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# GRETA

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# G R E T A

A journal for teachers of English

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A journal for teachers of English

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It is an increasingly acknowledged fact that we are living a time of great change in language teaching in Higher Education (HE) worldwide. It is a time of necessary reorientation in tertiary language education, of curricular rethinking, and of reconfiguration of study plans. In Europe, this process of reinvigoration and renewal is being channelled through a specific policy framework – the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), whose creation is the overarching aim of the Bologna Process.

This reform, which seeks to achieve more broadly compatible HE systems across Europe, is affecting all curricular levels in the language teaching arena at tertiary level – from objectives to evaluation. We are at that crucial stage in the European convergence process of moving from theorizing to practice, of translating the general European agenda into a successful local one. As the Graz Declaration (2003: 5) states, “the main challenge now is to transform the multitude of legislative changes that have been taking place across Europe in the past few years into meaningful academic aims and institutional realities.” The goal of this monographic volume is to support this important endeavour, by presenting practical accounts and experiences which evince how the new European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) can successfully be put into practice in language classrooms across Spanish universities.

And it cannot be more fitting to check the pulse of Europe’s new landscape in language teaching than in a volume which pays homage to a Professor who has always been at the forefront of pedagogical innovation in English language teaching – Professor Neil McLaren. Neil’s towering figure has been the intellectual beacon guiding generations upon generations of students towards personal richness and academic excellence at the University of Granada’s Department of English Philology.

A students’ teacher and a teachers’ teacher, he embodies the purest essence of what university should be – not just a place of learning but a true community of teachers and students, a *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*. A true Renaissance humanist always at the side of students, this unique scholar who is now retiring emphasized the uniqueness of each of his students, nurturing their individual path to knowledge and personal development.

Never has the academic message been as rich, nor the messenger as tantalizing. His pedagogic magnetism mesmerized students, who literally

flocked to his lectures not only to learn concepts, but to absorb his method, based on the Enlightenment's critical attitude which has been so fertile for science (and humanity) for the past three centuries. As a distinguished member of our editorial board, he spreads the mantle of his wisdom over GRETA, to the immense benefit of us all, whether staff or readership.

Each of us is ultimately measured by the number and fertility of the seeds we have sown in our personal as well as in our professional lives. An endless, ecstatic field in bloom contemplates, in awe and gratitude, Dr. McLaren, our *magister*.

The volume kicks off precisely with his seminal overview of the changes in language teaching at Spanish university in the last four decades. In a beautifully conducted interview by **Professor Jesús M. Nieto García, Dr. McLaren** shares with us his insightful views on several hot-button issues in our field: the Bologna process, plurilingual education in Andalusia, the future of the *Selectividad* exam, the role of ICT in language learning, or the native vs. non-native speaker debate. An interview to be treasured.

In the first article, **Anna M. Brígido Corachán** illustrates the main assets of using virtual forums to foster crucial competencies within the EHEA, including collaborative work, problem-solving skills, or critical thinking. She also sets forth a valuable set of guidelines to activate and monitor virtual forum use.

**Alfonso Ceballos Muñoz** then makes a spirited defence of the shift from the traditional transmission of information model based on *ex-cathedra* lecturing to one which is grounded on competency development. He describes in detail the objectives, methodology, classroom arrangements, and evaluation system which he has gradually introduced and refined in the past four years of ECTS piloting within the subject of *Comentario Literario de Textos Ingleses*. The ultimate aim is to make the students aware of the fact that, while the knowledge they need is easily retrievable from accessible sources, they must strive to develop a set of competencies – critical and analytical capacity, research skills, teamwork – which will prove essential for their future incorporation to the job market.

In turn, **Carmen Fernández Martín** fleshes out the way in which *History of the English Language* – a traditionally challenging course at the University of Cádiz – has been transformed in the European convergence process. Within the latter, materials are increasingly diversified, learning from the best practices of others is actively incorporated, and correction and assessment have been modified to meet the demands of the new credit system. Data from learning outcomes and evaluation surveys is presented, highlighting the difficulties encountered and the most outstanding challenges yet to be faced.

