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Texts and ideas in the history of language learning and teaching

edited by
Giulia Nalesso, Alessandra Vicentini



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[17]

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Table of contents

<i>Alessandra Vicentini, Giulia Nalesso</i> , Exploring language learning and teaching through texts and ideas: A historiographical perspective	1
<i>Giulia Nalesso</i> , Obras lexicográficas para el aprendizaje del español y del italiano en el siglo XVI: el caso del <i>Vocabulario de las dos lenguas</i> de Las Casas (1570)	5
<i>Anna Polo</i> , La nomenclatura en la <i>Gramatica española</i> de J.F. Perles y Campos (1689)	27
<i>Victoriano Gaviño Rodríguez, María José García Folgado</i> , LinPePrensa. Ideas sobre la lengua y su enseñanza en la prensa histórica española (1800-1939)	51
<i>Natalia Peñín Fernández</i> , Los repertorios lexicográficos ¿menores? en la lexicografía italoespañola: aproximación a la nomenclatura de Francesco Marin	75
<i>Florencia Ferrante</i> , Una traducción en clase de español: algunas observaciones sobre la versión española de <i>De los deberes de los hombres</i> (1843) de Silvio Pellico, traducida y corregida con notas gramaticales por Manuel Galo de Cuendías	93
<i>Polina Shvanyukova</i> , Theory, practice or an impracticable combination of the two?	111
<i>Esteban Lidgett, María José García Folgado</i> , La enseñanza de la lengua en la prensa pedagógica argentina a comienzos del XX: un análisis las intervenciones en <i>El Monitor de la educación común</i> (1900-1922)	129
<i>Daria Zalesskaya</i> , Les manuels de russe langue étrangère pour francophones dans la période 1917-1960: influence des idées des linguistes-slavistes	153

<i>Alessandra Vicentini</i> , 1950s textbooks for EFL teaching and learning in Italy: A historiographical analysis	179
<i>Silvia Gilardoni</i> , Per una storia del metodo glottodidattico della grammatica valenziale.....	203
<i>Andrea Nava</i> , From knowledge telling to knowledge transforming. Towards a new view of writing in English language teaching in Italian universities in the last two decades of the 20th century....	225
<i>Félix San Vicente</i> , <i>Marco Mazzoleni</i> , <i>Carmen Castillo Peña</i> , <i>Ana Lourdes de Hériz</i> , <i>Hugo E. Lombardini</i> , <i>Juan Carlos Barbero Bernal</i> , LITIAS. Lo italiano en territorios hispanófonos	245

From *knowledge telling* to *knowledge transforming*. Towards a new view of writing in English language teaching in Italian universities in the last two decades of the 20th century

Andrea Nava
University of Milan

ABSTRACT: The late 1970s marked the beginning of a long period of experimentation in the teaching of English language (as opposed to its literature) in Italian universities, which mainly involved academics working in non-linguistic faculties (Politics, Economics and Commerce, etc.). In the 1980s and the 1990s, applied research in ESP (English for Specific Purposes) became particularly prominent and led to the publication of several teaching materials aimed at Italian university students which mainly focused on the teaching of reading. In the international context, on the other hand the 1980s and the 1990s saw a reappraisal of writing not only as an essential component of a student's communicative competence but also as a key skill in the process of acquisition of new knowledge. In this paper, I will investigate how increasingly more importance was given to writing in the Italian university context in the last two decades of the 20th century, through the analysis of a corpus of ESP materials aimed at Italian university students.

KEYWORDS: Teaching of EFL/ESL writing, English for Specific Purposes, History of English language teaching, English language teaching textbooks, University language teaching.

