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TEACHING ENGLISH FOR TOURISM STUDENTS
(ESP AND E-LEARNING)

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Abstract. The thesis shortly describes a module of online collaborative reading within a large class of students of English. Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) is an instructional practice combining cooperative learning and reading comprehension strategies.

Introduction. The paper describes the integration of online collaborative reading in a course about tourism discourse at the University of Turin. Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) allowed networking and improved the understanding of the texts used during the course. CSR is a well-known practice that combines cooperative learning and reading comprehension strategies. In this context, it improved the management of specialized and academic texts that require advanced language competence and basic knowledge of the profession. Students accessed the course on Moodle, which provided all the course material, e.g. readings, self-assessment grids, tests and recorded lectures. Moreover, Hemis and Moodle software(platforms) were used as an integrated Moodle tool to support pre-reading, brainstorming activities and the reading of texts themselves. Students were divided into small groups (max. five students) in parallel practice sessions. They read part of an academic paper describing tourism-related genres or a sample of a professional text and used Hemis to share annotations, ideas and comments within the group and with the rest of the class. As a post-reading activity, students were also asked to fill in a grid of analysis that will be illustrated in the following paragraphs to show typical behaviors. The integration of the three tools created a learning environment built online but is currently accessible to all the students enrolled as a MOOC inspired course for revision and self-study. We discuss the pros and cons of this practice having evaluated students' responses, comments, and notes. We believe that the concept of sharing is a motivating element in developing professional English. In particular, collaborative tasks lower anxiety that hinder students participation and performance. Hemis proved especially useful in managing the collaborative reading activities.

TEACHING TOURISM AS ESP. The teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) requires targeting students' level and, consequently, setting their goals to effectively select the course materials. Ideally, students should be at least B2 speakers with knowledge of the professional field sufficient to have a general understanding of the job and its communicative needs. In fact, students may have rather diverse levels of language and professional competence, especially in large courses, yet acknowledging diversity may stimulate student's collaboration rather than being an obstacle. In other words, diversity can be turned into a stimulus to overcome emotional issues and establish confidence. Therefore, students may be more likely to accept a challenging syllabus. In practice, discussing with students their background knowledge may create a more relaxed atmosphere where students feel free to ask for support and share. Collaborative activities can play a role in building confidence.

It aims at promoting mutual engagement through the cooperative reading of a complex text with or without teacher management. Students act roles and are responsible for construing one single aspect of text understanding. They focus on one task at a time and share their interpretation. In this way, they feel supported by peers and are not overwhelmed by the complexity of the whole text. A complex text presents lexical obstacles, complex grammatical and textual organization and needs metalinguistic competence to be understood. Students are asked to work out the content and bypass textual elements that may impair understanding depending on their level of fluency. Lexical density, morpho-syntactical complexity, implied knowledge, and length are obstacles that need to find appropriate strategies to avoid drop-outs. In this perspective, collaborative reading activities can help both in cognitive and linguistic terms to face the difficulty of professional readings. In general, an ESP course may address vocabulary and terminology or may focus on

broad communicative skills. Alternatively, it may focus on understanding professional genres and using linguistics to make sense of professional discourse. In the case of tourism, both perspectives are crucial given its multidimensional nature. Tourism communication draws from diverse settings, discourse communities and hence different genres − often hybrid genres. Tourism genres range from written legal/corporate documents, professional meetings, video-phone conversations, websites, and press releases along with tourist guides, brochures, emails, advertising texts, (e-)tickets, (phone/zoom/telegram) conversations, blogs, promotional videos, and reviews. The richness of tourism discourse needs a vast set of competencies and compels teachers to balance authenticity and readability.

As a matter of fact, authenticity is necessary for Tourism teaching as it prepares students to deal with a global, varied and unmediated language. They must be acquainted with the complexities of pragmatics, intercultural communication and discourse, i.e. they have to learn both the language for tourism and the language of tourism. Therefore, readings should be selected with a more holistic vision of tourism. Rather than starting from terminology, course planning should work on genres' overall structure and then develop a more analytical in-depth understanding of individual texts and vocabulary in context. Language for specific purposes can be engaging if focused on the analysis of professional genres in relation to a professional community, as aspects of pragmatics and genre conventions can be transferred and reused in other contexts and taken in as individual skills. In other words, students need to see that by learning specialized language and studying (tourism) genres, they are acquiring abilities such as reading that will impact them as this is deeply motivating.

Conclusion. Scholars note that students face reading problems in a foreign language because of a lack of reading methods and a lack of awareness and independence. As they rely on the teacher as in traditional lecturing, they are passive, which contradicts a core need of ESP teaching, i.e., being tailored to adults/ professional learning needs and participation. In the thesis examined, reading sessions stimulated comments, questions and encouraged a shared understanding of the texts. Students were asked to extract keywords, terminology, and concepts into the discussions of other readings for the course, thus building a net of ideas around the various genres analyzed in the tourism discourse frame. Reformulation of what was displayed in the academic readings also enabled students to develop their own authentic texts analysis. In this way, the course changed from being a mere knowledge provider to a collaborative learning environment.

In general, the distance learning setting slowed down the rhythm and allowed students to focus more on reading than in a classroom organized for traditional lecturing. The Hemis and moodle (platforms) setting, far from being an obstacle, favored cooperative work bypassing noise, static room facilities, and overall distractions that would hinder collaboration in a typical class. Hemis enabled a substantial sharing of information, allowing file annotation and note-taking, which, in practice, entailed a visualization of text structure and the partition of the text in its components. Therefore, we advocate for the integration of multiple tools to create an engaging learning environment.

Finally, the structure of the course was based on a gradual development of genre awareness. Discourse rather than vocabulary was the focus, and institutional communication and web dynamics became the object of investigation by using academic readings, direct experience, and the analysis of authentic materials. Text linguistics was the starting point to construe complex forms of textuality. Academic readings provided models and the tools to understand tourism discourse. Collaborative practices were used to allow students to share their difficulties in understanding authentic professional texts and then retrieve textual, linguistics and contextual information to overcome them. Students were stimulated to search for more examples as a learning community, especially in blogs, telegram, and multimedia items as a follow-up of their class activity. The use of technology in higher education (in-class, hybrid and blended courses) will only increase, and this should be seen as an opportunity to activate students, develop their expertise and skills.

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