ICT runs through the next set of articles. **Carmen Gregori-Signes** makes a case for the targeted incorporation of new technologies in the language classroom in order to bolster the Bologna process. She introduces and expands on educational digital storytelling by underscoring its numerous assets as a language teaching tool and by explaining how it can be successfully

incorporated into the field of English Studies. In turn, **Barry Pennock-Speck**, **Marina Torralbo Jover**, and **M<sup>a</sup> Goretti Zaragoza Ninet and Begoña Clavel Arroitia** report on extremely interesting experiences with very promising outcomes which they have carried out with ICT in diverse English Studies subjects: *History of the English language*, *Inglés Instrumental Intermedio*, *English Language II*, and *English Dialectology*. What transcends is that ICT is an exciting opportunity for teachers and students in the present and future of language teaching within the European convergence process.

**María Jordano de la Torre** focuses on a different field – that of ESP for Tourism. She explores the teaching of oral competence in a distance learning context by describing a project which has capitalized on the opportunities offered by ICT to use instant messaging and webinars to advance in the teaching of this competence, while also developing generic and subject-specific competencies.

**Melinda Dooly** and **Dolors Masats** frame their work within yet another area: that of teacher training. Their article expounds on the necessary paradigm shift which needs to take place in tertiary language education in order to move away from rote learning and traditional methodologies and towards project-based, collaborative, and self-directed learning. They attempt to overcome initial skepticism in the adoption of these novel methods by implementing a teacher training program with videos and movie-making with pre-service educators at the Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona. The ultimate aim is to prepare future teachers for the educational system of the 21st century.

The thrust of **Robert O'Dowd's** contribution to the volume is that, while competencies are crucial in the new higher education context, little concretion is provided as to their evaluation. He tackles the issue of learner competency development and assessment, and relates them to online foreign language education. He then reports on the outcomes of a survey to determine what and how online interaction is evaluated and concludes that online assessment is still a niche which needs to be addressed and filled.

Our regular sections – ***Culture and Literature***, ***Net Ideas***, and ***Reviews*** –, keep us well-informed on the latest goings-on in these areas and fill us in on where to look if want to continue to be up-to-date.

We thank our contributors to this volume for pooling their knowledge on the application of the ECTS to language teaching and for showing us, with their invaluable insights, how to face the so-called 'language challenge' successfully. Their experiences provide testimony to the fact that times of change like the ones we are living in our field should energize rather than deplete us. They evince how, far from engaging in mere methodological 'window-dressing', it is possible to use the ECTS as the perfect framework to reset, renew, and improve our HE system and to reinvigorate language learning.

**María Luisa Pérez Cañado**  
**Ana María Ortega Cebreros**

# INTERVIEW WITH NEIL MCLAREN



Jesús M. Nieto García

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When I think of James Neil Douglas McLaren, I always remember his first lessons in what was then the 4th year of English Philology at Granada University in 1980-1981. I had completed my first three years in the campus that Granada University had in Jaén at the time, and those among my new classmates who had been Neil's students previously said that he was a great teacher and that I could not possibly miss the subjects he taught. So there I went; that first year I enrolled in the two subjects he was teaching, one dealing with the analysis of non-literary texts (what has later been included in the field of "non-literary" stylistics) and one dealing with the analysis of literary texts proper. Well, after that first year in Granada, I thought I still had many new things to learn from him, so when I knew that he was teaching another subject the following year, on ELT methodology, I thought "I can't miss it," and there I went again. I think I did not miss one single lesson he gave in those two years, even though it sometimes meant walking a long way to and from the Faculty more than once a day. You can guess how lithe and active I felt at the end of those two years. And our internal history went on...

So last year, one day somebody came to me and said something like, "Hey, you know? I heard Neil McLaren is retiring at the end of the year," and I thought something like, "Oh, come on, this guy must be out of his senses." I simply couldn't think of the English Department without Neil, and it is not just melancholy (by the way, I used to stress the second syllable of this word at the time; thank you, Neil, I know better now), or the feeling that I am now obviously not so lithe and possibly not as active, but the thing is that, ever since then a few ideas seem to be going round and round again in my mind, considering the impressive and massive work he has done with so many of us in the past thirty-five years or so, and considering how we have improved so many things whereas others do not seem to be so well off as they should be. So, thanking him for these years and also for this little while that we are sharing, what follows is a rather informal chat between teacher and pupil, and also between colleagues. On the one hand, I am sure that, through his expertise, his writings and the indelible stamp he has left on all of us, he still has many more lessons to teach. On the other hand, I feel honoured to humbly speak of him as a colleague, although I know that this is practically an impossible challenge, being on an approximate par with him is no easy matter, although I think that I can improve, as a teacher, every day, and that is one of my goals for life.

