with an opportunity to “take charge of [their] learning” (Holec, 1981, p. 3) and as such would be a means to gain greater autonomy. Being allowed to participate in some of the decision-making processes regarding the course’s syllabus would offer them a greater stake in their learning. In this way, the syllabus, and by definition the course, would achieve a greater relevance and authenticity in both the content and the language practised, as well as fostering greater learner autonomy.

## 2. Learner Autonomy and Negotiation – An Overview

The concept of learner autonomy has been widely discussed in language education since the early 1980s when Holec described it as learners taking charge of their own learning so as “to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning” (1981, p. 3). This idea of autonomy originated from the practice of self-directed learning, which is “learning in which the objectives, progress and evaluation of learning are determined by the learners themselves” (Benson, 2001, p. 8). Self-directed learning in the 1980s mainly developed through resources made available in self-access centres, which, with their extensive collection of language learning resources, “would offer learners the best opportunity for experimentation with self-directed learning” (Benson, 2001, p. 9), although the focus was on learners who had already reached a proficient level in the language they were learning.

Despite the popularity of self-access centres with their materials and resources, there has not been any convincing evidence that self-directed learning alone can develop into learner autonomy and indeed, “under certain conditions, self-instructed modes of learning may even inhibit autonomy” (Benson, 2001, p. 9). Consequently, the pursuit of learner autonomy moved away from the unrealistic assumption that it would develop spontaneously from self-directed learning and concentrated more on learner training, which Holec defined like this:

The basic methodology for learner training should be that of discovery; the learner should discover, with or without the help of other learners or teachers, the knowledge and the techniques which he needs as he tries to find answers to the problems with which he is faced. By proceeding largely by trial and error he trains himself progressively (1981, p. 42).

Although Holec focused on learners training themselves, the practice of learner training has developed over the years and is no longer confined to self-directed learning, but now tends to be incorporated into classroom learning (Benson, 2001). Learner training can take various forms, including language

awareness training, which focuses on improving the learners' knowledge about the nature of language and acquiring effective learning strategies (Dickinson, 1988, p.46). Learner training is important for all learners but "it is essential for those aiming at some level of autonomy" (Dickinson, 1988, p.46).

The fact, therefore, that autonomy requires learners to take charge of their learning and take responsibility for it has been broadly accepted (Little, 1995; Cotterall, 2000; Benson, 2001), but this view can tend to focus on learners' concurrent language learning. Littlewood (1999) recognises that learner autonomy is a goal that should be reached in order to benefit learners not only during their educational experiences learning languages but subsequent to that:

If we define autonomy in educational terms as involving students' capacity to use their learning independently of teachers, then autonomy would appear to be an incontrovertible goal for learners everywhere, since it is obvious that no students, anywhere, will have their teachers to accompany them throughout life. (Littlewood, 1999, p. 73)

Little (1995) also recognises how acquiring a degree of autonomy benefits learners both during and after their language educational experiences, as they can attain a degree of "pedagogical autonomy" that will be of an advantage in any learning context. However, he also states that "the whole point of developing learner autonomy is to enable learners to become autonomous users of their target language" and therefore exercise "communicative autonomy" (Little, 1995, p. 176). If pedagogical autonomy is encouraged, learners will be able to practise it and make use of it directly during any classroom activities as well as outside the classroom while engaged in their language learning, even if they are unable to exercise communicative autonomy because their language proficiency level is too low. However, as learners increase their language proficiency, pedagogical autonomy, and communicative autonomy will then begin to interact and learners will be more confident when using the target language in contexts away from the classroom than learners who have not practised learner autonomy. Little states that confidence in using the language is crucial for successful language learning:



this confidence to use the target language in a personally appropriate way is a necessary precondition for, but also the outcome of, the kind of communicative activity that gradually but ineluctably promotes second language development. It is the single most impressive achievement of successful projects to promote learner autonomy. (Little, 1995, p. 176)

Moreover, fostering learner autonomy can be seen as being even more desirable now than in the past, given how English has become so pervasive in so many contexts, whether they be cultural, social, educational or technological. The use and learning of English in the globalised world are ever-changing due to the rapid growth of communication technologies and the omnipresence of the internet, which has provided language learners with an infinite supply of input, stimulus, and communicative opportunities. Waters (2012), in his review of English language teaching (ELT) methodology, states that “the increasing ubiquity of web-based language teaching and learning resources has the potential to redistribute the balance between teacher-led and learner-based instruction” (2012, p. 448). As a consequence, learners have more opportunities than ever to work more independently, whether that be explicitly in language learning environments, or in their every-day lives. Moreover, the assumption that the English we use today can be represented by a homogenous and monolingual culture is clearly irrational, given the global status that English now enjoys. Illés refers specifically to the established but unrepresentative native-speaker models that have traditionally been used, and to a certain extent are still used, in ELT, but which can no longer be considered appropriate for 21<sup>st</sup> century English-language learners who have to operate in a globalised world where English is used so prevalently. She therefore believes that “the task of language education is... to help learners develop self-reliance and autonomy, which will enable them to communicate successfully in international settings” (Illés, 2012, p. 506). These developments make it fundamental that there is a focus on ways to foster learner autonomy in any context where a syllabus, especially a learner-centred syllabus, is being designed and implemented in English-language courses.

Cotterall agrees that learner autonomy should be integrated into classroom practice and she focuses particularly on how teachers can help foster learner autonomy in their courses. She states that

Language courses which aim to promote learner autonomy will incorporate means of transferring responsibility for aspects of the language learning process (such as setting goals, selecting learning strategies, and evaluating progress) from the teacher to the learner. (Cotterall, 2000, p. 109–110)

This approach, therefore, regards the learner as a decision-maker who has a certain amount of control over aspects of the learning process, and Benson states this explicitly: “the key factor in the development of autonomy is the opportunity for students to make decisions regarding their learning within a collaborative and supportive environment” (2001, p. 151). Allwright also believes that autonomy is fostered when teachers reflect on whether the decisions they normally take should be taken by the learners instead. Typically these decisions concern the planning of classroom activities and the evaluation of their outcomes (1979, p. 105), but Cotterall asserts the real challenge for course designers is “to find ways of supporting the transfer of responsibility for decision-making about learning from teacher to learner” (2000, p. 110). She further states that if learner autonomy is to be achieved, the course must address the language learning goals that learners have established:

in a course which seeks to foster language learners’ autonomy, time is devoted to raising learners’ awareness of ways of identifying goals, specifying objectives, identifying resources and strategies needed to achieve goals, and measuring progress. Decisions about language, texts, tasks, and strategies to focus on during the course are made in relation to the stated goals of the learners. (Cotterall, 2000, p. 109–110)

This approach implies that the teacher and the learners should engage in activities that will allow the learners to express their needs and interests and provide opportunities for reflective feedback, both from the teacher and the learners. In her discussion of the context in which her study occurred, this is effectively what happened, as her learners, all low-level adult learners, were initially asked to set goals for the course, were encouraged to keep learner

journals, had regular interviews with the teachers and engaged in ongoing reflection both with their teachers and their peers (Cotterall 2000). Moreover, many tasks in class were developed based on the individual learner's goals and future communication situations so that "rather than having to create links between pedagogic tasks and their own needs, learners instead practised tasks associated with their target situations, and received feedback on their performance" (Cotterall, 2000, p. 114). Therefore, although not once does she refer to a negotiated syllabus, the approach she describes is almost identical to general models of the negotiated syllabus presented in the literature (Breen, 1987; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000c; Slembrouck, 2000; Breen, 2001). However, she does refer to the process that was undertaken and states that it

presented the learners with a means of meeting their own needs. By making the language learning process salient, the course helped learners understand and manage their learning in a way which contributed to their performance in specific language tasks (Cotterall, 2000, p. 115)

Cotterall's study focused initially on learners establishing their own learning goals as a means to foster learner autonomy, but she makes no mention of a negotiated syllabus. Other studies also implemented approaches where learners took responsibility for decision-making regarding their learning (Dam 1995; Hall & Kenny, 1988; Karlsson, Kjisik, & Nordlund 1997) and the syllabus models used were very similar to the negotiated syllabus, although the term *negotiated syllabus* was never used. Therefore, a clear link between promoting learner autonomy within a negotiated syllabus was not made in these accounts.

Bloor & Bloor, however, establish a clear link between learner autonomy and a negotiated syllabus in their paper entitled "Syllabus negotiation: the basis of learner autonomy." They describe syllabus negotiation as an "approach to helping students arrive at the position of being able to understand and articulate their language learning objectives" (Bloor & Bloor, 1988, p. 62) and they regard syllabus negotiation as a crucial way to encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning, the fundamental premise of learner autonomy:

Whether it be with an individual in a self access programme or with a group of students in a conventionally taught course, negotiating the syllabus is the first step towards full responsibility (Bloor & Bloor, 1988, p. 65)

In their account of a negotiated syllabus for an academic writing course at the University of Warwick, they identify the limits that the context presented, compared to the self-access courses to which they also refer. In the case of the self-access courses, they were able to negotiate the "broad objectives" of the course due to the individual nature of the courses, whereas with the courses taught, they identify that it is the "details" that can be negotiated (Bloor & Bloor, 1988, p. 70). This account and its approach follow a similar approach to that presented by Breen and Littlejohn (2000a), where negotiation that takes place in the classroom can relate to the content, the language learning procedures, the goals, and even how these or other aspects are assessed. Breen and Littlejohn see this process as a cycle where decisions are negotiated initially about one or more aspects relating to the classroom work in the initial stage, actions are taken to implement those decisions in the next stage and then there is an evaluation phase where both the learning outcomes and the process that led to those outcomes are evaluated.

Therefore, this demonstrates that promoting learner autonomy often follows a very similar framework to that of the negotiated syllabus and that the concept of learner autonomy is inextricably linked to that of the negotiated syllabus as Bloor & Bloor state:

Syllabus negotiation increases students' understanding of the nature of language in use and of the learning process; it helps them to become aware of the facilities available in the immediate context of the university and in the wider context of society; it improves their ability to formulate their learning goals; and, above all, it enables them to begin to take control of their own learning, breaking out of the cocoon of dependence on the teacher. Once this has happened, negotiation inevitably becomes an ongoing process. It is thus that the foundations of autonomy are laid. (1988, p. 73)

To sum up, therefore, promoting learner autonomy plays a significant role in the syllabus that was designed and implemented for the ESAP course that was

the subject of my research. Fostering learner autonomy is crucial for three reasons: first, it prepares students for when they will no longer have a teacher accompanying them in later learning experiences; second, it enables the teacher to optimise the little time available in class (see Cotterall 2000, p. 115); third, it empowers learners to engage in beneficial communicative activities.

### 3. Research Methodology and Participants

In order to redesign the syllabus for the ESAP course in question, a thorough needs assessment and analysis were undertaken by using a mixed methods research design. Needs assessment requires information about learners, and Carkin states clearly that “needs assessment of the diverse learners in EAP underlies syllabus design” (2005, p. 87). However, as the aim was to establish a learner-centred approach to syllabus design, I wanted the students to be involved from the beginning. Therefore, quantitative data were collected from the students who were attending, had attended or who would attend the ESAP course from an online questionnaire, which was administered over three academic years. In total 365 responses were collected. However, the aim of the study was to gain as many insights as possible into the English being used at the Faculty and any problems students may have been encountering while studying in English. Therefore, just approaching the students to provide data would have excluded an important target population: the lecturers who use EMI in the courses they teach. As at the time of the study there were only ten lecturers who taught in English, qualitative data were collected from them in the form of semi-structured interviews. Once the data were collected and analysed, the results were merged with the data gathered from the students to achieve triangulation. Triangulation has been defined as

intentionally using more than one method of data collection and analysis when studying a social phenomenon so as to seek convergence and corroboration between the results obtained from different methods, thereby eliminating the bias inherent in the use of a single method (Riazi & Candlin, 2014, p. 144)

The use of triangulation thus aims to lead to a fuller understanding of the subject under investigation, particularly when there is a variety of data sources and data collection methods, as was the case in this study.

## 4. Results and Implementation of Syllabus

### 4.1 Findings from Data Analysis

The data collected from the students and EMI lecturers aimed to identify different aspects relating to the subjects taught in English including the skills used in the courses, the levels of language proficiency required in the different courses, and what problems students were perceived to encounter in an EMI context. These findings were then integrated into the design of the modified syllabus for the ESAP course.

The analysis of the data from the questionnaires highlighted the fact that the students' self-reported proficiency levels in the receptive skills (listening and reading) were higher than their levels in the productive skills (speaking and writing). As can be seen in Figure 1 below, the students' self-reported levels in reading and listening were more often C1 whereas in speaking and writing there was a tendency to rate themselves at B2 (or lower).

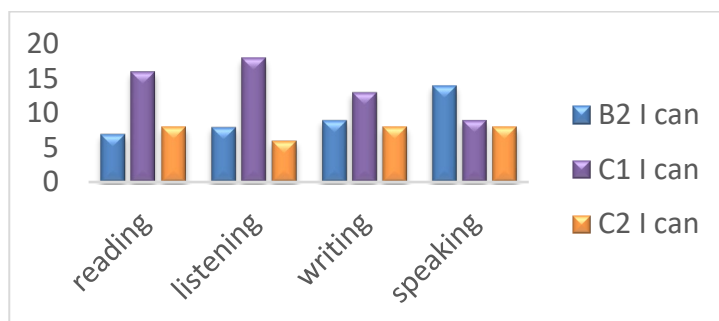


Figure 1 – Self-reported levels in the 4 skills based on adapted “I can” statements from the CEFR

Comparing the data collected from the semi-structured interviews with the EMI lecturers, there seemed to be broad agreement amongst the lecturers that writing and speaking were the weaker skills. An example of a comment from the lecturers included the following, which referred to speaking:

I think the first and the main [problem for students] is not an adequate level of the knowledge of the language which allows you to communicate freely and not to feel sort of you know afraid from asking the questions and so on

Another lecturer highlighted the problems some students faced with writing:

they just don't know... they write in German or Italian with English words of course. So they don't know what an English sentence is, they don't know how to connect two sentences, many of them... the fact that how a sentence is meant to be connected in order for an English eye to make sense of what is written.

The merging of the two datasets demonstrated that there had been general agreement concerning the skills needed to follow the courses taught in English successfully and both the students and the EMI lecturers had identified that speaking and writing were the weaker skills. Consequently, in order to meet these needs, I decided to focus on providing more skills practice, particularly in speaking and writing, during the ESAP course and therefore the syllabus had to be modified to reflect these findings.

## 4.2 Integration of Negotiation into the Syllabus

As stated previously, one reason I chose to use negotiation in the ESAP course was as a means to promote learner autonomy. From a pedagogical perspective, the value of using negotiation in the classroom creates opportunities for learners to engage in authentic communication. Therefore, the modified syllabus not only needed to provide opportunities to improve and practise the productive skills, it also needed to integrate opportunities for negotiation so that authentic communication would take place. However, the crucial question arose as to what parts of the course could be negotiated with the students. Wette (2011, p. 137) notes that "pure" versions of a negotiated syllabus, where

all the decisions about the course from content, procedures, and relation means are negotiated with the learners, are virtually non-existent, which is echoed by Breen & Littlejohn (2000c, p. 30) who state "it would be highly unusual and inefficient for a classroom group to seek negotiated agreement on all of the major questions in every lesson, even if this was feasible." Breen & Littlejohn therefore suggest that a negotiated syllabus should be interpreted as a framework for decision-making, which implies that the number and type of decisions open to negotiation can and will differ greatly from context to context (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000c, p. 29). Consequently, decisions can range from the widest context possible, the entire curriculum, to the narrowest at the single task level (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000c, p. 35).

Given these considerations and the limitations that existed in the context, I decided to allow the students to negotiate the content of and procedures for the coursework-based component of the ESAP course, the so-called Portfolio. This choice to negotiate the Portfolio originated from the fact that much of the rest of the ESAP course's contents and procedures could not be negotiated. The assessment means – a written exam and an oral exam – were established by the Faculty and could not be altered. The number of hours for the course was also a given. The focus of the course contents – on specific language for academic purposes for economics students – was also pre-set. The Portfolio, however, was my attempt to distribute some of the final exam marks onto work that was produced away from exam conditions, in order to make the task more authentic academically and promote personal study and research skills. As such, therefore, its design was more suitable to being negotiated with the students.

### 4.3 The Portfolio

The Portfolio was – and still is – work that is completed by each student during the course outside of class time and was based on the book *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything* by Levitt and Dubner (2005 and successive editions). The book had been used in previous years and feedback from those students had been almost wholly positive. Therefore, I



took the decision to maintain this source material, but would allow the students to negotiate the contents of the Portfolio, the length of the Portfolio and the task types included in the Portfolio.

The students were informed in the first class that there would be the opportunity to undertake this negotiation and that they should acquire the book and read the 15-page introduction in preparation for the “Negotiated Portfolio class.” On the day of this class, students were provided with a worksheet (see example in appendix A) and were first asked to list their strengths and weaknesses in English as a means to encourage them to reflect on their own language needs. Then they were asked to work in small groups (between 2 and 4 people) and discuss the questions on the worksheet, thus giving them a framework for their discussions, but otherwise allowing them freedom to discuss. As Chappell remarks, “when teachers relax the framing of the pedagogic discourse in small group interactions, they allow students to develop their oral fluency” (2014, p. 111), which was one of the aims of the skills-based focus of the syllabus. The students were asked to discuss the contents of the Portfolio, in other words, which chapters or topics they regarded would be useful to work on and to discuss the procedures related to the Portfolio including how many questions there would be, how many words they would write, the type of writing tasks they felt would be useful, as well as how the tasks would be assessed. Once they had discussed in small groups, the whole class came together, each group summarised what they had discussed and then, with me, we negotiated the final version. This final version, which had been designed to have a variety of questions based on various chapters of the book, *Freakonomics*, provided students with a certain degree of autonomy to pick and choose the questions they preferred to focus on. Moreover, an open question analysing aspects of the book, which could be interpreted and answered in a variety of ways, provided additional freedom for each student to tailor the Portfolio to their own interests and skills. In this way, although the Portfolio was based on exactly the same source material, the choice available of question types and content focus contributed to each Portfolio produced being completely individual.

## 4.4 Evaluation of the Negotiated Portfolio

As a follow-up to this class, I asked students to complete a survey about the negotiation process and especially I asked them “Do you think it’s a good idea for you to be able to negotiate the contents of (some of) your course?” Of the 105 students who responded, 101 answered *yes*. They were then asked to explain why they felt it was a good idea and using a thematic analysis, the answers were coded and integrated into a conceptual framework as can be seen in Figure 2.

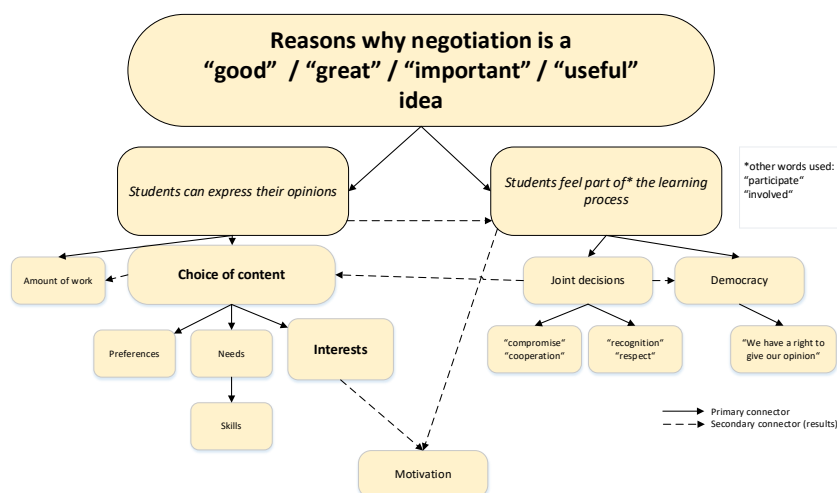


Figure 2 – Conceptual framework visualising the students’ responses

The conceptual framework visualises the answers given to the question. The main category at the top is the answer to the question, and apart from the responses saying negotiation was a “good” idea, other adjectives were also used, as can be seen. The reasons why students thought negotiation was a good idea were divided into two main categories, which were coded as *Students can express their opinions*, to reflect the more practical, yet relational aspect of the students’ responses, while others concentrated on the more participatory aspects of negotiation and so this category was coded *Students feel part of the learning process*. The *Students can express their opinions* category was

divided into what students could express their opinions about, which comprised two main elements—the amount of work to be undertaken and the contents of the course. Students had tended to complain about the amount of work expected for this ESAP course in the past, so reference to the workload is not surprising.

However, the majority of students who stated that negotiation was a good idea because they could express their opinions tended to refer to the contents of the course, as the question that they were answering had suggested. This aspect was actually coded 25 times. To highlight the importance of this aspect, therefore, the *Choice of content* category in the conceptual framework is significantly larger than the *Amount of work* category. The *Choice of content* category is further subdivided into three subcategories that comprise the aspects that the students mentioned about being able to choose the content. Using a word frequency analysis, the reference to content that was “interesting” or that students were “interested in” was coded 30 times. In other words almost a third of the survey responses agreed that being able to negotiate the contents of their course was a good idea because they could negotiate content that they personally found interesting. As this was by far the most frequent reason stated, its visualisation as the subcategory in the conceptual framework is larger than the other two explanations, which were coded as reflecting the “needs” of the students and their “preferences.” The “needs” subcategory is the only one that contains a further element, which is a reference to skills work, which was explicitly mentioned in two responses.

A significant aspect that emerges from this analysis is that the students seemed to appreciate deciding on content connected with their own interests rather than with their language learning or academic needs. It has been recognised for a long time in ESP that needs can comprise “necessities, lacks, and wants” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 55), where the necessities refer to the objective needs of the target situation, lacks are what the learners do not yet know, and wants are more the subjective needs of the learners. Hyland also focuses on the multifaceted aspects of needs:

Needs is actually an umbrella term that embraces many aspects, incorporating learners' goals and backgrounds, their language proficiencies, their reasons for taking the course, their teaching and learning preferences, and the situations they will need to communicate in. (2006, p. 73)

The students in this study, therefore, seemed to particularly value negotiation to achieve their more subjective needs based on their personal interests.

The other main category that answered the question in the survey was coded as "Students feel part of the learning process" in an attempt to capture the more participatory aspects of negotiation. As the students used various expressions to refer to this category, the conceptual framework notes the other words used, which were "participate" and other forms of this lexeme, and "involved" as in the following examples:

"Because [negotiation] enhances... participation of the students"

"A person should always be able to participate in a discussion and negotiate for the desired aims"

"I believe [negotiation] makes students more involved"

"[negotiation] is a good way to involve the students and to let them express their opinions"

Many students did not go beyond expressing anything further than what was coded as *Students feel part of the learning process*, but some did elaborate on the theme. Therefore the two subcategories of *joint decisions* and *democracy* were integrated to reflect these aspects. One example that was coded as "joint decisions" was the following statement:

students and professors often have different expectations of the portfolio, so they can explain them to each other, find a compromise

An example that was coded in the *democracy* category is the one that appears in the conceptual framework, where one respondent stated, "We have a right to give our opinion."

Given the fact that many of the categories that were generated in the coding of the survey responses tended to intermingle, these relationships are shown in the conceptual framework with the connecting lines. Therefore, the solid lines show the primary connectors in the categories, whereas the dotted lines show secondary connectors, which always refer to a result. To exemplify this, the statement below was coded as *joint decisions*, but the result is *choice of content*:

I think it is a good idea because the professor can understand the interests of the students and take them into account during the preparation of the lectures

The final category visualised in the conceptual framework is *motivation*, which, although appearing explicitly six times, always appeared as a consequence of one of the other categories. In the following statement, for example, motivation comes from the interest: “if students find [the course] interesting, they will have more motivation to do it”, whereas another referred to the motivation coming from the ability to choose: “if we can negotiate the contents we can choose topics which we like and we are more motivated.” This finding corresponds with the idea that learners who take responsibility for their own learning have a greater likelihood of reaching their learning goals, and this is linked to motivation issues, as these learners tend to “maintain a positive attitude to learning in the future” (Little, 1995, p. 176).

## 5. Conclusions

This chapter has provided a brief presentation of an ESAP course at the Faculty of Economics and Management at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano whose syllabus was modified so that students were given the opportunity to negotiate some of the contents and procedures relating to the course. By providing the students with more decision-making powers than is normally envisaged or encouraged in an undergraduate university course, they were able to choose content that they identified was more interesting for them, and they were also able to influence the amount of work they had to do for

the Portfolio. This approach to syllabus design not only allowed the students to focus on more skills practice than there had been previously, especially writing and speaking, but also to exercise greater learner autonomy through the process of negotiation. As “at the heart of learner autonomy is the concept of choice” (Cotterall, 2000, p. 111), negotiation allowed students to be part of the decision-making process and provided a solid opportunity for them to develop their learner autonomy. This increased level of learner autonomy also had an impact on one of the main precepts of ESP, which “is an approach to language learning, which is based on learner need” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 19). Because the students were provided with opportunities to develop their autonomy, which allowed them to tailor the course more closely to their perceived language learning needs, using negotiation in the ESAP classroom can therefore be regarded as an effective strategy to address this fundamental principle of ESP.

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## Appendix

### Negotiated Portfolio

#### A Yourself

1. Think about your own strengths and weaknesses in English. Try to list them:

Strengths	Weaknesses

After having read the contents pages and introduction to the book *Freakonomics*, preview the rest briefly and answer the following questions. Be ready to discuss your views in the second half of this class.

#### B Freakonomics

2. Make a list of the topics covered in the book. Are any of them irrelevant to your interests or needs?

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3. Are there parts of the book that you could read and benefit from (either language or content-wise) without support from this class?

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**C The Portfolio**

4. Given the limited time available for a 3-credit point course like this one, which parts of *Freakonomics* would you prefer to study for the Portfolio?

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5. Given that writing has been identified as a general problem for Economics and Management students, what writing tasks based on the parts of the book you have identified in question 4 would be useful for you to do for the Portfolio?

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6. How many writing tasks could you do for this Portfolio? (consider the number of words for ease of reference and discussion)

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7. Which parts of the book you have identified in question 4 would be better to deal with in class orally?

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8. Do you have any other suggestions/requests relating to this Portfolio?

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# Teaching English to Refugees in Italy: A Case Study

**Karoline Steckley – American Corner Trieste – Associazione Italo  
Americana del FVG, Italy**

## Abstract

The story begins with a desire to make a difference in an Italian community by offering English classes to refugees. The intent was to help participants integrate into the local community and increase their chances for success if continuing on to another country. In practice, many of the things teachers thought they knew about teaching, from prior experience, mostly with adults, were based on assumptions that simply were not relevant in this specific context. In short, it quickly became clear that a thorough needs analysis and thoughtful consideration about participant and teacher expectations were essential in order for the course to reach its objectives. In this case, needs analysis was an opportunity for teachers to question and re-examine their teaching styles to better assess and effectively confront the real-life immediate needs of their students and update the course design accordingly. Trial and error and subsequent careful reflection directed teachers to move away from the teacher-centred approach often relied on in the adult English classroom at the Associazione Italo Americana del FVG/American Corner Trieste and instead take a closer look at the success of the children's program to see if the strategies employed there could be adapted for an adult audience with varying levels of ability and prior educational exposure. This led to a shift towards experience-based learning. Unlike the children's program, however, which used STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math) principles as a general approach, it was hypothesized that teaching so-called Life Skills in English would meet the real-life needs of refugees in their new context and, at the same time, allow all participants to thrive in their own individual way. The change to experience-based learning proved successful in the refugee classroom and was later applied to all adult courses at the Association.

The ESP – English for Refugees – Life Skills program<sup>1</sup> at the Association produced results that went beyond the original objectives by increasing quality in all adult classes at the school and changing attitudes towards refugees outside the classroom and in the community at large.

## 1. Background

The Associazione Italo Americana del FVG (Friuli Venezia Giulia region) (also referred to as The Association or AIA) in Trieste, Italy, is a non-profit American library and cultural association established in 1961 through a partnership with the US troops stationed there while Trieste was under Allied Military Government rule (1945–1954). The Association promotes American culture and the English language through cultural initiatives and English language courses. In 2007, the American Embassy in Rome and the American Consulate in Milan gave the library special status as an American Corner—a United States Department of State-sponsored regional initiative for providing information and programs highlighting American culture, history, current events, and government. English classes are complemented by a full calendar of cultural activities and events organized by the American Corner that are free and open to the public.

All language courses at the Association are taught using a communicative, experience-based learning approach based on STEAM (Science, Technology Engineering, Arts, Math) principles. At all levels there is a strong reading component, with children’s courses focusing on early literacy. Adult and Business English classes generally take place once per week in the mornings and are repeated in the evenings. There are also intensive weekend options once per month. Groups are roughly divided into four levels based on the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (Council of Europe, 2001):

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1 The course was made possible by a US Department of State Grant for English Language and Entrepreneurship-focused Outreach for refugees. An additional grant was issued to continue the program in February and again in November, 2017.

absolute beginners (A1) and advanced beginners (A2), intermediate (B1), and upper intermediate/advanced (B2/C1+). Participants determine their own level with guidance from instructors. Courses in the children's program (ages 0–18) take place once per week after school in the afternoons and on Saturdays. It is important to note that, unlike the adult program, children's courses are divided by age rather than ability or level. The fact that teachers are trained to deal with mixed groups made them a source of inspiration for the adult refugee classes once needs analysis determined that the initial approach to refugees was not sustainable.

Course participants are generally Italians interested in learning/perfecting their English language skills for international travel and to improve job prospects. Ongoing needs analyses of students and feedback indicate that conversation is where they feel they can benefit most, as it is their perception that Italian public schools emphasize written production and correct grammar, while large classes make it difficult to offer adequate opportunities for speaking.

## 1.1 The Refugee Situation in Trieste

The year 2015 showed a sharp increase in requests for Permits of Stay for humanitarian reasons, up from 2,553 in 2014 to 4,217, the largest group being Afghan nationals (41%). The number of asylum seekers in the region doubled over the previous year to reach 2,635. Eight out of ten asylum seekers were under 30 years of age, 97% of them were men, and 74% were unmarried (Friuli Venezia Giulia Region).

Trieste is a welcoming city offering valuable services for refugees; however, work is hard to find, so it is often seen as a temporary stop-off until these people can move on to another country with more work opportunities. For this reason, it was thought that English language skills could benefit asylum seekers no matter where they ended their journey. While asylum seekers are required to take mandatory Italian classes, one of the challenges for refugees

and case workers alike in the Italian context is finding a *lingua franca* to communicate with in the meantime.

### 1.1.1 English for refugees in Trieste

On a human level, locally, there was a popular perception within the Association that little was being communicated about the refugee situation and there were few opportunities to make contact with these new arrivals who were mainly housed in private apartments and residences. For this reason, it was also hoped that hosting English classes for refugees would offer additional opportunities for contact between local residents and the refugees and therefore foster the idea of international understanding, one of the core values of the Association.

The refugee courses at the Association were originally suggested by a retired American couple who had read about the refugee crisis in Europe and wanted to volunteer at the American Corner to have a direct impact on asylum seekers in the FVG region. Their trip was cancelled, however, due to illness. As contact had already been made with a local association that works with refugees, the Italian Consortium of Solidarity (ICS), and response to the courses was overwhelmingly positive, it was decided that classes would be taught as planned, by in-house English instructors. Because of the high number of asylum seekers in Trieste and the lack of space and resources to be able to offer free English classes to everyone, case workers at ICS made the decision to give priority to refugees with the highest probability of integrating into European society.

## 2. Initial Challenges and Needs Analysis

Teachers who agreed to teach in the program each had roughly 20 years of experience in the immersion foreign language classroom and felt confident about their ability to teach this new group of participants. Because of uncertainty about culture differences, prior English experience, and general participant expectations, doubts emerged about how to accurately divide into

effective working groups, foreshadowing the necessity of updating course design to accommodate learner expectations (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, pp. 154–155). It was thought that a multiple-choice placement test would give teachers enough information to understand if the curriculum that had been drafted would adequately address learner needs at this initial stage.

Twenty-five participants were seated and asked to complete the 50-question test. While self-assessment is a normal part of adult courses at the Association, teachers, who had no idea what to expect on day one, were concerned students would not have the basic language skills in English or Italian to allow them to understand the instructions and descriptors used in the test and therefore to self-assess. It was speculated that an oral assessment would be more appropriate in this case, but there were time restraints with just two teachers present.

The written test as an individual exercise did not go as planned, as participants used their native languages to communicate with others, making it a group exercise. Teachers, understanding that this was a collaboration between stronger students helping others with a history of limited or interrupted schooling, recognized it as a desire to make a good impression on the teachers and changed tactics. The experience highlighted a specific need on the part of the participants to belong to and work within a group. Further course modification would have to take this into consideration.

While needs analysis is a natural part of teaching an ESP class, the initial frustration at how to come up with the *right* strategy cannot be understated, as answers are not always apparent from the beginning; hence the need to regularly question the approach. This frustration, coupled with a lack of resources and time to develop new materials, can lead to teachers falling back on teacher-centered activities (Windle & Miller, 2012, pp. 325–326). In this case, the immediate shortcoming of the first lesson plan was that it operated on the assumption that participants could read the Latin alphabet fairly well and that students would work independently.



## 2.1 Course Tweaking and Activating Prior Knowledge

Rather than rely on results of the placement test, participants were then asked to self-assess and divide themselves into two levels: *beginner* or *advanced*. Both classes were to be held on the same days, but at different times. Some participants chose the group based on their level, especially those with more experience with the language. Others based their choice on start time and participants in each group. The teachers respected their choices and prepared for groups with vastly mixed levels.

With the negative experience of the placement test in mind, teachers decided to eliminate the first lesson plan and, instead, sit students in a circle and ask them where they were from, what their job was in their native country, how long they had been in Trieste, and what route they used to get there. Conversation proved lively, as the questions allowed participants to access knowledge they had about their own lives and experiences and share them with the group. A participant with particularly strong English skills was chosen to help absolute beginners by translating when necessary.

While this informal conversational turn worked well in the first meeting, it was agreed that there had to be a better plan for subsequent lessons. Over the next few meetings, however, a similar situation was observed. Lessons were planned, but were not perfectly appropriate to these particular groups. The main problem was that the teachers had assumed a base level of literacy that was not guaranteed in either group. This gap in prior knowledge led to more explicit explanations by teachers and thus a teacher-centered classroom. It excluded some participants because their level was too low or too high. It took some time to process the fact that this approach to refugees, and, after more broad analysis, adult learners in general, would have to change.

## 3. Chocolate Chip Cookies and a Turning Point

In a fit of frustration at yet another lesson plan that didn't work well, teachers decided to give up for that day and go to the kitchen with the participants to

bake chocolate chip cookies together. That experience marked a turning point in the approach used from then on. By taking the focus off the teacher and instead getting together to solve a problem, or, rather, carry out a task, all participants and instructors had a meaningful foreign language, and human, experience. Teachers enjoyed themselves and appreciated the positive atmosphere and spirit of collaboration.



Figure 1 – Making cookies created a group

The cookie experience provided guidance on where to look for a benchmark for a significant change in approach. Going in the kitchen to bake together was a common event at the school for children’s classes at the Association. The pre-school and elementary program, which had a relatively short history at the Association compared to the adult program, had become increasingly popular, with families returning year after year. Like the refugee groups, these classes also had participants varying in ability, and yet were quite successful. Making cookies gave a first taste as to why this was the case, as well as inspiration that the same results could be achieved with the refugee classes as well and then perhaps exported across the entire adult program.

While pre-kindergarten and elementary programs at the Association are based on the STEAM approach (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math), the refugee classes would have to be different. Based on information gained from participants themselves during the process of getting to know them better, it was determined that what participants wanted and needed was tools for coping with their new surroundings and real-life practical strategies for navigating everyday life. Rather than accuracy in language production, the

new focus would be problem-solving. Each lesson would be a specific problem to solve: baking something in the kitchen, going to the doctor's office, etc.



Figure 2 – Coffee in Italy is a life skill!

Lessons became hands-on and project-based with a focus on life skills. Each lesson had to be conceived so that it could stand on its own in case participants were unable to attend class because of job interviews or meetings with case workers. Each lesson would have a beginning, a middle and an end. Attending lessons would give value, missing them would not be an obstacle for progression. The more lessons participants attended, the more experience they would gain. Classes became more student-centered and provided concrete opportunities for students to become teachers and teachers to learn from students.

