FOLLOWING BOLOGNA GUIDELINES: CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING ON-LINE RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES FOR CORE MODULES IN THE ENGLISH STUDIES DEGREE

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The article will show different resources and materials employed in two core modules –Historia de la Lengua Inglesa *and* Historia y Cultura de los Países de Habla Inglesa–*, both third-year annual courses in the Degree in English Studies at the University of Cádiz. In order to provide flexibility and to encourage students' active participation, an array of practical activities has been devised along the lines of the new Higher Education framework, i.e., the Bologna Process. These practical assignments account for 30% to 40% of the student's final mark. In order to analyse student responses to this new approach and to assess their performance, a comparison of the annual surveys on teaching practices carried out in the last three academic years is presented.*

GETTING STARTED: A PILOT PROJECT

The Degree in English has been one of the first degrees in Andalucía to put into action a pilot project for the new European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) (IAU, 2004). The universities of Cádiz, Córdoba, Granada, Huelva and Jaén have been working since 2004 on a new framework whereby a full-time student's workload per year is 60 credits, which, when computed into hours, ranges between 1500 and 1800 hours of work per course (European Communities, 1995). When planning a course, the lecturer has to take into account not only the contents, but also the competencies which the students must acquire and develop throughout the learning process.[1] The Department of French and English in Cádiz agreed to start this new system for the Degree in English Philology and several meetings were held among the teaching staff responsible for the first-year modules to coordinate the pilot project.

The following specifications had to be taken into account by the lecturers in charge of elaborating a detailed plan of the module to be taught: contents, competencies, methodology, evaluation system, amount of formal lectures and practical classes, the number and type of tutorials – i.e., individual, or collective –, which activities were to be guided by the lecturers and which were to be done autonomously, and the number of hours the student would be expected to work on the module (either to revise contents, to read material or to prepare assignments). Moreover, the lecturers had to design a week-by-week

chronogram where the aforementioned contents and activities had to be fitted in. Four years later, in 2008, the first students to graduate under this new system have now left university to seek a professional career. Nonetheless, it is too early to appraise the way these undergraduates are putting into practice the learning outcomes achieved during this pilot programme.

History of the English Language is a core module taught in the third year and the number of ECTS credits assigned to it is ten. Students have always complained about the great quantity of topics that they have to learn, and the small amount of practical activities they do. Furthermore, students are generally not comfortable with the conventional system of evaluation that comprises a final exam of all those contents. The pilot project was a chance to redesign the module, trying to furnish it with a more flexible structure. As a starting point and during the academic years 2003/04 and 2005/06, two undergraduate students[2] were funded by the national Ministry of Education with a one-year grant to collaborate in the compiling of Internet resources on the history of the English language. It was an opportunity to look at how other degrees all over the world (especially in American Universities) approach the subject in a more dynamic way.

This process of compilation proved to be successful, and an abundance of reliable data was located for every topic, due to the fact that it was all downloaded from university websites. These resources included digitalised manuscripts for every stage of the language, sound files reproducing how the language might sound at different points in history, interactive maps showing the different migrations and conquests, glossaries and on-line courses on the evolution of the English language. In certain cases, the downloaded material was directly uploaded to the virtual platform, whilst on other occasions specific exercises were designed from various digital data.

This module, together with some others from the English Department, have been participating since 2005 in a project[3] whose aim is to increase the use of electronic tools to help the students assimilate in more efficient ways the contents of the different subjects. This project has been incorporated into a registry of innovative teaching actions within a new space created by the *Vicerrectorado de Ordenación Académica e Innovación Docente.* A digital library was created where the participating lecturers uploaded didactic material gleaned from distinct internet sources onto *Moodle*, the freeware virtual platform used by the University of Cádiz. This meant that all students enrolled in any of the subjects taught by the group of lecturers involved in the project had access to this material, regardless of the module it was originally designed for.