**J.N.: Neil, trying to make a balance of these years, in what sense is the current situation different from the situation you found in Spanish Universities in the 1970's?**

N.M.: First of all, I should like to thank *GRETA*, and its editorial board, most sincerely for the privilege of this interview, and Prof. Jesús Nieto personally for his extremely friendly, tactful and professional preparation and editing of the same, with all the work that involves. I would also like to apologise in advance for the disjointed nature of some of the observations that follow. Coming on to the first question, then, there are really many differences between the situation now and the situation when I arrived, in 1973. If we think about the University curriculum, it was first of all a five-year course and English was only introduced in the third year; it was a

closed syllabus in the sense that there were no optional subjects; and it was also –not so anecdotally– different in the sense that we had classes on Saturday morning! So that it was a regular procedure for the student to have three classes Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and three classes Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, which was a very good idea, in my opinion! Teaching *Prácticas de Lengua Inglesa*, as it was then, in the third year and fourth year, we had big groups, and we were allowed to divide the groups by competence, that is, after a pre-test we effectively "streamed" them and we adjusted the teaching to the two or three groups. That, perhaps, would not be politically correct nowadays –or maybe it would– but I didn't have any problem with it. I'm not at all sure the students had very many problems with it either - that's something which has changed.

Of course, the number and type of students is also different nowadays. I don't want to categorise sociologically a type of student, but obviously the primary and secondary education system was quite different then to what it is now: there were far fewer people who went through the whole system. And there were quite a lot of students who, although they were not particularly gifted perhaps linguistically, when they came into English in the third year did have the backup of those first two years. Apart from the lack of the greater flexibility we have nowadays, when I started it was pretty clear, I think, when you came into a Faculty like the Arts Faculty, you were more or less assured of a job, and that job basically was teaching. I remember our course was very clearly orientated to providing a good, solid, general education in English Philology, and specifically a pedagogical education for future English teachers, and nobody, I think, had any serious doubts about that, apart from the few people who went on to do research: in those days, as you remember, certainly in Granada, there were few facilities for secondary school teacher training, since the professional teacher training colleges were basically concerned with primary school teachers and not with training secondary school teachers. I think that nowadays we have to be much more flexible, and much more concerned with a greater variety of future occupations, which hopefully will be reflected in the materials students have to study, and how they study them, in our English courses.

The next thing, of course, is that when I started it was "pre-internet", pre-multi-media: books were the thing, and books were expensive, libraries had nothing like the capacity they have now. Many, perhaps most, of our students could afford to buy books, perhaps more than nowadays - it's difficult to compare -, but obviously books and photocopies were the essential staple element, which in one sense simplified the task enormously, with all the limitations inherent in that. But if we think that you can't do everything anyway in a university English course, even one of five years, then it's not a bad idea to have a book-based course, where students at least get the most they possibly can out of their learning material.

Anyway, to conclude, I have quite fond memories of that initial curriculum. I do think it had very positive features, despite its rigidity –it could have had, for example, such things as introducing translation activities into the English curriculum. It had to be modified, and it has been modified. Whether for the better in general terms is very difficult to say, because the student population has changed so enormously over the last years. I think that we have much greater resources, and the challenge we have nowadays is to use those possibilities of all kinds, not only technological, but others. For example, in the old days it was more difficult for students to travel abroad, as there was no established Erasmus system. The situation is vastly different now and there is a very well-established system, and I think it's really sad that all students do not take up all the opportunities they have for travelling. Anyway, I feel equally comfortable about both situations, because they were/are in a sense both appropriate for their respective times.

**J.N. Thinking of what we can imagine just round the corner, how do you think we should start adapting to the new challenges implicit in the Bologna process?**