The classroom started looking different, too. Preparation took more time, but gave more satisfaction. Games became an integral part of the lessons, as participants truly enjoyed playing and laughing together in English.



Figure 3 – Food props and a picnic in the classroom

In the children's program at the Association, children are grouped by age rather than ability; therefore teachers were familiar with strategies for helping students of all backgrounds progress in the language in spite of these differences and were accustomed to using an innovative hands-on approach to teaching. Although the *one-room schoolhouse* concept was a point of pride in that context, it had never truly been applied successfully to the adult class-room. Hindsight suggests this was a result of our fear of either failing to meet adult student expectations or insulting participants by doing things that could be misinterpreted as childish. In this case, the teacher-centred or traditional approach did not work well in this non-traditional classroom, while crafts and art projects and the use of props were readily accepted by the adult learners.

Modeling the refugee program on what was being used successfully in the children's program made classes more fun for participants and more interesting to teach for the instructors as well. Further, there was an added perception that they ran more smoothly, and more learning happened. It was noted that participants created lasting and meaningful relationships with the language, and with each other, through these stand-alone lessons and the approach that allowed everyone to contribute in their own meaningful way.

### 3.1 Moments of Pride

Activating prior knowledge proved a winning strategy for getting students to open up and share what they knew (Windle & Miller, 2012, p. 320). Art projects with simple directions and strict, short time-limits (e.g., "use watercolors to paint what home looks like to you in ten minutes or less") followed by a group art *critique* with (only) positive reinforcement from classmates (learning how to make compliments) and individuals explaining their idea of home (public speaking skills) were moments of creativity and pride.



Figure 4 – Art projects get participants talking about home

One of the best examples of the effectiveness of the new approach was when a group sewing lesson put participants who were tailors in their home country in the position of sharing their prior knowledge with their classmates and instructors.



Figure 5 – Instructors learn how to sew from the experts

## 4. Outcomes: Progress in English and Italian

One of the surprising outcomes of the Life Skills program was seeing how attitudes towards learning the Italian language shifted as participants progressed in their English learning. While participants overwhelmingly regarded Italian as “less important than English” or “not at all important” or even a “waste of time and energy” at the beginning of the program, the instructors, Americans living in Trieste who also spoke fluent Italian, gave participants the tools required to go to the doctor in English, for example, but also navigate the situation in Italian. It was noted that participants put increasing effort into learning Italian as the English classes continued and were eager to use Italian with instructors both inside and outside of the classroom, along with their English.

The obvious explanation for the rapid acquisition of Italian could be that participants were living in Italy and thus in contact with the language on a daily basis. However, this explanation does not reveal the full picture, as some participants had already lived in Italy for an extended period and had put forth little effort to learning the language previously, instead choosing to stay in groups with people who spoke their native language.

One hypothesis for the change in attitude was that giving Italian equivalents when requested gave participants the confidence necessary to see Italian as more “useful” than previously thought. The change in attitude may also have been due to the fact that the information in Italian was coming from foreigners who had previously gone through the same language acquisition process that participants were currently going through. Informal feedback from participants was that Italian instruction provided by outside sources was teacher-centered, “boring,” and lacked a friendly connection between students and teachers, while the student-centered approach at the Association gave them new strategies for developing their language skills on their own outside the classroom as well as during lessons. Thus, one of the most important life skills offered by the course was the development of specific learning strategies.

## 5. Conclusion

Since the original refugee courses began, course design has evolved to reflect past successes gained through applying an experience-based approach to teaching English to adults in the refugee program. Eventually the entire adult program at the Association made the same shift with encouraging results. As for the impact on refugees and beyond, many of the refugees who participated in the initial experience now hold jobs in the Trieste area and come back to visit and volunteer when possible to share their expertise in sewing and baking and to lend a hand with new groups of asylum seekers taking English at the Association. Our alumni share their experiences with current Association students in both the children and adult programs. Every course culminates with a very special multi-ethnic potluck dinner and always finishes with tea, and, of course, chocolate chip cookies.



Figure 6 – Participants serving the food they had prepared

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# Reshaping the Language of Mathematics and Physics: Some Intersemiotic and Interlinguistic Issues

**Michela Canepari – University of Parma, Italy**

## Abstract

This chapter aims to analyze some of the transformations the highly specialized languages of mathematics and physics undergo when adapted in the production of cultural goods, namely popular television productions. On this basis, it explores new teaching methodologies which might render the languages of these disciplines more interesting and stimulating for young adult language learners. The chapter thus analyzes audiovisual materials which intersemiotically translate the language found in various specialized texts (articles, books, textbooks, etc.) and describes the use of these texts and television productions as teaching materials during two third-year courses taught at the University of Parma in Italy for students of modern languages. These courses – which were taught in 2015–2016 and 2016–2017 – provided a useful testing ground for an innovative approach to teaching and learning English for specific purposes (ESP) with the aid of popular culture. In particular, the classroom experiment focused on the language of mathematics and physics found in Mario Livio's *Is God a Mathematician?* (2009) and Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (1988) on the one hand, and in documentaries such as *The Story of Maths* (2008), *Origins: Back to the Beginning* (2004) and *Stephen Hawking's Universe* (1997) on the other. Moreover, the chapter examines the transformations the specialized language of science is subjected to when inserted in popular television series such as *Numb3rs*, *The Big Bang Theory*, and *Supernova*, in order to demonstrate the extent of the role played by specialized discourses within cultural industries. The chapter therefore suggests that this phenomenon has important repercussions on the very notion of *needs analysis*, and it argues that ESP syllabi should acknowledge its existence, offering customized teaching materials.

## 1. Introduction: A New Notion of Science and Scientific Discourse

Even though Languages for specific purposes (LSPs) originated from within restricted communities of specialists and have for a long time been perceived as elitist forms of communication, it has become apparent in recent years that many of the disciplines they find expression in make a profound impact on the life of ordinary people too.

This is particularly true in relation to the language of mathematics and physics on which this chapter focuses, and is partly due to the fact that, during the first decades of the twentieth century, the way traditional science was shaken by new theories such as Einstein's General Theory of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics profoundly changed the mode in which people thought about the universe, science itself and, ultimately, their surrounding reality and themselves.

By abolishing the old notions of absolute space, absolute time, and a flat universe, and by stating that no measurement is any more correct than another, Einstein's theory basically undermined the claims of science to discover universal and fundamental Truths in relation to any event. The notion of absolute concepts was thus destroyed, and time and space appeared to be the interdependent elements of what was then called space-time which, in 1915, Einstein suggested was curved by the distribution of mass and energy, thus giving birth to what is now called the General Theory of Relativity. In addition, the General Theory of Relativity also predicted that the notion of a static universe would be abolished, for the reason that, if it actually were so, it would soon start to contract and collapse under the influence of its gravitational force. This was also predicted by the Russian Alexander Friedman, and the three different models of the universe which obeyed Friedman's two fundamental assumptions (namely that the universe looks identical in whichever direction we look, and that it would look the same from wherever we looked at it), and which shared the idea that at some time in the past, before the universe began to expand, the distance between the galaxies must have been zero, and the density of the universe and the curvature of space-time infinite. This moment

corresponds to what is popularly known as the Big Bang (which provides the title to both Hawking's book and one of the situation comedies briefly discussed below), at which the universe and time itself are considered to have begun. Because it was assumed that the early universe was infinitesimally small, the small-scale effects could no longer be ignored. It was on the basis of the so-called Quantum Theory, which Max Planck formulated in 1900, that in 1927 Werner Heisenberg formulated, in turn, the Uncertainty Principle. By demonstrating the impossibility of measuring precisely the present state of the universe, Heisenberg's Principle – whose ramifications, as suggested below, are innumerable – illustrated the lack of tenability of a deterministic notion regarding the universe.

On the basis of the Uncertainty Principle, during the 1920s Heisenberg, Schrödinger, and Dirac reformulated mechanics into a new theory called Quantum Mechanics, according to which particles and waves were considered to behave identically, and could not have separate or precisely defined positions and velocities. On the contrary, they were said to be in a quantum state, in which position and velocity were combined. Because Quantum Mechanics cannot calculate a single and definite result for an observation, but predicts a number of possible outcomes, it naturally contributed to introducing an element of unpredictability into science.

The acknowledgement of the undermining of the claims of absolute Truth in science obviously had multiple repercussions, and led to the abolition of concepts of absoluteness in many different arenas, from biology (where, for example, it naturally put into question the *inferior* identity assigned to Others on the basis of *race*), to medicine (which had to concede defeat in the face of various diseases). As a consequence, over time the language itself of these disciplines began to change, as the lack of absolute objectivity of scientific observation began to be expressed through linguistic means. For example, the very compact structures based on nominal phrases with pre-modifications, heavily relying on participles – and often identified as typical of specialized discourse (see Gotti, 2008) – began to be replaced by *mitigated* phrases that relied much more on post-modification. Furthermore, rather than adopting impersonal

constructions through the exploitation of either impersonal subjects or passive forms, the author of scientific prose too began to be present in scientific discourse in the form of first-person *I* (see Glanville, 1998). Naturally, this tendency to make specialized language closer to ordinary language has raised various concerns about the declining standards of the language of science (see Mills, 1997). Yet, it has simultaneously helped to provide a minimal scientific education which, while not providing an actual proficiency in specialized fields, has enabled the general public to partake, at least to a certain extent, in these disciplines, equipping them with some of the terminology and founding notions. As such, these popular (and popularizing) products seem to point to the creation of a more democratic administration of knowledge which – as for instance in the case of the medical language of psychiatry – played an important role in the development of a new approach to (mental) illness (see for instance the Democratic Psychiatry Society founded by Basaglia in 1973).

As discussed in more detail elsewhere (see Canepari, 2013), this attitude – together with the increasing demands made by average members of society to take part more actively in many aspects of social life and the decision-making processes that involve them directly – has led to drastic changes not only in the structure of society itself but also in the language spoken by its institutions, leading, for example, to Plain English movements of different kinds (see Steinberg, 1991). Undoubtedly, these processes were facilitated by the advent of the new technologies which enabled the public to retrieve with minimal effort information once available only to professionals. Furthermore, the spread of television largely contributed to this phenomenon, thereby justifying the perspective adopted in this chapter and offering a tentative response to the need for what Italian researcher Giuseppe Testa (2014) calls an innovative logic, capable of leading to a “science increasingly inclusive of the needs of an increasingly aware society” (online).

Because of this, the products on which this chapter focuses, and the research path outlined here, appear to acknowledge the evolution scientific disciplines and their languages have undergone, leading from the deficit model of *public understanding of science*, now outdated, to the notion of a *public engagement of*

*science and technology*. The latter, in Pitrelli's words (2003), should engage "the publics of science, through... an open and equal-to-equal discussion between scientists and non-experts that would enable non-experts to become the actual protagonists in the scientific decisions producing social effects" (p. 5). Clearly, the approach suggested here is rather simple and unsophisticated. Nevertheless, it appears to be equally engaged in the construction of that "civic epistemology" Testa (2014) describes by stating that, since we live in a "knowledge intensive society," a civic exercise of confrontation and exchange is required, not only between scientists, but also between scientists and non-experts (online).

## 2. Mathematical Discourse and its Popularization: The Case of Pythagoras's Theorem<sup>1</sup>

As discussed in more detail elsewhere (Canepari, 2018), the relevance that disciplines such as mathematics and physics can assume in an individual's life is clearly stated in the opening theme of the pilot of the television series *Numb3rs* (Falacci, Heuton, & Jackson, 2015), where the voice-over emphasizes how we resort to the language of science every day in order to perform ordinary actions such as handling money or telling the time. Each episode of the series actually echoes the idea that the language of mathematics is at the very basis of natural phenomena, history, and human accomplishments since ancient history, a notion explored not only in other fictional products such as *Touch* (Sutherland, 2012), but also in the works by mathematicians such as Mario Livio (2002; 2009) and Marcus Du Sautoy (2003; 2007), on which the television shows seem to focus (see for instance: Kring, 2012, 00:00:01–00:01:09 and 00:28:51–00:29:44).

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1 Some sections of this paragraph are partially based on a paper published in Canepari, M. (2018) *Reading Paths in Specialized Languages*, Parma: Athenaeum.

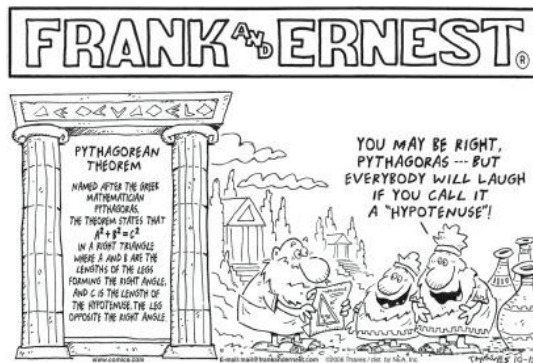
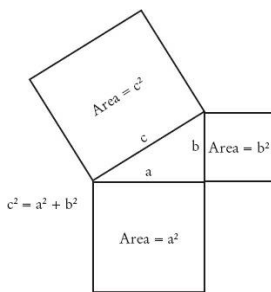
As a consequence, these products can become useful tools in a learning environment, in so far as they can be exploited to introduce some of the fundamental notions of these disciplines and their terminology, in order to train not only good students and/or translators, but also active members of society, able to interpret the signals that the contemporary world presents them when they perform ordinary activities. Moreover, these goods seem to work towards the transformation of science into that “collective enterprise” for which, for example, writer Antonio Giangrande hopes (2017). Indeed, since scientific knowledge can often be identified at the very basis of the decision-making processes entailed by society – for instance when individual citizens are called to vote in referendums regarding nuclear energy, assisted fecundation, genetically modified organisms, vaccines, etc. – it is important that all members of society (both experts and non-experts) can understand and assess its positive and negative value.

With this goal in mind, during the third-year courses I held at Parma University, I endeavored to focus my students’ attention on some of the features of the language of mathematics and physics they are likely to have been confronted with during their school years. In particular, in order to reveal how the process of popularization which this form of intersemiotic translation entails might work in relation to the language of mathematics, the students were asked to read an extract from Mario Livio’s book *Is God a Mathematician?* and compare it to the documentary *The Story of Maths* produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation (Du Sautoy & McGann, 2008) in collaboration with the Open University and presented by Marcus Du Sautoy.

Since it was necessary to take into consideration the different mathematical skills which students brought with them to the course due to their different educational backgrounds, they were also instructed on a mathematical principle that is taught in first grade, namely Pythagoras’s Theorem. Students were therefore asked to read the second chapter of Livio’s book *Mystics: The Numerologist and the Philosopher* and identify, on the one hand, those linguistic features that render its language specialized and, on the other, those elements

which might be recognized as part of the popularization process evidently at work here:

Even the ordinary numbers encountered in everyday life have interesting properties. Take the number of days in a year—365. You can easily check that 365 is equal to the sums of three consecutive squares:  $365=10^2 + 11^2 + 12^2$ . But this is not all; it is also equal to the sum of the next two squares ( $365=13^2 + 14^2$ )!... [T]he Pythagoreans had a way of figuring numbers by means of pebbles or dots. For instance, they arranged the natural numbers 1, 2, 3, 4,...as collections of pebbles to form triangles. In particular, the triangle constructed out of the first four integers (arranged in a triangle of ten pebbles) was called the Tetraktys (meaning quaternary, or “four-ness”), and was taken by the Pythagoreans to symbolize perfection and the elements that comprise it... The square numbers associated with the gnomons may have also been precursors to the famous Pythagorean theorem. This celebrated mathematical statement holds that for any right triangle (Figure 3), a square drawn on the hypotenuse is equal in area to the sum of the squares drawn on the sides. The discovery of the theorem was “documented” humorously in a famous *Frank and Ernest* cartoon. As the gnomon in Figure 2 shows, adding a square gnomon number,  $9 = 3^2$ , to a  $4 \times 4$  square makes a new,  $5 \times 5$  square:  $3^2 + 4^2 = 5^2$ . The numbers 3, 4, 5 can therefore represent the lengths of the sides of a right triangle. Integer numbers that have this property (e.g., 5, 12, 13; since  $5^2 + 12^2 + 13^2$ ) are called “Pythagorean triples.”



(Livio, 2009, pp. 8–16)



The analysis enabled the students to categorize certain unmistakable features such as the presence of numerals, special symbols, graphic representations, words of classical origin, etc., words which, during Pythagoras's time, were considered neologisms as belonging to the specialized language of mathematics. However, although Livio's text appeared rather specialized to students reading modern languages, the narrative the author construed in the text, the structures he opted for, the graphic representations of particular notions, the use of punctuation (for instance the insertion of exclamation marks), and the insertion of a cartoon, clearly demonstrated that the text was meant to offer a "popular" version of the main notions set forth by Pythagoras and his disciples.

In order to help students appreciate this aspect to the fullest, they were asked to read (and if possible find by themselves) other explanations of the theorem, as presented in specialized textbooks and articles. Afterwards, students were required to analyze some of the documents from the small corpus they had compiled (an example is given in Figure 1), and identify the intralinguistic and intersemiotic procedures adopted in Livio's book first and, later, in the documentary that translates it intersemiotically<sup>2</sup>:

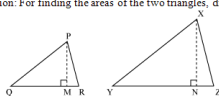
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2 In fact, the examples provided in this chapter represent those rare occasions when the reference to the notion of intersemiotic translation in the field of specialized languages seems perfectly appropriate. Indeed, as maintained elsewhere (Canepari, 2013), most of the time, in such contexts, the source text can be identified with a more general notion and understood as a text which is intertextually composed of different extracts originally belonging to other texts. In the specific circumstances addressed in this chapter, however, the target texts represented by the documentaries under study are the intersemiotic translations of Livio's and Hawking's books.

Given: Two triangles PQR and XYZ such that  $\Delta PQR \sim \Delta XYZ$

To prove:  $\frac{\text{ar}(\Delta PQR)}{\text{ar}(\Delta XYZ)} = \left(\frac{PQ}{XY}\right)^2 = \left(\frac{QR}{YZ}\right)^2 = \left(\frac{RP}{ZX}\right)^2$

Construction: For finding the areas of the two triangles, draw  $PM \perp QR$  and  $XN \perp YZ$ .



Proof:

$$\text{ar}(\Delta PQR) = \frac{1}{2} QR \times PM \text{ and } \text{ar}(\Delta XYZ) = \frac{1}{2} YZ \times XN$$

[Area of triangle =  $\frac{1}{2} \times \text{base} \times \text{height}$ ]

$$\therefore \frac{\text{ar}(\Delta PQR)}{\text{ar}(\Delta XYZ)} = \frac{\frac{1}{2} QR \times PM}{\frac{1}{2} YZ \times XN} = \frac{QR \times PM}{YZ \times XN} \quad \dots (1)$$

In  $\Delta PQM$  and  $\Delta XYN$ ,

$\angle Q = \angle Y$	( $\Delta PQR \sim \Delta XYZ$ )
$\angle PMQ = \angle XNY$	(Each is equal to $90^\circ$ )
$\therefore \Delta PQM \sim \Delta XYN$	(AA similarity criterion)

Thus:  $\frac{PQ}{XY} = \frac{PM}{XN} \quad \dots (2)$

Figure 1 – Proof of Pythagoras's theorem (<http://www.simages.org/similar-triangles-formula>)

On the basis of the students' results, it became apparent that, in addition to numerous instances of faithful rendition,<sup>3</sup> procedures of omission, shifting, and dramatic synthesis are exploited from the very beginning of the documentary. As a consequence, the television program *A History of Maths* refers to the Greeks' interest in *proof* and some of the legendary aspects of Pythagoras's life at a later stage, and whereas Livio's written text dwells on specific details of the mathematician's life (for example his travels), the documentary is much more concise. This appears particularly true in relation to some of the specific and more specialized notions presented in the book (for instance the relationship between intellectual and scial numbers, the notion of gnomon, the reference to the celestial *harmony of the spheres*, etc.), which tend to be omitted in the documentary. It is actually fairly easy to understand the motivation behind such choices, in so far as – temporal constraints aside – the documentary (precisely because it is a product directed to a mass audience) could not present notions bound to be considered too difficult and specialized by the general public. In spite of this, the omission of the references to the Chinese yin

3 For instance, both the written and the filmic text emphasize the fact that none of Pythagoras's works survived and that he was born in the early sixth century B.C. on the island of Samos.

and yang or to British author Arthur Conan Doyle, which are present in Livio's book, was deemed rather surprising, since these elements could have contributed to rendering the topic alive for, and accessible to, an audience of laymen, by creating a connection with the reality they inhabit.

At the same time, however, the documentary occasionally lays more emphasis on particular aspects simply mentioned in the book, which are amplified and diffuse in the filmic text. Consequently, particular elements – such as Pythagoras's theory of music – are rendered more incisive in the audio-visual product, in that the latter can provide the audience with an actual performance of a string quartet, demonstrating how the theory works in real life. This exploitation of the audio element typical of documentaries also becomes extremely relevant on other occasions, for instance when the text suggests that the discoverer of irrational numbers might have been drowned by Pythagoreans. In this scene, in fact, both the close shots of the breakers and the dramatic use of music are certainly bound to render the film more appealing to a mass audience.

In an analogous fashion, the visual aspects of the documentary become extremely useful and effective on many occasions. For example, rather than showing, as Livio does in his book, a static representation of the theorem, the documentary first offers a shot of some t-shirts sold as souvenirs at the market of Samos which reproduce the famous theorem (Du Sautoy & McGann, 2008, 00:40:45–00:40:58), thereby creating once again a strong connection between the theorem and the daily life of spectators. In addition, it subsequently exploits animations in order to draw, literally in front of the viewer's eyes, the triangle and the squares built on its sides (Du Sautoy & McGann, 2008, 00:41:26–00:41:56).

However, students were encouraged to notice how, as with any form of translation, any change (in terms of omission, variation, expansion, and addition) might have consequences which reflect on the ideological stance of the text, thereby resulting in the presentation of a different version of reality. Thus, the fact that Livio's book refers to the Pythagoreans' veneration of numbers and, in a later chapter, to their "numerical religion" (Livio, 2009, p. 45), whereas

the filmic text repeatedly suggests that they were an actual “sect” (Du Sautoy & McGann, 2008, 00:40:09–00:40:25), clearly has important consequences. Indeed, the strategies of variation, shifting, and dramatic synthesis adopted here by the director create a different scenario and by adopting a term which, in mass culture, is negatively connoted (being often associated with dangerous practices, murders, sacrifices, etc.) presents the Pythagoreans under a different light, exploiting the emotive charge of such a term.

In actual fact, this kind of change in the perspective from which information is put at the audience’s disposal corresponds to a further difference between written and filmic texts. Indeed, whereas *Is God a Mathematician?* is written and *narrated* by one single viewpoint, namely the author’s, who tends to adopt an impersonal style, in accordance with one of the general features of specialized languages, the documentary is narratologically much more complex, with different *voices* taking over the narrative at different moments.

Consequently, in one of the activities introduced at a later stage of the courses, students were asked to categorize the various narrators in the filmic text, with a view to identifying: Du Sautoy himself, who produces a much more subjective narrative and actually creates a *plot* and a *story*, projecting himself as an auto-diegetic narrator; various expert witnesses, who generally are quite impersonal as they are consulted so as to create the impression of higher objectivity, and can thus be identified as homo-diegetic narrators; the voice-over, which connects the various parts in a rather impersonal style and which, by not being physically *present* in the story, could be identified as a hetero-diegetic narrator (Genette, 1972). Furthermore, through such analysis, it became evident that both voice-over and Du Sautoy remain at a first-degree level, whereas the various scholars who intervene as experts are placed on a second, intradiegetic level relating thematically to the first.

The students were then urged to connect the variety of voices represented within the documentary, and their different registers and levels of specialization, to the very idea of popularization and the notion of *need* it implicates. Moreover, they were encouraged to observe that, in the documentary, the relationship between the visual and the verbal text could be described in terms

of both redundancy (generally speaking, images and voice “say” the same thing) and complementariness (in that, even when the images and the voice say different things, they nonetheless complete each other). Naturally, these relationships came as a further confirmation of the user-friendly format typical of the popularization process analyzed here and to which specialized languages have to adapt on the basis of various factors. First, obviously enough, the function, which in a popular product such as a documentary is not simply informative-referential, or, as Halliday (1994) would say, “ideational,” but much more interpersonal and conative (in that it tries to attract viewers and give them reasons to continue watching the whole documentary). Secondly, the target audience is clearly not only specialists, but a much wider audience of laymen. Indeed, the target audience does not even necessarily include viewers who are merely interested in mathematics, but also distracted home viewers zapping through the various channels who were successfully seduced by the documentary. This includes those who are neither students nor specialists simply wanting to learn but, as in the best tradition of *edutainment*, want to be entertained too.

This aspect becomes more evident when we approach the even more popular cultural goods which were subsequently introduced in the courses: television series which employ the language of mathematics. For example, in order to help students appreciate how the language of mathematics is treated in such products, examples were found of how the Pythagorean theorem is used in the situation comedy *The Big Bang Theory* (Belyeu, 2007). To this end, the thirteenth episode of the tenth season (Lorre, Prady & Cendrowski, 2017) offered a clear example of how some of the pillars of science inserted in this extremely successful series are turned into typical elements of popular culture.

Naturally, to fit the televised format of the situation comedy, specialized discourse needs to undergo a further intralinguistic translation and be made more “popular” in order to be accessible to the masses. In this specific case, Norrick’s (1993) theory of humor – according to which sitcom writers rely on the fact that viewers capture the comic effect of verbally-expressed humor thanks to the common lexical, general, and cultural knowledge they share –

was presented to the students. Consequently, the class expected that products such as these could provide spectators with the fundamental information necessary to familiarize them with the topic and help them understand (and enjoy) the various jokes. In point of fact, since humor in sitcoms is often based on mechanisms such as misunderstanding and hyper-understanding, in the case of *The Big Bang Theory* (Belyeu, 2007) humor stems from word-play which exploits polysemy, homonymy, near-homonymy, or literalization. Naturally, if it is true that rather often the humoristic effect of the sitcoms depends on the viewer's recognition of particular notions and lexical items, it is undeniable that in this particular series it is elicited by other characters' incapability to understand specialized discourse (in particular, the character Penny's, with whom the extra-diegetic receiver identifies, frequent inability to understand her physicist neighbors and their friends). Because the very format of situation comedies usually provides a reading key to these polysemiotic texts (through the canned laughter and clap track inserted in the audio-visual products, which work in synergy with visual, non-verbal language), it seems important for spectators to understand the various elements of the discourses represented on screen. Yet, as students were encouraged to notice in class, this is not always the case. For instance, in the episode introduced above, the character Sheldon applies the Pythagoras's theorem to a very informal speech event (two male friends discussing their love life), by comparing the difficulties his roommate Leonard experiences in his relationship with Penny once the initial excitement wears off, to the change he experienced in relation to the Pythagorean theorem: "[when I first encountered the Pythagorean Theorem] I was blown away that the square of the hypotenuse was the sum of the squares of the opposite sides. Yeah, but now I'm just like 'eh'" (Lorre, Prady, & Cendrowski, 2017, 11:04:13–11:16:01).

The same Theorem is also referred to in various episodes of the television series *Numb3rs* (Scott & Scott, 2005). For example, it is implicitly mentioned in the third episode of the second season (Falacci, Heuton, & Behring, 2005), where viewers are confronted with the following dialogue:

DAVID: We have something new for you to look at. It's related to the same case. Now, we don't have an address, but we're trying to find out where this place is. I noticed that the basketball hoop was casting a shadow. I thought I read somewhere that you can calculate a location based on shadows.

CHARLIE and LARRY: Spherical astronomy.

AGENT SINCLAIR: What's that?

LARRY: Well, it's a way of looking at the cosmos to define one's location on the earth.

CHARLIE: Sailors use it when they're lost at sea.

LARRY: Cosmologists use it when we're just plain lost.

CHARLIE: And it just happens to be the same math used with sundials.... We need to measure the length of the pole as well as the shadows.

AGENT SINCLAIR: Well, the basketball hoop looks like it's regulation height.

LARRY: Yeah, and those are bricks on that driveway.

CHARLIE: Right.

AGENT SINCLAIR: Bricks? How does that help?

CHARLIE: Well, they're the same size. It allows us to measure the movement of the shadows. By measuring the length of the shadows against the bricks and then factoring in the exact times that these two images were snapped, the equation can then determine the altitude of the sun on a grid. Then by mathematically overlaying these images, I can provide to you, with certainty, latitude and longitude down to a hundredth of a degree.

(Falacci, Heuton & Behring, 2005, 00:31:57–00:33:38)

Within the show, no explicit mention of Pythagoras's name is made. However, Charlie's reference to spherical astronomy implicitly recalls astrometry which, as illustrated in Figures 2 and 3 below, fundamentally rests on Pythagoras's theorization:

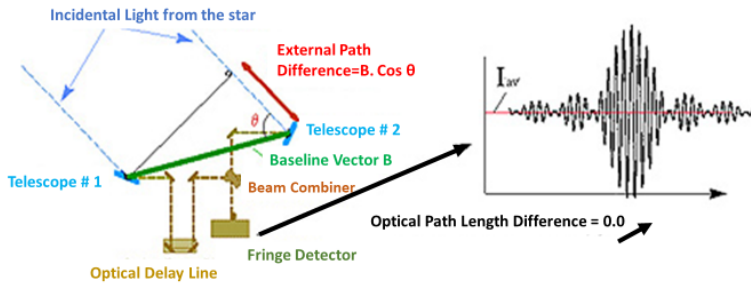


Figure 2 – Optical interferometric measurements (<https://www.revolvly.com/page/Astrometry>, © NASA/JPL-Caltech)

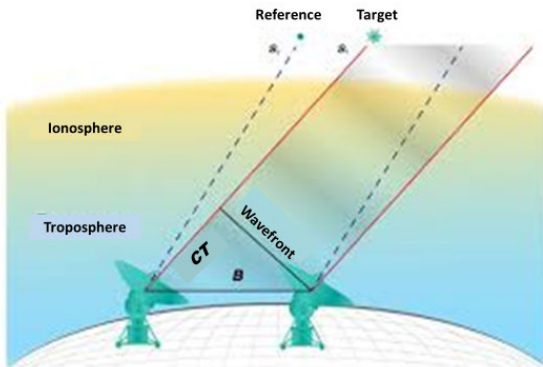


Figure 3 – Radio astrometry measurements (<http://www.gisopen.hu/eoadasok/2019/cs10.pdf>, p. 14, © M. Reid)

In the fifth episode of the third season (Falacci, Heuton, & Miller Tobin, 2006), the filmic text openly quotes the Pythagorean theorem and references the law of cosines which, while pertaining to trigonometry rather than pure geometry, clearly rests on the theorem and is equally used in triangulations:

CHARLIE: Hey. Pythagorean theorem, law of cosines, metrics.

LARRY: Equivalence principle.

CHARLIE: Back to basics. (Falacci, Heuton, & Miller Tobin, 2006, 00:16:25–00:16:35)



Thus, although the general expectation was to find simplified versions of scientific notions in more popular products, in reality in both television series, the theorem, which is explained at length by Du Sautoy, is to a certain extent taken for granted and not explained at all. This is particularly true in relation to the situation comedy, which, as a genre, is generally characterized by an even more “incidental” educational value (Dash, 2013), although even the explanations offered by the protagonist of *Numb3rs* (Scott & Scott, 2005) partially rest on the assumption that the spectators will be able to activate their knowledge of the theorem and apply it to the current situation. This is particularly evident in the second episode mentioned above, and it can be justified by referring to the cohesive devices which hold the entire series together. Indeed, having introduced the theorem in more detail in the previous season, producers probably assumed that viewers had already had the chance to “re-visit” the mathematical principles on which the theorem rests and therefore felt they could consider it shared knowledge.

This is the reason why a product such as *Numb3rs* (Scott & Scott, 2005) could become a useful teaching and learning tool for both specialist and non-specialist students. This is actually the approach investigated for example by Hudson (2009), who focused some of the activities she prepared for her students of mathematics on the television show, in order to encourage them to investigate how the relationship between  $A^2 + B^2$  and  $C^2$  is affected by the measurement of angle C. Naturally, within a course in modern languages, these products are particularly interesting from a linguistic perspective, and they can become useful to demonstrate how sentences are constructed, which types of verbs and verb tenses are mainly adopted in scientific language, etc.

Although it is obviously necessary for them to understand “the language of mathematics” as well, the primary aim of these students was not to become mathematicians or physicists. Therefore, the knowledge (and its teaching) of this specialized language should in such cases be adapted to their needs. To this end, some of the exercises which can be used with mathematical students in order to stimulate them to use this variety of English properly are equally useful in a modern languages class. In particular, providing students with a

glossary and asking them to complete simple exercises in order to learn the meaning of mathematical terms and symbols (following the footsteps of the HM Learning and Study Skills Program, while adapting it to the University context)<sup>4</sup> proved to be a valid tool and helped students avoid becoming frustrated, while encouraging and stimulating their curiosity.

Furthermore, by watching the same filmic extracts in both the original language and their dubbed versions, these audio-visual texts can become a useful tool also in terms of translation practice, helping students raise their awareness in relation to the way specialized languages work in different cultures and encouraging them to think about the translation strategies that might prove helpful when approaching such texts. With this aim in mind, a series of extracts were selected from different episodes both in the original and the dubbed versions of the shows, from which students were asked to complete activities such as *find the (translation) mistake*. These exercises proved very stimulating for them, and by focusing on theories and notions they were familiar with, enabled them to recognize whether the translation of the filmic text respected the use of the specialized language of math normally made in the Italian translations.

### 3. The Language of Physics

Because the discipline of mathematics is closely connected to physics, often the specialized languages of the two fields are simultaneously present and work in synergy within the same product. Indeed, as Galileo stated,

this grand book, the universe... cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend and read the letters in which it is composed. It is written in the language

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4 The program was elaborated by the HM Group in order to meet the needs of adolescent learners and encourage the development of their capacity for abstraction. The program is geared for grade levels and teaches the skills students need in order to be successful (organizing, use data, etc.). The publications of the group had an immense success, as they teach students to exploit and put to use their specific learning style.

of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometric figures without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it. (Galilei, 1623/1957, p. 238)

In fact, Boyer sustains that mathematics and physics have been interwoven since ancient Greece, when mathematicians (as Du Sautoy suggests in the documentary briefly introduced above), had to resort to mathematics in order to overcome the difficulties they encountered

In their attempt to express their intuitive ideas on the ratios and proportionalities of lines, which they vaguely recognized as continuous, in terms of numbers, which they regarded as discrete. (Boyer, 1949, p. 4)

This is actually the same notion Sheldon reminds spectators of in *The Big Bang Theory* (Belyeu, 2007), when, in an attempt to teach Penny some of the basic notions of Physics, in order to enable her to understand Leonard's work better, he repeatedly states:

What is physics? Physics comes from the ancient Greek word "physika."... Physika means the science of natural things. And it is there in ancient Greece that our story begins.... It's a warm summer evening, circa 600 B.C. You've finished your shopping at the local market or agora. And you look up at the night sky. And there you notice some of the stars seem to move so you name them "planets" or wanderer.... This is the beginning of a 2600-year journey we're going to take together from the ancient Greeks through Isaac Newton to Niels Bohr to Erwin Schrödinger to the Dutch researchers that Leonard is currently ripping off.... As I was saying, it's a warm summer evening in ancient Greece... (Lorre, Prady, & Cendrowski, 2009, 00:10:17-00:11:38)

As mentioned above, on many occasions viewers of this situation comedy are not provided with an explanation of the various notions and theorems the filmic text introduces. This became perhaps even more evident during the discussion of the language of physics, when it was possible to appreciate an important difference in relation to the other television show succinctly discussed above, namely *Numb3rs* (Scott & Scott, 2005).