ABSTRACT: Gli anni Settanta del secolo scorso segnarono l'inizio di un lungo periodo di sperimentazione nell'insegnamento della lingua inglese (in quanto disciplina accademica distinta dalla letteratura) nell'università italiana che coinvolse in un primo momento in maniera quasi esclusiva i docenti delle facoltà non linguistiche (Scienze Politiche, Economia, ecc.). Negli anni Ottanta e Novanta si moltiplicarono le iniziative accademiche dedicate alla ricerca applicata e alla didattica dell'ESP (Eng-

lish for Specific Purposes) a cui si accompagnò una ricca produzione di materiali didattici indirizzati a studenti italofofoni, incentrata in modo particolare sull'insegnamento della lettura. In questi stessi anni, nel contesto internazionale, si assistette ad una rivalutazione della scrittura, non solo in quanto componente imprescindibile della competenza comunicativa, ma anche, in prospettiva psicolinguistica, come abilità fondamentale nel processo di acquisizione di nuove conoscenze. In questo contributo, vorrei riflettere su come si è arrivati a dare maggior spazio alla scrittura nell'insegnamento dell'inglese in corsi non linguistici in Italia negli ultimi venti anni del XX secolo, partendo dall'analisi di un campione di materiali per l'insegnamento dell'ESP destinati a studenti universitari italiani.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Insegnamento della scrittura in inglese come lingua straniera/seconda, Storia dell'insegnamento dell'inglese, Materiali per l'insegnamento dell'inglese, Insegnamento delle lingue a livello universitario

1. Introduction

Writing instruction has traditionally been the Cinderella in foreign language teaching, even in those contexts where the language input and the norms presented were based on the written language. In particular, many of the 20th century language teaching methods that appear to have had a lasting impact on language teaching practices (e.g. the Direct Method, the Oral Situational Method, the Audiolingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching, cf. Barsi and Rizzardi 2019) emphasised the importance of oral/aural skills over written ones. In this contribution, I would like to investigate the role that writing played in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Italian universities during the 1980s and the 1990s – a period when Italian universities had started to feel the effects of changes in the make-up of the student population. The article is organised as follows. In the first part, I will provide an overview of English language teaching and research in Italian higher education in the period under investigation, focusing in particular on the teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), as that was the domain where most scholarly efforts were focused on. In the second section, I will briefly sketch the role that writing has traditionally played in teaching and assessment in Italian universities. I will then shift to the international con-

text and highlight the main changes that occurred in views of writing and approaches to the teaching of writing in the 1980s and the 1990s. Finally, in order to show how, in those decades, a change in writing conceptions also started to emerge in the Italian university context, I will illustrate the results of the analysis of a small corpus of English language teaching materials published in the last two decades of the 20th century and aimed at ESP teaching in Italian universities.

2. English language teaching in Italian universities (1980s-1990s): an overview

The founding conference of the Italian Association of English Studies (AIA)¹, which took place in Florence in April 1977, ended with a three-pronged motion calling, among other things, for “[...] autonomia a tutti gli effetti dell’insegnamento e della ricerca linguistica, con pieno riconoscimento del suo statuto scientifico” (Melchiori 1978: 12). This motion was taken up and further debated in the 1978 Conference of *Comitato Interlingue* (i.e. six associations of university foreign languages and literatures academics), which again stressed “[...] [l’] autonomia, la dignità scientifica e lo sviluppo dell’insegnamento linguistico” (*Idem*: 14). This pressing need to assert the independence and boost the status of languages as academic disciplines was one of the consequences of changes in the role of higher education which had been brought about by the open access policy implemented since the beginning of the 1970s. Not only did the number of students increase exponentially but among modern languages it was English that became heavily oversubscribed as it was increasingly viewed – rightly or wrongly – as “uno strumento indispensabile per accedere ad un qualsiasi sbocco professionale” (*Idem*: 9).

Against this changing backdrop, the status of modern languages in Italian universities had all but remained the same as it was at the beginning of the century. Modern languages were traditionally taught by fixed-term contract *lettori*, whose job was to provide practical language instruction. Researchers and professors in modern languages did not

¹ *Associazione Italiana Anglistica*.

teach or research languages/linguistics, but literary and, to a more limited extent, philological issues associated with one or more languages. As those were the domains of research valued in appointments and promotions, linguistic research was *de facto* discouraged (Prat Zagrebelsky 1991b). Ten years after the Florence conference, Prat Zagrebelsky (1991a: XIV) called for an overhaul of the study of foreign languages in Italian universities, and wistfully remarked that the subservience of languages to literature was still very much in place:

The study of a foreign language should free itself from its subordination to the study of literature and stand on its own feet in terms of aims, contents and methods. This claim is supported not only by practical needs but also by the development of modern linguistics.