N.M. The first thing I think we will have to do is to get our aims clear. The term "Bologna" is bandied about in a loose way, and I feel we really will have to decide what we mean by it. Is it a re-working of the whole degree course, or is it, as I personally think it should be, much more a concentration on the methodological side and getting that right, providing the right number of physical possibilities, rooms for example, to be able to teach in the way that the Bologna concept suggests? I might say that it is not, in my view, a question of reproducing the "Oxford and Cambridge" system, which as you know is very much based on individual supervisions, or tutorials. I'm not sure we realise the enormous expense which that involves. I mean, those universities are very well-off, for historical reasons, and it's not something which can be introduced, at least in those terms, overnight, or perhaps ever, in a University like Granada, with sixty-five thousand students, or whatever, so I think we've got to be careful about trying to copy systems which have operated in other universities. British universities are,

comparatively, very small –though admittedly other European universities are certainly not–, and you can't just translate their system wholesale into the Spanish system. However, I'm all in favour of the change, as long as we don't go overboard and try to do too much and therefore feel frustrated that we're not doing enough. I also hope that we won't discard the formal lecture just like that –I'm not suggesting that that has been proposed–, since I feel it's got a clear place in the syllabus, given what we could term the traditional Spanish "learning style".

It's perfectly obvious that the students will have to use all the resources of technology at their disposal –and that does not mean just switch on the Internet and look for something–, the teachers also will have to be very much clued up on what is available in the Internet in their field, which is half the job, directing the students to the reliable sources, and not "any old" source. That's an area which all of us are completely aware of; it's just that there are different levels of confidence about using these techniques. In my view, the whole principle of the student workload being the basic unit, as it were, is perfectly sound, as long as –to go back to my first point– we are very clear what our aims are. It shouldn't be the case that, as long as students work three thousand hours, or whatever, they get their degree, and also I'm not sure that we all realise how much, not simply extra work, but careful reading of projects done by the students, etc., how much time and energy that is going to take. It will have to be built in, not only to the students' workload, but the teachers' workload, in an intelligent way.

My last reflection on the "Bologna" process is that, as always, the key word is going to be patience: we're not going to be able to expect

My last reflection on the "Bologna" process is that, as always, the key word is going to be patience: we're not going to be able to expect quick results, it's not going to be the case that everything is going to change overnight.

quick results, it's not going to be the case that everything is going to change overnight. There are going to be inequalities, for all kinds of reasons; some universities with a smaller student-staff ratio than others will probably be

able to function more efficiently; even universities with new buildings will be in an advantageous position, maybe. All those kinds of logistic things will mean that we're not talking about instant success, we're talking about, say, five years to get going, ten to know that we're pretty well on the right track.

**J.N. "Universal" knowledge of at least one foreign language seems to be one of the great issues ahead, for all**

**graduates. To what extent are Spanish universities ready for this change in conception and attitudes, both for students and the administration?**

N.M. This question is framed generally. Of course my experience is local, but just thinking generally, although it's absolutely essential that most – at least, students who graduate at university level – do have some command of English, for obvious reasons, we come back to the problem of numbers, with universities and faculties being so immensely big here, which is obviously an initial difficulty, no matter how many techniques you use. Though I'm not up-to-date with the latest curricula of different faculties, it seems to be the case that, with the apparent reduction in contact hours in some degree courses, the people who teach those courses are very reluctant to "lose" hours to their students' learning English. That's a difficult problem which will have to be tackled. Whether it can be tackled by law, as it were, is a very difficult matter, it probably cannot, or should not.

What should inevitably be done is *content teaching*; that is, there should be, let us say, one subject in each year that should be taught in English, and I don't think it's too difficult in the great majority of degree courses. I also feel that, apart from that, there should be the obligation for all students to submit, during their years of study, a certain percentage of their work in English. Some students, for example, may feel their English is not good enough in the first year to write anything in English, but they know they'll have to produce, in the four or five years, say, ten pieces of work in English, so they can do two a year, or they can leave the first year and do three a year, or whatever. That would get them accustomed to academic writing in English in their specialities - medicine, or science, or law, whatever - and would also foster the idea that English is directly related to their speciality. I feel that's the way it'll have to go, rather than obligatory English lessons for

everyone, which is not feasible, or very difficult. This kind of obligation puts the ball back in the student's court, which is what Bologna is about at the end of the day. It's the students' responsibility, really, to educate themselves as well as they can.