Apart from the free-access resources, the project also purchased two educational database licences. *United Streaming*, an educational subsidiary of *Discovery Education*, proved to be very effective, as it contains numerous small and easily downloadable videos. The *United Streaming* videos are designed for a young English-speaking audience, which means that our students found little difficulty in understanding them. The videos come with teaching guides that include discussion topics, writing prompts or whole lesson plans which have undoubtedly saved us time. The interdisciplinary character of the database also meant that there was material for all the modules involved. *Onestopenglish*, run by the *Macmillan Group*, provided us with many exercises and audio files which enhanced autonomous learning on behalf of the student. The fact that this website offers graded material which, in turn, is divided into specific linguistic skills, meant that we could be more effective in adapting these resources to our specific activities.

The *Proyecto Europa* Office also put into action an initiative to digitalise module contents with the intention of creating a library of digital objects.[4] Staff from the computing services at our University were involved in this standardising of didactic material which group members had designed over the previous years. One salient advantage of this transformation has been that

such activities are now corrected automatically, something which simplifies the continuous evaluation of course work.

THE BOLOGNA SPIRIT: HOW TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE AND DYNAMIC

The principal aspect we wanted to improve to guarantee that the module would follow Bologna requirements was how to make it more dynamic (European Commission, 1999: 5). The module's value (10 ECTS credits), coupled with the complexity of the course contents, can make the module both dull and difficult, which, is undoubtedly a fundamental impediment to the Bologna spirit. On a practical level, the lecturer spends most of his/her time trying to make the students understand the phonological, semantic and morphological processes by which English has changed over the centuries, without being able to engage the student in those processes. This results in the students spending most of their time trying to learn the rules by heart, which leaves little time for them to fit this rote-learned knowledge into its socio-historical context.

In 2006/07, we began implementing the new ECTS system, which meant that the old lecture system was reduced to a minimum. Firstly, the contents were previously made available for the students on the *Moodle* virtual platform, so that the students did not have to take notes and could fully concentrate on the lecturer's explanations. This increased student autonomy as, once the main problems were teased out in class, students could work either individually or in small groups within the classroom. As a consequence, the student's role changed from passive recipient to active organiser of his/her learning process, while the student's workload became diversified. As regards the evaluation of this process, the student's active participation in class and the completion of the different tasks through the virtual platform constituted a 30% of the final mark. The teacher's role thus also changes: on the one hand, it is more interactive and, on the other, s/he becomes a guiding actor in the learning process, instead of an intrusive agent.

As mentioned above, flexibility and dynamism were the two main goals to achieve. Increasing the number and the types of practical activities has proved to be an efficient way to reach those goals. Furthermore, the students were getting more practice before the final exam and this has definitely decreased the stress levels typical of such an exam. We have designed many different types of tasks to approach the study of the English language. Some are prepared to be done in class and some are downloaded in the virtual platform where the student has a set time to accomplish them.

Firstly, there are exercises about the evolution of English. And here, we distinguish between those activities in which the student practices rules governing sound changes after learning them (type A); and those exercises that require the student to formulate his/her own sound laws using examples provided in class (type B).

Type A exercises would require the student to, for example, look at a list of reconstructed Indo-European words and their supposed meanings and, following Grimm's law, to find the possible words descended from those forms. Here, we can also include the classic word evolution exercises where the student must trace the evolution of a word from Old English times to modern times, giving a detailed account of the different sound and orthographical changes undergone by the term. We include, too, activities in which the students, once they have learned a concept, have to look for examples in Modern English in which the transformations suffered by a sound change are still evident. Type B exercises, in turn, would encompass comparing languages from the same branch and inventing sound laws to account for the similarities, as well as looking at exceptions and trying to explain why they occur or classifying vocabulary, sound changes, or syntactic structures depending on the transformations suffered.

Secondly, and following the syllabus contents, students have to analyse and translate Old English texts into modern English. This exercise is carried out in class at the end of the first semester, and they can use all their notes and a glossary of terms. It constitutes 20% of the total mark.