Apart from its end-of-conference motion, the first AIA conference also set a good example by hosting a number of papers dealing with linguistic (as opposed to literary) issues. In the proceedings, these were gathered in a section named *Aspetti teorici e sperimentali della ricerca sulla lingua inglese*, suggesting that research into linguistic issues could rest on sound theoretical underpinnings while acknowledging that much of what was being done in this domain in Italy at the time had an applied, teaching-driven focus. An example of this double orientation (theoretical and applied) is provided by Cortese's paper (*English for Academic Purposes: teoria e strategia didattica*), where the author first identified and defined English for Academic Purposes as an area of research and not only a practical concern and then went on to pinpoint potential teaching issues and suggest solutions that were mindful of the specific Italian context:

Non dobbiamo [...] lasciarci egemonizzare da quel tipo di linguistica e di metodologia che conosce in misura scarsa, talvolta nulla, i nostri contesti. Dobbiamo invece cominciare dall'analisi dei nostri contesti operativi. (Cortese 1978: 369)

A distinctive feature of the Italian university context, which set it apart from other European countries (e.g. Germany, Netherlands, Belgium), was what Prat Zagrebelsky (1991a: XIV) called a "paradoxical" situation. Whilst most academic positions in the area of modern languages were actually for researchers and professors in modern languages and *literatures*, the limited number of posts for modern languages only

were almost exclusively to be found in non-linguistic faculties (Economics, Political Science, etc.)² – an example being the chair in English language held by Giuseppina Cortese at Turin’s Political Science faculty. It is thus little surprise that the emerging debates about the revamped role to be played by modern language teaching in Italian higher education predominantly involved those academics associated with non-linguistic faculties and, with regard to English language teaching in particular, dealing with English for Specific Purposes (ESP). While admittedly not doing justice to the complex nature of the debates which unfolded in the 1980s and the 1990s, I will mention four key controversial issues that were at the forefront of ESP teaching and research in Italian universities in the last two decades of the 20th century.

The first issue concerned the function of ESP teaching in higher education. This issue was often framed through an opposition between an instrumental and a formative/educational function. Both external (e.g. the business world, where English had become a *lingua franca*) and internal (academics teaching non-linguistic subjects) pressures conspired to make the teaching of English simply a way to provide students with a skill needed to work in an international context or to access specialist literature, “without any concern for reflection on it as a subject in itself” (Vincent Marreli 1991: 117). Italian ESP researchers, on the other hand, advocated an educational/formative function for English language teaching in universities – along the same lines as other subjects within a curriculum of, e.g., an Economics degree. Vincent Marreli (1991: 118) stressed that the contexts of non-linguistic faculties made it all the more important to lend ESP an educational function:

The educational goal [...] may be of even greater urgency in the non-arts and humanities faculties where there would perhaps be no other opportunities for the raising of cross-cultural and linguistic awareness.

The second issue debated, which was closely connected with the first one, focused on the type of ESP teaching that was to be offered in universities. While English language academics stressed the need for

² Even in non-linguistic faculties, however, the bulk of language teaching was done by fixed-term contract *lettori*, who greatly outnumbered researchers and professors.

courses on theoretical and methodological issues to be taught by researchers and professors alongside practical language instruction, other academics teaching non-linguistic subjects argued that ESP could be acquired by students through less formal instruction, relying on the equipment and know-how of university language centres, which were (slowly) starting to be set up in Italian universities. Prat Zagrebelsky (1991b: 4) summed up this position thus:

Some colleagues of other disciplines or whole faculties argue that competence in foreign languages should be required from the students but taught and tested in a less formal way.