**J.N. This has obvious connections with those challenges that both primary and secondary schools have to face. From what you have heard concerning plurilingual education, what are your impressions about it in primary and secondary schools?**

N.M. I will be fairly traditional in my response to this question. I just said that I think content teaching should be an important part of university education. However, I'm not at all sure that it should be anticipated in the primary or the secondary situation. Now, this is not intended to be, in any way, a criticism of the

capacity of teachers to attempt something extremely difficult; it's just that I feel it's essential for students to get the basics right, remembering that secondary school is nationally obligatory up to 16, and therefore you cannot presuppose motivation, as we know. I feel that it's so important for students to get, if you like, the "content", that I would be hesitant about adding an additional difficulty, which might reduce competence in the content to possibly dangerous levels - I don't want to over-dramatise-, though I haven't participated in

teaching in a bilingual or plurilingual situation, and I know many teachers have and that there are regular conferences about the issue. I would also like to see a clear statement of *evaluation* procedures, which seems to be a difficult, thorny issue - exactly what you're going to test, and how you're going to test it. As I said, I'm speaking out of ignorance, I really don't know enough, but I think if there is research

on that, it'll be very good to see. Also I'm a bit worried about, and I don't mean this critically, the anarchical way in which it may be introduced. I mean, if school X, or region X, teaches philosophy, or whatever, in English, and region Y teaches history in English, then how are we going to compare, for example, the results of the philosophy students and the history students when they come to university entrance examinations and all that - what impact is it going to have?

However, it's perfectly true that, in other European countries, it's been attempted and done - other countries, it must be stressed, with more experience in this kind of teaching, and in foreign language teaching in general. But we shouldn't, as we sometimes do, say "They do it in (Sweden), why can't we do it here?". It's not that we are better, or worse, or whatever; it's

I think content teaching should be an important part of university education. However, I'm not at all sure that it should be anticipated in the primary or the secondary situation.

just the social, economic, and educational situation is so different that it's difficult. However, I would reserve my judgment, if you allow me, on bilingual or plurilingual education in primary and secondary, while definitely being in favour of a percentage of it at university.

**J.N. So, do you think that other supplementary actions, like intensive English courses, the use of undubbed films on TV and some cinemas, for example, would be any help?**

N.M. Of course, absolutely. It's a national scandal –I think that's not an exaggeration– that the mass media do not provide the Spanish listener with more English input. It's perfectly true that we have satellites and many TVs have “dual”, and people who have them, and people who are interested can tune in to the BBC and so on, but it's not good enough that all the national television channels are not *obliged* to programme films and so on in English with subtitles. People must come to regard it as normal to hear English sometimes on TV. A recent example of what seems to me a totally misguided approach was the first speech of president Obama. On national TV, they dubbed it from about the fifth second of his speech. The speech was extremely well delivered, it would have been easy to subtitle it, with no difficulty whatsoever. It's a tragedy, without being dramatic, that possibly one of the most important presidential speeches in our lifetimes, given the situation, was not obligatorily made available to the Spanish audience in English, because it just doesn't give anybody the chance to begin to understand what this man is saying, who he is saying it to, how he is saying it. The Spanish listener may not understand everything, but the tone of voice and the body language are so important. I think that's a very concrete, specific case, which could be multiplied, and I was very sad to see it not given in the language. It's true that satellites help,

but I think that doesn't mean that the authorities don't have a tremendous obligation to do much more.

**J.N. Another on-going debate has been the reliability of *Selectividad*, the exam that all Spanish students have to pass to enter the University. I have very recently heard that in less than three years this will include not just a written test –as has been customary–, but also an oral one. In what sense do you think that this may change attitudes among students and teachers, and priorities, in terms of methods and approach?**

N.M. If there is an oral element of some kind in the Spanish university entrance exam, it will obviously condition the way teachers prepare for this exam, and I would estimate, condition it for the better, because I think we all agree that in general the oral competence is really one of the, as you say here, *asignaturas pendientes* of the language teaching programme. Since all the criteria which are being used now, nationally and internationally, to organise foreign language teaching place, quite rightly, a tremendous

It's a national scandal –I think that's not an exaggeration– that the mass media do not provide the Spanish listener with more English input.

emphasis on oral skills, then of course it's important and it's obviously going to have a serious effect. The first thing one thinks about, given the practical situation, is a listening test, which is OK, if it can be done fairly for everybody. It will mean, again, a tremendous amount of work, extremely

careful synchronisation of exams and security measures, but I think that can be done. What's much more problematic, naturally, is the speaking skill. If *Selectividad* is going to be, in serious terms, the public exam to get into university, and if we are going to demand some degree of speaking proficiency, I suspect that will mean including external examiners, which logistically is complex but it can be done –it's done in many other countries–, but it will have to be paid for, and organised. And then there's

time: oral exams can't be done like a listening test where the students listen together, even if in smaller groups. They take many more hours, so it's going to be difficult in the school timetable to organise it. Then, even if it's a fairly simple oral exam, which it will have to be, I do feel that it should be two examiners, one of them external, in order to give a certain level of reliability in the test

–I really don't know enough to say what possible role the new technologies could have here. The old –and I don't mean "old" negatively– ARELS exams, as models for a possible oral component in Selectivity would be very interesting, if they could be reformulated, because they were very good at giving a situational context where people could speak. I know there are more modern exams on the market now, but that would be an interesting model to look at. This is a very complex issue, and maybe we will begin with a listening section, see how it goes, as it were, and then with our confidence renewed, add a speaking one.