Other activities are to do with the elaboration of linguistic maps. Working with the different

suffixes to form place names, students have to find examples with those suffixes. The idea here is to show them how both the external and internal history of the language are always connected. Similar exercises are crosswords which are easily digitalised using the electronic tool *Hot Potatoes*.

Students have found watching educational videos or listening to audio files about the different stages of the language very useful. Approaching the contents of the module through different sources has increased the students' interest. The Internet has helped us enormously, as many web pages from universities, and from governmental and research institutions offer free resources such as manuscripts, glossaries, and images. Other very useful materials we have included are Melvyn Bragg's *The Adventure of English, The BBC Story of English*, BBC Radio 4 series *The Routes of English*, and Bill Bryson's Journeys in English. Of particularly interest, for example, were the videos on American English from the database *United Streaming*, as some of them show re-enactments of different periods in history. To meet and to listen to the protagonists of this story of the English language has an engaging effect on the student, bringing the contents closer to them. As we said before, these videos are short enough to be downloaded on the platform so the student can watch them at home working autonomously on different tasks.[5]

Another way of dragging the students out of the traditional class environment is to ask them to attend conferences or seminars and to write memos or critical essays. In 2007, the Spanish Association of Renaissance Studies (*SEDERI*) held its annual conference in Cádiz. It was a magnificent opportunity for the students to attend the conferences and to meet researchers investigating some of the topics included in the syllabus. In 2008, the French and English Department organised a seminar, *Images and Cultures*, about the adaptations of literary works to cinema. The students had to attend several conferences and to hand in a report. During this academic year (2008/09) the second edition of *Images and Cultures II* is again part of the practical activities included in the module. Once more, these activities are intended to make the students aware of the effects that the historical context has on a language and on the diverse cultural representations of a country.

MARKING AND ASSESSING LEARNING OUTCOMES

The heterogeneity of the activities requires diverse systems of correcting and assessing students. For those exercises similar to the ones that were going to appear in the final exam, we have downloaded the answers for the whole group, albeit adding individual comments to each student. Another system is to correct each student's task individually; more tiresome as the explanations must be very detailed, but the only method which guarantees a close follow-up of every student. Individual or small group tutorials are also another possibility to meet the students and group them depending on the type of difficulties they have. The virtual platform has also provided us with a useful tool – the forum. Whenever a student has a difficulty or just a technical question, s/he can post it on the forum and everyone can respond, the novelty being that not only the teacher but also the students can solve other classmates' problems.

The multiplicity in the number of tasks resulted in a diversity in the number of marks. This has proved essential to assess the students' learning outcomes. *Forcing* the student to work on different fronts can contribute to the acquisition of the competencies needed to complete the Degree in English Philology.

STUDENTS' FEEDBACK

To evaluate the experience, we have looked at the number of students who have passed the module since we implemented the pilot project. Comparing the results with the academic year 2005/06, where 59% passed, results show that there has been an increase in the number of students who have succeeded. In the first academic year (2006/07) when the new system was implemented, the percentage increased to 69% (39 students out of 43 followed the system; from them, 32 sat the exam; and from them, 27 passed). In 2007/08, 36 out of 37 handed in most of the tasks and sat the exam; from them, 29 passed, which represents a huge increase of 80%. But more importantly, the number of

students who prefer working along ECTS lines has augmented. This could be interpreted as a change of attitude in the Spanish students who were used not to attending classes very regularly and who mostly studied at the end of the academic year for the final exam. We believe that the recurrent use of virtual tools has fostered open discussion in class, has increased students' motivation and has enriched the teaching practice. Moreover, the students' instrumental competencies outlined in the Bologna principles and included in our syllabus have been improved, namely:

- The capacity to find and handle Internet resources.
- The capacity to analyse texts within a historical perspective.
- The capacity to relate their philological knowledge to that of other areas and disciplines.