The third issue revolved around the status of Italian ESP university students. While the methodological proposals developed in English-speaking countries appeared to target individuals who already had specialist knowledge in different non-linguistic disciplines, it was by no means clear whether such proposals could be applied in the Italian context. Typically, ESP university courses were offered in the first two years of a four-year non-linguistic degree and at that stage students were arguably still novices in their specialisation area. Nevertheless, whether specialists or specialists-in-training, Italian ESP university students – argued researchers and professors – needed far more than knowledge of specialised lexis:

[...] non importa tanto fornire all'economista in formazione una dose di lingua specifica, di terminologie economiche o finanziarie ecc. Nella misura in cui ne abbia bisogno, se le può procurare da solo. (Destro 1994: 127)

On the whole, the picture of English language teaching in Italian universities in the last two decades of the 20th century that emerges is one where in linguistic faculties English language as an academic subject still played second fiddle to literature and philology. In non-linguistic faculties, despite both internal and external pressures to strip ESP of an academic status, a great deal of experimentation was being carried out aimed at devising courses that fostered the development of academic knowledge and skills alongside practical language proficiency. Italian ESP researchers' call for teaching that went beyond "vocational courses geared to instruction" (Cortese 1991: 181) led them to focus their rese-

arch efforts on investigating methodological (i.e. teaching-related) issues drawing upon the most recent theoretical developments in descriptive and applied linguistics.

A key domain targeted was ‘study reading’ (Ciliberti and Ambroso 1981) – the development of a methodology of reading for academic purposes. The conferences and seminars devoted to this issue in the 1980s are too many to mention in this paper, but a few key publications that originated from these events are Jottini (1981), Cortese (1980), Cortese e Podestà (1983). A focus on reading as “an objective in itself” (Nuccorini 1982: 205) was particularly appropriate as it drew upon a home-grown tradition of teaching ESP through the close reading and translation of extracts from specialised literature. At the same time, it acted as a needed complement to the focus on oral/aural skills that the newly developed communicative approach had once again made prominent (Bono and Tessitore 1982). More important, it enabled researchers to develop practical applications of breakthroughs in register studies and text linguistics (Nuccorini 1982).

In order to provide a snapshot of the actual implementation of ESP teaching in Italian universities over the two decades under consideration, I shall refer to the findings of a survey (Garzone and Salvi 1993) which involved 42 out of the 44 universities that at the time offered degrees in Economics and Commerce or similar subjects³. The survey was carried out between January and July 1993. The data was generated from the analysis of course descriptions and the responses to a detailed questionnaire. The survey focused on several aspects of the ESP curriculum but I shall only provide a selection of the findings regarding written assessment options⁴. Given the heavy test-oriented nature that has always been

³ An earlier survey (Sainato *et al.* 1972) was carried out in the early 1970s in view of a proposed overhaul of curricula of Economics degrees. The survey, which had involved both major Italian companies and deans of Economics faculties, showed that most of the deans polled viewed the teaching of foreign languages as an essential element of an Economics degree course, and seemed to agree that the best assessment option was administering oral tests of sight translation of economics texts.

⁴ Oral exams have been the default (and often the only) form of assessment traditionally implemented in Italian universities in arts and social science faculties (cf. *infra*). Nevertheless, assessment of modern languages has often included a written component alongside an oral exam.

a distinctive feature of Italian university teaching of modern languages, these findings arguably also offer an insight into the teaching that was implemented in Italian non-linguistic faculties in the 1980s and the 1990s.

According to Salvi and Garzone's survey, the most popular written assessment form proved to be reading comprehension tests (62%) – a hardly surprising result given the efforts that were being made to develop applied research in this area. More than half of the universities polled required students to take a translation test (54%), a finding showing that 'old habits die hard', in that surveys carried out in the two previous decades had pointed to the popularity of translation as a form of assessment in non-linguistic faculties (cf. footnote 3 and Bamford and Munat 1993). Far less popular turned out to be summaries (19%) and what were generically termed compositions (16%) – both being tests of writing. According to the two researchers, it was practical problems stemming from writing being a subjective test ("prove soggettive per eccellenza", Garzone and Salvi 1993: 70) that conspired against its use as an assessment option. While this was undoubtedly part of the problem, the limited role played by writing in teaching and assessment has been an overarching and long-standing issue in Italian higher education, and it is to this issue that I will now turn.