**J.N. And now, in a more personal vein, what do you, as a father of two bilingual children, think of the age factor in learning a foreign language? What means do you think other couples may have if they want to have some "guarantee" that their own children will attain a reasonably good command of a foreign language in the future?**

N.M. In this respect, I would like to comment on, and I'm sure he won't mind, the experience

of one of my colleagues –I have seen and talked to the child in question. The parents deliberately exposed their child, or let her be exposed, to an enormous amount of input from satellite TV, children's programmes, etc., from a very early age. The child is now, I think, five and a half. The input was constant, almost at any time of the day, the father is a native English speaker

and spoke to the child in English, but it is absolutely amazing the amount of knowledge the child has acquired, *and* the capacity the child has to produce and adapt that knowledge. Motivation was great; there was no frustration. I've had many conversations with the father, and he's assured me that the child comes out with expressions which he certainly hasn't taught her, which are perfectly appropriate, and which are even used ironically. I mean, it's not simply the language, it's the discourse. Of course, there are dangers involved, which all of those involved in this particular family

realise: there's the danger of a possible isolation, or possible overdependence on the TV. And it's probable that such progress can only happen *before* the formal instruction stage: it's probably not going to happen with a child of ten or eleven.

**J.N. To what extent do you think that Information and Communication Technology can be a help in learning a foreign language? Is this part of a new conception of the way people communicate with each other, do you think the risk of "wasting" your time in front of**

If there is an oral element of some kind in the Spanish university entrance exam, it will obviously condition the way teachers prepare for this exam, and I would estimate, condition it for the better, because I think we all agree that in general the oral competence is really one of the, as you say here, *asignaturas pendientes* of the language teaching programme.

**a computer screen is simply not worth it, or should there be some means to make the most of these new tools without interfering in the learners' new interests?**

N.M. It's perfectly obvious that it's all here to stay. I think we have to distinguish between "authored" programmes, I mean, *CALL* –Computer Assisted Language Learning– in the traditional sense, and the more recent use of the Internet and Internet-related activities. I think we will have to be very careful about choosing the right *CALL* programmes, because they're very often too self-enclosed. Even though they may call themselves "interactive," they don't allow the students very much leeway to recycle themselves in the programme, and if we use those kinds of authored programmes on CDs too often in a class, it will become mechanical, in a similar way in which the language laboratory was mechanical. But there are extremely helpful webpages on the use of computers in language learning available for teachers nowadays –like *ICT4LT*. The Internet, on the other hand, and associated activities, give more English possibilities. The range of language is greater, it's less organised, and therefore the teacher has a difficult job. You can't just let your students loose on the Internet and let them pick up everything, you have to structure the tasks carefully, but, if we come back to what seems to be accepted as a modern axiom, that foreign language teaching must be learner-centred, then it's obvious that the Internet does offer a lot of possibilities for the students to do many activities that they are genuinely interested in. So from that point of view, it's enormously useful, because of the immense variety.

I was just reading recently an article which said that we still need more research on the *effectiveness* of computer-aided learning, because it's OK, and it's enjoyable, but really how effective is it, and how do we test that effectiveness? We will have to evaluate how effective certain things are, and it's not easy to do, that's a question which still needs to be answered with more research, but I think there's no question that the modern technologies are going to be, or are being, very useful.

The other difficulty I see with it is organising the curriculum. We're talking about time, and we all

know the tremendously limited time we have. Just going back to our first question, at the very beginning, when I arrived in Spain, in secondary schools there were in the first year of what was then *Bachillerato*, five hours a week of English, and this regular daily "dose" was very useful. Now, with the reduced number of hours, if you're going to use the technologies, you will have to have very clearly defined aims and levels you want to reach.