We can also measure the level of student satisfaction by looking at the survey on teaching practices the university administers every year. Comparing the results from 2005/06, when there was no pilot project, with 2006/07 and 2007/08,[6] the students' evaluation differs significantly. In the section entitled *Class development*,[7] the students' evaluation (on a five-point scale) goes from 3.2 to 4 to 3.6. This section includes a question about the adequacy and number of resources, where the students' opinion is clearly more favourable in the last two years (3.1 – 4 – 3.3). The students' general evaluation of the lecturer shows a rising curve from 3.2 in 2005/06 to 4.2, and then 3.8. In the section *General opinion of the module*, the appraisal is not particularly positive: 3.3 in 2005/06, compared to 3.9 and 3.4 in the two years of work with the new system. However, there is one question within this section which clearly shows that the students' satisfaction has increased. For number 18 - *Are the lecturer's criteria and system of evaluation clear enough for the student and do they match the contents and methodology?*, results go from 2.6 (2005/06) to 4 (2006/07) and 3.6 (2007/08). For the section on the students' self-assessment, we also find an improvement: 3 for the first year, compared to 3.7 and 3.3. Here, we can highlight the results for questions number 25 and 27. In number 25, they are asked if they are satisfied with what they have learned: the poor evaluation in 2005/06 - 2.1 - contrasts with 3.7 and 3.2 in the two following years. On question 27, they have to answer how frequently they attend tutorials: in the academic years under the pilot project the rating was 3 and 2.4, which contrasts with 1.9 in 2005/06. These results show that:

- The increase in the number of resources through the platform has had a positive impact on the students.
- The more planned the teaching, the better it seems to work.
- The student's role is more active and his/her level of engagement has increased.

MAIN DIFFICULTIES ALONG THE WAY

Despite these positive outcomes, the experience has also faced different hurdles. Firstly, the high number of students that has followed this system has tripled the teacher's workload. Around 20 activities per student are corrected throughout the year, which, multiplied by a mean of 35 students, amounts to 700 assignments! We have managed to lessen the workload by digitalising some of the exercises. As I mentioned above, this is now possible thanks to an initiative started by the University: *The Library of Digital Objects*. Together with the computer services staff, we designed certain exercises that could adapt to a digital format, and so the computer marked them automatically, saving us time.

Another can of worms is that of plagiarising, i.e. copying indiscriminately from Internet sources. This is very evident in this Degree, as the students are not native speakers of English, and it is clear when they cut and paste information in perfect English and add a few comments with lots of grammar mistakes. We have to look for activities which make them think and whose answers are not found in *Google* or the *Wikipedia*, a mission almost impossible to accomplish! Another source of problems has to do with the use of the virtual platform itself. Not every student is a computer *freak*, so different

technical difficulties arise such as accessing the Web, handling programmes, downloading files, using basic computer tools, etc.

Then, there is the conundrum of how to mark those students that spend a semester in an exchange programme (Socrates/Erasmus students). They often do not hand in any activity while they are away, even though they know they should do some *homework* via the virtual platform. At the end of the academic year, the number of tasks they hand in is inferior and so is the percentage they get for their practical activities. Some of them have complained, arguing that the percentage for the practical activities should not be that high for them. The lecturer is obliged to design different systems to tailor individual needs.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

It would be risky and pretentious to assure that, during the first year of implementation of the Bologna model, the students have developed the cognitive abilities expected to be acquired:

- the student should know the Anglo-Saxon culture through the history of its language;
- the student should develop his/her own learning strategies;
- the student should be able to work autonomously;
- the student should be able to develop his/her own critical criteria;
- the student should be able to develop his/her own creative capacities;
- the student should approach the study of English by learning about internal (linguistic) and external (historical) evidence.

Yet some of the latter have been clearly tackled. For instance, the fact that the students have approached the contents from different angles, working for themselves, has encouraged their autonomy and their creativity. This, in turn, has resulted in a better assimilation of those contents. We do not want to abandon the traditional method, as we believe that it is essential that the students have a direct contact with their teacher. However, to let them learn by themselves is a very important asset for their future career. If we want the Spanish student to move freely in Europe, autonomy has to be encouraged. According to Giménez de la Peña and López Gutiérrez (2006: 3): *"El profesorado tiene la responsabilidad de programar y orientar la actividad del alumnado y facilitar los instrumentos de acceso a los contenidos formativos, pero el alumnado, como último responsable de su aprendizaje, es quien adquiere el compromiso de obtener una buena formación"*. We also wanted to give them the chance to be assessed differently, applying a system of continuous assessment and fostering individual participation. The feedback has been very positive and has spurred us to continue working along Bologna guidelines.