3. The role of writing in university English language teaching in the 1980s and the 1990s.

Unlike most Anglo-Saxon university contexts, where essay writing has traditionally been the most commonly used assessment procedure, Italian higher education has been known for its (almost exclusive) oral-based assessment policy, with students often having to face the writing of their final degree dissertation without having produced any substantial piece of writing previously (Anderson 1987). Indeed, for the better part of the 20th century⁵, in arts and social science faculties, the only students

⁵ Law n. 919, which was passed on 11th December 1969, not only started the open access policy in Italian higher education but also gave universities the option of devising curricula that departed from the ones centrally imposed by the Ministry. For each degree course, students were thus allowed to opt out of the centrally im-

required to produce essays during their four-year course were those enrolled in one of the three degrees offered by Faculties of Education (*Magistero*)⁶. This type of essay-based written exam was termed *tema di cultura generale* (general knowledge essay). If the handbooks meant to help students prepare for this exam are anything to go by (e.g. *Guida all'esame scritto d'ammissione alla Facoltà di Magistero*, 1966), *tema di cultura generale* boiled down to the presentation of a literary, historical or philosophical topic⁷ – the transcription in monologic form of what was the traditional oral *interrogazione*⁸. It is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate the reasons for this neglect of writing in Italian higher education. It is, however, worth pointing out that in secondary education too, until at least the beginning of the 21st century, writing (in Italian as a native language) was assessed rather than taught, and descriptive, expository or narrative writing was much more commonly implemented than argumentative writing.

Apart from its widespread use in teaching and assessment in those academic contexts where English was a native language, in the 1980s and 1990s, writing also started to play an increasingly important role internationally in the teaching of English as a second language. This ELT (English Language Teaching) writing ‘revolution’ was on the one hand the culmination of decades of experimentation by practitioners in search of “techniques for teaching writing” (Grabe and Kaplan 1996: 27) and on the other the result of practical applications of research carried out since the 1960s in “cognitive psychology, sociolinguistics, educational ethnography, whole-language education, and applied linguistics” (Grabe and Kaplan 1996: 31).

posed curriculum and follow one of the curricula devised by their university.

⁶ Until the open access policy was adopted in Italian higher education, a *tema di cultura generale* was also used with a ‘gatekeeping’ function – to select those students with a four-year upper secondary school diploma in primary school teaching under their belt who were deemed capable of undertaking higher education.

⁷ Two examples of cultura generale essay titles (*Guida all'esame scritto d'ammissione alla Facoltà di Magistero*, 1966) are Carducci, Pascoli, D'Annunzio. *Parlare di uno di questi grandi poeti* and *Napoleone e la sua storia*.

⁸ Students of Foreign Languages and Literatures (*Lingue e letterature straniere*), a degree that could be earned in different faculties (including *Magistero*) were required to sit at least one essay exam in the foreign language they specialized in.

Among the theories that fed into approaches to teaching writing in the decades under consideration, there were developments in text linguistics, register analysis and the Hallidayan functional approach (as part of the overarching field of discourse analysis). These theories helped practitioners conceptualize writing as a context-based purposeful activity and the linguistic resources a writer relies on as “located in social actions” (Hyland 2009: 12).

Cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics provided the foundation for the “liberating concept” (Grabe and Kaplan 1996: 86) of writing as a process, and not just a static product, which was developed into a socio-cognitive view of writing, whereby “the various social factors which influence writing” are acknowledged as well as “the idea that writing itself is produced through the cognitive activities of the writer” (Grabe and Kaplan 1996: 107). Within this domain, Bereiter and Scardamalia (e.g. 1987) developed the influential distinction between the type of writing undertaken by “immature” and “mature” writers (Scardamalia and Bereiter 1987: 142). The former tend to resort to simple ‘knowledge telling’, the focus of this process being the generation of content in a cumulative fashion – the reproduction of what is “already assembled” (Scardamalia and Bereiter 1987: 171) knowledge. This form of writing is akin to the type of discourse produced in the typical oral-based mode of assessment used in Italian education – or in its written counterpart in the shape of *tema di cultura generale*. For expert writers, on the other hand, writing is enacted as a “heuristic process”. In other words, writing is no longer just a matter of retrieving and transcribing pre-digested knowledge but through the writing process writers ‘transform’ (refine, develop) knowledge: writers’ “understanding of what they are trying to say grows and changes in the course of writing” (Scardamalia and Bereiter 1987: 142).