In order to help students elicit these differences, it was decided to focus on one of the basic principles of physics which, as anticipated in the initial paragraphs of this paper, revolutionized the mode in which people thought about the universe and about science itself, namely the principle of uncertainty elaborated by Werner Heisenberg in 1927. To this end, students were initially required to read the fourth chapter from Hawking's best-seller *A Brief History of Time*, from which the following passage is extracted:

In order to predict the future position and velocity of a particle, one has to be able to measure its present position and velocity accurately. The obvious way to do this is to shine light on the particle. Some of the waves of light will be scattered by the particle and this will indicate its position. However, one will not be able to determine the position of the particle more accurately than the distance between the wave crests of light, so one needs to use light of a short wavelength in order to measure the position of the particle precisely. Now, by Planck's quantum hypothesis, one cannot use an arbitrarily small amount of light; one has to use at least one quantum. This quantum will disturb the particle and change its velocity in a way that cannot be predicted. Moreover, the more accurately one measures the position, the shorter the wavelength of the light that one needs and hence the higher the energy of a single quantum. So the velocity of the particle will be disturbed by a larger amount. In other words, the more accurately you try to measure the position of the particle, the less accurately you can measure its speed, and vice versa. (Hawking, 1998, pp. 54–55).

This explanation of the Principle was then compared to an extract from the second episode of the first season of *Numb3rs*, where the same notion is introduced by Charlie, in an attempt to help his brother and his FBI colleagues catch a group of robbers:

CHARLIE: Heisenberg noted that the, uh, the act of observation will affect the observed. In other words, when you watch something, you change it. And, uh for example, like, an electron. You know, you can't really measure it without bumping into it in some small way. Any physical act of observation requires interaction with a form of energy, like light, and that will change the nature of the electron, its path

of travel... you've observed the robbers. They know it; that will change their actions.

(Falacci, Heuton, & Guggenheim, 2005, 00:13:28–00:14:02)

As hinted at *above*, in this rather sophisticated series, the language adopted often responds to the requirements of specialized language as such (to the extent that also the various equations spectators are confronted with during the opening titles and on many occasions throughout the different seasons, are actually mathematically sound), and in each episode, one or more fundamental theorem is presented. Nevertheless, because there is always at least one character in the series who plays the role of the learner, the viewer generally finds an explanation of the theories presented, and s/he is therefore enabled to follow the episode, enjoy it, while learning something new.

Because of the rhythm enforced by the genre of the sitcom, on the contrary, in *The Big Bang Theory* (Belyeu, 2007) – where Sheldon explains specialized notions for the benefit of Penny, his fellow scientists and, as a consequence, the extradiegetic audience, only occasionally<sup>5</sup> – the didactic explanations typical of *Numb3rs* (Scott & Scott, 2005) are replaced by much shorter illustrations and/or mere definitions of the theorems the filmic text refers to.<sup>6</sup> Thus, during

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5 See for example the seventeenth episode of the first season, where Sheldon posits the experiment of Schrödinger's cat as an analogue for Penny and Leonard's potential relationship before they actually start dating. On this occasion, Sheldon tells Penny: "In 1935, Erwin Schrödinger, in an attempt to explain the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics, he proposed an experiment. A cat is placed in a box with a sealed vial of poison that will break open at a random time. Now, since no one knows when or if the poison has been released, the cat can be thought of as both alive and dead.... Just like Schrödinger's cat, your potential relationship with Leonard right now can be thought of as both good and bad. It is only by opening the box that you'll find out which it is" (Lorre, Prady, & Cendrowki, 2008, 00:15:04–00:16:06).

6 This is for example the case with the Doppler effect, which Sheldon, despite the obvious difficulty that other characters have in understanding it, simply defines without any form of amplification or exemplification: "It's the apparent change in the frequency of a wave caused by relative motion between the source of the wave and the observer" (Lorre, Prady, & Cendrowki, 2007, 00:07:26–00:07:32).

the twenty-third episode of the second season, Sheldon introduces the uncertainty principle by stating:

SHELDON: Well, now, here's a peculiar e-mail. The president of the university wants me to meet him at his office at 8 a.m.

LEONARD: Why?

SHELDON: Doesn't say. Must be an emergency. Everyone at the university knows I eat breakfast at 8 and move my bowels at 8:20.

LEONARD: Yes, how did we live before Twitter? I guess you'll find out what it is in the morning.

SHELDON: That's 14 hours away. For the next 840 minutes, I'm effectively one of Heisenberg's particles. I know where I am or how fast I'm going, but I can't know both.

(Lorre, Prady, & Cendrowski, 2009, 00:00:50–00:01:22)

Naturally, the function of the situation comedy is patently to elicit the audience's laughter and, in reality, the comic effect depends, for example in this case as well as many others, on the viewers' partial understanding of specific notions. Subsequently, the educational purpose is rather thin. However, within the same series, spectators do actually come across a "popularized" version of the Principle and can perhaps better understand Sheldon's comment in the second season retroactively. Indeed, in the fourth season ("The Herb Garden Germination") spectators meet theoretical physicist Brian Greene, who participated as a star guest on the show, playing himself, in the twentieth episode of the season. On this occasion, Professor Greene – who is famous for his popularizing efforts in actual life – is giving a conference at a bookstore, presenting his book *The Hidden Reality: Parallel Universes and the Deep Laws of the Cosmos* (2011). Sheldon and Amy attend the conference and when Professor Greene refers to the special-order menus of Chinese restaurants in order to explain the uncertainty principle, the two protagonists ridicule him (Lorre, Prady, & Cendrowski, 00:00:45–00:01:01). Certainly, the explanation seems far too "popular" to be appreciated by the two scientists, but it still provides a useful exemplification for the general public watching the series.

Thus, despite the priorities of television series such as those briefly commented upon *supra*, it is certainly true that, albeit “incidentally,” spectators might learn some of the basic notions of physics and its language (or they might feel encouraged to learn more). Consequently, it is my contention here, if adopted by teachers, a situation comedy too might become a useful learning tool. For instance, in order to achieve a fuller understanding of the pragmatic uses of language made in the series, students might be asked to search for more information about some of the notions introduced. Likewise, they might be encouraged to ponder over the translation strategies that the dubbing or subtitling of these episodes entail, thereby acquiring – if only indirectly – a higher level of competence in both languages. In particular, on the occasion of Heisenberg’s principle above, it is essential for students to realize that, even though in ordinary language the term *uncertainty* is generally translated into Italian as *incertezza*, within the specialized field of physics, Heisenberg’s principle has acquired a different form (*Principio di indeterminazione*), and, on the basis of a strategy of divergence, it should be translated as such. In this sense, it might be interesting to draw students’ attention to the fact that the title of the second episode of the first season of *Numb3rs* – which in English reads, precisely, “Uncertainty Principle” – is rendered in Italian as *Il principio di Heisenberg*, in an attempt to understand the motivations (and the consequences) behind this translation choice.

Indeed, when dealing with such popular products as *The Big Bang Theory* (Belyeu, 2007) or *Numb3rs* (Scott & Scott, 2005), which have been translated in many different languages, the activities can be based on contrastive analyses and *find the mistakes* type of exercises. In this context, then, it would be equally productive to exploit other documentaries which, due to the notoriety of their producers and/or presenters, have been translated in other languages as well. Among the various products available, the documentaries *Origins: Back to the Beginning* (Levenson, 2004), introduced by physicist Neil de Grass Tyson – who is famous all over the world for his efforts in popularizing science – or *Through the Wormhole* (McCreary, 2010), hosted by American actor Morgan Freeman, not to mention the mini-series *Stephen Hawking’s Universe* (Sobel, 1997) or *Into the Universe with Stephen Hawking* (Foster, 2010), presented – at

least in part – by Hawking himself, appear particularly useful. Indeed, these specific filmic texts focus on the same notions introduced in Hawking's book. Thus, it was very stimulating for students to reflect on how the same "raw" material (namely the physical world itself and the laws of physics which regulate it) is treated in the various products introduced and how the documentaries attempt to render it more "popular" through processes of intersemiotic and intralinguistic translation.

Thus, on this occasion too, students were required to identify the various intersemiotic strategies adopted in the rendition of Hawking's book, which, in a similar way to Livio's book before, was defined as the source text as the basis not only of the two documentaries actually written and presented by Hawking himself, but also of at least some of the episodes from the other two programs. Hence, students were able to identify strategies of amplification, explicitation, omission, and dramatic synthesis, which emphasize the way the visual and audio aids the medium puts at the producers' disposal were exploited.

Moreover, students were once again asked to provide a narratological analysis of the texts, after which it naturally became apparent that the same structure which was identified in relation to *The Story of Maths* (Duke, 2008) (especially in terms of the way the different narrating voices are connected), could be recognized in these products as well. However, whereas the documentaries introduced by DeGrasse Tyson and Freeman actually appeared to adhere to the format rather closely, the other two distinguished themselves with their different organization. Indeed, during the analysis of these filmic texts, it was sometimes difficult to identify the main narrator, in so far as – for example in the first episode of *Stephen Hawking's Universe* (Hawking, 1997) – spectators are confronted with two intra-diegetic narrators (Hawking himself and, in this specific case, the headmaster of his college at Cambridge). In addition, the various expert witnesses do not actually appear visually on screen but enter the filmic narrative only as voice-overs. Spectators thus recognize that various narrators are contributing to the construction of the documentary simply because the voices sound different, without, however, being able to see who



is speaking. This aspect therefore raises various issues in relation to the status that should be assigned to these narrators, in so far as they are obviously outside the narrative but – contrary to the expert witnesses – they often seem present at a first-degree narrative level.

Once this part of the course came to an end, students were required to approach some of the many documentaries retrievable from YouTube and the British television series *Supernova* (Freeland, 2005) namely products which, since they have never been translated into other languages, provided them with more challenging activities.

For example, during the courses, various extracts from the British sitcom were introduced. In particular, the second episode of *Supernova* (“God Are You Out There?”) provided stimulating material at more than one level. Indeed, initially the episode – which focuses on the discovery of a wormhole almost fourteen billion years old, and which therefore “stretches back to the dawn of time” (Cripps & Lipsey, 2005, 00:11:24–00:11:52) – was compared to extracts from the first episode of the first season of the documentary series *Through the Wormhole* (Isser, Lund, & Sharp, 2010), in order to appreciate the similarities between the two products from both a visual point-of-view and in terms of the language used. In fact, although the television series, due to the genre it belongs to, presents a distinctive use of informal register, students were asked to identify the linguistic elements the two products share. Furthermore, students were required to complete a series of lexical cloze and multiple-choice exercises based on the script of the episode, and subsequently translate extracts from the script which presented particularly specialized notions, expressions, etc.

Finally, the class was encouraged to reflect upon the popularizing strategies exploited in this sitcom and compare them to those utilized in the products analyzed during the previous stages of the courses. Indeed, while sharing some aspects with both the documentaries and other television series taken into consideration earlier, it became immediately apparent that this product is rather different on various levels, thus providing yet other examples of pop-

ularization strategies. For instance, the entire second episode of the first season (Cripps & Lipsey, 2005), rests on fundamental references to British culture and the science-fiction television program *Dr Who* (Nathan-Turner & Lambert, 1963) produced by the BBC since 1963 and whose eleventh series is scheduled to be released later in 2018 (Chibnall, 2018). In particular, during the episode spectators are confronted with very swift visual references to the third Time Lord, whose role was played by British actor Jon Pertwee (Sherwin, 1970). Naturally, while being a British production, *Dr Who* has actually become such a cult series for science fiction fans all over the world that the reference is bound to be appreciated by many spectators. However, whereas the various references to science fiction identifiable in *The Big Bang Theory* (Belyeu, 2007), by belonging to American top-grossing comics, films, and TV series, are bound to be easily recognized by an international audience, the visual inter-textual references to *Dr Who* more likely appeal to a niche public. Thus, the scenario these references activate and the function they perform can be appreciated by a more restricted audience. This holds true also in relation to the ironic comments made in relation to the Doctor's role, which, in *Supernova* (Freeland, 2005), is fundamentally that of God. Indeed, the whole episode is actually based on the fundamental misunderstanding sparked by a failure in the equipment the protagonists use at the Royal Australian Observatory that serves as the main setting to the situation comedy. By analyzing the wormhole they discovered, Dr Paul Hamilton believes in fact he has beheld God's face, thus proving His existence. As Figures 4, 5, and 6 demonstrate, however, at the very end of the episode the scientists (and, with them, the spectators) realize the image that appeared among the nebula was created by a crossing of signals between the astronomical equipment and the television broadcast featuring *Dr Who*:



Figure 4 – Standstill (00:15:45)



Figure 5 – Standstill (00:19:25)

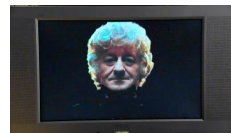


Figure 6 – Standstill (00:26:14)

In addition, the (often surrealistic) narrative this television show composes equally strikes viewers for its “Britishness,” whereas the tendency to avoid important amplifications of the specialized notions introduced appears even more marked.

Thus, the analysis conducted in the final stage of the courses, gave students the opportunity to ponder about broader issues that fell outside strictly linguistic perspectives. First of all, it became apparent that when dealing with phenomena such as specialization and popularization, cultural knowledge remains paramount, and the metaphors specialized discourses resort to are bound to offer different interpretations and representations of the same reality.

Furthermore, the discussion of these differences emphasized the fact that cultural (neo) colonialism plays a major role in the depiction of the world in specialized contexts, which inevitably triggered a reflection on the role of English (usually in its American variety) as a *lingua franca* in specialized fields. As a matter of fact, as Lindsay (2011) maintains among many others, “English has become *de facto* the language of science” (p. 11). Through the work carried out during the courses on which this chapter is based, the fact that language-related issues have recently assumed a fundamental role in science therefore found a further confirmation, thereby helping students recognize the role language plays in our understanding of reality and nature. This was further substantiated by references to physicist Bohm (after whom the protagonist of the television series *Touch* (Sutherland, 2012) mentioned above is named),<sup>7</sup> who emphasizes the active role played by language in scientific domains, to the extent that in his opinion, particular uses of language might lead to a block in the scientist’s creativity (Bohm as cited in Peat, 1987). Similarly, references were made to physicist Neils Bohr’s epistemological theory, which attributes

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7 The American physicist and the character played by Kiefer Sutherland share only the surname, the former being called David and the latter Martin. Given the main topic of the series, however, this intertextual reference appears very relevant.

a great importance not only to the object of observation but also to the observing (and describing) subject. As such, his theory assigns a fundamental role to language and communication, to the extent that the Danish physicist maintains in (1960) that “[i]t is wrong to think that the task of physics is to find out how nature is. Physics concerns what we can say about nature” (online), thereby positing an intimate (if reversed) relationship between the world, science, and language. Thus, as Ford and Peat (1988) notice, the importance of language is such that “a change in the use of the word is indicative of a change in theory” (p. 1236), which leads to the patent consequence that understanding the way language works and the impact it can have is essential in any field of study and circumstance of life.

#### 4. Conclusion

It is therefore possible to see how the products discussed in this contribution are actually conceived on the basis of some of the fundamental notions of the didactic perspective we refer to as needs analysis, since, in the case of the aforementioned television shows, generally one of the protagonists plays the role of what Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998, p. 13) describe as the ESP practitioner as teacher, whereas the co-protagonists or other characters occupy the position of the learners with whom the extradiegetic receivers can identify. As mentioned above, these products might become the focus of teaching activities within an English course for students of mathematics and/or physics only occasionally. On such occasions, they might in fact become useful when introducing notions which are bound to be further elaborated during the course, since their level of sophistication is not adequate to such specific courses.

Nevertheless, precisely because English – despite the controversy that surrounds this notion (Albert, 2001; Tardy, 2004) – is often considered the *lingua franca* of science, these goods prove that non-specialists, and non-native speakers, need to master the trends of this specialized language too (Wheatley, 2014). Thus, the need is very much felt for university and training courses

(as well as publications) whose aim is to improve students and trainees' proficiency in scientific English.

Furthermore, students attending courses of study such as modern languages – who often envisage a career either in teaching or translating – are also required to have some knowledge of the specific uses of the language of science, on the basis of a syllabus specifically designed in accordance with needs analyses. Clearly, teachers cannot expect students from the humanities to “talk in mathematics” (Badyopadhyay, 2002) and/or “think in math” (Bing & Redish, 2007), and the evaluative stage of ESP courses should always take this aspect into consideration. However, in order to become functioning members of society, as well as good teachers and translators, students should be aware of some of the founding aspects of these disciplines as reflected in the language they rely on. It is precisely from this perspective that the products on which this paper has focused might become extremely valuable, enabling students to appreciate some of the basilar features of the language of science, not only in terms of, as illustrated above, the specific terminology typical of this field, but also in terms of more general mechanisms, such as the use of past and present participles and the highly evaluative lexis which, as Hunston (1993; 1994) and Cava (2010) for example recognize, are often essential in scientific writing and must therefore be comprehended, used, and translated appropriately.

In addition, these television series can become useful for illustrating other crucial features of scientific language too. This is for example the case with the recourse to metaphors, some of which, as Brookes (2003) suggests, represent the pillars of physics itself. Thus, these products can help illustrate how heat is discussed as a fluid (we talk in fact about *heat flow*), how the atom is compared to a solar system (and in fact we talk about *electron orbitals*), and how *electrons* are equated with *waves*. In this sense, the fourteenth episode of the third season of *The Big Bang Theory* (Belyeu, 2007) can be highly instrumental, as during the episode, Sheldon, while working at The Cheesecake Factory in order to stimulate his brain, drops a series of plates on the floor and has an epiphany:

The interference pattern in the fracture. The motion of the wave through the structure. I've been looking at it all wrong. I can't consider the electrons as particles. They move through the graphene as a wave. It's a wave! (Lorre, Prady, & Cendrowski, 2010, 00:16:39–00:16:52)

Naturally, the various texts adopted should be diversified and associated to scientific articles and extracts from books and essays where possible.<sup>8</sup> However, if appropriately adapted by ESP teachers, these products provide useful tools to help students lower their affective filters, develop, as we have seen above, their higher order thinking skills (Bloom, 1956), encouraging them to ponder broader (philosophical, political, etc.) issues, and trigger their curiosity, which, according to Einstein himself, is at the very basis not only of scientific discovery but of life itself. According to Einstein, in fact, “the important thing is not to stop questioning” (Calaprice, 2000, p. 281).

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8 The author is willing to share part of her material if contacted directly at the following e-mail address: [michela.canepari@unipr.it](mailto:michela.canepari@unipr.it).

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# Teaching and Assessing Academic Writing for Tourism Studies: An Example of Reflective Practice from the Field

Michael Joseph Ennis – Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy

## Abstract

This chapter describes the process of developing an English for tourism studies course at a trilingual university across five academic years. The process involved four phases. During the 2011–2012 academic year, I gained a grounded understanding of the needs of the learners from the standpoint of a *reflective practitioner* (see Farrell, 2007). This initial experience teaching the course served as the basis for a formal needs analysis which informed the writing and implementation of a customized course book during the 2012–13 academic year based on the concepts of English for specific academic purposes (ESAP) and task-based language teaching (TBLT). In response to the observed effectiveness of the course and student reactions, in particular their continued sporadic attendance and reluctance to complete ungraded collaborative writing assignments, I conducted two classroom experiments during the 2014–15 and 2015–16 academic years, respectively, in order to test the effects of two interventions involving the use of extra credit pop quizzes. The extra credit scheme utilized in 2014–15 relied upon multiple choice pop quizzes to incentivize attendance and participation, but resulted in less class time for collaborative writing tasks and less individualized instructor feedback for the students. The modified extra credit scheme in 2015–16 greatly increased the submission of collaborative writing tasks by awarding extra credit for satisfactory completion.

## 1. Introduction: Teaching English for Tourism Studies at a Trilingual University

From 2011 to 2016, I was contracted as the instructor of a thirty-hour “specialized English” course for students enrolled in the bachelor’s degree program in Tourism, Sport, and Event Management (TSE) at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano in South Tyrol in northern Italy. The University adheres to a trilingual language model, whereby tuition is offered in English, German, and Italian and all students must meet stringent language requirements in order to matriculate and graduate. Roughly 50% of courses in the TSE program are conducted in English, 25% in Italian, and 25% in German. The majority of students speak German and/or Italian as their first language(s), and English is learned as a foreign language (EFL) and serves as both a *lingua franca* (ELF) and a medium of instruction (EMI). Students therefore also require basic academic language skills in order to complete the 50% of their courses and exams which are offered in English. This chapter describes the actions I took to design and continuously enhance the efficacy of the course against this background, with a focus on the materials and methods adopted to teach and assess academic writing skills (see Ennis, 2015, 2018).

The experience as a whole serves as an example of the type of *reflective practice* which I believe should characterize all English language teaching (ELT), but especially English for specific purposes (ESP) and English for academic purposes (EAP), given the growing recognition that decision making in ELT should be *evidence-based* and *data-driven* (Farrell, 2012; Mann & Walsh, 2013; Walsh & Mann, 2015). From the onset, I relied upon both theoretical knowledge and practical experience, I applied mixed methods to collect and analyze various sets of qualitative and quantitative data, and I tested carefully planned interventions under pseudo-experimental conditions. Although my experience was embedded within a specific context, I believe that the approach and the results can be informative to colleagues charged with developing ESAP courses in other settings.

## 2. Phase 1: Triangulating the Needs of Students of Tourism Studies

When I started teaching the course in the autumn of 2011, there was no established syllabus in place, and I was informed by colleagues and administrative staff that it was my responsibility to decide what and how to teach. I was informed by a colleague who had previously taught the course and the administration staff for the degree program that I would have to administer both a written exam and an oral exam. Based on the syllabus used the previous year and the “study manifest” (i.e., the official description) of the degree program, I could ascertain that the course had previously taught specialized English skills at the B2 level according to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001), that most students were required to submit B2 certification to matriculate, and that all students would have to certify B2+ in order to graduate. It was logistically impossible to conduct a more complete needs analysis before the semester began.

For the 2011–12 academic year, I therefore decided to teach from a commercially available course book while I familiarized myself with the students and the context, and I planned a formal needs analysis in preparation for 2012–13. Based upon a comprehensive survey of teaching material available on the market, I settled on *Oxford English for Careers: Tourism 3*. Like most books on the market, *Tourism 3* is intended for professionals working in the tourism industry and adopts a functional, communicative approach to teach field-specific lexis and communication skills. Unlike most textbooks, it is intended for managers and therefore contextualizes each chapter to a contemporary theme of tourism management. Although the students—or at least the approximately 25% who regularly attended—enjoyed discussing the themes in English, and undoubtedly learned useful lexis for their field of study, the book was deemed inappropriate, once I formed a grounded understanding of the students and the context (see Ennis, 2011).

The limitations of *Tourism 3* in this context coincided with three emerging observations regarding the needs of my students. First, it became apparent that the majority of the students in the course were already effective and fluent

communicators in English, but struggled with grammatical accuracy and, as adult learners, would require a focus on form. Yet, the textbook failed to systematically review the key grammar of the B2 level, and this often had to be done ad hoc, in response to student inquiries or in the form of corrective feedback. Second, as first-year students, most lacked the academic communication skills required for university study (often also in their L1s), basic academic writing and speaking skills in particular. While the book engaged students with authentic, relevant, current, and intellectually stimulating content, many of the activities were too professional for students more immediately concerned with certifying their language proficiency and passing courses instructed in English. Third, my students were a diverse group of multilinguals who aspired to work in an industry founded upon multilingual and cross-cultural encounters, and thus deserved an intercultural approach to language teaching and learning (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Ennis & Riley, 2017). Unfortunately, like most commercial teaching material, the textbook treated culture only superficially.

Based upon these observations, it became apparent that I would have to produce customized teaching material for this course, as is often prescribed for teaching English for tourism (EfT) (Garcia Laborda, 2011; Ennis, 2011). The first step in this process would be to expand upon my initial observations and conduct a formal needs analysis which triangulated the needs of my students by using multiple sources and methods for sampling (Long, 2005, pp. 28–30). To this end, I adopted a three-pronged approach, including my personal reflections as the instructor, the expectations and requirements of the degree program, and the learner profiles of the students. Specifically, I reviewed the degree program documents and the syllabi of all courses taught in English across the TSE curriculum in order to identify the language skills which would be expected of the students during their studies;<sup>1</sup> I administered a survey to a sample of students from the incoming 2012–13 cohort in order to identify their

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1 I also attempted to solicit input from the professors of other courses, but received few responses and found it difficult to meet with colleagues, most of whom, as contract professors, were based in other cities and countries.

backgrounds, interests, and aspirations with regard to both English and tourism, sport, or event management; and, finally, I reflected on the type of course I deemed most appropriate in this context and began systematically reviewing the pertinent academic literature for inspiration.

The university documents and student survey identified the following learner variables and needs:

- a. *Diversity*. Twenty-two (56.4%) respondents identified German, fourteen (35.9%) identified Italian, two (5.1%) identified Ladin, and one (2.6%) identified both German and Italian as their L1, while eighteen (46.2%) were from South Tyrol, fourteen (35.9%) were from other provinces in Italy, six (15.4%) were from Germany, and one (2.6%) was from Austria.
- b. *Motivation*. A majority (83.8%) expressed a desire to learn English because they “like” the language, 62.2% felt English would help them achieve their career goals, 27% believed English would help them meet their academic goals. No students said they were studying English only because it was a degree requirement.
- c. *Compulsory courses*. Students attended subject courses in economics, statistics, management, law, communication, accounting, finance, and information systems, as well as courses on tourism, sport, or event management (e.g., destination management, event planning, sports marketing).
- d. *Required skills*. In the TSE program, students were expected to actively follow lectures, read textbooks and secondary literature, write short texts, and, occasionally, give oral presentations.
- e. *Majors*. More than half (59.5%) of respondents said they were interested in tourism, 46% were interested in events, 18.9% were interested in sports, and 8.1% were undecided.
- f. *Subject interests*. Most (81%) respondents said they were interested in marketing, 76% were interested in management, and 76% were interested in languages. There was relatively little interest in other subjects offered in the program.



- g. *Experience abroad.* According to the survey, many students had a desire to study abroad (53%) or complete internships (44%) in an English-dominant country.
- h. *After graduation.* Some of the students said they would like to do graduate study (23.5%) or seek employment (31%) in an English-dominant country. (Ennis, 2015, pp. 364–365)

Based on these results and the observations made during the autumn of 2011–12, I resolved to focus on the most immediate needs of my students and design an English for tourism studies course book based on the concept of ESAP and using a TBLT approach.

The initial review of literature in 2012 (which continued through early 2016), produced a plethora of information on teaching ESP and EAP with TBLT approaches and suggested that there was sufficient input on teaching ESAP, as well. But there was a blatant gap in the literature on teaching EFT in general—that is for any current or future professional in the field—and English for tourism studies in particular. I located a vast body of scholarship at the time on travel literature and the translation of tourist texts as well as numerous studies which applied discourse analysis, genre studies, and corpus linguistics to further understanding of how English is used within the tourism sector. All of these sources were very informative in terms of potential content for an EFT course, and several in fact reflected on this application and/or were published in a journal on language teaching and learning. But the limited work available which investigated specific pedagogical practices or phenomena of language acquisition was often only coincidentally situated within a tourism context, and was not informative for teaching students of tourism as much as it was informative for teaching EFL or ESP more broadly. Papers of particular interest to teaching EFT included needs analyses, surveys of textbooks, and suggestions for the incorporation of technology and corpora in the classroom. The few sources which investigated teaching methods, materials selection, and course design focused on teaching English for occupational, professional, or specific business purposes, including all sources which did so within a university context. All works reviewed were insightful, but offered

few practical tips for developing an ESAP course to prepare university students for studying tourism in an EFL and EMI context.

The literature review, as it continued to develop over the five years I taught the course, produced three key findings (see Ennis, 2017a). The first was that there are two distinct branches of ESP inquiry related to tourism: *English of tourism* (EoT), which studies the use of English within the tourism sector, and *English for tourism* (EfT), which studies the teaching and learning of English for students studying tourism as a field of study or professionals working in tourism as an economic activity. The second finding was that, while there was a vibrant EoT discourse in Italy, an academic discourse on teaching EfT, or at least one documented in the literature, had yet to develop in the country in which I was contracted to develop an EfT course. The third finding was that, while there had been significant research on teaching and learning English for current and future professionals in tourism, not to mention numerous textbooks available for purchase, it was clear I would have to design a course on English for tourism studies from scratch.

### 3. Phase 2: Designing an English for Tourism Studies Course from Scratch

During the 2012–13 academic year, I developed a book for the TSE course based on the immediate needs of my students. The book was conceived as a perpetual work in progress, so that it could be continuously updated and adapted according to the currency of the content, the changing needs of the students, the observed effectiveness of the material, and emerging insights from scholarship on language teaching and learning.

My students' most urgent need, in my opinion, was that all of them would have to complete 50% of their degree in English, yet most lacked the necessary academic writing and speaking skills and field-specific language to do so. The book was, thus, based upon the concept of ESAP (see Dudley-Evans & St. John,

1998, pp. 53–73; Jordan, 2005, pp. 228–270) and, as such, would rely upon “customized learning material to foster the learning of specific language features (grammar and lexis), discourse patterns (cohesion, organization, and coherence), and communicative skills (writing and speaking), as applied to the composition of the specific genre (generic academic texts and formal presentations) common to the TSE Management curriculum” (Ennis, 2017b, p. 153).

Another urgent need of the students, the one of which they were the most acutely aware, was that most of them would have to certify B2+ general English proficiency in order to graduate. Although the aim of the course was by no means to support their efforts to attain a target proficiency level, I decided that it would be appropriate to teach and assess at the B2+ level. By the end of the course, the hope was that my students would be able to provide evidence of a full range of language features and communication skills typical of the B2 level, but with early signs of the discourse management typical of the C1 level. More precisely, I wanted them to use grammar identified as being exemplary of B2 (e.g., Trinity College London, 2009; North, Ortega, & Sheehan, 2010) in order to compose brief written and spoken texts with more purposeful organization and more complex linking devices than was commonly expected of B2 learners of English.

As often prescribed for ESP and EAP, a task-based approach (Ellis, 2003) was adopted with the aim of engaging students with materials and tasks which were authentic and relevant to their chosen field of study. The premise was that if each learning unit simulated the learning of another subject, not only would the experience be more learner-centered and meaningful for the students, but it would also better prepare them for learning higher educational content through EMI. However, as the students struggled more with accuracy than with fluency, I realized they would also require formal instruction, a focus on form, and frequent instructor feedback. I therefore adopted a *weak* TBLT approach, which adhered to the input-interaction-output model of second language acquisition (see Ellis, 1997; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Gass, 2017), so that students would be urged to process input for meaning and form

in an effort to improve both their fluency and their accuracy in reading, writing, and speaking about current issues in tourism studies. The course book would seek to expose the students to a broad range of field-specific language as they performed authentic and relevant tasks, but would focus their attention on practicing and producing specific grammar, lexis, and academic communication skills. This would be achieved by combining top-down and bottom-up processing of language as well as inductive and deductive learning of new language input. I believed that this mixed method would provide a scaffold for the development of autonomous learning strategies which might provide a firm foundation for learning English across the curriculum and as lifelong learners after graduation.

As academic writing and speaking had been identified as a blatant deficit in the skills of my students, I deemed teaching the fundamentals of academic writing to be a central goal of the course and decided to make written production a capstone of each learning unit. (Input on formal academic speaking would be integrated during the 2013–14 academic year.) The weak TBLT approach lent itself to two methods of teaching writing. The first was *reading-for-writing*, which is an integrated-skills approach whereby the input contained in authentic texts is analyzed so that reading can serve as a model for the genre the students are expected to compose themselves. The advantage of reading-for-writing is that it affords students opportunities to scaffold aspects of their own writing upon all forms of authentic input, including the content, the lexis, and grammar, and the discourse features which characterize the genre, and thereby resembles the acquisition of L1 writing skills (Hirvela, 2004). The second concept, which was also necessary due to the high student-to-teacher ratio, was *collaborative writing*, that is, requiring students to complete writing tasks in small groups. Rooted in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (see Wertsch, 1985) and Long's (1983) interaction hypothesis, there was already compelling evidence at the time that collaborative writing lowers anxiety, increases motivation, promotes the phenomena of scaffolding, metatalk, and languaging, offers more opportunities for peer feedback, and improves task performance (e.g., Saunders, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 1998; Storch, 2005; Storch, 2011; Mulligan & Garafolo, 2011).

A final principle of course design was based on the fact that my students were multilinguals who studied at a trilingual university and aspired to work in a profession founded upon multilingual and intercultural encounters. It was evident that I could best serve my students by adopting an intercultural approach to language teaching (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Ennis & Riley, 2017). Given the existing constraints of teaching to high academic standards with limited instructional hours and a high student-to-teacher ratio, it was determined that it would not be possible to include separate units or tasks about cultural differences and intercultural encounters. Intercultural competence could only be fostered by fully integrating intercultural learning into language learning tasks designed to develop linguistic and communicative competence. Such integration was attempted by carefully selecting texts which were produced in diverse English-speaking contexts and which confronted students with at least two conflicting points-of-view, and by then urging students to appropriate aspects of the conflicting views during their collaborative writing tasks (Ennis, 2017b).

Following these guiding principles, the course book was designed on a lesson-by-lesson basis and adapted according to the observed effectiveness. The process of designing the course was systematic in that each unit contained two readings, a set of target language features and communication skills, and a series of tasks which required students to engage the readings and the language. The themes, texts, and tasks were selected and adapted based on the survey of syllabi across the TSE curriculum and the expressed academic interests of the students. However, the process of selecting and adapting materials was circular, rather than linear, in that the appropriateness of themes and language informed the selection of texts, while the selected texts confirmed the appropriateness of themes and language.

Themes included current issues in economics, management, law, information systems, event planning, etc. Texts were sourced and adapted from textbooks, academic publications, institutional reports, news media, and websites related to tourism studies, many of which directly from the reading lists of other curricular courses. Tasks were designed to resemble the reading and writing

activities students would engage in other courses, albeit with an explicit focus on the linguistic features. The target language and skills were in part pre-defined according to the B2+ level of the CEFR, and in part defined by the selected themes and texts.

The final product (Ennis, 2012–2016) consisted of nine learning units, each divided into two parts. Table 1 outlines the thematic focus, target grammar, and communication skills covered in each unit. Each part progressed from tasks which required top-down processing of the thematic content and specialized language contained in the respective text, to tasks which required bottom up processing of specific information and specific linguistic features (see Carrell, Devine, & Eskey, 1988; Chaudron & Richards, 1986). Top-down processing consisted of extensive reading and two collaborative tasks: a pre-reading group or pair discussion that served as an advance organizer and a post-reading discussion, information gap task, or brief collaborative writing task which required students to apply their understanding of the gist and their comprehension of key terms. Bottom-up tasks were initially completed individually, and required both inductive and deductive processing of specific details and specific lexical items and grammatical forms. Inductive tasks were particularly influenced by processing instruction (see Lee & VanPatten, 2003; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993) requiring learners to draw connections between form and meaning/function and to formulate their own definitions of new lexis, their own explanations of grammar rules, and their own descriptions of the embedded conventions of formal writing by completing brief text, genre, and discourse analyses of excerpts (see Paltridge, 2001; Wennerstrom, 2003; Hyland, 2004). Deductive learning was more explicitly language-focused, and offered explanations of the rules and conventions, followed by language drills and exercises (see Long, 2000). Various forms of instructor feedback were provided at every stage (see Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Table 2 summarizes the structure underlying each half of each unit.

Table 1 – The thematic units

Unit Themes	Target Grammar	Communication Skills
1. Definitions of tourism and current trends in the tourism market	Present simple versus present continuous	Stating facts and describing current trends
2. History of tourism and recent developments in the tourism market	Past simple versus present perfect	Narrating the past and describing recent trends and recent changes
3. Role of leadership in management	Adjectives, adverbs, comparatives, and superlatives	Comparing and contrasting characteristics (traits) and actions (skills)
4. History and future of ICTs in tourism	Past simple versus present perfect for duration; modal verbs for future certainty and uncertainty	Describing past and recent activities and trends; making predictions about the future
5. Role of government in tourism	Zero, first, and second conditionals	Describing the effects of interventions
6. Principles of advertising and advertising laws in Europe	Modal verbs for obligation, necessity, and possibility	Describing rules and regulations and making recommendations
7. Tourism market reports	Present perfect continuous, past continuous, past perfect, and past perfect continuous	Describing and comparing sets of data and describing trends in data
8. Impact of global warming on tourism	Conjunctions and relative clauses	Linking ideas into coherent discourse
9. Social, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism	Adverbial linkers and discourse markers	Linking ideas into coherent discourse

Eight of nine units culminated in a collaborative reading-for-writing task which required the students to consolidate the thematic content, specialized

lexis, target grammar, communication skills, discourse features, and, where possible, opposing points-of-view present in the unit. (Units 2 through 5 contained two capstone tasks, one for each part, whereas units 6 through 9 contained one larger capstone task at the end.) The writing tasks were completed and submitted in groups of three or four students.