NEW CHALLENGES

Which are the challenges we will have to face in the future? The transformation of Higher Education and its Credit Transfer System demand on the part of the lecturer new teaching strategies. Our role is to guide the students, not to direct them, and the final aim is to promote self-learning. The combination of different procedures and resources and the introduction of new technologies force the students to be more visible, changing their approach to learning. More and more practical activities should be offered, more and more electronic resources should be employed and a thorough planning is deemed essential. Linked with planning is the coordination with the rest of the lecturers teaching in the third year. We hope to be able to advance in this area, as this year (2008/09) the same lecturer is teaching another module which complements this one, i.e., *History and Culture of English-Speaking Countries*. As practically the same students enrol in both modules and the contents are very similar, the lecturer can make cross-references throughout the year. Furthermore, the students will be asked to complete various tasks in both modules using data from the two of them.

The module *History and Culture of English-Speaking Countries* (10 ECTS) has also been framed under the European Credit Transfer System. Final exam marking would represent 60% of the total mark and 40% would be assigned to practical assignments. Listening and reading comprehension and writing short critical

essays are among the various tasks. Moreover, students are expected to work on a project where not only the assimilation of contents is assessed, but also their potential teaching abilities. The project which includes an oral presentation, involves, firstly, team-work[8] as a way to promote discussion. Secondly, direct contact with the lecturer is expected to be increased, as every group has to meet the lecturer at least twice a year for a follow-up of the project. Thirdly, to ensure all the projects conform to the same structure, they have to follow certain guidelines and they have to include exercises or practical activities for the rest of the classmates. And finally, to guarantee that the whole class participates, each group has to pose questions to every group during the oral presentation. We believe that connecting the contents and activities of both modules will help the students to approach the study of English in a more holistic way.

The amount of work and energy that is being invested to follow the Bologna spirit might, however, be completely wasted if in 2010 this Degree is not included in the catalogue of university degrees. The prospects are discouraging and uncertain, but maybe we have to look at a bigger picture. It is not about the history, the language or the mechanics, it is not about particular disciplines; the new Higher Education framework is about showing us a different path to learning and we educators have to walk that path.

Notes

1 Two types of competencies are distinguished: generic and specific. The latter are subdivided into cognitive, instrumental and attitudinal. At the end of an academic year, the student is assessed not only in terms of the contents learnt, but also in terms of the learning outcomes achieved. This information must be published together with the contents of every module on the University web page, so the student knows, before enrolling, what s/he is expected to achieve.

2 I would like to thank the two students - Aranzazu Fernández Giles and Rocío Facio Romero - for their time and devotion to their projects.

3 The Project "Elaboración de un manual práctico de ejercicios y recursos electrónicos para asignaturas del departamento de inglés" started in the academic year 2005/06 and is still running this year.

4 Our Project was entitled "Creación de ejercicios interactivos para la asignatura de Historia de la Lengua Inglesa, Modalidad B".

5 Professor Miguel Milla helped us to prepare an interactive quiz using the animation software *Flash*. The idea was to offer the students a self-corrected test, so they could repeat it as many times as they wanted.

6 In the last academic year, students' evaluations have not been very positive. Although the same system has been employed, the group was not as receptive as the one in 2006/07.

7 This section enquires about the structure of the classes, about the resources employed, about the inter-relations with other modules and about the lecturer's capacity to encourage students' participation and interest.

8 As the lecturer knows the students, she has mixed them, so in each group there are at least two hard-working students. She has also included a Socrates/Erasmus foreign student in each group to increase diversity.

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