Although drawing upon insights from several research domains and traditions, ELT writing practitioners in the 1980s and 1990s seemed to agree on the role that writing needs to play in teaching and learning. The activity of writing cannot be divorced from a specific sociocultural context. Writing has an educational role as it is instrumental in the learning process. In order to become expert writers, however, students need to be given the chance to transform knowledge and not simply reproduce facts or information.

Against this backdrop, the next section will attempt to investigate whether and how writing was taught in Italian university ESP courses in the 1980s and the 1990s.

4. Writing in Italian ESP university textbooks for Economics and Commerce (1980s-1990s)

In the first part of this paper, I have reviewed – albeit briefly – the debates surrounding the revamped role played by English language – as an academic discipline divorced from its literature – in Italian higher education in the 1980s and the 1990s. Given that English language academics were almost exclusively associated with non-linguistic faculties, most of their scholarly activities – whether descriptive or applied – concerned ESP. Apart from Politics/Political Science, the non-linguistic faculty where ELT had a long-standing tradition was Economics and Commerce. To shed some light on the role of writing in ELT (ESP) in Italy, I will carry out a content analysis of a restricted sample of ESP university textbooks aimed at Italian students of Economics and Commerce published in the last two decades of the 20th century. Details of the corpus are provided in Table 1 below⁹.

Table 1. ESP university textbooks for Economics and Commerce students.

Mergoni Pario, M. 1980. <i>Looking into the English of Economics</i> . Seconda edizione.
Enright, M. 1984. <i>English for Economics. Corso di inglese per studenti italiani di economia</i> .
Zambardi Mall, G.A. 1987. <i>English for Economics and Commerce. Reading comprehension in context, translation practice</i> .
Bondi, M and F. Poppi. 1994. <i>L'inglese per studenti della facoltà di economia. Vol.1 Introduzione alla comunicazione scritta</i> .
Mattu, A. and L. Fodde. 1995. <i>21st century business English</i> .
Barbieri, F. and L. Codeluppi. 1997. <i>From business and economics to language</i> .

⁹ The corpus was created by searching the catalogue of *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze*, one of the two national legal deposit libraries in Italy.

Taken as a whole, the corpus has a number of distinctive features. All of the authors were at some stage charged with teaching ESP in an Italian faculty of Economics and Commerce. While some of them (Mergoni Pario, Enright, Barbieri, Codeluppi) were lecturers or contract lecturers (hence with no research duties), an involvement of tenured researchers/professors (Bondi, Poppi, Fodde) with applied research leading to textbook writing appeared to become more common in the 1990s.

Another feature is the authors' awareness of the unique situation of ESP teaching to students who were also pursuing a university degree. ESP was not a self-standing course but was one of the disciplines of the students' academic curriculum. It was also assumed that mastering ESP had a role to play in students' future professional lives, outside of academia. Needless to say, this twofold nature of ESP teaching – academic vs. professional, which is reminiscent of the debate about an instrumental vs. formative function of university language teaching, was tackled differently by different authors. The earliest book in the corpus – which was published in its second edition in 1980, but had appeared in its first edition five years earlier –, for example, claimed to foreground professional needs, stating in the preface that it aimed to guide students in the “use of the language of business”, thus catering for their “future professional needs” (Mergoni Pario 1980: 1). However, all of the input materials were drawn from economics essays, which seemed to be more in keeping with an academic rather than a professional orientation. By contrast, Zambardi Mall's 1987 textbook claimed to aim at “students in high schools and universities, wishing to improve their academic reading skills and translation practice” (Zambardi Mall 1987: 1). Despite this mention of an academic orientation, Zambardi Mall's textbook is the only one in the corpus featuring technical documents used in business transactions alongside extracts from economics essays.