Table 2 – Unit structure

Tasks	Task Types	Language Learning Function
Pre-reading	Discussion in small groups or pairs with prompt	Advance organizer: Sharing pre-existing knowledge and opinions on theme in order to activate schemata
Reading	Extensive reading (individually)	Top-down processing of information and language
Vocabulary	Matching words and phrases to definitions; scanning for words or phrases with particular meanings/functions; or defining words and phrases → Comparing responses in small groups or pairs → Solutions and instructor feedback	Understanding the meanings of new words and phrases in context
Reading comprehension	Intensive reading → Information gap, discussion, and/or brief collaborative writing in small groups or pairs → Solutions and instructor feedback	Skimming and/or scanning for gist and main ideas; discussing and expressing opinions about the issues
Inductive grammar	Input processing and language analysis tasks using excerpts from reading → Completion of grammar grids and rules using excerpts from reading → Solutions and instructor feedback	Drawing connections between form and meaning/function of morphemes, syntax, and function words from context; inductive learning of grammar rules



Deductive grammar	Explicit explanation of grammar rules using excerpts from reading → Grammar drills and exercises using excerpts from reading → Solutions and instructor feedback	Deductive learning of grammar rules
Capstone	Collaborative reading-for-writing task using input from readings → Instructor feedback	Scaffolding upon the information, lexis, grammar, discourse features, and conflicting viewpoints contained in readings to compose expository text

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Input on academic writing skills followed a similar inductive to deductive learning sequence as that employed for the instruction of vocabulary and grammar. Prior to completing the writing tasks in units 2, 4, and 6, students were asked to work with their groups to formulate a given number of rules or tips for completing the task. They were encouraged to refer to the reading(s) for examples and ideas. The rules and strategies produced by each group were first shared with the class and then compared to rules and tips provided in an appendix, which also contained a model response. Students were instructed to follow these rules and tips and refer to the model response as they completed the writing task in groups. Following this pattern, four rules of writing a complete sentence were introduced in the second unit (pp. 102–103); four rules of writing purposeful paragraphs were introduced in the fourth unit (pp. 104–106); and five tips for writing three-paragraph expository texts (i.e., brief essays and reports) were introduced in the sixth unit (pp. 7–9). Before completing each capstone writing task, students were advised to also review the rules and tips provided in previous units. Table 3 below summarizes how basic academic writing skills were integrated into the course, while Table 2 above depicts how the collaborative reading-for-writing tasks fit into each unit.

Table 3 – The integration of academic writing

Unit	Academic Writing Skills	Capstone Task
2	Four rules for writing complete sentences	Complete sentences about history of tourism and recent market trends
3	Review and practice	Complete sentences about ideal leadership traits and skills of managers
4	Four rules for writing purposeful paragraphs	Purposeful paragraphs about history and future of ICTs in tourism
5	Review and practice	Purposeful paragraph supporting or opposing a tourist tax
6	Five tips for writing three-paragraph expository texts	Brief essay to propose a marketing campaign for a local Christmas market
7	Review and practice	Brief report on the Italian tourism market
8	Review and practice	Brief essay to propose a climate policy for local tourism
9	Review and practice	Brief essay supporting or opposing local investment in tourism

Although Italian higher education caters toward teaching to the test (Ennis, 2018) and leaves little room for continuous assessment, I was trained to view assessment as an integral part of the learning experience. Course assessment was thus based upon the concepts of *testing what you teach* and *testing how you teach* in an attempt to promote positive washback (for a discussion of these concepts in communicative language teaching, see Lee & VanPatten, 2003). Not only were students tested on their ability to recall the grammar, lexis, and communication skills taught during the course, but they were tested on their ability to apply their linguistic competence for a communicative purpose as they completed tasks which resembled those they had completed during the course. In addition to applying the language and communication skills they had developed in the course to similar tasks, they were tested on their ability to engage new texts, new themes, and new language as they did so. In this

sense, they were tested on the autonomous learning strategies they had practiced (i.e., top-down to bottom-up processing, inductive learning, and scaffolding) during the semester as a simulation of learning new language as they engaged new content.

Course assessment consisted of four equally weighted components. The first component was a portfolio of relevant written genre, which was completed and submitted individually during the semester. The central task assigned for the portfolio was a brief report on a tourist attraction, sports team, or event in the student's hometown. The second and third components comprised two parts of a final written exam. Similar in structure to the learning units, the first part of the written exam was a reading, grammar, and vocabulary test in which students read four texts on a common theme and completed a series of reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar activities embedded in or based upon the texts. The texts and theme were authentic and relevant to tourism studies, but had not been encountered during the course. The second part of the final exam was a reading-for-writing task for which students composed a three-paragraph essay on an aspect of the theme discussed in the texts. Identical in structure to the collaborative writing tasks completed during the course, students were given a three-question prompt which instructed them to scaffold their composition upon the information and language presented in the texts and balance conflicting perspectives in order to express their own informed opinions (an example of both parts of the written exam can be found on pp. 116–124 of the course book). The fourth component of assessment was an oral exam during which students gave a five-minute oral presentation of the findings of the report and were asked a series of questions by a two-member exam commission. The written and oral productions were assessed according to range and accuracy of lexis and grammar, discourse features, and task completion, with a particular eye to the specialized language and academic writing skills instructed during the course. Table 4 summarizes course assessment.

Table 4 – Summary of course assessment (Ennis, in press)

Components	Items	Constructs
Portfolio	Various written genres	Ability to compose a brief report on a tourist attraction, sports team, or event in student's hometown (and other relevant genre, such as bios or cover letters); Ability to state facts, narrate the past, describe trends and data, make predictions, and give recommendations
Written Exam Part I: Reading, Grammar, and Vocabulary	Six multiple choice, true-or-false, gap fill, and lexical cloze items embedded in or based upon four short texts	Comprehension of four short, authentic and relevant texts on a common theme; knowledge of specialized lexis and grammar covered in course; ability to understand the meaning of new lexis from context
Written Exam Part II: Writing	Essay with a three-question prompt	Reading-for-writing: Ability to synthesize language and content of readings to produce a basic, three-paragraph academic text
Oral Exam	Oral presentation	Five-minute formal presentation of the findings of the portfolio report, followed by brief Q&A; Ability to state facts, narrate the past, describe trends and data, make predictions, and give recommendations

#### 4. Phase 3: Getting University Students to Practice Writing

During the 2012–13 academic year, the new course book seemed effective at meeting the stated learning objectives, in that the majority of students who regularly attended and participated in lessons performed satisfactorily on end-of-course assessment. Unfortunately, despite my attempts to cater to their

needs, most students attended and participated sporadically, and were reluctant to complete and submit ungraded assignments.<sup>2</sup> The average course attendance rate was only 51.9%, 95% CI [47.4%, 56.4%] and student attendance per lesson exhibited a volatile downward trend (see Figure 1). This meant that most of my students were neither practicing nor receiving much corrective feedback on their writing, especially toward the end of the semester. I believed that this was the root cause of many of the disappointing performances on the report assignment and the writing task on the final exam.

In an attempt to improve the situation, I planned two modifications to the course for 2013–14. First, in order to better prepare students for the portfolio and oral exam, the course book was updated with a model presentation and accompanying report (pp. 110–115) which could be analyzed in class, both inductively and deductively, to teach basic oral presentation and report writing skills more explicitly. Second, I amended the assessment policy in order to emphasize the importance of academic writing. In 2012–13, students were required to earn a minimum composite score of 60% on the reading and writing exams in order to proceed to the oral exam and a minimum score of 60% on the oral exam as well as a minimum cumulative score of 60% in order to pass the course. After observing that multiple students had managed to pass the course with failing scores on the reading-for-writing task, I required students in 2013–14 to earn passing scores on all components except the portfolio in order to pass the course, in addition to a passing cumulative grade.

Unbeknownst to me until after the next academic year was in progress, the degree program also lowered the general English proficiency required to enroll for my exam from B2 to B1. This decision was made in response to the misconception on the part of students that the purpose of the course was to

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2 The lack of effort on the part of students had not only been observed the previous academic year, but also seems to be paradigmatic of university language courses in Italy (Ennis, 2018), and has been observed among university students of tourism at other institutions in other countries (e.g., Garcia Laborda, 2002).

support them in achieving B2+ proficiency, whereas the stated learning objective in the course syllabus was to foster the development of the academic communication skills necessary for university study, albeit at the B2+ level.

The combination of me raising my expectations of the students in terms of their written production and the institution relaxing the prerequisite to enroll for the exam accentuated the problem, perhaps due to the mixed message received by the students. The average course attendance rate fell slightly to 45.6%, 95% CI [40.8%, 50.4%],  $t(176) = 1.87$ ,  $p = 0.032$ ,  $d = 0.28$ , while the downward volatile trend in attendance per lesson remained nearly identical (see Figure 1). More importantly, a larger percentage of overconfident but underprepared students were admitted to the first exam session in January/February, and the pass rate fell sharply from 83.6%, 95% CI [ $w=-71.5%$ ,  $w+=91.5%$ ] in 2012–13 to 53.9%, 95% CI [ $w=-42.2%$ ,  $w+=65.3%$ ],  $z(135) = 3.67$ ,  $p < 0.001$  in 2013–14 (Ennis, 2018).

My belief was that the lack of effort on the part of many students was a result of several demotivating factors inherent to the learning context, including limited instructional hours, a high student-to-teacher ratio, and Italian university culture which encourages *teaching to the test* and deemphasizes the role of classroom teaching (see Ennis, 2015, 2018). Reflecting upon the results of the 2012–13 offering of the course shortly after the first exam session, I wrote:

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that class attendance at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, like most universities in Italy, is optional, resulting in sporadic attendance. Typically, only the weakest and/or most motivated students regularly attend lectures. Professors in Italy often deal with this problem by dividing students into attending and non-attending students and offering attending students the opportunity to complete graded assignments in class. Thus, one solution in this context might be to adapt the assessment procedure to such a model by reducing the homework and incentivizing attendance. Specifically, I am considering assigning extra credit pop quizzes for attending students.... (Ennis, 2015, pp. 374–375)

Thus in 2014–15 the only significant modification to the course was the introduction of extra credit pop quizzes<sup>3</sup> as a form of continuous assessment which offered an extrinsic reward for regular attendance and active participation. Previous research had provided evidence that both extra credit and pop quizzes were effective at increasing student effort in secondary and tertiary education in the United States, but the effectiveness of these practices appeared to have never been empirically studied within the context of language education or in the national context of Italy (for a comprehensive literature review, see Ennis, 2018, pp. 5–7), and there was very limited empirical research on the specific practice of giving extra credit for pop quizzes. Thus the intervention was conceived as a classroom experiment which also aimed to extend previous research findings to these specific contexts (see Ennis, 2018).

As summarized in Ennis (in press):

The extra credit scheme was designed to incentivize regular attendance and active participation without punishing non-attending students and without causing excessive grade inflation. Ten multiple-choice pop quizzes were administered dur-

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3 “Extra credit” and “pop quizzes” are terms employed in North American education. “Extra credit pop quizzes” can be defined as the comparatively rare practice of giving extra credit for pop quizzes. My working definition was as follows: “A pop quiz is merely a specific type of quiz which, although similar in form and function to all quizzes, is administered without giving the students prior notification of the day and time on which it will occur. Students are typically aware that pop quizzes will be a component of course assessment and they are aware of the relative weight of the quizzes in the calculation of their cumulative course grades, but a pop quiz is a ‘surprise.’ hence the word ‘pop.’ The conventional wisdom supporting the use of pop quizzes is that where pre-announced quizzes temporarily increase the students’ effort to complete a particular assignment or to pay attention and actively participate during a particular lesson, pop quizzes result in a sustained increase in effort because the students never know when a quiz will occur or which course content the quiz will assess. Students are therefore encouraged to attend and participate in lessons, and practice and review at home more regularly.... Extra credit is a term that refers to optional coursework which students may complete in order to improve their cumulative grade. Such work can either be assigned on an ad hoc basis in order to give students the opportunity to compensate for unsubmitted, incomplete, or insufficient work, or, more typically, it can be integrated into a course syllabus and assessment procedure as a motivational tool” (Ennis, 2018, p. 6).

ing lessons in order to test the students' recall of the field-specific vocabulary, grammar, and academic communication strategies that had been previously covered in the lessons and learning material. Only attending students, defined as those who had attended at least ten of fifteen two-hour lessons, were eligible for extra credit at the end of the semester. Attending students were awarded half a bonus point added to their portfolio grade for each quiz on which they scored a minimum of 60%. Students were awarded an additional half a point for perfect attendance and/or if they finished the semester on a top ten list for average quiz scores. After the application of extra credit, students could effectively earn a maximum score of 36 out of 30 points on their portfolio, but because the portfolio assignment only accounted for 25% of the cumulative course grade, the extra credit effectively increased the maximum final grade to 31.5 out of 30 points... As students were required to pass all components of a final exam in order to pass the course, the portfolio score had no consequence on whether a student passed or failed the course. Extra credit only served as an extrinsic reward for passing students who had regularly attended lessons, actively participated in class, and completed ungraded assignments.

The extra credit scheme (see Table 5) produced very promising results. As reported in Ennis (2018), the average attendance rate rose from 45.6%, 95% CI [40.8%, 50.4%], in 2013–14 to 73.1%, 95% CI [68.2%, 78.0%],  $t(183) = 7.87$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.16$ , in 2014–15. In 2014–15 the trend in the attendance rate per lesson was also flatter and less volatile than in the previous two years (see Figure 1). The pass rate during the first exam session increased from 53.9%, 95% CI [w=-42.2%, w+=65.3%], in 2013–14 to 68.6%, 95% CI [w=-57.6%, w+=77.9%],  $z(160) = 1.92$ ,  $p = 0.027$ , in 2014–15. There was also evidence that greater effort, as measured by attendance and pop quiz performance, was associated with improved end-of-course performance, while quiz performance was a stronger predictor of achievement than mere attendance. The 2014–15 cohort expressed positive attitudes toward the intervention and more positive attitudes about the course in general than the 2013–14 cohort on a course evaluation survey. Crucially, the extra scheme had minimal impact on grade inflation, as the addition of extra credit resulted in an average increase of only 3.8% on cumulative grades (see Ennis, 2018 for complete results).



Table 5 – Extra credit scheme for attending students (Ennis, 2018)

Pop quizzes passed	Portfolio bonus	Cumulative bonus
1	0.5	0.125
2	1.0	0.250
3	1.5	0.375
4	2.0	0.500
5	2.5	0.625
6	3.0	0.750
7	3.5	0.875
8	4.0	1.00
9	4.5	1.125
10	5.0	1.250
One leaderboard	5.5	1.375
Both leaderboards	6.0	1.500

However, there were two negative effects of the extra credit scheme with direct implication for the teaching and learning of writing skills. First, pop quizzes required on average 20 minutes to administer, or 11% of the 30 instructional hours, which greatly reduced class time available for collaborative writing tasks. Second, an increase in attendance implied a higher student-to-teacher ratio and, thus, less individualized instruction and instructor feedback during lessons. The net result was that while I was spending substantially more time preparing and marking pop quizzes outside of class, students remained reluctant to submit collaborative writing assignments, especially if they had to complete them at home (see Table 7).

Table 6 – Modified extra credit scheme in 2015–16 (Ennis, in press)

Quiz	Quiz Type	Task Type
1	Multiple choice	Individual
2	Multiple choice	Individual
3	Practice paragraph	Small Group
4	Practice paragraph	Small Group
5	Practice report	Small Group
6	Multiple choice	Individual
7	Practice essay	Small Group
8	Practice presentation outline	Small Group
9	Practice reading exam	Pair
10	Practice reading exam	Pair

The classroom experiment with extra credit pop quizzes was therefore replicated in 2015–16 with a modification intended to reallocate class time to collaborative writing, offer students more opportunities for feedback on their writing, and incentivize the completion and submission of writing tasks. Specifically, I decided to assign four of the collaborative writing tasks as unannounced extra credit assignments, in lieu of multiple-choice quizzes. I also replaced three further multiple-choice quizzes with two practice reading exams and one practice presentation outline (see Table 6). Students were informed that any task completed during lessons might be converted into an extra credit pop quiz at any moment without advance notification. In fact, on two occasions I converted a task into an extra credit assignment upon observing that students were putting forth minimal effort. The extra credit scheme, outlined in Table 5, as well as the course book and course assessment procedure, otherwise remained identical to those used in 2014–15.

Table 7 – Written assignment submissions in 2015–16 (Ennis, in press)

Unit	Capstone Task	14–15	15–16
2	Sentences	0	0
	Sentences	5	6
4	Paragraph*	6	25*
5	Paragraph*	1	22*
6	Essay	3	8
7	Report*	0	19*
8	Essay	0	2
9	Essay*	2	17*
	TOTAL	17	99
	AVERAGE	2.1	12.4

\*Assigned as unannounced extra credit

The replication experiment (see Ennis, in press) maintained the positive impacts which extra credit had had on course attendance and the pass rate. The trend in attendance per lesson was nearly identical (see Figure 1), though slightly less volatile, and the average course attendance rate of 73.3%, 95% CI [67.5%, 79.1%],  $t(200) = 0.04$ ,  $p = 0.484$ ,  $d = 0.005$ , and the pass rate of 63.5%, 95% CI [w- = 52.3%, w+ = 73.5%],  $z(182) = -0.70$ ,  $p = 0.242$ , were statistically unchanged in comparison to 2014–15. As expected, students submitted more collaborative writing tasks, where the greatest impact was observed for tasks which were assigned as extra credit (see Table 7). Students were noticeably more engaged during collaborative tasks than in previous years, and they had more time than in 2014–15 to complete tasks during lessons. As a result, the total number of submissions increased sharply from 17 in 2014–15 to 99 in 2015–16, while the average number of submissions per task increased from 2.1, 95% CI [0.5, 3.7] to 12.4, 95% CI [5.8, 14],  $t(14) = 2.95$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ,  $d = 0.62$ . The number of students receiving regular feedback on their written production

increased from approximately 7.4 to 43.4 per task. Grade inflation increased only marginally from 3.8% to 4.2%.

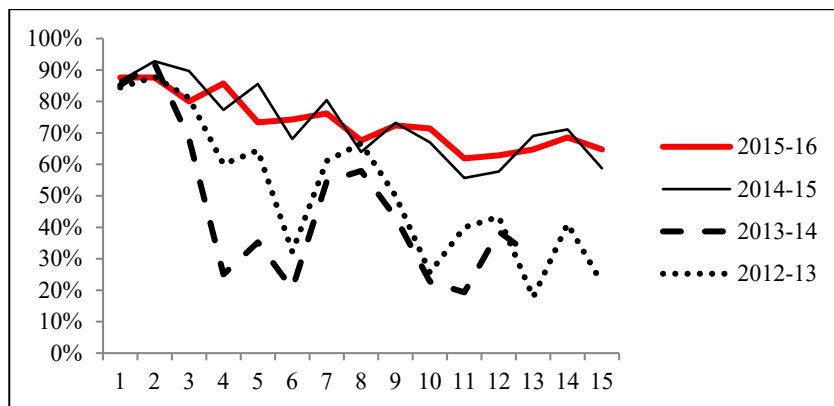


Figure 1 – Attendance rate per lesson by year (Ennis, in press)

The replication experiment produced four results which qualified the findings of the original experiment. First, while there was evidence that better quiz performance was a predictor of passing the course in 2015–16, attendance was no longer found to be a predictor. My interpretation of this observation was that attendance was merely an indicator of an effort to earn extra credit, whereas quiz performance was a better indicator of effort to actually practice and improve in response to the extra credit. Second, while there was no change in students' attitudes about the course overall, they did express less favorable opinions of the extra credit scheme than in 2014–15, which was interpreted as being a result of the extra effort necessary to complete collaborative writing tasks, in comparison to brief multiple choice quizzes. Finally, the substitution of collaborative tasks for multiple-choice quizzes resulted in an unverifiable number of students *freeloading* by signing their name to a submission without contributing much to group work, as well as substantially more time spent marking on my part. These final two observations were interpreted as unavoidable consequences of any extra credit scheme.

It was concluded that the use of extra credit to motivate my students was effective at increasing and sustaining student effort, but that their response to

the extra credit scheme constituted irrational behavior in light of the small value of the extrinsic reward in comparison to the significant increase in effort required to obtain it (for a complete description, see Ennis, *in press*).<sup>4</sup>

## 5. Phase 4: Was It All Worth It?

The obvious question is whether or not my efforts to be a reflective practitioner and meet my students' learning needs actually paid off. Did the countless hours spent collecting and analyzing data, designing a custom course book, writing and marking hundreds of extra assignments, and reflecting on every aspect of the course have a positive impact on my students' acquisition of the specialized English required for their field of study? The short answer to this question is that I will never know definitively.

While I had access to the certified CEFR proficiency level of most of my students upon matriculation, I never administered a diagnostic test as a baseline with which to compare my students' performance on the final exam. Even had I given them a pretest, the assessments I designed for the course were never formally tested for validity and reliability.

During the first experiment with extra credit pop quizzes in 2014–15, I did find a moderate correlation between effort—as measured by attendance and quiz performance—and performance on each component of the final exam (Ennis, 2018). There was also a statistically significant increase in the average oral exam score in comparison to the previous academic year. The mean oral exam score increased yet again during the replication experiment (Ennis, *in press*). However, likely because freeloaders were skewing the data, I found only low correlation between effort and each component of the final exam in 2015–16, despite the increase in collaborative writing submissions.

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4 The positive effect of extra credit pop quizzes on regular attendance and active participation was subsequently verified by a colleague, who, upon hearing of my results, implemented a similar scheme in the spring of 2016 (Prior, 2018).

In terms of quantitative data, I will have to take solace in the finding that my efforts did have an observable effect on my students' engagement and did increase their probability of passing my course. However, the collaborative writing submissions also produced a rich set of quantitative data which provides evidence that the course was successful in promoting the desired form of learning.

For example, one of the collaborative writing tasks assigned as extra credit in 2015–16 was the capstone task in the fifth unit, which discusses the role of government in tourism and reviews the zero, first, and second conditionals for the purpose of describing the effects of government intervention (pp. 46–55). The readings in the unit, sourced from textbooks on tourism economics, define national tourism authorities and organizations, discuss the effects of taxes and subsidies on the tourism market, and present the conflicting interventionist and non-interventionist positions on the role of government. The capstone task asks the students to write a paragraph in which they take the position of an interventionist or non-interventionist in order to evaluate a hypothetical tourist tax:

The local tourism office is considering a hotel tax during the winter so that it can subsidize the provision of summer tourist activities. They have asked you for your expert advice. Write a brief paragraph in favor of or against this proposal. Support your opinion with your position on the government's role in the market (i.e. interventionist vs. non-interventionist), a brief explanation of the effects of taxes and subsidies, and what would happen if the plan were implemented. (p. 55)

Despite the numerous typographical errors, transfer errors, comma splices, and somewhat superficial task completion, the two responses below (reported in Ennis, 2017b, pp. 155–156), submitted by groups of three or four students, provide ample evidence that the students attempted to apply the rules for purposeful paragraph writing introduced in the previous lesson and the grammar of conditional sentences reviewed during the present lesson. In addition, they were clearly scaffolding upon the input received and using new lexis from the texts appropriately. For instance, they made decent attempts at starting their paragraphs with concise topic sentences and linking sentences

with adverbs, and their responses borrow ideas, technical terms, and collocations and chunks directly from the texts in order to express their own opinion (examples marked in bold).

The local tourism office should not introduce a hotel tax during the winter in order to **subsidize the provision of summer tourist activities**. A new tax **would increase** the room prices. As a consequence tourists **may spend** their holiday in another ski-resort, where there is no additional tax. The government should therefore **create favourable conditions for the service providers in tourism**, [sic] this **would make it possible** for them to decrease prices and to **attract more tourist[s]** in [sic] our area. (Group 1)

In our opinion the proposal of **levying a hotel tax** during winter is not convenient [sic]. In fact, on one hand the government **would earn** more money thanks to this winter tax but on the other hand it **would be** a damage [sic] for hotels, because people would spend less money on rooms and local economies would be dramatically affected. However, governments [sic] investments play an important role also in the area of tourism, using some for **public services, infrastructures** [sic] and advertising and ensuring a **minimum wage** in order to permit workers to have [sic] a holiday. Although government investments are good, **hotel taxes should be imposed** both winter and summer season [sic], since **subsidies** are needed during the whole year. Some hotels work more during the winter while others during the summer. For this reason, not only winter hotels should **be taxed** [sic], because all hotels should receive **subsidies**. (Group 2)

Evidence of intercultural learning can be found in the student responses as well. On occasion, I would augment task instructions for more engaged groups in order to make the intercultural dimension of the course more explicit. Inspired by the concept of *destabilization* as used in intercultural training (e.g., Anderson & Boyle, 2017) as well as intercultural approaches to language teaching rooted in the tradition of phenomenology (Kramsch, 1993), I would first solicit a group's consensus view on the issue at hand, and then request that they write their text from the opposite perspective. The third response which follows (reported in Ennis, 2017b, pp. 156–157), comes from a group of

students who were convinced that government has a responsibility to intervene in support of the tourism market. They were therefore instructed to write their paragraph from the perspective of a *non-interventionist*.

From our point of view the introduction of a hotel tax during the winter is not a good idea. In fact it is not the governments [sic] **duty to ensure market equilibrium** through imposing taxes and providing subsidies. Therefore [sic], if the government levies [sic] hotel taxes during the winter season, hotels have to raise [sic] their prices. As a consequence the amount [sic] of bookings and potential winter tourists decrease and this might **lead to market instability**. We believe that the tourism sector will grow, if we **trust the market to regulate itself**. (Group 3)

Like the previous two examples, this response contains evidence that the students made an attempt to scaffold and apply skills and grammar covered in the course. Unlike the previous responses, these students adopted a non-interventionist perspective and borrowed chunks of language from the non-interventionist discourse which did not appear in the previous two responses (i.e., “ensure market equilibrium,” “lead to market instability,” “trust the market to regulate itself”). Such articulation of opposing worldviews is not only a proven technique in intercultural language teaching, but is a skill which ensures academic honesty (see Ennis, 2017b for a full discussion).

Similar evidence can be found in all 99 of the collaborative writing tasks submitted in the autumn of 2015, as well as on the final exam administered in January 2016.<sup>5</sup> Common sense, my experience as a language teacher and life-long language learner, and sixty-plus years of second language acquisition research available in print suggest that my students must have learned something.

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5 Unfortunately, I never requested informed consent to share student responses on the final exam.



## 6. Conclusion: A Perpetual Work in Progress

Based on the observations made in the autumn of 2015, I had planned many short and long-term interventions to improve the course further. For instance, I was in the process of developing a series of inductive and deductive learning tasks to teach reading-for-writing skills more explicitly, including skimming, scanning, learning new words in context, and the thin line between borrowing new language and plagiarism. I was also considering integrating academic listening tasks (perhaps with some instruction on note-taking and active listening) as well as converting the writing and oral exams into collaborative assessment tasks so that I would be fully *testing how I teach*. In addition, I was planning to assign collaborative learning tasks as pair work, instead of group work. Although this would have almost doubled the time I spent marking, there was empirical evidence that less engaged students are more likely to participate in pairs than in small groups (Dobao, 2012). However, after accepting another job in 2016, I no longer teach the English for Tourism Studies course. Conceived as a perpetual work in progress, the course will forever remain an incomplete project. But the many useful insights gained from the experience will continue to influence how and what I teach and assess. Perhaps this experience will also be useful for colleagues who find themselves facing similar challenges and who strive to reflect on their teaching materials and methods.

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# Anglicisms in the Discourse of Brexit: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Italian Newspapers

Valeria Fiasco – University Roma Tre, Italy

## Abstract

This study describes the Anglicisms used by three important Italian newspapers (*La Repubblica*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*) in reporting about Britain's exit from the European Union. More specifically, this mixed-method analysis focuses on technical English expressions from the fields of economics and politics. The aim is to investigate how they are used in newspaper articles and why English is preferred to an Italian word, thereby making it harder for the average Italian reader to understand. Preliminary results show that Anglicisms are often used without any explanation, even though newspaper journalists sometimes provide a description of the concept expressed by the English word. It is argued that such corpora can be used to aid learners of English for specific purposes in the acquisition of specialized lexis.

## 1. Introduction

This study investigates the use of Anglicisms—i.e., “English-derived vocabulary and phraseology” (Pulcini, Furiassi, & Rodríguez González, 2012)—in Italian newspapers reporting about the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, in other words, *Brexit*. This event was particularly significant during the periods that preceded and followed the referendum, and the United Kingdom and the European Union were the focus of attention of numerous newspapers. Since most Anglicisms belong to the specialized fields of economics and politics, this analysis also deals with the repercussions on readers' comprehension of the Anglicisms used (Pulcini, 2008b; Fusari, 2012). The study is based upon a corpus drawn from three of the most widely read Italian newspapers: *La Repubblica*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, and *Il Sole 24 Ore*. The corpus

consists of newspaper articles about economics and politics from May, June, July, August, and September 2016, that is, the period that preceded and followed the Brexit referendum. The collection of the corpus was facilitated by the fact that these Italian newspapers are available online.

## 1.1 Brexit

Brexit is a portmanteau word of the words *Britain* and *exit* used to indicate the UK exit from the European Union. The UK became a member of the European Union in 1973, joining a common project of support and international development that also facilitated trade, political cooperation, and mobility for the citizens of European countries. Over time, these advantages were often downplayed by successive UK governments and certain sections of the press and the economic measures implemented by the EU were often criticized by British politicians. Moreover, strong Eurosceptic sentiments within a part of the Conservative party led to pressure to have a referendum on continued membership of the EU. As a consequence, in 2015, David Cameron, the Prime Minister and leader of the ruling Conservative party at the time, finally capitulated and announced a referendum to put the question to the British people as to whether the UK should remain in the European Union or leave. Of all UK citizens eligible to vote 72.2%<sup>1</sup> went to the polls. The electorate was divided into two opposing factions. The vote to leave won with 51.9% on 23 June 2016, with the majority of leave votes being cast in England and Wales, while 62% of Scotland and 55.8% of Northern Ireland voted to remain. The results greatly shocked both the United Kingdom and Europe. The day after the referendum, Prime Minister David Cameron resigned, and a few days later the Conservative Leader, Theresa May, became Britain's new Prime Minister.

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1 The source is the Electoral Commission website, an independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK (<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/eu-referendum-result-visualisations>).

## 2. Newspaper Language

Newspapers often reveal emerging trends in contemporary language. Indeed, they can often be the main source of new words and loanwords. According to Beccaria (1983), newspapers are one of the main forums of exchange between written and spoken language, where different varieties coexist, for example, bureaucratic, technical, and literary language. They also utilize the language of economics, politics, literature, cinema, sport, and news. They employ specialized terminology for linguistic prestige, for technical and modern connotations, and in order to convey a sense of objectivity that ensures accurate and trust-worthy information. That is, a sports commentator does not speak like a doctor or a film critic, and different registers and genres address different types of readers. For example, the reader of the business section is different from the reader of the sports section. Genres are characterized by a set of specific communicative purposes which are easily recognized and understood by the members of different professional communities. Bhatia (2014) defines genres as “recognizable communicative events, characterized by a set of communicative purposes identified and mutually understood by members of the professional or academic community in which they regularly occur” (p. 26). Although genres are highly structured, and are distinctively characterised by a combination of textual, discursive, and contextual factors which determine their communicative integrity, they are dynamic and innovative and can be modified by members of professional communities for their purposes. This dynamism among genres may cause overlaps and conflicts because genre boundaries are unstable and are sometimes re-negotiated. In this respect, Bhatia (2005) speaks of “colonization” (p. 66), which is a process that involves the invasion of the integrity of one genre by another genre, often leading to the creation of a hybrid.



### 3. Linguistic Interference

Newspapers regularly report on global issues and events, and the words that define them are often of English origin. For example, one of the concepts of great significance of Brexit is framed in the Anglicism *shock*. This term is directly borrowed, rather than translated, into Italian as “*scossa*”, so as to retain its incisiveness, connotation, and context-specificity. In the past, many French words regularly became used in Italian. That trend began in the 17th century and increased in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. However, according to De Mauro (2014), in recent years Gallicisms have lost their predominance in Italian because of the growing influence of English as well as the GRADIT (*Grande dizionario italiano dell'uso*) (2007), which includes the many new Anglicisms entered the Italian core vocabulary. English has in fact become the *lingua franca* for international communication, and its use in academic and professional settings has caused a pervasive presence of Anglicisms in European languages (Marazzini & Petralli, 2015).

Anglo-American society has a significant impact on most other societies, thus generating an extensive influence on different aspects of life, such as politics, technological progress, culture, and language (Pulcini, Furiassi, & Rodríguez González, 2012). Anglicisms have thus become a symbol of the American lifestyle of dynamism and progress (Beccaria, 1983). By and large, Italian newspapers have absorbed many Anglicisms and they regularly use them for cultural, stylistic, and pragmatic purposes. Sometimes newspapers include loanwords in different ways: with italics and quotation marks to indicate that the borrowing has not been absorbed by the recipient language, or as an alternative, by having the English word sometimes accompanied by the Italian equivalent in order to make its meaning clear, even though its comprehension is frequently taken for granted (Gusmani, 1997). Cortelazzo (2015) maintains that such borrowing often becomes popular and imposes its presence on Italian due to the lack of an effective alternative. For example, laypeople, journalists, and professionals alike or other institutions will often refer to a specific notion or object with a loanword, either because they cannot find any feasible

Italian alternative, or, in the case of an existing Italian alternative, because the Italian equivalent is not as commonly used or familiar as the loanword.

#### 4. ESP and Pedagogical Applications

Specialised corpora offer abundant evidence of the languages used in professional domains, contributing considerably to language description. While there are numerous resources available for general English, it is more difficult to develop ESP materials and keep up with constant changes in terminology in specific domains. Corpus linguistics can reveal how specialized language is used, and teachers and learners can therefore use corpora to discover patterns at different levels of analysis, from vocabulary to collocations to discourse (Boulton, 2012). These authentic materials can in turn be employed in ESP classes to expose learners to real-life specialized communication. They can be used to confront students with real language in use and thereby serve as a stimulus for further reflection and analysis (Koester, 2007; Phillips & Shetlesworth, 1978). Keywords and word frequencies reveal, in fact, some of the key features of business and political discourse, and how they are used by newspapers.

In particular, given that technical Anglicisms often convey an obscure meaning for L2 students, teachers could use corpus extracts from Italian newspapers in which these terms are currently used in order to help students better understand them across professional fields. This way learners can grasp the meaning of technical Anglicisms as mediated through the L1. Teachers can supply English newspaper extracts containing such Anglicisms or ask the students to type the Anglicisms into British or American newspaper search engines on the Internet and compare the results with Italian extracts in order to compare their use in the target language.

Moreover, there are instances where some technical Anglicisms have become stable and standardized in the Italian terminology of politics, economics, and finance. Such words may support the learners in developing the crucial skill

of identifying the meaning of new L2 words from context and may facilitate the top-down processing of L2 linguistic features. Thus, the learner's L1, in this case Italian, becomes the medium for better understanding the use of an L2 term and learning how to use it correctly. For example, on the basis of the economy principle in language, the vocabulary of any language is limited; as a consequence "some items may have to do double duty, so that words may be pressed into service as terms in particular special languages" (Sager, 1990, p. 19). In particular, the general reference of the word *benchmark* is *point of reference* or *standard*, but in the special language of economics it refers to "an impartial point of reference whose purpose is to compare a portfolio's performances with market trends".<sup>2</sup> Namely, it is a general language word that has taken on new meaning in the English of economics, where it has lost certain semantic features and has taken on a more restricted meaning. This process may be highlighted by the teacher in order to expose how the semantic features of this word are distributed. Likewise, in the domain of politics, the term *establishment* has undergone the same process. In fact, its general language definition is "setting up, formation, business organization", while its special definition is "the system, the regime." Such revelations may aid students in their comprehension of specialized language, and it was also with this application in mind that the present study was undertaken.