A final overarching feature of the corpus to be mentioned is the fact that the books' authors provide hardly any explicit comment about the fact that the role of ESP within academic curricula in the Italian university context was at the time the subject of debate among Italian academics. An exception is Mattu and Fodde's textbook, which features a lengthy introduction lamenting “the present Italian trend in the Faculties of Economics, toward the de-emphasis of traditional foreign language

studies”, which is said to be “short-sighted and conducive – as it were – neither to international understanding nor to personal growth” (Mattu and Fodde 1995: 1). The authors are referring to the policies that were implemented in some Italian universities in the 1990s which resulted in the teaching of ESP being replaced by just a pass/fail test of basic general English skills (*prova di idoneità*).

I will now home in on the issue of teaching writing in the books under analysis. I should first point out that all the books except Mattu and Fodde (1995) feature a ‘practical’ component (with exercises of different types meant to have students process the input) alongside the more traditional ‘input’ component (with texts mainly in the form of extracts from economics essays).

The core of Mergoni Pario’s 1980 book (*Part Two*) consists of passages from economics essays with comprehension questions, notes on lexis, the Italian translation of the essays, grammar points and cloze tests based on abridged versions of the passages. Despite not being an extended production activity, the latter type of exercise can be viewed as a way to have students reprocess (rather than just reproduce) the key information from the input texts while at the same time fostering the noticing of linguistic features of economics discourse.

Enright’s 1987 textbook features a main section labelled *Reading Comprehension*, and two subsidiary sections with grammar explanations and exercises and further reading passages. As in the previous book, Enright does not provide extended writing tasks, but a range of activities meant to have students transform content knowledge from the input materials are featured in the ‘practical’ part – an example being “information transfer from graphs and charts” (Enright 1987: 14).

While published in the same year as Enright’s textbook, Zambardi Mall’s book appears to have been more explicitly influenced by contemporary developments in applied linguistics. As mentioned above, it is aimed at both secondary schools and universities and features a wider range of input materials than earlier ESP textbooks (economics essays, technical documents, entries from business dictionaries, expository texts about the geography and economics of Canada, newspaper and magazine articles). In a separate *Guide to use and answer book*, Zambardi Mall (1987b) provides a classification of the exercises featured in the

book into three categories: *recall/recognition*, *cognitive*, *production*. There seems to be an awareness of the fact that production – however limited – is essential to the appropriation and possibly the transformation of knowledge. While cloze tests are viewed as mainly recognition (i.e. knowledge-telling) exercises, as part of the cognitive category, Zambardi Mall lists cohesion, text analysis and reference exercises. There is evidence of the influence of the Hallidayan functional approach and the fledgling field of discourse analysis. This is explicitly acknowledged in the author’s presentation of teaching ESP as “[...] presenting and analysing meaning in connected discourse and the processes associated with it” (Zambardi Mall 1987b: 3). An example of a cohesion exercise is provided below:

To give grammatical cohesion and a logical development to the theme, conjunctions are used which help the reader to predict the discourse. Complete the following sentences to give the summary greater cohesion by selecting suitable conjunctions from the list below:

1. _____ a government may need to raise money to maintain state services, it must choose between loans and taxation.
 2. _____ it decides to finance itself by capital loans, a certain limit must not be passed.
 3. _____, to recognise when this limit has been exceeded, there must be an index.
 4. _____, the interest rate can be used to provide a suitable index
- And though whereas even if therefore however nevertheless in fact furthermore (Zambardi Mall 1987a: 13)

In this type of exercise, students are required to work on a summary of an input text in order to become aware of the role of cohesive devices in not only organizing knowledge but also reprocessing it and thus potentially developing new knowledge.

The third type of exercises included in Zambardi Mall (1987a) are labelled ‘production’. The author seems to place particular emphasis on role-playing, as an exercise type which “gives definite form to a linguistic situation” (Zambardi Mall 1987b: 3). This is of course in keeping with the oral focus of the Communicative Method, which, as this textbook shows clearly, had also started to influence ESP teaching. What appears particularly interesting in the category of production exercises,

however, is an exercise type called ‘amplification’, an example of which is provided below.

Extend the following unfinished sentences by focusing on the word(s) underlined and then adding more information from the text to complete the sentences.

Example: Almost half the land of Canada consists of forests. There are forests of spruce, balsam, fir and pine.