## 5. Research Method

As previously mentioned, this study aims to investigate how Anglicisms in the field of economics and politics are used by Italian newspapers and what the repercussions on reader's comprehension are. For this purpose, a research method that combines both a quantitative and a qualitative investigation of Anglicisms in the Italian press during the period surrounding the Brexit

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2 Here is an Italian definition of *benchmark*: "parametro oggettivo di riferimento per confrontare le performance di portafoglio rispetto all'andamento del mercato" (www.borsaitaliana.it, 13 April 2007).

Referendum was carried out. A mixed methods research design was thus adopted to analyze the Anglicisms present in the corpus (Brown, 2014; Dörnyei, 2007). Mixed methods aim at achieving a complex and broad understanding of a complex phenomenon, by perceiving it from different points of view. This method combines qualitative and quantitative analyses so that the strengths of the two methods might overcome their individual weaknesses. The main purpose of this design is to provide a general description of the data before determining how different findings support and confirm one another. In this case, the data consisted of Italian newspaper texts. Following Johnson et al. (2007, p. 123) this study can be categorized as *qualitative mixed*, that is, the research follows both approaches, qualitative and quantitative, but is predominantly qualitative. The preliminary quantitative stage maps the corpus in order to structure the semantic fields and to capture a complete picture of how the Brexit discourse is shaped. Quantitative research can then provide a broader perspective about the trends in the words used to describe this historical event, for example, the Anglicisms used and their relative frequencies. A second qualitative phase allows for a detailed linguistic observation and investigation of the individual Anglicisms, for example the contexts in which they are used, their behaviours in Italian and the strategies adopted by the journalists who use them in the articles. These two approaches are used separately, but during the interpretation phase, the results are compared and evaluated. Data are thus triangulated through the use of multiple conceptual standpoints (Brown, 2014, p. 20). More specifically, the investigation of Anglicisms combines cluster analysis, linguistic interference analysis, and discourse analysis so that each method may corroborate the findings of the others in the overall interpretation of data. As a result, the qualitative analysis directs the quantitative investigation of corpus data, thereby creating a virtuous circle whereby the two methods enhance the understanding of the use of Anglicisms in Italian newspaper coverage of Brexit.

## 5.1 The Brexit Corpus

The corpus was collected from three Italian newspapers: *La Repubblica*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, and *Il Sole 24 Ore*. *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica* are the most widespread and authoritative Italian daily newspapers, while *Il Sole 24 Ore* is a daily business newspaper. They were selected because they exemplify political and economic jargon. They also address an extensive readership and offer the possibility to access their online archives with a free subscription. They all dealt with the Brexit issue thoroughly. The corpus was compiled by downloading and storing all the articles about Brexit published in the online versions of these newspapers from June to September 2016. The articles were identified and retrieved by typing the word Brexit into the digital archive search engine of the newspapers' websites.

The selected articles provide a brief, but detailed overview of Brexit, even if they are not representative of the Italian press as a whole. However, the corpus contains a substantial number of Anglicisms as currently used in Italian newspapers. The corpus includes 90 articles (30 articles per newspaper) and 51,340 tokens,<sup>3</sup> 16,639 of which come from the *Corriere della Sera*, 15,829 from *La Repubblica*, and 18,872 from *Il Sole 24 Ore*, the last of which has a greater number of longer articles compared to the other two newspapers. As far as Anglicisms are concerned, they were identified both manually from the corpus wordlist and automatically through Taltac2, a text mining and analysis software first developed by Sergio Bolasco at the University of Rome La Sapienza (Bolasco, 1999).

## 5.2 Research Instruments

Data was analysed using Taltac2. This software automatically analyses texts for two types of data: linguistic and statistical. The corpus was also analysed with Iramuteq, a software based on the Alceste method (Analyse des Lexèmes

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3 Tokens are the number of times a particular word is used, Bolasco (2013, p. 53) defines it as "Il numero totale delle occorrenze."

Cooccurents dans un Ensemble de Segments de Texte) developed by Max Reinert in 1986 (Reinert, 1986a).<sup>4</sup> The Iramuteq software was used to study the Brexit corpus by way of a multidimensional analysis that can capture the complexity of a phenomenon by taking into account many different relationships, each of which represents a structural dimension of the phenomenon (Bolasco, 1999).

### 5.3 A Brief Quantitative Analysis

The first application of the quantitative methods in the study was the subdivision of data into semantic fields, which was carried out by way of cluster analysis. The aim of this analysis is to reorganise a heterogeneous sample of words into internally homogeneous subdivisions. That is, cluster analysis produces a descending hierarchical classification (Reinert's method) by dividing the lexical data into clusters of different lexical content, thus forming various semantic fields. In order to identify the semantic fields of this particular corpus, cluster analysis is very useful because it groups lexical items in terms of similarity. One of the possible representations of data obtained from the cluster analysis is the dendrogram in Figure 1, which is a graph depicting the level of similarity within and across the clusters in the Brexit corpus. In particular, it displays the similarity of all words as grouped into two semantic fields: politics and business/economics.

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4 Reinert was a student of J. P. Benzécri, a famous French statistician who in 1987 developed correspondence analysis, a statistical technique for analyzing large matrixes of data in order to establish a hierarchy and easily visualize its rows and/or columns, in this case texts and words, respectively (Benzecri, 1973).

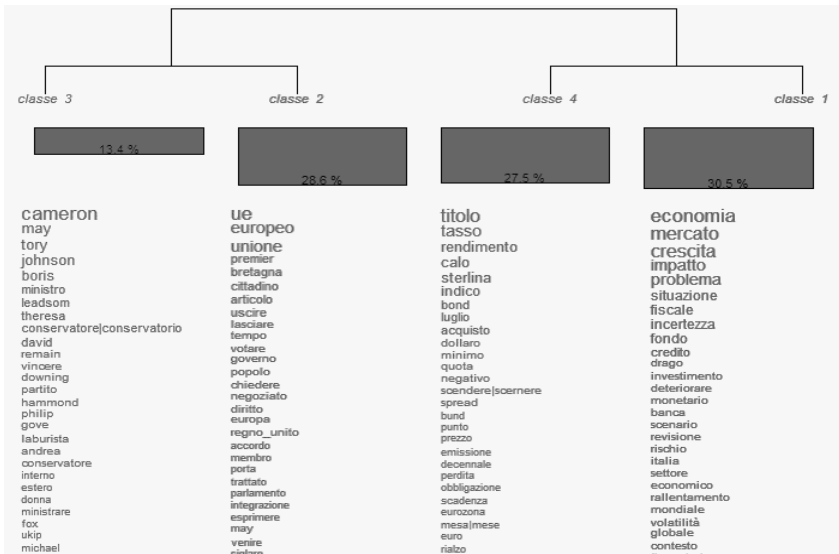


Figure 1 – Dendrogram showing the level of similarity within and across the clusters in the Brexit corpus

In representing the semantic fields of Brexit-related vocabulary this graph also represents the main subject areas characterizing this historical event. According to the cluster analysis, the following are some of the most frequent words in the corpus:

- politics: “European Union,” “premier,” “ministro,” “negoziato,” “cittadino, governo,” “conservatore”;
- business/economics: “titolo,” “tasso,” “rendimento,” “economia,” “mercato,” “bond,” “sterlina,” “fiscale.”

The dendrogram shows the association of all the words included in the Brexit corpus according to their similarity. The cluster analysis thus groups the words into two homogeneous sub-corpora: the first concerning politics and the second related to economics and finance. The two sub-corpora are further divided into four clusters: clusters 2 and 3 are part of the politics sub-corpus, whereas clusters 4 and 1 are part of the economics and finance sub-corpus. As to the politics sub-corpus, cluster 3 groups the words that regard British politics, while cluster 2 includes the words concerning European politics. In the

economics sub-corpus, cluster 4 includes specialized financial terms and cluster 1 contains general economics terms. The percentage of words included in each cluster is as follows: 27.5% in cluster 4 (finance), 30.5% in cluster 1 (general economics), 13.4% in cluster 3 (British politics), and 28.6% in cluster 2 (European politics). The dendrogram also includes proper nouns and thus reveals the main actors in this event: the European Union, David Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, and Andrea Leadsom.

## 6. Preliminary Results

The preliminary quantitative analysis carried out by way of both Iramuteq and TalTAc2 showed that the corpus includes 231 Anglicisms (types) for a total of 1,045 occurrences (tokens). These numbers also contain Anglicisms adapted to Italian like *robotica*<sup>5</sup>. The percentage of tokens in the corpus is 2%, and the percentage of types is slightly higher at 2.6%. Moreover, the sum of types also includes a lot of hapax<sup>6</sup>, 139 to be exact (approximately 62% of all types). The percentage of Anglicisms conforms to the most recent studies on Anglicisms in Italian by Cortelazzo (2015), Giovanardi (2015), Scarpa (2015), and Serianni (2015). On the whole, non-adapted Anglicisms in Italian represent a growing trend which is affecting different layers of the Italian lexicon, including the core vocabulary (Marazzini & Petralli, 2015).

Figure 2 shows the ten most frequent Anglicisms in the Brexit corpus.

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5 Robotica is a branch of technology that designs and constructs robots.

6 A hapax, or hapax legomenon, is a word that appears only once in a corpus.



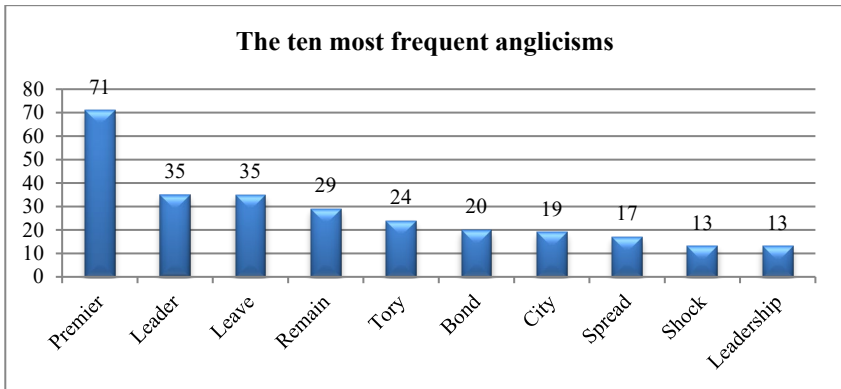


Figure 2 – The ten most frequent Anglicisms in the Brexit corpus

It is interesting to point out that most of these words are also common in general English: *leader*, *leave*, *remain*, *bond*, *city*, *spread*, *shock*, *leadership*. But when they are applied very specifically to the Brexit crisis these general English words take on exclusively British English connotations. Adjusting for the fact that the field of politics includes the word Brexit, with 349 tokens, politics still represents the largest semantic field (287 tokens) (Figure 3).

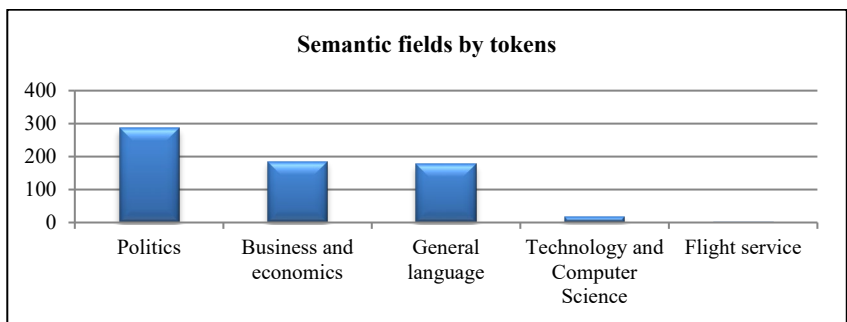


Figure 3 – Distribution of Anglicisms into semantic fields

This quantitative analysis served as a basis for the qualitative analysis, during which some of the most significant and frequent Anglicisms were studied in detail in relation to the specialized field to which they belong. In particular,

the qualitative analysis focused on translation couplets,<sup>7</sup> on the use of non-adapted Anglicisms from the fields of business and politics, on the use of acronyms within the field of economics, and on the presence or absence of glosses that explain the meaning of the foreign word versus new Anglicisms that are left without a definition.

## 7. Data Analysis

This section reports on the analysis of some the most frequent and important Anglicisms in the Brexit corpus. The most interesting occurrences concern terms from specialized fields like economics and politics, but the corpus also includes some general language Anglicisms that are not commonly used in Italian. These terms are not easily understandable to readers who either do not know English or have very limited English proficiency. Moreover, the corpus includes many Anglicisms with just one occurrence which were analysed either because of their significance or because of their particular function within the articles.

The corpus shows that, while all three newspapers in the study use similar Anglicisms, they employ different strategies to ensure comprehension. Anglicisms may either be accompanied by their Italian equivalent, followed by explanatory sentences or simply presented with no explanation is given, presumably because comprehension is assumed. The first two strategies both clearly and overtly help readers in their understanding of Brexit. An explanatory sentence is used more frequently than a translation with an Italian equivalent. However, most Anglicisms are left unexplained: only 25 out of 89 Anglicisms from the field of economics and 9 out of 52 Anglicisms from the field of politics are explained by translation or by explanatory sentences.

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7 A translation couplet is an Anglicism coexisting with its Italian equivalent.

As far as explanatory glosses are concerned, the two most representative Anglicisms of Brexit, *remain* and *leave*, are written with capital letters and have been defined in the three newspapers in the following ways:

1. ... chi avrebbe voluto restare nell'Unione Europea (Remain) contro chi ha deciso di lasciarla (Leave)... (*Corriere della Sera* – 22 July 2016)

... those who would stay in the European Union (Remain) in opposition to those who decided to leave it (Leave)...

2. ... primi opinion poll di YouGov davano il “No” all’uscita (Remain), al 52%, mentre i “Sì,” cioè i voti a favore dell’uscita dalla UE (Leave), al 48 per cento. (*La Repubblica* – 24 June 2016)

... the first YouGov opinion polls indicated that remain voters (Remain) said No (52%), while voters who chose to leave the European Union (Leave) said Yes (48%).

3. ... Barack Obama, che nei mesi di campagna referendaria aveva sostenuto in prima persona le ragioni del “Remain” (la permanenza di Londra nella Ue)... (*Corriere della Sera* – 30 June 2016)

... Barack Obama, who personally supported the “Remain” reasons (London staying in the EU) during the referendum campaign...

The second extract also displays the presence of another Anglicism, *opinion poll*, which occurs only once in the corpus, and which, as can be seen in the example, is not clarified in any way. The word *opinion poll* is composed of the words *opinion* and *poll*, where the first has a similar equivalent in Italian (*opinione*) and the word *poll* has become recognizable in Italian. But the journalist also fails to explain what the word YouGov means. YouGov is a British internet-based market research and data analytics firm. The company obtains responses from an invited group of internet users, and then weights these responses in line with demographic information. It then publishes the findings and summary statistics.

The word *political divide* is also similar to its Italian equivalent and probably does not require a dictionary to understand its meaning. This concept is not clearly explained by the newspaper, but the journalist uses a sort of metaphor to depict the idea of a polarization in political parties with the word *chasm*:

1. Ha mostrato la copertina dell' Economist in cui appare una voragine (Political divide) non più tra la destra e la sinistra, ma tra chi è aperto a concorrenza, meritocrazia... (Corriere della Sera – 9 September 2016)

The Economist cover displayed a chasm (Political divide), no longer between left and right, but between those who are open to competition, meritocracy...

In the same newspaper article, the word *political divide* is repeated three times and a variation, *divide*, whose meaning is taken for granted, can be observed:

1. ... la chiave sta nel convincere quelli che stanno "dall'altra parte del divide"... (Corriere della Sera – 9 September 2016 )

... the key is to persuade those who find themselves "on the other side of the divide"...

Another Anglicism that frames the referendum comes from the field of British politics. *Project Fear* is an expression that was used by the *leave* supporters against the *remain* campaign that was dominated by warnings of the devastating consequences of the Brexit vote. In the following passage this Anglicism goes along with a sentence explaining its meaning:

1. Dopo aver passato un decennio a distruggere, interdire e disprezzare tutto quanto sapeva di Europa... Cameron... si è ridotto al "Project Fear," cercare di impaurire i suoi stessi elettori con le conseguenze economiche della secessione europea... (Corriere della Sera – 25 June 2016)

After having destroyed, forbidden and scorned everything that smelt of Europe... Cameron... reduced himself to the "Project Fear," namely trying to scare his own voters about the economic consequences of the European secession...

In business and economics, there are numerous Anglicisms that need to be explained. In fact, many of them are clearly explained for the non-specialist, while many others are used without any definition. Even the most difficult ones, often those associated with the stock market and central banks, for example, *futures*, *supply chain*, *stress test*, *credit crunch*, *blue chips*, and acronyms like *PSPP* (Public Sector Purchase Programme) are not clarified. The Anglicism *quantitative easing* (4 tokens) and its acronym *Qe* (13 tokens) has also come to be used in Italian when Mario Draghi, the head of the European Central Bank, used this term a few years ago during the prolonged period of low inflation. Quantitative easing is a policy used by central banks to stimulate the economy in order to promote lending and liquidity. This concept is often used in the corpus, but most of the time it is not explained. Its abbreviation is either *Qe* or *QE*.

1. Quando la Bce ha annunciato e avviato il suo QE in linea con quello della Federal Reserve... lo spread si è stretto. (*Il Sole 24 Ore* – 23 June 2016)

When the ECB announced and began its QE in line with that of the Federal Reserve... the spread narrowed.

2. Difficile quindi ipotizzare che il Qe venga sospeso a marzo (*Il Sole 24 Ore* – 8 September 2016)

It is thus difficult to hypothesize that the Qe will be suspended in March

The following examples can all be found in the same article: in the first example the acronym *Qe* is used in the headline of the article without any definition, while the compound *quantitative easing* is used in the body of the text, followed by an explanatory sentence. The same article also includes the Italian equivalent of quantitative easing, *allentamento quantitativo* (example 3), without any reference to the English word:

1. [headline] Londra, bazooka anti-crisi. La BoE taglia i tassi allo 0,25% e rilancia il QE. Cade la sterlina (*Il Sole 24 Ore* – 4 August 2016 )

London, anti-crisis bazooka. The BoE cuts rates to the 0.25% and relaunches QE. The pound falls.

2. ... rilancio del quantitative easing, misure ulteriori per garantire che la strategia di politica monetaria varata dalla Bank of England “filtri” dal sistema bancario a imprese e famiglie. (*Il Sole 24 Ore* – 4 August 2016)

... relaunch of quantitative easing, further measures to guarantee that the monetary policy strategy passed by the Bank of England “trickles down” from the banking system to firms and families.

3. Al di là dei tassi infatti il programma di allentamento quantitativo è stato innalzato di 60 miliardi con l’acquisto di bond del Tesoro... (*Il Sole 24 Ore* - 4 August 2016)

Apart from rates, the programme of quantitative easing has been increased by 60 thousand million euros by way of the purchase of the treasury bonds....

The compound and its acronym are only used by the newspapers *Il Sole 24 Ore* and *La Repubblica*, even though *Il Sole 24 Ore* contains more instances. In the following examples, these two words are described and explained in the same way by two different newspapers, *acquisti di titoli*:

1. ...l’attenzione si concentra sull’estensione degli acquisti di titoli, il quantitative easing (Qe), che procede al ritmo di 80 miliardi al mese. (*Il Sole 24 Ore* – 8 September 2016)

...attention focuses on the increase in bond purchases, quantitative easing (Qe), which advances towards a rhythm of 80 billions per month.

2. ...il Quantitative easing è stato confermato a 80 miliardi al mese... (*La Repubblica* – 21 July 2016)

...Quantitative easing has been confirmed at 80 billion per month...

On the whole, this concept is mainly expressed by using the Anglicism *quantitative easing* and its acronym in the corpus. Moreover, the Anglicism is chiefly used by *Il Sole 24 Ore*, a daily economics newspaper, which often uses economics and financial terms without any explanation. This is presumably due to its target reader, who can be portrayed as a highly educated person in a managerial position. Therefore, the journalists of *Il Sole 24 Ore* take most Anglicisms for granted, since they are confident in their readers' ability to comprehend such terms. *La Repubblica* also uses this economics term, but there are a fewer number of occurrences than those in *Il Sole 24 Ore*. Journalists prefer using the Anglicism because it conveys a certain degree of objectivity and specificity in the text. *Corriere della Sera* does not use this term, presumably because its readership is more diverse than that of *Il Sole 24 Ore*, that is, readers of the latter are not primarily interested in the economy or business issues.

An Anglicism connected to the field of investment is *corporate*, a word whose meaning is modified according to its collocates. The corpus contains two such collocations: a *corporate tax* and a *corporate bond*. The first one refers to a tax on the income or capital of corporations, while the second one is a bond that is produced and sold by a company, which is typically funded with money earned from future operations. The following examples show the word *corporate* together with these collocates as well as the word used with its primary meaning, that is *a firm* or a company.

1. Un taglio nel Regno Unito alla corporate tax, l'imposta sulle società, dal 20 al 15 per cento.... (*Corriere della Sera* – 4 July 2016)

The UK cuts the corporate tax, a company levy, from 20 to 15 per cent...

2. ... abbassare il costo del finanziamento per le imprese, sostenendo così l'economia e ravvivare il moribondo mercato dei corporate bond britannici. (*Il Sole 24 Ore* – 6 August 2016)

... lowering the cost of financing companies, sustaining the economy and reviving the moribund market of the British corporate bond.

3. ... un effettivo rallentamento economico post Brexit, è destinato ad avere ancora effetti sui mercati. A cominciare dal corporate... (*Il Sole 24 Ore* – 6 August 2016)

... an actual economic slowdown post Brexit, destined to produce effects on markets, starting from corporate....

The first extract shows a different way of describing the meaning of the Anglicism by using the Italian equivalent of the Anglicism *corporate tax*, which is *imposta sulle società*. The third extract shows the use of the Anglicism *corporate* as a noun preceded by the preposition in combination with the singular definite article. It is interesting that this English word is mainly used as an adjective, but in the above-mentioned extract the Anglicism is used as a noun to refer to *corporate banking*. As a consequence, this extract illustrates an example of overextension of the borrowed word. The journalist uses this abbreviation probably under the assumption that the average reader of *Il Sole 24 Ore* would easily understand it.

The corpus also includes some obscure financial acronyms. Most of them are clarified with the terms expressed in full, but one of them is not explained at all, *PSPP*. These acronyms belong to the semantic field of economics and finance. The following examples refer to the acronym *TTIP*, Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, whose Italian translation is *Trattato transatlantico sul commercio e gli investimenti*. This acronym is always explained with the full term. Example 2 seems to show the use of *TTIP* without any reference to its meaning, but the Anglicism is later explained in the body of the text (example 3). Example 2 also shows a second Anglicism, *round*, whose meaning is connected to the domain of sport and to the field of negotiations and consensus-seeking in Italian.

1. Dopo le dichiarazioni degli ultimi giorni sul presunto fallimento del trattato di libero scambio transatlantico TTIP, il Governo britannico spera di rinnovare la "special partnership" con Washington.... (*Il Sole 24 Ore* – 1 September 2016)



After the announcements about the supposed failure of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, TTIP, the British Government hopes to establish a “special partnership” with Washington again....

2. [headline] Brexit, elezioni Usa e prodotti doc. Le ragioni dello stop al TTIP (*Corriere della Sera* – 28 July 2016)

Brexit, USA elections and doc products. The reasons for the halt to the TTIP

3. Dopo tre anni di trattative e 14 round di negoziati il Trattato transatlantico sul commercio e gli investimenti sembra essere arrivato ad un binario morto. (*Corriere della Sera* – 28 July 2016)

After three years of consultations and 14 negotiations, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership seems to have arrived at a dead-end track

4. ... una delle prime vittime della Brexit è il Trattato Transatlantico sul Commercio e gli Investimenti (TTIP)... (*La Repubblica* – 6 August 2016)

... one of the victims of Brexit is the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)....

The acronym *NPL*, *Non performing Loans*, is translated in the Brexit corpus as *crediti deteriorati* (13 tokens) and *prestiti problematici* (1 token). The glossary of the Borsa Italiana translates the English word with the calque *prestiti non performanti*, which is not present in the corpus, while the Banca d'Italia denotes the concept *crediti deteriorati*. The English acronym in the corpus is not often mentioned, usually being substituted with the Italian equivalent *crediti deteriorati*, as seen in example 1, while example 2 displays the journalist's free translation of the Anglicism, *prestiti problematici*, a translation that is not used by the official financial sources:

1. ... il problema è stato accentuato da “un elevato livello di crediti deteriorati ereditato dalla recessione.” (*Corriere della Sera* – 15 July 2016)

... the problem has been accentuated by “a high level of non performing loans inherited from recession.”

2. ... i livelli, ancora molto elevati in alcune parti del sistema bancario dell’area dell’euro, dei prestiti problematici,” gli Npl, “che continuano a pesare sui bilanci bancari.” (*Il Sole 24 Ore* – 19 August 2016)

... in some areas of the European bank system, the very large number of problematic loans, the Npl, continue to weigh on bank balances.

Among the Anglicisms found in the corpus, there is the interesting case of the hyphenated word *dote-spending*, composed of two words, that is, the Italian word *dote* and the English word *spending*. In this case the journalist coined a new mixed word to refer to a grant that should be used for the budgetary manoeuvre within the spending review, namely procedures and policies to enhance the management and the planning of the government budget. This neologism was specifically coined for the purpose of this article because it does not appear in any other sources; therefore it had a restricted circulation without becoming stable in the general vocabulary or in the economics terminology. The Anglicism is presented in the title of the article and the journalist who coined it does not make it clear that the term is his own invention. He merely explains the concept in the article referring to it as *dote* or *dote di scorta*.

1. [headline] Con lo scenario più difficile, la dote-spending alla crescita (*Il Sole 24 Ore* – 28 July 2016)

The more difficult the situation gets, the more the dote-spending grows

2. ... non fornisce ancora cifre... su quella che dovrà essere la dote da garantire per la prossima manovra di bilancio autunnal .... Anche se per il 2017 il Governo potrebbe utilizzare, come dote di scorta, il maggiore risparmio ricavabile.... (*Il Sole 24 Ore* – 28 July 2016)

...the government hasn't still released figures... on the guaranteed endowment for the next manoeuvre of annual balance.... Even if the government might use the higher saving obtainable as reserve endowment in 2017...

It is worth making a final observation about the general-language Anglicisms retrieved in the corpus. The wordlist includes many of the Anglicisms that are widely used and known in Italian, such as *shock*, *card*, *staff*, *fan*, *team*, *stop*, *film*, *pay-tv*, *mix*, *stress*, *test*, and many others. However, there are also some Anglicisms and typical English expressions that may be unfamiliar to the Italian reader with limited English proficiency.

In the first extract below, it is interesting to observe the use of three synonyms for the same concept: the Anglicism *ferry-boat*, the Gallicism *navire transbordeur*, and the Italian word *traghetti*. The journalist does not explain the two foreign words and at the end of the article uses the Italian word without any connection to the previous foreign words.

The second example contains the Anglicism *cherry-pick*, an English expression defined by the Collins dictionary as "to choose or take the best or most profitable of (a number of things), especially for one's own benefit or gain." In this case the Anglicism is followed by an explanation.

1. Dover, la Manica, Calais: non sono solo indicazioni geografiche. Sono i simboli di secoli di inimicizia, decenni di sospetti e una lunga tradizione di reciproco sarcasmo. Perfino il nome *ferry-boat* suscitava diffidenza, sulla sponda meridionale della Manica. I francesi, illusi, pensavano di poter imporre *navire transbordeur*. Solo recentemente—con l'ingresso del Regno Unito nella Comunità Europea (1973), il Mercato Unico (1992), l'apertura del Channel Tunnel (1994), la festosa invasione di Londra da parte di mezzo milione di giovani francesi—le cose sono cambiate. Ora si rischia di tornare indietro: alle code, alle attese, ai confini, ai *traghetti* sulla Manica. (*Corriere della Sera* – 22 July 2016)

Dover, the English Channel, Calais: they are not just geographical areas. They are symbols of centuries of enmity, decades of suspicion and a long tradition of mutual sarcasm. On the southern bank of the English Channel, even the word *ferry-boat*

arouses suspicion. The gullible French people sought to impose the word *navire transbordeur*. Only recently, after the UK entered the European Union (1973), the Single Market (1992), the opening of the English Channel (1994), the joyful invasion of London by a half million young French, have things changed. Now the risk is to going back to queues, stand by, boundaries, English Channel ferries.

2. ... i negoziati per lasciare l'Ue "saranno molto difficili" e Londra non deve sperare nella formula "cherry pick" cioè poter scegliere dell'Europa solo il meglio che ha da offrire. (*Il Sole 24 Ore* – 27 August 2016)

... negotiations to leave the European Union "will be very hard" and London must not hope for the "cherry pick" formula, namely choose only the best that the Europe could offer.

## 8. The Use of the Brexit Corpus in the ESP Classroom

As already mentioned in Section 4, technical Anglicisms are not always properly understood by L2 learners. Teachers can therefore take advantage of corpus extracts to help students interpret the meanings of such words. To some extent, learners can use their L1 to grasp the obscure meaning of technical terms in the L2. The corpus thus represents a medium between L1 and L2 for L2 students to learn specialized terminology from the fields of economics and politics.

In this section, a hypothetical lesson using the Italian Brexit corpus is briefly presented in order to better illustrate such application. The activities adopt a learner-centred and inductive approach with limited teacher intervention. Language learners thus engage in a hands-on activity to investigate authentic examples of language for themselves. As Johns (1991) points out,

the task of the learner is to 'discover' the foreign language, and ... the task of the language teacher is to provide a context in which the learner can develop strategies for discovery - strategies through which he or she can 'learn how to learn. (p. 1)

While the various stages of the lesson might be tailored to suit different learners' needs, in all renditions students must have access to a concordancer. The concordancer proposed here is part of SketchEngine, an online platform that allows users to upload and analyse their own corpus, in this case, the Italian Brexit corpus, but also to consult other larger corpora like the British National Corpus. The first step would be to get students to investigate the Brexit corpus using the keywords and the frequency list tools in order to identify Anglicisms and extract specialized terminology. Next, the analysis of their concordances could be carried out to observe their use in context and to fully understand their meaning. In order to consolidate the student's knowledge of these technical English words in the fields of politics and economics, the teacher could also make use of more comprehensive English corpora included in SketchEngine, such as The British National Corpus or the English Web Corpus 2015 (EnTenTen 2015), thereby facilitating the top-down processing of L2 linguistic features and allowing students to learn how to use English technical terms correctly. In this final phase, the teacher might also decide to integrate the information extracted from the corpus with information included in English monolingual dictionaries so that students could confirm and improve their understanding of English terms.

By using such corpora in the classroom, each student becomes a language detective who discovers facts about the language from authentic materials. Bernardini (2016, p. 17) uses the metaphor of the *learner as a traveller* "focusing on the learning experience, the voyage, rather than its destination", thus favouring inductive learning and student autonomy.

## 9. Conclusion

This study has provided a short overview of the Anglicisms in the discourse of Brexit and a general outline of their use in major Italian newspapers. The quantitative analysis of the corpus identified two main semantic fields in the vocabulary of Brexit through a multidimensional analysis: political terms and financial/economic terms (see Figure 1). The Anglicisms in the corpus display

the same semantic division (see Figure 3). The investigation highlighted that even if Anglicisms are often used by newspapers, they represent only about 2% of the corpus. Moreover, most of the English words belong to the specialized fields of economics and politics, together with a group of Anglicisms associated with general language (e.g., *stop*, *team*, *cash*, *boom*). Economics Anglicisms are mostly used without any explanation and are taken for granted by the daily newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore*, which seems confident in its readership's ability to comprehend the terms. *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera* use numerous Anglicisms as well, but tend to aid comprehension with a brief description or an Italian equivalent, which may be due to their diverse readership; in fact, they define themselves as "generalist daily newspapers." During a conference organized by the Accademia della Crusca<sup>8</sup> about loanwords and neologisms in Italian, in relation to non-adapted Anglicisms and to their impact on both laymen and experts, Serianni (2015, p. 124) stated that several non-adapted Anglicisms have permanently entered Italian vocabulary and some of them like *marketing* and *partner* have become more frequent in usage than other common Italian words like *anima*, *meraviglia*, or *gettare*.

Nevertheless, Tullio De Mauro (2016), commenting on the weekly magazine *Internazionale*, maintains that, at the moment, the "tsunami anglicizzante" (anglicizing tsunami) is a growing phenomenon. This study therefore intended to reveal the extent of this phenomenon in the recent discourse on Brexit in the print media. It might be interesting to collect further data on this contemporary event in order to instantiate the Brexit process from a cross-linguistic perspective and to explore specific applications in the ESP classroom.

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8 The Accademia della Crusca is among the leading institutions in the field of research on the Italian language.

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# Learner Corpora and Embedded Assessment of Undergraduate EFL Writing: The Case of Metadiscourse Markers

Letizia Cirillo – University of Siena

## Abstract

The present contribution discusses how a learner corpus can be used to identify learning gaps and plan assessments embedded in teaching and learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom. The learner corpus under investigation is a collection of opinion articles written by undergraduate students with English as a foreign language. A concordancer software was used to generate frequency lists from this collection and perform related searches. A first look at the list of the most frequent n-grams prompted us to consider specific clusters, which seem to relate to the organisation dimension of writing and the use of *metadiscourse*. A closer look at the concordance lines and the collocates for these clusters elicited initial “writing questions,” such as *what patterns of co-occurrence can be found for the search terms?* and *what is the role of these patterns in topic development and argument building?* These same questions can be passed on to the students as part of hands-on activities aimed at encouraging observation, such as short guided searches on the learner corpus, related searches on reference corpora and other learner corpora, and learning logs based on these searches. Ultimately, a learner corpus can be employed to generate continuous formative assessment (including peer- and self-assessment), thus providing students with feedback for improvement and at the same time encouraging them to reflect on their own learning process.

## 1. Introduction: Writing for Academic Purposes and Using Metadiscourse

The study reported on in this paper stems from a research project funded by the Faculty of Economics and Management of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano between 2013 and 2015. The project was meant to assess the English as a foreign language (EFL) writing skills of first-year undergraduates in economics at the University. To this end, diagnostic and achievement tests were administered to identify learning gaps and measure advancements of students' productive skills with respect to written academic English. The tests were designed to mirror *the target language use (TLU) domain* (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p. 60) that may be described as "functioning as a student at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano attending courses with English as the language of instruction." Writing skills are crucial for students in a trilingual learning environment like at the University: Just as it occurs with Italian and German, one third of all content courses are taught in English and the final exams for these courses are written, not rarely including some kind of extended production. The Faculty of Economics and Management is no exception in this respect, which explains why extended writing tasks were chosen for the tests referred to above.

Selecting a writing task that could be suitable for both the diagnostic and the achievement tests administered to first-year undergraduates was not easy. While academic writing comprises a vast number of genres ranging from notes to dissertations/theses, we were reticent about requiring test-takers to produce any text type that they were unlikely to have been regularly exposed to and unlikely to have practiced at school (e.g., essays). We therefore decided to ask them to write a short opinion article, for two main reasons. On the one hand, besides being a genre that they might already be familiar with (not just from school work but also from autonomous online reading), opinion pieces were – not least because of their moderate length – among the texts used in class as input for reading comprehension activities conducted with test-takers (see sections 3.1 and 3.2 for additional information on the EFL courses of which these activities were part). On the other hand, academic discourse is not

just informative, but also inherently persuasive, as highlighted by studies such as Hyland's (2009), which shows that *persuasion* is part and parcel of the communicative processes constructing both (disciplinary) knowledge and (disciplinary) communities, and at the same time testifies to the growing importance of English as the language of academia worldwide. Against this backdrop, we thought that an opinion article, and the argumentative writing practice that goes with it, would serve as a good testbed for critical thinking skills, which are among the focuses of courses in English for academic purposes (EAP, especially English for general academic purposes, or EGAP; see the introduction to this volume) and, incidentally, also appear – under the heading *making judgements*—within the *Dublin descriptors*, that is, the statements of the typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with the harmonization of higher education qualifications put forward by the Bologna Process (Bologna Working Group, 2005).

Concerning persuasion and the construction of knowledge, some clarifications are in order. As pointed out by Hyland (2009, p. 13), academic persuasion has to do with how readers (or listeners) are guided to a given interpretation of reality and to how language is used “to relate independent beliefs to shared experience”. This orientation to the reader is common to opinion articles and academic written genres alike and is reflected, among other things, in the pervasive use of *metadiscourse* markers. These comprise “self-reflexive expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assist the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community” (Hyland, 2005, p. 37); they therefore fulfil important rhetorical and pragmatic functions. As noted by Dafouz-Milne (2008, p. 97), while metadiscourse markers can “range from a single word (‘probably’) to a full sentence (‘the next point covered in this article deals with the topic of economy’), several sentences or even a whole paragraph,” they can roughly be divided into two broad categories, *textual* and *interpersonal* metadiscourse markers, as we will see in section 4. It is precisely to the use of metadiscourse markers that we decided to turn when exploring the written production of test-takers. In fact, given the latter’s level of proficiency, the nature of the task, and the TLU domain (see above, as well as sections 3.1

and 3.2 for more details), the use of metadiscourse markers was found to provide useful insights into students' relative performance in terms of academic writing and precious indications on how to help them address any gaps between achieved and expected results. Patterns of use of metadiscourse by test-takers were analysed in a learner corpus compiled from the test tasks mentioned above. The reasons that prompted us to investigate metadiscourse and the features of the learner corpus will be dealt with at length in 3.1 and 3.2. Before dwelling on the genesis and rationale of the project and on related methodological issues, however, we shall take a closer look at the significance of electronic corpora for language teaching and learning.

## 2. The Heuristic Value of (Learner) Corpora

Over the past thirty years, a growing number of language researchers, instructors, and students have been engaging with corpus methods, supported by the availability of increasingly powerful compilation and interrogation software and increasingly large and diversified language corpora. The heuristic value of corpus methods is by now beyond dispute, as shown in a considerable body of literature (see Biber, 2006, Partington, 1998; Sinclair, 1991; Stubbs, 1996; Tognini Bonelli, 2001, to name but a few). For instance, corpus data has crucially contributed to shedding new light on language phenomena such as the co-selection of lexis and grammar, which until not long ago had been treated separately in linguistic theory (see, among others, Groom et al., 2015; Hunston & Francis, 2000; Römer & Schulze, 2009).

Undoubtedly, one of the main advantages of corpora – especially large ones – is that they yield reliable information on the frequency and distribution of lexical and syntactic patterns. As pointed out by Granger (2002), “[f]requency is an aspect of language of which we have very little intuitive awareness but one that plays a major part in many linguistic applications which require a knowledge not only of what is possible in language but what is likely to occur” (p. 4). The incredible amount of information on frequency generated by corpora has literally revolutionized the ways we conceive dictionaries, which are

now largely corpus-based,<sup>1</sup> and has had an impact on descriptive grammars, as shown by the ground-breaking *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber et al., 1999). The revolution lies precisely in the fact that corpora provide evidence not just of what is cognitively feasible, grammatically accurate, and contextually appropriate, but also of what is attested in use. This has paramount socio-cognitive implications for language learning, notably for the development of learners' *competence* and *capacity* (as described by Hymes, 1972 and Widdowson, 1983), that is, both their awareness of how the language is used and their ability to use it (see also Aston, 2001, pp. 3–5).

Based on these characteristics, corpora are a major resource in *data-driven learning* (DDL), which moves from the assumption that the task of the learner is to *discover* the foreign language, and that the task of the language teacher is to provide a context in which the learner can develop strategies for discovery – strategies through which he or she can ‘learn how to learn’ (Johns, 1991, p. 1). This approach to language learning goes hand in hand with the Observe – Hypothesize – Experiment (OHE) paradigm championed by Michael Lewis, whose pedagogic value has been acknowledged by more and more language instructors. In his work on what he called the *lexical approach*, Lewis (1993, 1997) claims that the OHE paradigm is more effective than the Present – Practice – Produce (PPP) model in second language acquisition (SLA), and calls for the inclusion of *lexical items*, that is, words or sequences of words counting as units of meaning, into the input English language teachers should present learners with. While a discussion of the merits and limitations of either the OHE or the PPP model is beyond the scope of the present paper,<sup>2</sup> we embrace the view that introducing learners to the OHE approach through carefully designed teacher-

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1 The first fully corpus-based dictionary is the *Collins COBUILD English Dictionary*, which was first published in 1987 (see <https://collins.co.uk/pages/elt-cobuild-reference-the-history-of-cobuild>)

2 Suffice it to say here that Lewis' theories on language learning have been challenged among others by Ellis (1992), who posits that the PPP paradigm does not necessarily imply adopting solely a deductive approach, and by Golebiewska and Jones (2014), who point out areas of overlap between the OHE and the PPP models, and report on how, under test conditions, the two seem to yield similar results in terms of their effect on learners' receptive and productive knowledge.

guided activities aimed at *chunking* the language, that is, at discovering patterns of use, is likely to enhance their noticing and reflection (see section 4 below for examples).

Ultimately, the OHE paradigm reflects the now widely accepted formulaic view of language whereby native speakers' production heavily relies on the retrieval of prefabricated lexico-grammatical chunks stored in memory (see, among others, Bolinger, 1976; Firth, 1957; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Pawley & Syder, 1983; Wray, 1999, 2005). Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) highlight the pragmatic function of these chunks, suggesting that they have a significant role in allowing both native speakers and L2 learners to communicate in a socially acceptable and effective way, thus sharing Lewis' pedagogical proposition for ELT (see above). However, though praised for introducing an innovative approach to ELT practice, the proposal of founding second-language pedagogy on the acquisition of lexical items has drawn some criticism for at least two reasons. First, some have argued that this proposal fails to fully account for the differences between L1 and L2 acquisition processes (see, for instance, Wray, 2000). Second, and more interesting for the purposes of the present paper, some have highlighted the proposal's failure to provide information regarding the selection and categorization of the lexical items to which L2 learners should be exposed (see, for instance, Leech, 1994). What are the criteria that should guide instructors and course designers in choosing the chunks of language to be used in an L2 classroom? This question is relevant at all levels of L2 proficiency and in all settings of L2 acquisition, including universities, where lexical phrases are key to the teaching and learning of languages for specific and academic purposes. It is precisely in answering this question that learner corpora come into play.

Learner corpora are electronic collections of texts produced by second or foreign language learners. The very fact that corpus data come from language learners provides considerable insight in terms of where these learners are in the learning process and what their learning gaps are with respect to the target language use domain (see section 1 above). Learner corpora can be classified based on various parameters, of which, for the purposes of the present paper,

the most relevant are a) the degree of naturalness; b) the time(s) of data collection; and c) the time of pedagogical use (see Granger, 2008, 2013; see also section 3.2 below). Naturalness is probably the fuzziest parameter, as pointed out by Granger (2013, p. 3235), in that learner corpora can range from naturally-occurring learners' communications with other learners or native speakers to language produced to complete more or less open-ended pedagogical tasks. The time(s) of data collection is instead the main feature employed to distinguish between cross-sectional and longitudinal learner corpora. The former "sample language data from different learners at a single point in time," while the latter "track the same learners over a particular time period" (Granger, 2013, p. 3236). Finally, the time of pedagogical use can be immediate or delayed, depending on whether learner corpora are used "directly as teaching/learning materials" for the learners who have produced the data or compiled for later use with "similar-type learners" (Granger, 2008, p. 263). In any case, learner corpora can serve the two distinct but related purposes of describing learners' interlanguage, on the one hand, and generating "tools and methods that more accurately target" learners' needs (Granger, 2008, p. 259), on the other, thus being valuable resources for both research on SLA and foreign-language teaching (FLT).

### 3. Notes on Methodology

In what follows we will provide a detailed account of how we came to compile the learner corpus on which the present study is based (3.1), as well as a description of its main features and of the tools that were employed to explore it (3.2).

#### 3.1 Genesis and Rationale of the Study

Our initial research project included one diagnostic test and one achievement test administered to all attending students of two first-year EFL specialised language courses (respectively, at the beginning and at the end of the first semester of the 2013–2014 academic year), for which the author of the present



paper served as the main instructor. Both tests consisted in one opinion writing task and were assessed and scored by two trained external raters based on an analytic scoring rubric with different scales covering *overall task fulfilment*, *topic/content control*, *organisation*, and *language control* (see the analytic scoring rubrics for writing detailed in Cushing Weigle, 2002; Purpura, 2004; and Kim & Shin, 2006, among others). Despite the limited size of the sample (143 participants taking both tests), results pointed to some generalised deficiencies concerning the idea development of writing and the related coherence and cohesion of the texts produced. The results of the diagnostic test were informative for making decisions about areas of (further) work, notably argumentative writing, while the results of the achievement test were employed to measure progress, thus also assessing the appropriateness of the course and planning future changes (Brown, 2005), which were implemented the following year.

The achievement subset of the sample was then digitised and used to perform searches at a short demo workshop on corpus methods and tools conducted during the 2014 edition of LUNA (European Researchers' Night) at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, as well as during a lesson on hedging held for 2014–2015 freshers attending the specialised English language courses for economics referred to above. A first look at the concordance lines of the most frequent words in the *achievement corpus* and some of the observations made by students during the already-mentioned workshop and lesson, especially on (logical and linguistic) transitions and on (the linguistic features indicating) writer's positioning, encouraged us to collect additional data for more in-depth qualitative analyses of students' writing. The achievement corpus previously obtained was thus enlarged to include 166 further texts, that is, the opinion articles produced for the achievement test administered to the 2014–2015 cohort of students.

This larger corpus of learners' extended productions was employed to perform searches aimed at answering one general research question, namely *what kind of feedback can instructors provide based on learner language output?*, and a more specific one, *what kind of feedback can instructors provide to help students*

*use metadiscourse in a textually appropriate and pragmatically and rhetorically effective manner?* As seen above, the qualitative analysis conducted on the achievement corpus had two main triggers: a) the external raters who had assessed a diagnostic test taken by the 2013–2014 cohort of students had pointed out students' issues with text organisation, especially regarding their use of logical connectors;<sup>3</sup> b) other students, who had been exposed to a subset of the achievement corpus, had inquired about some language features used to express writer visibility in the texts (e.g., self-mentions in combination with thinking verbs). The observations made on metadiscourse markers in the learner corpus led us to construct classroom-based formative assessment activities of the kind described in section 4.

### 3.2 Data and Tools

In section 2 we have seen that learner corpora are highly heterogeneous, as is learner language, and as are learning situations and learners themselves. That is why, when collecting learner data, setting precise criteria for corpus design and compilation is the only way to build corpora that are both usable and useful.

As already mentioned, our learner corpus (or, in this case, achievement corpus) is composed of *written* texts. It is *local*, in that it was collected as part of regular teaching activities by the teacher herself, and it is representative of a small group of learners (see Granger, 2013, p. 3236), counting 94,696 tokens and 5,060 types in 309 texts (with a 0.053 type-token ratio). These were written by two different cohorts of students, respectively in 2013–2014 and 2014–2015, at the end of a one-semester English course offered at the Free University of

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3 The diagnostic test was comparable to the achievement test in terms of task (extended written production), text type (opinion article), and required length (300–350 words), although it was not related to any reading comprehension activity and did not require knowledge of any specialised contents and/or language. Students were expected to write an article recommending the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano to prospective freshers, explaining why the programme they had enrolled in was the best choice, and why the city of Bolzano was an ideal place for university students.

Bozen-Bolzano to first-year undergraduates of the BA programmes in Economics and Management (EM) and Economics and Social Sciences (PPE). To be more precise, the *times of collection* were the end of January 2014 and the end of January 2015, whereas the *time of pedagogical use* (see the examples discussed in section 4), was academic year 2015–2016. The corpus' main statistics are summarized in Table 1. For the purposes of the present paper, the corpus was not annotated, and the data were saved in a *plain-text format*, after having been transcribed from students' handwritten texts without any editing (i.e., without any error correction).

Table 1 – The achievement corpus at a glance.

<i>Achievement Corpus</i>			
309 texts	94,696 tokens	5,060 types	TTR 0.053
2014		2015	
143 texts	103 EM	166 texts	124 EM
	40 PPE		42 PPE
tokens	45,345	tokens	49,351
types	3,607	types	3,131

The texts were produced in response to writing tasks a) and b) below as part of the course final exam:

a) *2014 exam question*

According to Irina Feygina, a social psychologist who studies environmental policy issues, “releasing comprehensive information about gas drilling problems is important because the debate is no longer about just science but trust,” and losing public trust is “a surefire way to harm” the reputation of any business. You have been asked to write an article for the “Technology & Environment” section of the Free University of Bozen’s monthly magazine commenting on this statement and giving your own views on gas drilling-related opportunities and problems.

Please write your article in 300-350 words in an appropriate style. You have 60 minutes.

b) *2015 exam question*

In the past year, many US businesses have responded to Obama's call by raising their minimum wage above the level required by law. Randy Garutti, CEO of Shake Shack restaurant chain, explains why his company has increased wages: "Our turnover is lower, we can hire the best, they stay longer, and we can grow them into management. If the team feels taken care of, then they'll go out and take care of the guests."

Write a short opinion article commenting on this statement and giving your own views on the effects of minimum wage raises on employment.

Please write your article in 250-300 words in an appropriate style. You have 60 minutes.

In both cases, the writing task came after a set of reading comprehension tasks, which in turn followed a text on one of the topics covered during the course (respectively, gas drilling in a and minimum wage raises in b). While dealing with different topics, the two writing tasks (similarly to the reading texts they were based on) share a number of features, which mirror the EAP/ESP nature of the courses for which they were designed. Moving from a statement by an expert on a given activity/measure, they require learners to write an opinion article discussing the benefits and drawbacks of such activity/measure. In both cases, students are expected to write texts that are relatively formal in style, although addressing an audience of non-experts, and contain semi-technical vocabulary pertaining to a given subject area. Finally, both writing tasks impose the same constraints in terms of allotted time and required length.

As to the profile of test-takers, all students were enrolled in the first year of either the BA in EM or the BA in PPE (see Table 1). They were all speakers of EFL with similar levels of proficiency. To be more precise, at the time the achievement test was administered, all of them had already obtained a certificate of English proficiency at an upper-intermediate level (level B2 of the

Common European Framework of Reference for languages) issued either internally (after taking a test administered by the University's Language Centre) or externally (after taking internationally recognised tests such as Cambridge FCE or CAE, IELTS, or TOEFL), as required by the University's language policy. In line with its international profile, test-takers declared themselves native speakers of different languages, as follows: Italian (53.8%), German (28.7%), Ladin (4.2%), both German and Italian (3.5%), other (7.7%, including Basque, Finnish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Spanish, Ukrainian, and Urdu), no reply (2.1%).

The corpus was searched using WordSmith Tools and AntConc.<sup>4</sup> Both sets of tools have a very user-friendly interface, which students can use to investigate language patterns in texts by observing the search word or phrase in context and studying its collocations. These functions open a series of possibilities for learners and teachers alike, in terms of exploring the language produced by learners themselves and comparing it with the language produced by other learners and/or native speakers, as we will see in what follows.

#### 4. Using Corpora to Explore Metadiscourse in Learners' Writing

In section 1, we mentioned that metadiscourse markers can be grouped into two macrocategories, as identified by Dafouz-Milne (2008), *textual* and *interpersonal*. The former refers to the organisation of discourse and includes seven sub-categories: logical markers, sequencers, reminders, topicalisers, code glosses, illocutionary markers, and announcements (Dafouz-Milne, 2008, p.

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4 The former is an integrated suite of programmes that includes a concordancer, a keyword generator, and a wordlist generator. The latter, which is also a concordancer-type software, while permitting less sophisticated searches, is free of charge, which makes it highly appreciated by students. WordSmith Tools and AntConc are downloadable respectively from: <http://www.lexically.net/wordsmith/> and <http://www.laurenceanthony.net/>. For further details on WordSmith Tools, see Scott (2001, 2008). For additional information on AntConc, see Anthony (2005, 2013).

98). The latter refers instead to the “writer’s stance towards both the content in the text and the potential reader” (Dafouz-Milne, 2008, p. 97) and comprises five sub-categories: hedges, certainty markers, attributors, attitude markers, and commentaries (Dafouz-Milne, 2008, p. 99; see Figure 4 below).<sup>5</sup> In 4.1 and 4.2 we shall discuss some examples of textual and interpersonal meta-discourse markers.

#### 4.1 Textual Metadiscourse Markers

A preliminary look at the most frequent n-grams in the achievement corpus prompted us to consider specific clusters, as those circled in Figure 1.

Rank	Freq	Range	N-gram
1	183	91	the minimum wage
2	122	85	a lot of
3	104	75	in order to
4	101	96	on the other
5	92	42	oil and gas
6	87	45	a minimum wage
7	85	84	the other hand
8	83	82	on the other hand
9	71	69	in my opinion
10	68	55	gas drilling is
11	63	49	i think that
12	63	62	of shake shack
13	63	55	one of the
14	60	42	about gas drilling
15	59	48	take care of
16	56	56	ceo of shake
17	55	55	ceo of shake shack
18	55	40	minimum wage is
19	53	32	of gas drilling

Figure 1 – Most frequent n-grams in the corpus (AntConc).

5 These two, textual and interpersonal, categories align with what Thompson (2001) has called respectively *interactive* and *interactional* resources.

We noticed that of the 101 occurrences of “on the other” (which ranks fourth on the list of the most frequent clusters) only 83 were followed by “hand,” as in the *textual metadiscourse marker* “On the one hand... on the other...,” which Dafouz-Milne (2008, p. 98) subsumes under the functional subheading she calls *sequencers*. We then generated concordance lines for “on the other” and found that, of the remaining 18 occurrences, 12 were followed by “side” (see also Figure 2).<sup>6</sup>

Concord																			
Edit View Compute Settings Windows Help																			
N	Word	With	Relation	Set	Texts	Total	Total	Total	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
							Left	Right											
1	ON THE OTI-	on the other	0.000		96	101	0	0						101					
2	HAND	on the other	0.000		82	83	0	83							83				
3	THE	on the other	0.000		22	24	5	19	1	3		1				10	1	2	6
4	A	on the other	0.000		19	19	7	12	2	4	1					1	2	5	4
5	ARE	on the other	0.000		15	16	1	15			1					1	11	1	2
6	IT	on the other	0.000		13	15	2	13					2			1	11		1
7	THERE	on the other	0.000		14	14	0	14							1	13			
8	IS	on the other	0.000		14	14	1	13	1								7	2	4
9	THAT	on the other	0.000		13	13	0	13										9	4
10	SIDE	on the other	0.000		12	13	1	12	1						12				
11	TO	on the other	0.000		11	11	3	8	1	1	1					1		3	4
12	OF	on the other	0.000		10	11	5	6	1	2			2			2		4	
13	BUT	on the other	0.000		11	11	11	0						11					
14	GAS	on the other	0.000		10	10	3	7	1	1	1				1	4		1	1
15	ALSO	on the other	0.000		8	8	0	8										1	7
16	HAVE	on the other	0.000		8	8	1	7			1							5	2
17	WE	on the other	0.000		8	8	0	8								7			1
18	BE	on the other	0.000		7	7	0	7										1	5
19	COULD	on the other	0.000		7	7	1	6			1					1	3	2	1
20	PEOPLE	on the other	0.000		6	7	2	5	1				1			3		1	1

Figure 2 – Collocates for “on the other” (WordSmith Tools).

At the same time, the cluster “the other hand” struck our attention for being slightly more frequent than “on the other” (85 vs 83 occurrences) and, when we looked at its collocates in position 1R, we found that two students had used the preposition “in” instead of “on.” Given these slight differences in wording, we moved on to look for the first-part component of the sequencer, that is, “on the one hand,” to see how frequent it was and whether it had alternative forms. We found only 13 occurrences of “on the one hand,” but we found 19 of “on one hand;” taken together, these 32 occurrences were retrieved from 32 different texts, 30 of which also included the second-part component of the sequencer under investigation, that is, “on the other (hand).” Surprisingly, this left 53 occurrences (64%) of the second-part component “on the other

6 5 were followed by a punctuation mark (4 commas and 1 full stop) and 1 by “end”.

hand” without the first-part component “on (the) one hand.” Similarly, when we checked how many “on the other side” were preceded by “on (the) one side,” we could only find 3, leaving the other 9 without a first-part component. We drew on these and other observations (e.g., we noticed that students had used both components either in sentence-initial position or within the sentence, and some of them had employed “on the other (hand)” immediately after “but” or “however”) to formulate a set of writing questions, as exemplified by the following list:

- *What is/are the right wording(s)? (On (the ?) one hand/side ?... on (the ?) other hand/side ?)*
- *Is this a fixed or semi-fixed expression? (Do different versions of it have different meanings?)*
- *What is its position within the sentence?*
- *Can I omit/replace any of the components? Does that depend on the position of the expression within the sentence?*

These and similar questions can be passed on to students as part of a classroom activity consisting in the following steps: 1) guided searches on the above-mentioned clusters in the learner corpus; 2) related searches in large reference corpora such as the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Contemporary Corpus of American English (COCA; to see, for instance, whether “on the one side... on the other” is attested in use and whether it means the same as “on the one hand... on the other;” or to see how often the second-part component “on the other hand” is used without the first-part component “on (the) one hand”);<sup>7</sup> 3) learning logs based on the observations made in step 1) and step 2) and written following the outline provided by the questions themselves.

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7 Free search interfaces for the BNC and the COCA corpora are available respectively at: <https://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/> and <https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>. For the BNC, see also Burnard and Aston (1998), as well as documentation available at: <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk>, especially Burnard (2007). For the COCA, see Davies (2009, 2010), among others.



## 4.2 Interpersonal Metadiscourse Markers

A more in-depth look at students' individual productions revealed a somewhat inconsistent use of *interpersonal metadiscourse markers* (Dafouz-Milne, 2008, p. 99), as shown in Figure 3. For ease of reference, the colours with which we have circled the markers under investigation are the same as those used in Figure 4 to highlight the corresponding categories in Dafouz-Milne's (2008) taxonomy.

1. Fellow students, I'm sure gas drilling can seem, from an economic point of view at least, a fairly safe bet.
2. All in all, it might be said that this incentive will surely not disappoint anyone. On the contrary all party will benefit from it, seizing from this opportunity.
3. In general it can be said that if the country or state is not in a recession and firms are making profits large enough to compensate rising labour costs, or the wages paid by most employers are already above the minimum wage, rising the minimum wage might be a good idea.

Figure 3 – Examples of interpersonal metadiscourse markers in the corpus.

Interpersonal metadiscourse markers		
Macro-category	Subcategory	Examples
<p>➔ Hedges</p> <p>Express partial commitment to the truth-value of the text</p>	<p>Epistemic verbs</p> <p>Probability adverbs</p> <p>Epistemic expressions</p>	<p>May / might / it <u>must</u> be two o'clock</p> <p>Probably / perhaps / maybe</p> <p>It is likely</p>
<p>➔ Certainty markers</p> <p>Express total commitment to the truth-value of the text</p>		<p>Undoubtedly / clearly / certainly</p>
<p>Attributors</p> <p>Refer to the source of information</p>		<p>'x' claims that... / As the Prime Minister remarked</p>
<p>➔ Attitude markers</p> <p>Express writers' affective values towards text and readers</p>	<p>Deontic verbs</p> <p>Attitudinal adverbs</p> <p>Attitudinal adjectives</p> <p>Cognitive verbs</p>	<p>Have to / we <u>must</u> understand / needs to</p> <p>Unfortunately / remarkably / pathetically</p> <p>It is absurd / it is surprising</p> <p>I feel / I think / I believe</p>
<p>Commentaries</p> <p>Help to establish reader-writer rapport through the text</p>	<p>Rhetorical questions</p> <p>Direct address to reader</p> <p>Inclusive expressions</p> <p>Personalisations</p> <p>Asides</p>	<p>What is the future of Europe, integration or disintegration?</p> <p><u>You</u> must understand, <u>dear reader</u></p> <p><u>We</u> all believe/let us summarise</p> <p>What the polls are telling <u>me</u> / I do not want Diana (<u>ironically</u> for a Spencer) was not of the Establishment</p>

Figure 4 – Interpersonal metadiscourse categories (Dafouz-Milne, 2008, p. 99).

In Example 1, leaving aside the initial address term (which is probably more appropriate in a speech rather than in a written opinion article), the reader

will probably be struck by the combination of the *attitude marker* “I’m sure” and the *hedge* “can seem,” whose levels of epistemic certainty are undoubtedly discordant. Given that the writer further hedges her/his statement with the stance adverbial of limitation (see Biber et al., 1999, p. 863) “from an economic point of view at least” and the downtoner (see Biber et al., 1999, p. 555) “fairly” preceding the noun phrase “safe bet,” the reader may be left to wonder whether the writer has deliberately used the attitude marker containing a self-mention and an adjective expressing certainty before a series of hedging devices, or is instead not fully aware of the rhetorical effects that the combination of these interpersonal metadiscourse markers may have (for instance, resulting in an overemphatic and thus ironic statement).<sup>8</sup> To further investigate this issue, we looked for the attitude marker “I am/I’m sure” in a large learner corpus compiled in the 2000s, namely the Michigan Corpus of Upper-level Student Papers (MICUSP), a record of around 830 A grade papers (roughly 2.6 million words) from a range of disciplines.<sup>9</sup> Before performing the search, we ticked the partition “argumentative essay” under the research parameter “paper type,” leaving all other parameters (student levels, nativeness, textual features, and disciplines) unselected. If we exclude two quotations, we obtained only one hit for “I am sure” and one hit for “I’m sure,” neither of which were followed by the modal “can” in combination with the introductory verb “seem,” or by other hedging devices.

If Example 1 may be somehow open to interpretation, Example 2 shows rather clearly that putting together mitigating and reinforcing devices may generate confusion over the standpoint for which the writer is arguing. The reader is likely to be caught off guard by the *hedge* “it might be said” followed by the

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8 The writer will in fact move on by expressing her/his doubts about gas drilling being safe, and will do so by introducing the following sentence with the adversative “but” and by switching to the inclusive first-person plural pronoun “we” (“But before we jump ahead... we should first be well informed.”).

9 The disciplines covered relate to four academic divisions (Humanities and Arts, Social Sciences, Biological and Health Sciences, Physical Sciences) of the University of Michigan. MICUSP is freely available through an online search and browse interface available at: <http://elicorpora.info>. On the MICUSP, see also Römer and Wulff (2010).

*certainty marker* “surely,” which, together with the litotes “will not disappoint anyone” and the contrastive marker “on the contrary,” make the sentence rather wordy and the line of argument somewhat fuzzy. In addition, if we search the MICUSP for concordances of “surely” (again in argumentative essays), we will find that this adverb and hedges like “it might/may be said” never occur within the same sentence (see Figure 5 for sample concordances). Example 2 is rather similar to the examples discussed in Thompson (2001), which show how devices used to signal different voices (the writer’s, reader’s, or other’s) in the text may be misleading, causing a clash between actual and expected reading.

than it would be for us to hold others, then he can't strictly hold that all moral judgments are false. When presented with this, I'm not inclined to think Mackie simply doesn't realize that in making his moral pronouncements he's unknowingly (or worse, knowingly) making what he earlier describes as a false claim. It seems more likely that he is overly rash in baldly declaring, "There are no objective values," when, really, he only attempts to (successfully, in my opinion) refute the existence of the sort of objective values implied by our common ideas of categorical rightness and wrongness (Mackie, 446). But there are, or could potentially be, I think, objective values of the more hypothetical sort, which I think Mackie is committed to in asserting that it would be better for us to believe in one set of moral claims rather than another. And these, I would assert, **surely** exist in the trivial way that one really "ought" to move in certain ways if one wishes to win a game of chess.

PHI.G0.07.2 1 of 2 hits <a href="#">Show all</a>	The Doctrine of Double Effect and Intentions Regarding Hiroshima and Nagasaki	Philosophy	Argumentative Essay
PHI.G1.01.1 1 of 3 hits <a href="#">Show all</a>	Can a lump of clay and a statue be identical?	Philosophy	Argumentative Essay
PHI.G1.02.1	A Defense of Ontological Relativity	Philosophy	Argumentative Essay

1. At this point it seems that one must try to distinguish the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki from an ordinary terror bombing - **surely** if our intuitions tell us that one is right and the other wrong, there must be some morally significant difference between the two. We might appeal to circumstances that arise specifically in wartime between sovereign states - perhaps certain things are moral permissible when done to bring about an end to a prolonged state of war. This reading only makes sense, however, if we construe the TB as something other than an agent working on behalf of one sovereign state against another. But Quinn's TB appears to be a pilot working for a sovereign state - we are to understand him as a pilot just like the strategic bomber. In any case, if we fairly apply the principles of DDE, it ought to make no difference whether the TB works for a state at war with another state or for a terrorist organization. I think that when presented the question, "is it morally permissible for military personnel to specifically target civilians if they have good reason to believe that the deaths of civilians will demoralize the enemy, bring the war to an end, and thereby reduce the overall loss of life," intuition will generally leads us to say no.

1. Here, the two-thinger might draw a parallel to casual talk about other aesthetic objects - such as songs, poems, and stories. Take the statement "my poem is written in black ink". As in the case with the statue and the clay, it looks like one is here making a claim about the aesthetic object (my poem). Yet the two-thinger might argue, one is not actually referring to the aesthetic object (my poem), but rather to the words on the page that constitute my poem in this case. And this might very well make sense. For it is **surely** possible that I could reproduce the very same poem in red, blue, or green ink just as Whitman's poem "Song of Myself" is re-produced in many different books that contain different colors of ink. In short, then, the two-thinger might argue that when we correctly analyze our discourse about a "poem's" or a "statue's" properties, we find that we are not actually committed to it having the properties that would lead to patently false beliefs. To put it in more general terms, the two thinger's response to this first objection is this: she is not committed to the veracity of patently false scenarios because the properties that the two non-identical objects have in common are different than what might initially seem to be the case.

1. Note that, despite the underdetermination, we can still have scientific justification to determine which of these opposing theories is true. Simplicity, parsimony and even falsifiability come up as virtues of Modern Physics that Newtonian Physics lacks. **Surely** many other considerations come to the defense of Modern Physics, but for this we need a scientist to tell. In any case, there is a fact of the matter as to whether Modern Physics is true or if Newtonian Physics is correct. For instance, there is a fact of the matter whether there are protons, electrons, quarks and even super strings.

<PREVIOUS    NEXT>

Figure 5 – MICUSP sample concordances of “surely.” (<http://elnicorpora.info>)

Example 3 is slightly different from the previous two, in that what emerges is not a contrast between modulating devices going in opposite directions (i.e., mitigation vs. reinforcement), but, arguably, an overuse of hedging. The introductory impersonal construction “it can be said” already works in the direction of deresponsibilising the writer with respect to the truth-value of the proposition “raising the minimum wage is a good idea,” which is further

hedged by the modal “might” (the actual text being “rising [sic] the minimum wage *might be* a good idea;” emphasis added) and the preceding if-clauses, which limit the validity of the writer’s statement to specific conditions. Again, turning to a larger learner corpus of academic written English is likely to provide insight into how interpersonal metadiscourse markers can be used to express stance. For instance, students may be asked to look for collocations of the construction “it can be said” in the British Academic Written English Corpus (BAWE), a collection of proficient university-level student writing created in the UK at about the same time as the MICUSP.<sup>10 11</sup> Among other things, they can be asked to see whether “it can be said” occurs with markers of the kinds accounted for in Figure 4, such as “perhaps” in one of the examples shown in Figure 5. As a next step, students may be encouraged to experiment with their academic writing by rephrasing portions of their own articles, using different interpersonal metadiscourse markers, and then comparing different versions and discussing them with their peers (as explained in 4.1, the instructor can facilitate discussion through guiding questions like *which statement(s) express(es) doubt, and which one(s) certainty?*), or even interview native speakers and/or experts at their faculty/department to obtain “qualified opinions” on the rhetorical decisions made.

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10 BAWE contains just under 3000 good-standard student assignments (6,968,089 words) in four broad disciplinary areas (Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Life Sciences and Physical Sciences) at both undergraduate and graduate levels. The corpus can be searched online via the Sketch Engine open site: <https://ca.sketchengine.co.uk/open/>. On the BAWE, see also Alsop and Nesi (2009) and Nesi (2011).

11 Another corpus that may be used as a reference for academic-writing related searches is the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS): <http://www.learnercorpusassociation.org/resources/tools/locness-corpus/>.

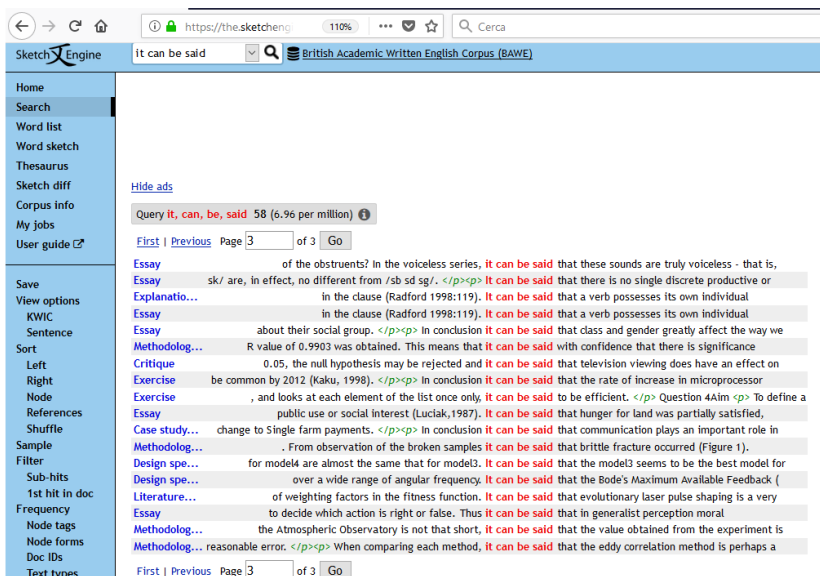


Figure 6 – BAWE concordance lines for “it can be said.” (<https://ca.sketchengine.co.uk/open>)

Overall, it is crucial that students engaging with EAP writing, especially argumentative, be aware of the resources—mainly interpersonal metadiscourse markers—they can deploy to modulate a) their commitment to the truth of the proposition; b) the illocutionary force of the utterance; and c) its deictic origin, that is, its I-here-now, or their self-ascription of responsibility for it (see Bühler, 1934 and Benveniste 1970, cited in Caffi, 1999). In other words, they should realize that the type of writers (or speakers) they want to be and/or are taken for largely depends on the way they use such resources. In this respect, Thompson (2001, pp. 71–72) suggests going through students’ texts with the students themselves, to decide “whether each proposition... was meant to be seen as [them] speaking, and which could be assigned to the reader, or a third person” (Thompson, 2001, p. 71). Drawing on Thompson’s suggestions for the revision of students’ papers, in Table 2 we have formulated possible questions that can be asked to the students who produced, respectively, 1, 2, and 3 in Figure 3.

Table 2 – Whose opinion? (adapted from Thompson, 2001).

	Writer	Reader	Other
1	Who believes gas drilling is a safe economic bet?		
2	Who supposes this incentive (the minimum wage) will be beneficial to everyone?		
3	Who assumes minimum wage raises are a good idea under the conditions described?		

Guided activities of this kind can help learners make their line of argument clearer by striking a balance between a “monologic ‘logical’ argumentation” and a “dialogic collaborative” one (Thompson, 2001, p. 74). Within these activities, the analysis of metadiscourse patterns in larger (learner) corpora or subsets thereof, particularly partitions by text type/genre and discipline, is likely to enhance students’ awareness that “effective argument involves a community-oriented deployment of appropriate linguistic resources to represent writers, their texts, and their readers” (Hyland, 2004, p. 148).