1. Pulp and paper are the most important forest products. This production of pulp and paper makes _____ [...]

7. Recently Quebec and the East Coast have become more self-reliant. The emphasis on this domestic development _____ (Zambardi Mall 1987a: 159)

This is a guided written production activity which again requires students to reprocess the knowledge gleaned from the input texts. Zambardi Mall (1987b: 3) describes amplification as follows: “[a] cue sentence is given in which a word is underlined as a focal point to be followed by a sentence written by the learner leading from the focus-word using information from the text”. While this type of activity is underexploited in the book, it is evidence of the author’s attempt to introduce writing as a way to foster the process of personal transformation of knowledge.

This role of writing as potentially a study skill on a par with reading becomes more prominent in Bondi and Poppi’s 1994 book, where the influence of applied linguistics research is much more noticeable. The book is divided into three sections (*Introduzione. Cos’è l’apprendimento di una lingua straniera?*, *Parte 1. La lingua attraverso i testi – Language in texts*, *Parte 2. Dalla lettura alla scrittura. From reading to writing*), each of which draws on one or more areas of applied linguistics (psycholinguistics, text linguistics and register analysis, discourse analysis). The section I will focus on is the last one, which explicitly highlights how reading and writing are strictly associated in the book, and writing develops out of and builds on text analysis. This section is divided into ten units leading the students to become familiar with the reading skills of skimming and scanning and practise them on texts of different types (narrative, expository, argumentative and instructional), whose syntactic and rhetorical features are also examined. Texts are then approached from the perspective of discourse analysis, starting from the analysis of

paragraph organization and then following on with the analysis of textual patterns. The paragraph is presented as a structured textual unit and the text as a logical sequence of paragraphs. The following extract features an activity which is reminiscent of Zambardi Mall's amplification:

In a collective or planned economy, government makes many of the major decisions about production and distribution. In a mixed economy businessmen and consumers determine some of the economic decisions through the use of the price mechanism, while the government makes other decisions of an economic nature. (...)

Very few economies are wholly capitalist or planned. The USA comes nearest to capitalism but, even there, the government intervenes considerably in economic decisions. Conversely, even in the collective economies of Eastern Europe, there are examples of individuals organizing their own enterprises.

10. In the above paragraphs, some key words have been underlined. Look at the sentences they occur in and then rephrase the information conveyed by these sentences, starting as given.

- a. Many of the major decisions about production and distribution _____
- b. In those countries where both businessmen and consumers, and the government too, make economic decisions _____
- c. Most economies are neither _____ nor _____ as they influenced _____

This type of writing activities follow on from reading comprehension and text analysis activities. The 'frames' provided lead students to re-process the input texts from both a semantic and a discourse point of view, thus leading to the transformation of knowledge. The number of such 'study writing' tasks increases in the latter part of *Part 2*, with the final unit representing a full-fledged case study where students are asked to process information from several sources and write a CV and a covering letter for a job application.

5. Conclusion

For a long time, writing was a ‘non-priority’ in Italian university teaching and assessment, and the beginning of the ‘mass university’ in the 1970s all but made writing harder to implement in Italian higher education. As the number of university students soared, language instructors and professors often had to teach and test classes of upwards of 500 students (Prat Zagrebelsky 1991b). In the international context, and particularly in the teaching of English as a foreign language, a reappraisal of writing started to take place in the 1980s and the 1990s. Writing began to be viewed as not only an essential component of a student’s communicative competence but also, on a par with reading, as a key skill to develop in the process of acquisition and transformation of new knowledge. This writing ‘revolution’ also affected – albeit to a limited extent – the Italian academic context, where the researchers’ drive to innovate seemed (at least in part) to counter the many practical hurdles which militated against the implementation of writing in teaching and assessment. As has been argued in this paper, this change was more conspicuous in ESP teaching. This is the domain where those academics who drew upon breakthroughs in descriptive and applied linguistics were able to take advantage of the potential of writing as a study skill in the design of teaching materials. It could be argued that it is indeed in the teaching of writing as a knowledge-transforming study skill that we can see an example of the much debated ‘formative’ function of language teaching, particularly in higher education.

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