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, we have discussed the use of metadiscourse markers in a learner corpus of opinion articles written by undergraduates in economics at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano. For reasons of space, we were only able to show a limited number of examples from the corpus, which, however, allow for some general observations to be made on how EFL learners with an upper intermediate level of proficiency manage text organisation/topic development and writer’s positioning within academic argumentative texts. Building and searching a learner corpus enabled us to analyse students’ preferred textual and rhetorical patterns. In particular, the examples illustrated in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 show that even language features that tend to be taken for granted (as acquired) at a rather high level of proficiency may be problematic in terms of

both well-formedness and use in context. For instance, the tendency to over-use, underuse, or misuse specific *textual metadiscourse markers* may be teacher-induced or due to cross-linguistic reasons (as pointed out by Granger, 2002, p. 22), but what is beyond doubt is that searching the compiled learner corpus for these markers will give both the learner and the instructor a better grasp of how significant any such tendency is and, as a consequence, what measures should be taken and at what level (individual vs. class) to tackle specific difficulties. Similarly, the use of certain *interpersonal metadiscourse markers* may be the result of either conscious choices or unreflective practices, but a close look at collocation patterns within the learner corpus will make it possible to spot discrepancies both within texts and between texts and thus assess learning (and teaching!) gaps. Based on these observations, syllabuses can be adjusted or redesigned. At a first, basic level, the input provided by ad hoc learner corpora can be a precious resource to be used with similar-type learners at a later stage (see Section 2 above), as was the case with our corpus, which provided copious examples supporting specific instruction on textual and interpersonal metadiscourse (especially hedging language) during the courses taught at the Faculty in the year that followed the compilation of the corpus itself. However, the activities illustrated in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 may also be conducted on a regular basis in the classroom (and/or during other contact hours), and material from learner corpora may be systematically incorporated in lesson planning for use with the same learners who produced it, so as to boost formative assessment allowing for both collective and individualised feedback and encouraging students to engage with both peer and self-evaluation, which they may not be used to. In addition, the possibility of analysing what they have written against large learner corpora like the BAWE and the MICUSP, as opposed to general reference corpora, is likely to increase students' motivation by exposing them to language produced by other learners (who may be native speakers or more advanced learners of English, but are still learners in writing classes!), while at the same time providing a wealth of examples of texts written for specific and academic purposes. Ultimately, learner corpora can be said to be conducive to a more informed use of language based on the communicative needs warranted by the TLU domain in which students live and work.

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# Communication in a Globalized World: Advanced English and its Assessment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Sharon Hartle – University of Verona, Italy

## Abstract

The special position of global English, a language used worldwide as a *lingua franca*, poses particular problems for those who teach and assess English, especially in English for specific purposes (ESP) and academic purposes (EAP) contexts. This article, the result of a longitudinal classroom study and reflection, explores key questions asked by test developers in the Language Centre at the University of Verona, when developing new assessment specifications to measure the language competence of advanced undergraduate learners attending the ESP course of English for Tourism Management. The questions that emerged during the re-assessment of existing assessment criteria were: What does it mean to be an advanced user of a global language? How should we redefine advanced levels if the traditional practice of respecting native-speaker norms is to be overturned? How should we assess this advanced level? The test developers explored learner motivations and needs by means of a survey of undergraduates, carried out with questionnaires and focus group interviews. This led to a re-assessment of the criteria for assessment where the example given here is of spoken English. The article shows ways in which these criteria are being reformulated to reflect the real needs of these learners, the majority of whom do not aspire to integrate in native speaker communities but need to be competent in English as a global language.

## 1. Introduction: Effective Language in ESP Domains

As our world becomes increasingly globalized, language skills, and in particular, English, are an essential fact of life in many fields. Communicating effectively leads to the co-construction of meanings and clarification of ideas, in fact, in *any* situation. It is, however, particularly important in ESP domains. In

fields such as aviation, for instance, misunderstandings through ineffective language use can lead to fatal accidents (Estival & Molesworth, 2009), but what does *ineffective language* mean? In Aviation English, it is not only a lack of second language (L2) competence that is problematic. Rather, misunderstandings may occur as the result of a departure from the internationally accepted language conventions used between air traffic controllers and pilots. It may actually be native speakers who use colloquial language, or nonstandard terms, that are misunderstood by those using English as an L2. As Estival (cited by Patty, 2016) explains, non-adherence to conventionally accepted phraseology between air traffic controllers and pilots such as “Mayday” or “Pan Pan”, or other such internationally acceptable terms, may lead to the misinterpretation of what are intended as distress signals. This is in fact what happened in the 1990 crash of the Avianca flight in New York, where the plane crew reported that they were “running out of fuel”. This shows that effective language use in our world is not merely a matter of attaining high levels of linguistic competence, but is also a question of developing the skill of being able to communicate clearly.

The undergraduate students at the University of Verona are in a hybrid situation. They require both EAP and ESP skills, depending on their fields. The specific group that are the focus of this article specialize in English for Tourism Management and need to develop the skills and specialist language for this field, which increasingly means combining specialized lexis, for instance, with a competence in global English when communicating in a wider context than a native speaker community. Learner aims reflected this need in a recent survey which sought to determine the actual motivations of those learners, and the results show that such needs may go beyond a narrow focus on the specialist language of the field itself. Educators in universities who are teaching ESP language to undergraduates need to examine the question of what “effective English” is and how best to meet the needs of such learners, who will not be communicating exclusively with native speakers in the future. In order to achieve this, the standards that such students need to reach would require re-examination.

This paper explores these questions with reference to learner needs in and beyond the local ESP context of the tourism management course at the University of Verona, at the heart of Kachru's *expanding circle* (1992), and asks what "advanced English" means in such a context and how our oral test proficiency assessment criteria might be adapted to cater for the needs of such students.

### 1.1 Which Norms are Required for Global English?

The standards learners are usually required to aim for when studying languages have generally been native speaker norms, reflecting the need of many language learners to communicate with native speakers. This is no longer enough for ESP students whose aim is to communicate mainly with other non-native speakers of English in specific professional contexts. Their aim is not to emulate native speakers but to express themselves clearly in their field. The dramatic example of aviation English mentioned above illustrates clearly how failure to communicate according to the accepted norms of a specific field may lead to a breakdown in communication. Global English, in fact, prioritizes clear communication over sophisticated accuracy at advanced levels. Tourism Management English language undergraduates at the University of Verona aspire to this type of global communication both for personal and professional language use. They communicate with friends, other students, and, in the future, intend to interact with a whole range of interlocutors, of whom native speakers form a small minority. English, therefore, stands in the very special position in our world of being a global language used as a *lingua franca* in professional contexts worldwide.

The University of Verona lies at the heart of Kachru's (1992) *expanding circle*, which is the area of his model inhabited by non-natives, such as Italian undergraduates who study English. In this article, my aim is to examine the role of global English for these learners, to consider the motivations of advanced level ESP learners in our context, and to explore what "advanced English" means to them. Assessment is a key component of the educational system, and this discussion therefore also examines the adaptation of assessment criteria for

oral tests at advanced levels in an attempt to reflect realistic *global English* norms.

## 1.2 English as a Global Language

English, as mentioned above, plays a new role in its special, global position. Experts refer to the way many use the language around the world in different ways. McKay (2003) refers to the phenomenon as *English as an international language*, Jenkins *et al.* (2011) and Seidlhofer (2004) refer to it as *English as a lingua franca* (EIL). It has now become the *lingua franca* for so many, however, used all around the world, that Crystal (1997, 2003b) refers to it as a “global language,” which means, in his words, “when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country” (2003, p. 3) It can be thought of, then, as a massive-scale *lingua franca*, where the numbers of those using the language are what make it a global phenomenon. This raises an interesting question: Who “owns” English? Traditionally, native speakers think of their language as belonging to them, but is that still true when the majority of speakers are non-natives?

## 1.3 Ownership of English

David Crystal (1997) already considered English to be a global language at the end of the last century, when he explored the idea of *English as a global language* in the news. Every time we switch on the television, he reminded us, we can see the language for ourselves, being used by everyone from politicians to celebrities, to communicate with each other. He stressed the fact that whilst native speakers may express pride in the fact that their language is being used like this, the phenomenon also gives rise to considerable concern about ownership:

We are all sensitive to the way other people use (it is often said, abuse) “our” language. Deeply held feelings of ownership begin to be questioned. Indeed, if there is one predictable consequence of a language becoming a global language, it is that nobody owns it any more. Or rather, everyone who has

learned it now owns it – “has a share in it” might be more accurate – and has the right to use it in the way they want. This fact alone makes many people feel uncomfortable, even vaguely resentful. “Look what the Americans have done to English” is a not uncommon comment found in the letter-columns of the British press. But similar comments can be heard in the USA when people encounter the sometimes striking variations in English which are emerging all over the world. (1997, pp. 2–3)

Ownership is, in my view, the crux of the matter when it comes to teaching and assessing global English in ESP contexts as well. Not only native-speaker but also expert English user teachers who profess their belief in the value of global English still often unconsciously adopt the native speaker model as their standard, putting pressure on learners to reach unrealistic and inappropriate levels that do not reflect the requirements of the fields they intend to work in. Learners who do not need to belong to native-speaker communities do not need to reach native speaker competence. The question that perhaps has to be asked is this. How does the language required for ESP contexts such as tourism management differ from the native speaker model?

## 2. Advanced Learners at the University of Verona and Their Motivation

In 2015, the Language Centre at the University of Verona decided to revisit both C1 courses and assessment criteria. The question was who our learners are now and what they need when they study English, thinking both of their EAP requirements for the academic coursework they do, and the specialist ESP language of tourism management, but also considering the use they will make of that language in their future professions. Approximately 50 undergraduate tourism management language students, who were attending our C1 level courses at that time, were asked to participate in a fact-finding mission which involved discussion of and reflection on the motivation behind their studies by asking them two questions:



- What motivated you to study English at the University of Verona?
- What do you intend to do with English after you graduate?

## 2.1 Methodology

The learners, who sometimes find it difficult to appreciate what questions like this might mean, were organized into small discussion groups of five individuals per group. They looked at the questions together and discussed their meanings to them personally. They then gave their own answers by anonymous poll. The questions were open-ended to ensure a measure of free expression to avoid influencing respondents by supplying multiple choice options. A focus group discussion with twenty students was then organized to clarify various points.

## 2.2 Results

Figure 1 shows *international communication* clearly as the number one motivator, followed by work and travel. The focus group participants added that by international communication they usually meant social media use both personal and professional. Most of the participants felt that, although they had begun their studies because they believed English would help them in practical ways in the future, the more they studied, the more they loved the language itself. They also agreed that working or communicating in an international community did not necessarily mean working abroad, but was more likely to mean dealing with people of different nationalities.

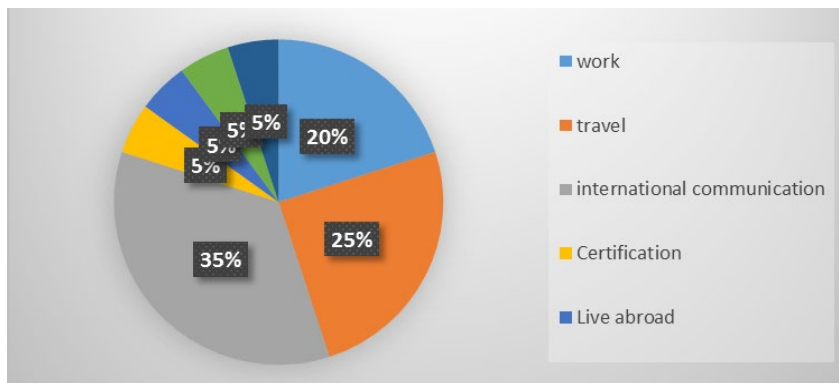


Figure 1 – Motivation to study English at the University of Verona

Figure 2 shows that the second question returned very similar results. When the end of one’s university career approaches, thoughts turn inevitably towards careers, so it is not surprising that, when answering this question, a higher number of learners declared that they saw themselves using English at work in the future, the percentage value increasing from twenty to forty-four percent, with *international communication* and *travel* coming in a joint second. The percentage of students who intended or wished to *live abroad*, on the other hand, is small in answer to both the first and the second question, around six percent.

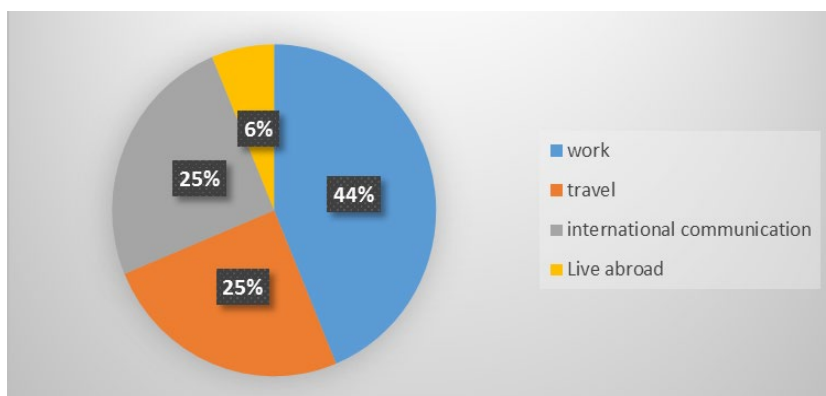


Figure 2 – Plans for future use of English after graduation

Clearly, learners aim not at native-speaker mastery, but at being able to express themselves clearly with other non-native English speakers both socially and professionally. Our teaching priorities, in the Language Centre, to prepare those learners for their future professional contexts, must shift towards ensuring clear expression rather than expecting learners to reach levels of native-speaker proficiency.

### 3. What Does “Advanced English” Mean?

How can teachers help learners navigate the unknown waters of this new global English? Kramersch and Sullivan (cited by McKay, 2003 p. 145) point out that “an appropriate pedagogy for the teaching of EIL depends upon local professionals thinking globally but acting locally.” This may mean teachers looking at their learners and the ways they will use English in the future. We then need to help our learners find the strategies they must develop to express themselves clearly. To determine our learners’ goals we asked this question: Who are advanced English learners in the University of Verona and what motivates them?

To attempt to describe what it means to be an advanced user of English in our world, one of the best places to start is the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) description.

#### 3.1 C1 and the CEFR

The CEFR groups advanced users into the C levels which come under the umbrella term of “proficient user.” It classifies a C1 level as “effective operational proficiency” (2001, p. 5), which, despite a certain vagueness, suggests that advanced English users can “operate” in all situations. The descriptors in the framework do not refer to specific contexts, as they were designed as general guidelines to apply and adapt to specific, local contexts such as work, study, or social interaction. The framework, in fact, aims to describe what can be

done rather than to create prescriptive norms which are set in stone. Chapter 4, furthermore, clearly underlines the fact that when non-natives communicate in an L2, the L1 does not simply disappear, and instead aspects of interculturality invariably arise, which need to be considered. When English users of different cultural backgrounds add their own cultures and linguistic backgrounds to the mix, the most successful ones will be those who know how to make their meaning as clear as possible and cater for misunderstandings that occur due to cultural factors or differences in proficiency level. In this scenario native-speaker competence may actually hamper communication if the interlocutor's competence is less advanced and that speaker is not able to accommodate to the level of others. A successful communicator, in fact, can accommodate his or her language level to the level of the interlocutor.<sup>1</sup> When considering advanced language, three concepts that are often used in assessment criteria are accuracy, fluency, and complexity, but whilst accuracy and fluency are possibly easier to define, complexity is somewhat more challenging.

### 3.2 Complexity

Many second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have explored the notion of "complexity" (Housen, Folkert, & Vedder, 2012; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Ortega, 2003). Contemporary researchers, in fact, often investigate the concept in two broad ways. The first is to approach the concept as an independent variable which has an indirect effect on the L2, such as the effects of instruction on certain areas of L2 performance or proficiency (Bulté & Housen, 2012; Spada & Tomita, 2010). The second approach, on the other hand, investigates complexity as a dependent variable, often grouped

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1 *Accommodation* in linguistics is a term originally coined by Giles (1973) as part of his Communication Accommodation Theory. It has been extended (Crystal, 2003a; Jenkins, 2000; Walker, 2010) to refer to interlocutors adapting their language by converging, or adapting speech, language and pronunciation patterns to reflect the other interlocutor's patterns, to gain acceptance or to create rapport with that person, or simply to increase the effectiveness of the interaction.

together with accuracy and fluency, as a basic descriptor of performance and proficiency. (Bygate, 1996, 1999; Norris & Ortega, 2000).

Pallotti, however, writes that complexity is still “poorly defined” (2015, p. 1) and proposes a simple view of the construct, limiting it to the structural complexity of language, “the complexity directly arising from the number of linguistic elements and their interrelationships” (2015, p. 1).

An interesting afterthought to the idea of complexity as we commonly conceive of it stems from The Cambridge Dictionary. The online site for this dictionary defines “complexity” as: “the state of having many parts and being difficult to understand or find an answer to.” Complexity, then, if it is “difficult to understand” should, on the face of it, be avoided, but when it comes to language, the opposite may prove true, because the vaguer the language you use, the less clear your message actually becomes. In spoken language, it is often a case of the number of clauses and information units conveyed that creates this complexity. “I like Verona,”<sup>2</sup> which is a simple statement actually does not tell us very much. Does the speaker like the people, the architecture, the food? Adding more constituent parts or a more specific word choice can make the meaning clearer. “I like Verona because it is a beautiful city”<sup>3</sup> is already more complex in that it has a subordinate clause which tells us that what this person likes is the beauty of the city itself.

When learners reach even higher levels, complex utterances enable them to express their meaning in much more precise ways, as they have greater linguistic resources to draw on. This is one such example: “I love the town centre, here... it’s the atmosphere and the mix of colours and styles... hmm, in the buildings, ..as I wander along its romantic, old streets.”<sup>4</sup> The resources the individual draws on, such as the more sophisticated word choice of “wander,”

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2 Produced at an A2 level by learners at the Language Centre at the University of Verona.

3 Produced at a B1 level.

4 Produced at a C1 level.

are much higher and, therefore, the language itself is more complex, with multiple constituent elements such as coordinated clauses and discourse markers such as pronouns. This learner wove all these elements skillfully together to create a clear meaning of what she liked about Verona. Using complex language, then, can actually make the meaning clearer and less difficult to understand. Indeed, complexity can be both structural, as discussed above, and also a matter of lexical choice, which includes choosing the most appropriate words or lexical items to convey meaning, where “appropriate” refers both to meaning, form, and register. When is it appropriate to use the verb “grab,” for instance, and when would “take” be the better choice? When thinking about collocation, clarity of expression falls down when learners talk about “making breakfast” when what they actually mean is “having breakfast.” The constituent parts of such collocations are not difficult, but what makes them challenging is the combination itself (Conzett, 2001; Granger, 2014; Martinez, 2013). A close examination of learner errors can therefore reveal which choices hinder the clarity of their expression.

### 3.3 What do C1 Undergraduate Learners Find difficult?

Analysing errors in L2 production often reveals major language areas that learners struggle with. Figure 3 shows the results of a study of ten descriptive texts written by learners on C1 level courses at the Language Centre at the University of Verona (see one sample text in Appendix A). Although writing gives us no insight into pronunciation or interaction skills, it does tell us what structural elements our specific learners need to focus on. In this case, as the statistics clearly show, one of the largest problems is lexis, with the highest rate of 57 of 195 errors related to word choice, many of which come from L1 transfer errors such as “The historical part of the city is collocated in the highest part...,” where “collocated” actually means “located” or “they promote the city with a lot of interesting manifestations such as “Eurochocolate...,” where “manifestations” means “events.” Collocation

errors also abound<sup>5</sup> such as “Umbrians are really proud about their...” instead of “proud of” or “Feltre is one of the most populated cities...” where it would be more natural, according to a corpus search in The Corpus of Contemporary American English (<https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>) to say “densely”/“sparsely”/“highly populated.”<sup>6</sup>

Other areas that learners struggle with are orthography, as can be seen in errors such as spelling “wich” instead of “which”<sup>7</sup> and “holydays” instead of “holidays”, word classes, such as “bakeries product the well-liked sweets” instead of “produce,” or possessives: “the Pope power” instead of the “Pope’s power.” Syntactic errors also affect clarity of expression, and these errors often take the shape of missing words such as articles or pronouns: “Historic part of the city” instead of “The historic part of the city” or “in addition to the pleasant surprises that offers” instead of “that it [the city] offers.” Many of these, as mentioned above, are transfer errors from the L1, and if what learners seek to do is to communicate clearly, then what matters is how far such errors impede the clarity of their message.

In spoken production, pronunciation features also play their role, in that incorrect single sounds, or even word or sentence stress can impede the clarity of the message. One of the problems learners face most frequently is that of having to “search for the word,” which causes long, unnatural pauses in their discourse. What the analysis tells us about the problems learners face is that they are primarily structural. Expressing your ideas clearly with the appropriately complex lexical and syntactic features means focusing first of all on these

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5 Some of these have been classified as missing word errors, where the error is a missing adverb/adjective collocation such as “well known”.

6 A collocate search in the American Corpus reveals the most frequent eight adverb collocates with “populated” to be, in order of frequency: “densely,” “sparsely,” “heavily,” “more,” “most,” “less,” “highly,” “thinly.”

7 Many spelling errors may in fact be slips made when typing rather than a lack of knowledge of orthography.

aspects. In short, L2 users who have an easily accessible repertoire of sophisticated lexical items as well as the underlying grammatical structures, will be able to express their meanings effectively.

Instances	Annotation	Explanation	Help link	Categories	Value	Points lost
3	???	Incomprehensible text		Sense	-1	-3
15	Collocation	Collocation error		Vocabulary	-1	-15
12	Cut	Cut -- this text is not necessary		Sense	-1	-12
19	MissingW	Missing word or words		Grammar	-1	-19
1	organisation_2	Ineffective organisation		Linking	-1	-1
14	Sing/Plu	Singular/plural error		Grammar	-1	-14
8	Punctuation	Punctuation		Punctuation	-1	-8
9	Wrong register	Wrong language choice for this context.		Style	-1	-9
4	Repetition	Repetition of information or phrase		Style	-1	-4
1	Syntax	The words chosen are structurally unnatural.		Syntax	-1	-1
8	VForm	Verb form		Grammar	-1	-8
1	VTense	Verb tense		Grammar	-1	-1
57	WChoice	You have chosen the wrong word or phrase for the meaning you want to express.		Vocabulary	-1	-57
28	WForm	Wrong word form or spelling		Morphology	-1	-28
15	WOrder	Word order		Grammar	-1	-15
20	Extension	Well extended idea		Sense	1	
18	GoodWordChoice	Good choice of vocabulary		Vocabulary	1	
<b>Totals</b>						<b>-195</b>




Fig. 3 – Advanced learner production statistics from 10 C1 level descriptive writing texts

The next step to take is to consider how to assess this advanced language, and we are currently revising our entire C1 course. However, for the purposes of this article I will focus mainly on the criteria we are developing for advanced spoken English.

#### 4. New Assessment Criteria for C1 Level Spoken Performance

Although language production, especially in our new world of global communication, goes beyond the purely structural level, the statistics here show



how interaction can be hampered by lacking complexity in areas such as word choice, and that not knowing the specific word to use completely blocks communication. In our context, however, where we want to assess global English, we need to go beyond simply testing the structural level of the language. Our existing assessment construct is based on criterion-referenced performance assessment used to determine communicative language ability (Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980). This reflects our learners' goals in part, but in order to assess learners with an eye to global English, such factors as language accommodation skills, or meaning negotiation also need to be included. They are part of interaction, which needs to be emphasized and developed. Kramsch described this skill as *interactional competence*:

Interaction always entails negotiating intended meanings i.e., adjusting one's speech to the effect one intends to have on the listener. It entails anticipating the listener's response and possible misunderstandings, clarifying one's own and the other's intentions and arriving at the closest possible match between intended, perceived and anticipated meanings (1986, p. 367).

Our assessment criteria already measure interaction, but the added aspects of "anticipating possible misunderstandings" or "clarifying" had not previously been well-defined in our descriptors. We have not completed the work on our C1 oral production descriptors yet, and our descriptors should be considered as a starting point for further work. A draft of the new descriptors, however, compared with a hypothetical model of commonly used descriptors gives some insight into the changes we are making. The lexico-grammatical criteria reflect a move away from pure competence to the ability to be able to use language for clear expression, where accuracy and complexity may determine the clarity of a specific message. With reference to word choice, which is particularly problematic for our learners, this means the ability to select appropriate lexis to express required meanings clearly. The first descriptors for pronunciation reflect native speaker norms, when they require candidates to be intelligible at all times. Testers who develop such descriptors have fallen prey to the lure of native-speaker norms. The focus in the new model lies, once again, in communicating clearly. Non-impeding pronunciation errors do not cause

communication breakdown and are therefore not overly taken into account. The new discourse descriptor highlights the skill of organization, with candidates required to use clear signposting to aid their message. Candidates must organize their ideas logically and extend their repertoire to include abstract thoughts, but the key here is to make that organization clear to the listener. Last, but definitely not least, comes interaction. This descriptor has grown in depth to go beyond factors such as turn-taking and to embrace mutual support and negotiation towards new meanings, seeing spoken discourse as a jazz improvisation where all the musicians build on what has gone before to make new music.

Table 1 – A comparison between a hypothetical C1 level model for spoken assessment criteria and the new draft for global English descriptors.

Hypothetical model of commonly used descriptors	Our model in progress
<b>Lexical and Grammatical Resource:</b> being able to use appropriate forms and make appropriate choices to express complexity.	<b>Ability to use a range of grammar and lexis</b> to communicate clear messages in as specific a way as possible.
<b>Pronunciation:</b> being intelligible at all times with a command of natural sound production, rhythms, and patterns.	<b>Pronunciation</b> must be clearly comprehensible with minimum impeding errors both of single sounds or prosodic features in general.
<b>Discourse</b> Ideas should be developed clearly even when complex and unfamiliar to speaker. Hesitation should be natural rather than prolonged as learners search for vocabulary.	Ideas should be structured and <b>signposted</b> logically to help support the listener. The language produced should be relevant and go beyond basic everyday meanings.
<b>Interaction:</b> speakers should respect the norms of turn-taking and neither dominate nor speak too little.	<b>Ability</b> to listen to other speakers and to negotiate towards new meanings. The ability to provide support for other speakers in order to reach mutual comprehension

## 5. Conclusion

Our C1 undergraduate English learners definitely aim to develop their own English voices particularly in the ESP field of tourism management. Clear expression is prioritized over native-speaker mastery, as mutual comprehension between interlocutors is key. Educators need to revise their strategies both when teaching and assessing this type of L2 use. Our new speaking assessment criteria seek to move in this direction by stressing two main points. Firstly developing criteria at the lexico-grammatical, structural level that focus on the clear expression of the message rather than only accuracy and range. Secondly, developing awareness of others means focusing also on learners' interactional competence and negotiation skills. By adapting the assessment criteria, we hope to be moving towards a more effective measurement of the type of language skills required by those learners to communicate internationally in their future professional fields.

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## Appendix A

### One Sample of C1 Level Written Production from the Study Text Two

Perugia is a nice and medieval<sup>1</sup> gothic city that raises<sup>WChoice</sup> in the green heart of Italy. Founded by {\*}MissingW Etruscan<sup>Sing/Plu</sup> between {\*}MissingW XI and X century<sup>b Punctuation</sup>.C Perugia represents<sup>WChoice</sup> nowadays one of the most ancient city<sup>Sing/Plu</sup> visited by tourists every year.

The historical part of the city is collocated<sup>WChoice</sup> in the highest part of {\*}MissingW Umbrian hills: in the past it was a very strategic place to get by<sup>WChoice</sup> <sup>2</sup> during war periods. "Corso Vannucci," which incorporates the most important sites like Palazzo dei Priori and August Arch, extends his<sup>WChoice</sup> allyways<sup>GoodWordChoice</sup> from the "Fontana Maggiore" to "Piazza Italia" where you can find the principal<sup>7</sup> terrace from which<sup>Wrong register</sup> spreads<sup>WOrder</sup> all the valley within the modern part of the city.

{\*}WOrder From the principal<sup>3</sup> train station you can admire the rest of the Etruscan constructions: only a little anticipation<sup>222</sup> of the incredible "Rocca Paolina" symbol of the Pope<sup>WForm</sup> power and nowadays used as an exposition site<sup>WChoice</sup>. Along the streets<sup>WOrder</sup> every restaurant invites you to taste the best truffles and cold meat ever<sup>GoodWordChoice</sup>, of course not forgetting red wine.

Umbrian<sup>Sing/Plu</sup> are really proud about<sup>Collocation</sup> their treasure<sup>9</sup> so that they promote the city<sup>GoodWordChoice</sup> with a lot of interesting manifestations<sup>WChoice</sup> such as "Eurochocolate" which takes place every October and let<sup>VForm</sup> {\*}WChoice people discover another sweet secret of the city: Perugia chocolate, one of the most {\*}MissingW sold all over Italy. Umbria Jazz is another great bargain<sup>WChoice</sup> during {\*}MissingW summer holydays<sup>WForm</sup> in which<sup>Wrong register</sup> a lot of artists delight people with their music<sup>GoodWordChoice</sup>.

So what are you waiting for? The green heart is waiting for you!

1. Link attributive adjectives with a comma.
2. I'm not sure what you mean here? Do you mean "pass"?
3. Why would "main" be better than "principal"?



# Seven “Secrets” to Improving Pronunciation

Todd Alden Marshall – Mohawk Valley Community College, Utica, USA

## Abstract

The importance of incorporating pronunciation in the ESL<sup>1</sup> curriculum is highly underrated. Teachers tend to shy away from pronunciation activities. On the one hand, for most teachers, it is a matter of time management and curriculum requirements that force pronunciation to be pushed back or pushed out of the ESL classroom experience. For others, it is the belief that pronunciation must be taught in a formal, time-consuming manner that tests their abilities and skills. On the other hand, students need pronunciation instruction and welcome the opportunity to work on theirs. From my experience, ESL students look forward to the opportunity to improve their pronunciation to converse better with native speakers and teachers in the academic setting. Most students would welcome 3-5-minute mini-lessons that could help them communicate more effectively. Therefore, the knowledge that students want and need pronunciation practice should be a catalyst to inspire teachers to begin to find ways to incorporate

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1 In North American high schools, colleges, and universities the broadly accepted term English as second language (ESL) is an all-inclusive term used to describe many forms of American English instruction. ESL encompasses other common terminology such as English as a foreign language (EFL); English for speakers of other languages (ESOL); English as an additional language (EAL); and the recently adopted English as a new language (ENL), accepted mainly in American High Schools. In addition, the term Intensive English Program (IEP) is mainly used in colleges and universities where the goal is to offer a condensed, accelerated program of study that allows diligent, academic-driven students to begin taking college courses for credit sooner. The term *IEP* is most closely associated with the term *English for academic purposes* (EAP), used in many colleges and universities outside North America. Considering the variety of preferences that educational institutions at different levels may have, this paper addresses instructors at all levels of teaching English to non-native speakers, focusing mainly on those teaching in college or universities. More specifically, this paper refers to any study of American English as ESL, when the goal is to improve communication skills and/or to further education.



pronunciation instruction time in their classes. The good news is that teachers do not have to devote hours teaching pronunciation, but, just by allotting a few minutes a day to pronunciation activities, they can give ESL students the tools and resources needed to make continued progress on their own. This paper will uncover seven so-called “secrets” educated speakers of English internally understand and can pass on to their ESL students. It also illustrates pronunciation teaching techniques that can be covered quickly without sacrificing vital classroom time.

## 1. The Dilemma

The discussion surrounding the teaching of pronunciation has certainly been lively over the past few decades, and a collective affirmation for a more visible presence of pronunciation in the ESL classroom has been gaining continuous momentum and ground. There seems to be no shortage of research and literature on the subject. Grammarians and other scholars have contributed copious amounts of books, papers, and resourceful online materials, underscoring the importance of teaching pronunciation. Furthermore, many teachers at schools, colleges, and universities agree that pronunciation needs a more prominent status across the curriculum. Fraser (1999) states that “the pendulum has swung back again, and more ESL teachers now agree that explicit pronunciation teaching is an essential part of language courses” (para. 1). The fact that teaching pronunciation has become more of a topic of discussion in ESL research and literature highlights the need for more pronunciation instruction.

Current thinking in research supports Fraser’s understanding of the importance of pronunciation. In an article focused on adult learners, Schaetzel and Low (2009) claim that “recent research has shed light on pronunciation features to be taught and on learner’s goals and motivations for improving pronunciation. By incorporating current research and its implications into their teaching practice, teachers can help learners gain skills they need for effective communication in English” (para. 1). All ESL teachers’ involvement in teaching pronunciation is perceived by some ESL scholars as part of the solution to the overall lack of pronunciation instruction.

ESL teachers must see beyond grades and tests in grammar and writing so as to see that students must be able to communicate effectively. Such communication goes beyond the classroom or campus. American students want to be understood at work, while running errands (shopping, banking, etc.), and dealing with social services, or medical emergencies. Furthermore, many students are called upon to be translators for their parents and must communicate effectively with nurses and doctors. So, correct pronunciation also has its benefits in practical ways that are important for our students outside of academia.

Consequently, with all this justification for increasing pronunciation activities in our ESL curriculum, how is it that pronunciation has yet to receive the consideration and attention that it deserves? True, there are teachers making an earnest effort to include pronunciation in their curricula, and many schools and universities even have separate pronunciation classes. It is encouraging to see that pronunciation is being given some level of consideration in curricula. Nonetheless, there still seems to be a sizeable schism between what is perceived to be the crucial role of pronunciation and how that perception is transferred into practical classroom lessons that teachers can easily offer students. In short, we have enough literature on the matter, but we do not have enough well-established pronunciation classes or lessons with teacher-student-friendly materials. How do we bridge the gap between the recognized benefit of pronunciation instruction and the actual implementation of it in the classroom? How can we break through the noteworthy plethora of literature to equip teachers with genuine pronunciation skills that they feel comfortable with and students find beneficial?

Students need assistance from their teachers in honing their pronunciation skills. Not understanding and not being understood can create an accumulation of frustrating and embarrassing experiences that often weaken a students' determination and drive to improve their English pronunciation. Sometimes students are already aware that their pronunciation leaves much to be desired. These discouraging thoughts can further negatively affect their communication skills. Gilakjani (2012) states “we judge people by the way they speak,

and so learners with poor pronunciation may be judged as incompetent, uneducated or lacking in knowledge” (p. 96).

Many students come to my class with the attitude that they simply cannot improve or change the way they speak. They have fallen into a pronunciation rut. Students must understand that the goal is not to speak perfectly, but to improve their overall mutual intelligibility. Once teachers focus more on the needs of the students, they will overcome any concerns or fears that they have about broaching the subject of pronunciation. A handbook for teachers and trainers by the Commonwealth Department of Education (2001) sheds light on the issue when it states:

One of the main problems found by this report is lack of confidence among teachers as to how to teach pronunciation, stemming from their own lack of training in this area. Yet many teachers really wish to be able to help learners with this crucial aspect of language. (p. 5)

So, the goal of this paper is not only to advocate for pronunciation to be taught in classes, but also to give support to teachers who are doing so and help build confidence for those teachers that want to, but simply do not know how or where to start.

## 1.1 The Challenge

While languages are not 100% phonetic, most languages do have a relatively close relationship between letters and sounds. This means that once you learn the alphabet, you are able to read the words of the language, even if you cannot understand them. Again, this is because what you see is what you read. On the contrary, the spoken and written forms of English are strikingly different. The English spelling system does not accurately reflect the spoken language. One of the reasons why pronunciation needs to be a part of English language instruction is that English orthography and English phonology are worlds apart. As educated speakers, we understand this fact and have consciously (through any formal learning we had in grade school) or subconsciously (through any spelling conventions or rules we have internalized) developed an

understanding in various degrees of the two forms of representing English. Tapping into this natural resource and making students aware of our thought-process and insights into English has been a substantial catalyst for the “secrets” in this paper. The purpose of this paper is to give students what we naturally know, supplying them with what they need to start taking more responsibility for their role in mastering pronunciation. McCrocklin (2013) highlights this point when she acknowledges that “students need strategies, skills, and tools that empower them to experiment with pronunciation, without relying on the teacher for constant monitoring and feedback, tools that will help students become more autonomous as pronunciation learners” (p. 18).

To sound more native-like when speaking, students eventually must comprehend at some point in their acquisition of English that there are really two independent forms of English they are learning. Without this fundamental awareness, their pronunciation will continue to be falsely misguided by the spelling conventions of English. In speaking about the spoken and written forms of English, Vacek (1973) states that “any language user belonging to a cultured language community should have an equally good command of both norms of the language concerned, because only then will he [*sic*] be able to exploit the systemic possibilities of the language to the full” (p. 16).

Even armed with a recognition of this reality, the teaching of pronunciation tends to sit on the back burner in an ESL curriculum. It is rarely a focus and often totally neglected. I believe that pronunciation needs to reach the same level of attention as reading and grammar do. Only then will it be constantly on the radar of teachers and students alike. Pronunciation affects all areas of ESL students’ academic lives. Students must learn to speak well when put into groups or pair work, and they must have correct pronunciation when they go to the registrar, library, advising, and other college services if they want to be understood. Students are often required to give class speeches or presentations in academic classes at North American colleges and universities. Many ESL students come to me for help on pronouncing words that they need in their presentations. They also confess that teachers and other students do not always understand them when they speak. Given all of the scenarios where

and ESL student's pronunciation is key to understanding and communicating well, it is amazing that more pronunciation courses are not taught. If students are to reap the full benefits of communication in all their courses and academic life, then pronunciation must become a visible and active part of the ESL curriculum.

Incorporating elements of pronunciation in the ESL classroom has never been an issue of extreme debate. As stated earlier, teachers and students both see the value of having pronunciation practice at some point in the ESL curriculum. The issue has never been about whether to teach pronunciation or not. Most teachers could clock unlimited and untold hours they have contributed to helping students with their pronunciation. The real issue has been and continues to be deciding when and how to teach pronunciation. For most teachers, it is a matter of time management and curriculum requirements that force pronunciation to be placed on low priority or removed entirely from the ESL classroom experience. More accurately, many teachers are hoping that somehow, someday students are getting the help they need with their pronunciation.

## 1.2 Too Little, Too Late

When pronunciation is taught formally, it is often reduced to a one-semester class, where the teacher is expected to address all the difficulties students have been having with pronunciation. I teach a pronunciation course (Pronunciation Course SL120) at my community college. I enjoy teaching this class and seeing how students focus and make serious effort to improve their pronunciation. However, the first mistake is that this course is offered to students after they have completed the ESL program, and just before students begin taking academic classes for credit. The second mistake is that it is optional, undermining the purpose for the course, which is to ensure that our students improve their pronunciation as they move into regular academic classes at Mohawk Valley Community College or transfer to a four-year college. It is also designed to help those who are or will be employed and need help communicating with their managers and co-workers. The unfortunate fact is that

many students fall through the cracks and end up missing out on the opportunity. Also, some international students, who would not necessarily benefit from taking ESL classes, are still in dire need of improving their pronunciation. Offering more ESL courses earlier in pronunciation and making it a requirement would prove to be extremely beneficial for all ESL students in the long run.

While the goals of our Pronunciation Class are admirable, the execution is ill-timed. I often must break through many fossilized inaccuracies and trivial blunders the students have unknowingly adopted over the last four semesters. For example, students mispronounce words with the American *r* in them, such as *work*, *bird*, *heard*, and *church*. They tend to pronounce the vowel sound before the American [r], making four distinct vowel sound combinations with the American [r]. They are quite shocked when they learn that the vowel and [r] combination in these words is pronounced the same. As I teach correct pronunciation, I must also weed out erroneous paradigms, shatter genuine misperceptions, and destroy deep-rooted habits. For example, many students pronounce the *ed* sound in all past tense verbs. So, while saying *wanted* and *needed* with two syllables is correct because the root ending of the verbs are [t] and [d], this rule does not apply to verbs whose roots end with something other than [t] or [d]. Students say things like, "I talked to him," where the word *talked* is said with two syllables, instead of one. Another example is the *schwa* sound, which sounds like [uh] in the second syllable of the word *soda*. Most students do not understand that unstressed vowels in American English are reduced to the schwa. The word *tomato* in most American English vernacular sounds like *tuh MAY tuh*. There are three syllables with the stress on the second syllable, *may*. These are minor vocal infractions that could have been addressed semesters ago, but now have become a part of the students' everyday speech habits that are hard to break.

My colleagues often inquire if I am working on the students' pronunciation of the past tense or covering any number of phonemes that students are mispronouncing in their classes. I sincerely welcome the suggestions and advice from my colleagues. However, for all the challenging work that I do in my pronun-

ciation classes, my class is not a panacea for all the ESL pronunciation problems. Although I accept the challenge to improve students' pronunciation in 16 weeks, it is not enough time to make even the slightest dent in their actual pronunciation because the students come to me too late. I do think they walk away with a more conscious awareness of American English pronunciation. Nevertheless, from what I hear in the hallways, and before and after classes have started, my eleventh-hour assistance has had little effect on most students' day-to-day speaking practices.

Then there are those conscientious students who ask me why there was no offer to help them improve their pronunciation semesters earlier. I understand their frustration. It does make me wonder: Would there be one grammar class to deal with all the issues that students are having with grammar? Would one reading class be offered to cover all the issues that students have with their reading? Like grammar and reading, teaching pronunciation must be taught in a multi-level, cross-curriculum manner. Perhaps not as complex as English grammar, but pronunciation covers a wide-range of segmental and supra-segmental features from phonemes, to words, to linking, to word and sentence stress, to intonation. With all the intricate aspects of pronunciation, I believe it would be more effective to teach pronunciation as we do grammar, teaching it based on levels from basic to advanced. Perhaps formal instruction of pronunciation with several levels would be more helpful for students and easier for teachers. This leads to the question of when and how pronunciation could be taught.

### 1.3 Hope on the Horizon

The reality is that teaching pronunciation need not be a daunting, dreaded task. Teachers can learn how to present pronunciation in a practical way that will not overtax students' abilities. The specific information needed to teach pronunciation effectively can start out minimally and gradually increase as the teacher gains more knowledge and confidence. Students really need very little instruction to make progress in improving their pronunciation. Teachers can unhurriedly train themselves on the basic concepts of pronunciation and slowly introduce them to their students as needed. The focus would not be to

become an expert, but to be able to see a student’s needs and address them in a timely and beneficial way. There are manuals, books, handbooks (Commonwealth Department of Education, 2001), and articles online and in print to equip teachers with necessary tools to teach a pronunciation lesson. (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996). Teachers can quickly cover relevant issues in pronunciation without sacrificing classroom time.

Teachers across the ESL curriculum must make pronunciation important and transmit this importance to their students. This paper encourages teachers to seek practical ways to enhance the language experience and their lesson plans with time for pronunciation activities. As Pesce (2017) has noted, “effective communication is a two-way street. ESL students must understand others when they speak English. But they must also make themselves understood. For ESL students who struggle with pronunciation, this is easier said than done. Which is why it is essential for you as an ESL teacher to include pronunciation practice in the course syllabus, and not merely correct pronunciation mistakes on the fly.”

We know that first impressions can be indelible. We have all been judged at one time or another according to the way we talk and pronounce words, especially in an academic setting. Consequently, our ESL students must see that improving pronunciation undeniably helps them to communicate more effectively. What do we know subconsciously that we can pass on to our students to help them in this endeavor? In this paper, I am offering seven effective and productive methods of improving a student’s overall pronunciation that I have personally implemented over the past few years with some success. Some of these methods are recycled concepts with a fresh perspective and twist. Indeed, teaching pronunciation really can be stress-free when the focus is creating exercises that are manageable and entertaining. Teaching pronunciation can be simple, practical, effective, and enjoyable!



## 2. Secret One: Raise the Ability to Make Accurate Predictions with the International Phonetic Alphabet

Secret One involves raising a student's ability to make accurate predictions by increasing extrapolative skills. The ability to infer, conject, and guess in L2 acquisition is fundamental in increasing language proficiency. It helps L2 learners to relate to language more like native speakers. Native speakers have a naturally high level of predicting the spelling of a word when they hear it and the pronunciation of a word when they see it. This is so because we have spent years learning how to spell, read, write, and speak English. Much of this ability comes from coding and decoding segments of sound and spelling that have become a part of our subconscious knowledge of how our language works. Vacek (1973) asked and answered the following question about consciousness:

How do we classify some orthographic systems as easy or difficult? This question may be somewhat clarified if we recall what was said above of the coexistence of the two norms, spoken and written, in the consciousness of every member of a given language community who, as we put it, must be able, if need be, to switch over from the one norm to the other. (p. 52)

The challenge is to get our students to be more aware of their pronunciation by telling them what we ourselves have learned about English pronunciation.

Tapping into and sharing this invaluable storehouse of knowledge will be of profound assistance to ESL students as they continue to develop their phonemic awareness as L2 learners—the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate phonemes. Students need to improve their ability to accurately guess the pronunciation and spelling of new words they encounter. Predictive skills are an essential part of language learning, but to cultivate predictive skills students must make use of the available building blocks intrinsic in the language. Students must learn to see the connected relationships that exist within the language. Chard, Pikulski, and Templeton (2000) state that:

In order to understand that there is an orderly relationship, learners must be aware of sounds, or phonemes, of the spoken form of the language (phonemic awareness),

and they must become very familiar with the letters of the alphabet (orthographic familiarity). (p. 1)

In time students can learn to predict sounds, a skill that they also need in other areas of study. Avery and Ehrlich (1992) make the point that:

Listeners as well as speakers need to be shown how guessing plays a role in understanding. Prediction is as central to spoken contexts as it is to reading. As in reading, incorrect predictions are a normal part of the process of sorting out meaning. (p. 234)

In addition, Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (1996) refer to the teacher’s role in teaching pronunciation stating:

It is important for ESL teachers to understand the correspondences between English phonology and English orthography so they can teach their learners (1) how to predict pronunciation of a word given its spelling and (2) how to come up with a plausible spelling for a word given its pronunciation. (p. 269)

Raising the ability to make accurate predictions about what a word or stretch of speech sound like is a common objective of all teachers. If this objective is clear, then it will influence the way we talk about pronunciation and the way we incorporate it in all our classes. There might be some obstacles that need to be overcome, but we need to start somewhere. Like the mouse with a huge block of cheese in front of it, we must encourage our students to just start nibbling. Furthermore, rather than viewing the task of teaching pronunciation as daunting and overwhelming, teachers just need to start teaching it no matter how competent we feel. To that end, teachers need a reliable tool that would allow them to start talking about pronunciation. What could assist teachers in raising students’ ability to make predictions when it comes to pronunciation? What would help students to be exposed quickly to the details of English sounds that could help them focus entirely on pronunciation? The answer lies in the International Phonetic Alphabet.

## 2.1 A Little Help from the IPA

The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is like a phonics crash course for our ESL students. It can be a visual bridge between the written and the spoken forms. Learning IPA helps students to hear and see how the words are pronounced. IPA is a tool that gives students the ability to *catch up* and quickly raise their ability to make predictions. It removes the heartache of using spelling to help with sound and focuses on a sound system designed to help with distinguishing and reading these sounds. IPA also helps to distinguish spelling and pronunciation because it offers a visual insight into English. It allows students to isolate sounds, understand them individually, and manipulate them.

Atkielski (2005) uses a pertinent analogy when he says that “the relationship between phonetic transcription and spoken language is very similar to that between a printed musical score and a musical performance” (para. 2). When someone is learning to sing, the musical notes provide an excellent tool to assist the learner in *seeing* the key and key changes, notes and note-lengths, pace, loudness, and chords, all of which improves the overall singing. IPA provides similar cues that help the student to see the smaller segments of words and focus on them to improve their overall pronunciation. Verner (2017) highlights this point when she states:

I am a firm believer that every ESL student should know the phonetic alphabet. Rather than depending on spelling, it is used to transcribe the exact sounds in English words. Students who know the phonetic alphabet and whose teachers use it get additional input when they are learning the correct pronunciation of words. They not only hear the correct pronunciation, but they see it, too. Phonetic transcriptions show students, even those who are struggling to hear the correct pronunciation, exactly how an English word is supposed to sound.

Celce-Murcia (1996) adds:

In most language classrooms, it is not essential that the students be able to transcribe words themselves; however, the ability to read phonemic transcriptions will

enable the student to comprehend the elements of pronunciation visually as well as aurally. (p. 40)

Even when students make errors as they use the IPA system, it allows them to compare their mistakes with the correct pronunciation in bitesize portions that are visible and easy to discern. In addition, IPA helps students to see the differences in spelling and sound in homophones *won* [wʌn] and *one* [wʌn]; homographs: *read* [rid] and *read* [red]; stressed and reduced unstressed vowels: [ˈkʌnflikt] and [kənˈflikt]; voiced and voiceless endings: *rote* [rout] and *road* [roud]; and [haus] noun and [hauz] verb; and phrasing and linking, such as *an ice boy* [ən aɪs bɔɪ] and *a nice boy* [ə naɪs bɔɪ]. These examples point out the practical benefits that the IPA system can give to students.

Most of all, IPA helps to raise student pronunciation awareness which in turn increases students’ ability to make predictions. Lintunen (2013) conducted a study that focused on a comparison of a student’s pronunciation and a self-evaluation of their pronunciation. Lintunen concluded that:

Phonetic teaching is an essential part of EFL teaching as it raises the learners’ awareness of the target language sound system and the phonological forms of words. When it comes to the explicit teaching of pronunciation skills and phonetics, it seems that by focusing on the sound systems and individual phonemes learners also start evaluating their pronunciation accordingly. (p. 58)

Making students aware of what they are doing well in pronunciation and areas where they need to improve is essential if we want them to continue to improve. IPA plays a vital role in helping students become aware of pronunciation. It allows them to distinguish and manipulate the sound system and brings them a tangible, concrete tool that they can continue to use throughout their academic lives and beyond.

### 3. Secret Two: Weave Pronunciation into Your Lesson Plans

Secret Two focuses on anticipating pronunciation errors and preparing mini-lessons in advance. Start early in your classes introducing and showing the importance of correct pronunciation to students. The more students are exposed to tips that improve their pronunciation, the more likely they are to remember and apply those tips. Perfection or sounding like a native is not the goal. However, sounding more native-like is. Regular pronunciation practice helps learners to develop their own hypotheses and gut-feeling for English pronunciation, something experts and researchers have long emphasized as an essential skill of a good language learner. Teachers should carefully consider weaving pronunciation lessons and tasks into regular classes when it is fitting and most effective. Therefore, teachers should teach pronunciation when needed instead of randomly, since teaching pronunciation randomly has little overall effect. So, discover what areas of pronunciation your students need and, then plan accordingly. When teachers are alert to pronunciation issues that arise in their classes, it becomes easier to prepare mini-lessons tailored to the needs of the class. While some pronunciation errors are more common among most ESL students, some errors may only show up in a particular class, especially when many students are from similar language backgrounds. So, an ESL teacher would have a resource of mini-lessons that covered errors that most students make. In addition, they would prepare mini-lessons for those errors they hear ESL students make in their classes. I often work on pronunciation on a word in my reading classes. One way I do this is to have the students repeat the word or phrase, even if I am correcting one or two students with that problem. This way no one student is singled out for mispronouncing any word. This drill exercise takes less than 30 seconds, but the results can be amazing. I have had students tell me that they appreciate being able to pronounce words correctly in class. This drill exercise also helps students to remember the correct pronunciation. Often the word will appear again in a reading and a student will pronounce the word correctly, often after self-correction. This and other pronunciation tips are essential for giving pronunciation its suitable place in ESL.

For example, when a teacher is teaching the simple past in English, this might be the opportune time to have a quick mini-lesson on the three pronunciation differences there are in the regular past tense. [/t/, and /d/, and /ɪd/]. Another example is when new vocabulary is being introduced in a reading class. Why not take a few minutes to have students repeat the words together? This will give students immediate feedback on their pronunciation. Many students have stilted vocabulary growth simply because they do not know how to pronounce words. From my experience, students often do not recognize words they know because they do not know how the word should be pronounced. Teachers might find students have more confidence using the new words in speaking and in discussions with their peers if they have been given a chance to *linger* on the pronunciation of the new vocabulary a bit. Often teachers do not understand why student do not remember words. However, it is important not only to teach vocabulary, but to ensure that students have proper pronunciation. Zielinki and Yates (2014) argue that “it makes little sense to immerse beginning learners in to the grammar and vocabulary of English but leave them to struggle on their own with the pronunciation” (p. 59).

Likewise, in listening and speaking classes students might enjoy reviewing new words orally that they will use in speeches, class presentations, and class discussions. Again, boosting their level of confidence will no doubt encourage them to make use of the new words when possible. Incorporating pronunciation skills activities in our classes can give students the tools that will create self-awareness and self-production and students will benefit the most when the teaching of pronunciation is both timely and effective.

#### 4. Secret Three: Include Memorization Techniques

Secret Three centers on a fresh viewpoint of *deliberate* memorization. The idea is that students are asked to memorize the pronunciation of words that they will need in discussions, pair work, or presentations. It might also be words they will read in a reading class. The goal of memorization in this way is not merely to retain information for a test or to be reiterated in a closed exercise.

The goal is to transfer and apply the memorized information into other settings and situations. This involves analytic and critical thinking. In these instances, students see first-hand the effects of good pronunciation. In turn, using correct pronunciation becomes a fundamental interest of our students in all aspects of their learning (Mayer, 2002, p. 227).

Memorization has its place in the ESL classroom. We recognize the importance of memorization as native speakers, but why do we hesitate to use it as another tool to help students with their pronunciation? How many times a day on average do we commit things to memory? Many of us memorize a shopping list, addresses, phone numbers, and passwords, just to name a few. How many mnemonic ways have you practiced remembering a name? This way of using memory is positive because it has a definite purpose. I want to memorize my students' names, not just so that I can say them properly, but so that I can show respect to the student and make a personal connection with them. Indeed, when memorization is connected to a task or a purpose, then it is more meaningful. Students can see the value in having good pronunciation.

Memorization can help students learn to internalize the differences between written and spoken language. In this sense, they can become more native-like in their approach to the language. For example, educated speakers have memorized a lot of words. Think of all the words that you have memorized the spelling of. Try to spell *thorough*, *parallel*, *committee* or *rhyme*! No doubt memorization played a large role in you being able to spell those words. If we tried to spell words based entirely on sound, we would be no better off than our students! One use of memorization that I have used in the past is to give the students 10 words a week that they must memorize. I record the words on an online recording system that allows the students to see the pitch and volume of the word they are learning. They can record their own voice and see how close they can get to my recording. I will use these words throughout the week and incorporate them in lectures, discussions, and homework assignments. These are not just a random list of ten words, but ten words that I want the students to know in order for them to apply them on different occasions when the opportunity presents itself.

Here are a few more tips. Write key words on the board and have students repeat them. Repeat key words that will be in upcoming speeches. Give students a list of words they have mispronounced and tell them they will have a spelling quiz. You will be surprised how many students love the opportunity to focus on spelling. It is like a dictation, and they get to focus on pronunciation and spelling, something they rarely get the chance to do.

Have students write 5–10 essential words from a reading or exercise on a scratch sheet of paper, say them aloud and have the students repeat. Next have the students write the words down again without looking, and then write the words on the board. I call these spelling checks. Spelling checks tie in well with memorization because it quickly tests a student’s knowledge, but gently reminds them that correct spelling and pronunciation are important. It also reminds the students of important words that you are asking them to learn. I do spelling checks if I have a few minutes at the end of class or to get things started at the beginning of class. These activities can take up little time, but the lasting benefits are immeasurable.

Create a list of core words for your class that you would like students to know by the end of the class. You can attach the words to your syllabus. As students learn the words they can check them off. Use the words as much as possible on tests and in class. From time to time encourage the students to see how many words they have learned. Go over the pronunciation of these words repeatedly and reward students for using them in their speaking and writing assignments.

One more key that will assist memorization is learning *roots*. Educated speakers know their roots. We can master many vocabulary words because the segments of the words remind us of their meaning. We must pass this gem on to our students. When the situation presents itself, write a root and root words on the board and give a mini-lesson on their pronunciation. For example, you could give students the root *dict* and give them a short list of words they know such as: *dictation*, *dictator*, *dictatorship*, *dictionary*, *predict*, *predictable*, and *verdict*. Say the words with the stress. Ask students if they know any other words with this root. Teach students the importance of compiling a journal of roots and



words that they are learning in class. Have them record the pronunciation of those roots. Give mini-lessons on pronunciation where students can practice them in the safe environment of your classroom. In this way you will be empowering the students to see roots more in their studies, and to predict how those roots are pronounced in unfamiliar words. It is also a great tool for raising their ability to make predictions. Keep reminding students that this is how native speakers increase their vocabulary. Root learning along with pronunciation instruction will quickly boost a student's ability to read and understand, not to mention the fact that their storehouse of vocabulary will quickly increase.

Educated speakers use memorization techniques as a way of gaining, organizing, and retaining information, and so can learners of English. Memorization has its place. Share this with your students and they will see the importance of memorization too.

## 5. Secret Four: Repetition Really is the Mother of Learning

Secret Four is all about drilling. It is closely connected to memorization, but the focus is more on repetition of pronunciation. If repetition is the mother of learning, then why do we no longer have more repetition in our classes? I enjoy spending a few minutes every day just drilling key words or phrases in my pronunciation class. First, it just gets their tongues moving and provides immediate feedback. They know that they are mispronouncing the sounds and they try harder to imitate my pronunciation. In drilling sessions, students get to focus on a few phonemes and/or minimal pairs which allows them to think about and analyze their own pronunciation and where they might need improvement. Lintunen (2013) agrees: "The role of consciousness, becoming aware or noticing certain features of the target language, is important in language learning." This is also referred to as "awareness-raising" (p. 55).

Drilling can be used as a warm-up exercise before moving on to a more serious task. It is like warming up the body before a heavy workout. Also, the shy or

the less confident students can participate in this activity because they can blend in with the whole class. It provides a few minutes for them to focus just on the accuracy of a word. You might be surprised to see how much the students respond to this activity when it is simple and well-prepared. Dictations are a great technique for drilling as well. Nilsen and Nilsen (2010) claim that “dictation exercises also provide good opportunities for error analysis in which you think and talk about why a student wrote one word instead of another” (p. 2).

I often give weekly dictation tasks that review the material and vocabulary we have gone over that week. It gives students the chance to hear, identify, and manipulate the spelling and sounds of English. It also allows them to revisit key vocabulary.

To further assist our students, new words can be accompanied by the IPA forms next to them, such as *business* [bɪznɪs]. Give students a list of words from your class and have them look up the IPA in the dictionary. Then have students record these words (repeating each word twice) and then send the recording to you for a weekly or bi-weekly grade. You can also find exercises in your pronunciation books that you can assign as a weekly recording. Students love these bite size recordings because they get to focus on one or two phonemes repeatedly, and they feel a sense of accomplishment when they send in their polished recordings.

You may also find it advantageous to invite students to come to your office to discuss issues that they are having personally and offer them an exercise tailored for them. I call these 5-7-minute meetings in my office *mini-conferences*. I try to address a problem or two that each student is having. I also take the time to see if they have any questions or concerns about their pronunciation. This may be a kind way to address issues that only a few students might be having. We might do some drilling exercises right then in my office. Drilling should always be relevant and quick! It is meant to jaunt the memory and to stimulate the brain. From my personal experience in teaching, drilling also reminds students that correct pronunciation is important! They know that when I am drilling, the exercise is to review, highlight a reoccurring problem,

or prompt their attention for an item on an upcoming test or quiz. I also use drilling to prepare them for upcoming recording assignments. From my experience, students willingly participate in drill exercises when they understand the reason or purpose for them. So, ESL teachers will need to make it clear why such drill exercises are important and beneficial for the students.

I like to see if students can recognize patterns and become aware of exceptions. Pattern recognition exercises can be given as homework assignments, giving students time to ponder and search for patterns they would not normally see. I also like to point out patterns in pronunciation. For example, when stress often dictates if the word is a verb or a noun: CONflict-noun and conFLICT-verb; REcord-noun and reCORD-verb; INcrease-noun and inCREASE-verb. When students see patterns, then they will most likely predict with greater precision new words that they encounter.

## 6. Secret Five: Teach Students to Recognize Patterns

Secret Five is an extension of Secret One and the introduction of the IPA in that it focuses on pattern awareness and recognition, but it is about increasing students' ability to predict the pronunciation of new words autonomously, that is, without the aid of teacher-provided insight. After using memorization and drill techniques, students should ideally begin to recognize patterns. However, this is not necessarily the case. We must continually highlight stress patterns and create awareness. Celce-Murcia (1996, pp. 131–173) presents a variety of ways to help students to see patterns in pronunciation. While the tools used to improve pronunciation are centered on getting students to pronounce words correctly, the goal of pronunciation is to get students to predict sounds and learn to apply this knowledge to new words. To that end, students can be introduced to mini-lessons that offer snippets of language that can be handled in less than five minutes to give the students something solid and practical to build up their ability to make predictions. Morley (1994, pp. 26–28) offers the pattern in Example 1.

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VC+e	<i>slate</i>	<i>hate</i>	<i>mate</i>	<i>rate</i>	<i>fate</i>
VC#	<i>slat</i>	<i>hat</i>	<i>mat</i>	<i>rat</i>	<i>fat</i>

---

Example 1 – Pattern snippet

In this example, students can clearly see the connection between the final vowel *e* and how it alters the *a* sound. A simple example such as this is easy to understand and provides a visual tool as well. This simple exercise can give the students a solid basis for analyzing new words like this in the future. Morley (1994) calls this “empowerment.” When we give students the proper tools, we empower them to continue to use these tools on their own long after pronunciation classes are over. Morley (1994) emphasizes the importance of teaching pronunciation when she says, “The best teaching is the teaching that meets needs. Teaching to empower students in pronunciation is not only a reasonable aim for instruction, but, because it meets the students’ needs, it should be an obligatory one” (p. 30).

## 7. Secret Six: Use Practical Exercises

Secret Six involves giving students practical exercises that foster learning and productive outcome. Think about what students need, and create an exercise that will help resolve the issue. Understanding how to pronounce words can come from a variety of clues. It can come directly from context, it can be the length of a vowel, or mouth and lip movement. In the exercise below, students learn to differentiate between minimal vowel pairs. The position of a student’s mouth when producing these words can make a world of difference. The shape of the mouth when saying “caller” is more oval-shaped than saying “collar,” which requires a fully-opened mouth. Students can benefit a lot from using their mouths (sometimes exaggeratingly) to distinguish between minimal pairs. We ask students to use a mirror or their cell phones to see if they are moving their mouths appropriately. The visual aid in Example 2 helps them to see and manipulate their mouths to mimic the sounds.

I also have given students *small talk tasks* that require them to speak to native speakers. It gets the students talking to people outside of the classroom. This is helpful because classmates and teachers are very forgiving. In the task below (Example 3), students get to focus on two things: short/long vowels and voiced/voiceless endings. The native speaker also gets a copy and is told to respond only if it is not clear. They are asked not to help or coach the student, and they are asked to sign the paper. Students enjoy it when other people understand their English. It is quite motivating. They also get immediate feedback from a native speaker who might not fully understand them. Students are highly motivated to want to sound more like native peers.

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*I didn't like the old collar/caller.*

*The bus/boss was loud today.*

*These cups/cops are dirty.*

*Here's a nut/note.*

*I wander/wonder all the time.*

---

Example 2 – Minimal pairs

Listening exercises can also provide excellent feedback on pronunciation. Students often freeze up when they are doing listening exercises. They often write nothing because they cannot spell a word. This causes them to suffer greatly in listening comprehension and note-taking exercises. To get students in the mindset of just writing down what they hear, I use this exercise in three steps. Step One: Students go home, listen, and write exactly what they hear from a provided audio recording. I do not count spelling. I am trying to teach students to hear the words and not focus on spelling at this point. I am also trying to prepare students for regular class with lectures. When students hear new words, they need to learn to write what they hear. Later, they can go and check spelling and meaning. However, if they have written nothing down, then they will be lost and not have a reference point to ask further questions. Even a misspelled word can be a point of reference in many instances. So, the students are asked to write down what they hear from the listening exercise.

Some students write down new words in IPA and then rewrite them in English afterwards. Step Two: Listen again in class. Step Three: Check spelling and review pronunciation. Example 4 is an example of a listening exercise.

### Task One

#### Student Copy {Go out of the classroom}

Read each word to your Native Speaker. You may have to repeat if they do not understand you. Please note how many times you had to repeat each sentence. Don't repeat any more after three times.

[g]	[k]	one	two	three
bag	back			
pig	pick			
sag	sack			
dug	duck			
rag	rack			

Have the Native Speaker underline what they think they hear you say. The native speaker does not have to say anything except for "Repeat Please" if they don't understand you.

#### Example 3 – Small talk task

I expect a variant of spelling errors. If they are close to the correct spelling, they get credit. They lose points or half points only if the spelling is way off or if the response has a grammatical error such as writing *overbook* when it is clearly *overbooked*. This exercise emphasizes the importance of writing down as closely as possible what they hear, a skill they will need in regular academic classes. It also forces students to engage in meaningful learning as they acquire the ability to bridge the gap between sounds and spelling.

*Hello. Passengers of flight 17 (1) \_\_\_ for Caracas, with stops in Atlanta and Miami. The (2) \_\_\_ gate has been changed to 30B. Also, there will be a (3) \_\_\_ departure delay due to (4) \_\_\_ weather outside. The ground (5) \_\_\_ is in the process of deicing the (6) \_\_\_ in preparation for departure. It also looks like the flight is slightly (7) \_\_\_, so we are offering (8) \_\_\_ round-trip tickets to a few passengers willing to take a (9) \_\_\_ flight. We should be boarding about a (10) \_\_\_ to the hour. Thank you for your patience.*

Answers: bound, departure, slight, inclement, crew, wings, overbooked, complimentary, later, quarter (Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab – For English as a Second Language)

Students' answers: bowned, depachur, slide, inklement, cru, wings or wins, overbook, complementary, late, quart

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Example 4 – Listening exercise

The next exercise (Example 5) is based on verb/noun stress patterns. Here is where context gives a clue. After a mini-lecture on homonyms with different stress patterns, students must mark the stress.

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1. *The numbers of international students coming to the US are increasing every year.*
  2. *There has been an increase in the number of sales over the past month.*
  3. *They got an upgrade on the flight.*
  4. *The men were suspects in the robbery of the local bank.*
  5. *There's a misprint in the book.*
- 

Example 5 – Verb/noun stress patterns

Students learn to recognize that context plays an important role in pronunciation. Just as context can reveal meanings of words, it can also reveal the way a word is pronounced. It is a profound lesson for a learner of English.

Also, the power of a video cannot be underestimated if the host shows you how to say words exactly. Here students get to mimic and exercise mouth movements. My favorite website for this is Rachel's English Page (<http://rachelsenglish.com/>) because she shows front and side positions of the mouth, lips, jaw, and teeth close up. This gives students a direct view of the position of their mouth when uttering certain vowels or consonants. This website is great for students who want help with a phoneme and need more guidance outside of the classroom. Teachers can just direct the student to the website and show them how to navigate through it in less than 3 minutes. It is extremely student-friendly.

These are just a few examples of practical exercises. The point is that these exercises have one purpose, they are short, and students quickly see the benefit. The more exercises of this nature are offered in class, the more our students will improve in their overall pronunciation.

## 8. Secret Seven: Make Pronunciation Enjoyable and Practical

Secret Seven involves having fun! Learning English through pronunciation can be enjoyable. It can create a relaxing atmosphere. How about a limerick? For their final project students in my pronunciation class must write their own limerick. They dread it at first, but when they understand it is supposed to be a simple, whimsical poem, they truly get creative and come up with some funny ones. I make it clear that the purpose is to demonstrate they understand sentence stress, rhyming, rhythm, and intonation. All of this is from a simple limerick. Egelberg (1999) points out:

The limerick is a light verse form that is appealing because of its humour, wordplay, rhythm.... The limerick is very regular, and each limerick follows the same rhythmic pattern. Because of this, limericks offer a clear example of how stress works in English. (p. 6)

Other poetry can also be of great help to students. This famous poem, for instance, about the dreadful English language covers information we have gone over in my pronunciation class:

*I take it you already know  
Of tough and bough and cough and dough?  
Others may stumble, but not you  
On hiccough, thorough, slough, and through.*

As part of their final project, students must record their reading of this poem. Students put so much work into it. They take pride in the fact that they can record it with minimal errors.



Tongue-twisters (Example 6) are another great way to start or end the class. Students love the challenge of learning them. I offer students bonus points for recording and sending them to me by a certain date. I am usually flooded with recordings towards the end of the semester. No doubt, tongue-twisters test pronunciation. However, they also test rhythm, stress, and intonation. I always urge students to choose ones that do not come easy to them to make it a challenge.

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*The thirty-three thieves thought that they thrilled the throne throughout Thursday.*

*I saw a kitten eating chicken in the kitchen*

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Example 6 – Tongue twisters

Example 7 is a great intonation exercise that I do each semester, which the students enjoy very much. Students receive a dialog that they cannot alter. Then they are given their respective roles. The only thing that can change is intonation and gestures. Give students a week or two to prepare. Such skits teach students the power of intonation (Celce-Murcia, 1996, pp. 122-124).

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*A: Hi, how are you?*

*B: Fine, thank you. And you?*

*A: Just great. What have you been doing lately?*

*B: Oh, not much. But I've been keeping busy.*

*A: Well...it's been good to see you.*

*B: Yes, it has...well, bye!*

*A: Goodbye.*

Roles to play: two old people who are all but deaf; two people who are angry at each other; two people who have met before, but can't remember where; two old friends who run into each other; and/or a detective and a criminal (Dave's ESL Café [www.eslcafe.com](http://www.eslcafe.com))

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Example 7 – Intonation skits

The class must guess the relationship between the students. It is a day of laughter and giggles, but students walk away remembering how important intonation is.

## 9. Conclusion

There are so many ways to incorporate pronunciation into our classroom teaching. When pronunciation is sporadically taught, students do not see its importance, nor are there lasting benefits. For pronunciation to be effective, it needs to be consistently present across the curriculum. When all ESL teachers take on the responsibility to teach pronunciation, then students will also view it as important.

By now it is clear that the secrets are not really secrets at all, but information and knowledge that we know but keep to ourselves. There are many more secrets to share with our students. What has helped you to improve your pronunciation in English or another language? What are some of the resources or materials that you can share? What have you considered to be an effective way to help a student’s pronunciation? Pass it on, do not keep it as a secret!

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## Authors

**Michela Canepari** works as an Associate Professor of English Linguistics and Translation at the University of Parma. Her research interests cover postcolonial, cultural, interlinguistic, and intersemiotic translation, and various branches of linguistics. Her publications include the books *Old-Myths – Modern Empires* (2005), *English and Postcolonial Translation* (2013), and *Working with Linguistics* (2017), as well as various articles and contributions in national and international journals. She is the editor-in-chief of the book series *Codici e segni* (Licosia) and *Glossae* (Athenaeum).

**Letizia Cirillo** is currently an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Siena. Her research interests include (interpreter-mediated) interaction in institutional settings, multimodal practices in spoken academic discourse, and corpus-aided translation and language learning. She has authored numerous contributions to international journals and edited collections, and has recently co-edited *Non-Professional Interpreting and Translation and Teaching Dialogue Interpreting: Research-based Proposals for Higher Education* (2017).

**Michael Joseph Ennis** is the Didactic and Scientific Coordinator for the English Language at the Language Centre of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano. He previously worked as a contract professor of English at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and the “Ca’ Foscari” University of Venice, where he primarily taught English for specific (academic) purposes. His interests include cultural studies, English for specific purposes, English for specific academic purposes, Content and language integrated learning, motivation, and intercultural language teaching.

**Valeria Fiasco** holds a master’s degree in Linguistics and has submitted her PhD dissertation in English Language and Translation at Roma Tre University. Her research interests include corpus linguistics, specialized languages, and lexicology.

**Sharon Hartle** works mainly at the University of Verona, where she is responsible, among other things, for teaching advanced levels of both general English and English for academic purposes at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels. She has also been involved in digital content development for several years, adopting a blended learning approach in her teaching. Combined with this, her two major research interests are assessment and learner autonomy.

**Todd Alden Marshall**, PhD, has been teaching pronunciation, advanced listening and speaking, and advanced composition in the English as a second language and intensive English programs, as well as French courses, at Mohawk Valley Community College in Utica, New York since 2012. His interests lie in second language acquisition, morphology, and discourse analysis. His recent research has been in pronunciation and effective teaching and pronunciation in early English L2 acquisition.

**Jemma Prior** has worked as an English for specific purposes and English for academic purposes lecturer at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano for over twenty years. Amongst other interests, she specialises in incorporating learner-centred approaches into her teaching, with an aim to providing her learners with as many practice opportunities as possible. She has recently completed her doctoral studies in this field, and her research interests also include discourse approaches to teaching, and language and gender.

**Karoline Steckley** is Director of the Associazione Italo Americana in Trieste, a non-profit language school and host institution of the American Corner Library. She holds a B.A. in French Language and Literature and an M.A. in Foreign Language and Literature from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She began teaching and translating in 1997 and has lived in Italy since 2003.