One final point which might be relevant: it does seem to be the case that communication technology activities, whether they are CD-Rom kind of authored programmes, or whether it's work on the Internet, do provide a kind of "safe" environment for the student to make mistakes: the student can make mistakes without being exposed. The students can go up the wrong track and then come back, as it were, if it's a good programme, or if they know what they are doing on the Internet, and that may be psychologically beneficial for students, to be allowed to make the mistake, not in writing, not exposed to the classmates, nor to the teacher necessarily, but just to himself or herself. To what extent do students really feel this is a safe environment where they feel they can play with the language, use the language with more freedom than they otherwise would?

J.N. And now, in for a "tricky" question. Please forgive me and feel free if you do not think you should answer it. We hear about methods, approaches and new instruments in the teaching-learning process, but we sometimes seem to forget about something that I think is previous. In the old debate between being a native and not being a native, some kind of agreement seems to have been reached, so that the emphasis now lies on qualifications, both for the native, through proper training in ELT, and for the non-native, through a deep knowledge of what being a non-native teacher of a language implies. And now, there comes a second debate, this time around models of English in the world, and we have Inner Circles –your own–, Outer Circles –a Nigerian "L2" English speaker, for instance–, Expanding Circles –mine, hopefully–, English as an International Language and what not. How do you, as a native teacher who has lived abroad

**for so many years and who is married to a non-native teacher of English, feel about all that?**

N.M. When I arrived, I shared a class with a Spanish native teacher, now a great friend, and we had a beer, before the course began, and we were just talking, and he said, “I’m Spanish, I know the Spanish situation and I can teach English. You are a native English speaker - who is more valuable?”. In many ways it doesn’t matter., the important thing is the combination, and that obviously is still the case. We should presuppose a high level of English competence in the non-native teacher; it’s perfectly obvious too that the non-native teacher, in our case the Spanish teacher, has considerable advantages in the sense of the knowledge of the difficulties which a Spanish student is going to face when approaching English, because the teacher has gone through the same process, and therefore can anticipate –and anticipation is always a good idea– possible difficulties, etc., apart from the obvious cultural affinity with the student. In this respect, I would just add a brief commentary on what was –I don’t know if it’s changed– the teaching curriculum in the Education Faculty, for Primary teachers, which has an extraordinary little amount of work in –and about– English, whereas a great proportion is on pedagogy and other related fields. This is not to despise any of that, but, if we’re talking about the competence, in general terms, of the non-native teacher, I think that will have to be sorted out, because you cannot seriously expect any teacher trainee to come to a very high level of competence unless you put in a lot more input on the English side: that’s my feeling, there’s not nearly enough time, I think, devoted to English.

You cannot seriously expect any teacher trainee to come to a very high level of competence unless you put in a lot more input on the English side: that’s my feeling, there’s not nearly enough time, I think, devoted to English.

Another factor –but this is me talking in my dotage! – is age, and going over now to the native English speaker in Spain, there’s another discussion I often have with my colleagues. When do we stop being reliable models? Is my English –I’m speaking purely for myself, knowing what I’m saying– really representative of the English which is spoken in Britain today? The answer is it is not 100% representative, it may be 90% representative, and I’m not just simply thinking about slang, the latest expressions, I’m thinking about the whole social and linguistic climate. Because if one has been out of that society, then, no matter how good and fluent one’s English is, which it obviously is, no matter how well you keep your accent, which you do, nevertheless you have not participated in that changing society, and I think, in my particular case, that British society has changed enormously over the last thirty-five years. Then, no matter how often you go back, it’s not the same going back as actually being there.

This is a factor which I think is probably not important at the secondary level so much, but it’s potentially important at university level. I’m thinking, too, about writing styles: they’ve changed enormously in Britain. You can “get away with,” if I may be old-fashioned, expressions, ways of writing, ways of formulating things, which for me, in my educational experience, would have been considered absolutely mistaken, and underlined with the red pen. There’s a greater flexibility, fluidity, there are different presuppositions when people are reading what you’ve written now than there were thirty-five years ago. As a university teacher, I think, one would have to be conscious of that possible limitation, apart from the fact that there’s no question that living

in a foreign country induces erosion of your own language, or attrition. It's perfectly true, you do find yourself forgetting the English words for so and so, because you're using the Spanish words every day. However, one tries to be professional, one tries to get over that, one keeps confident without falsifying anything. That's the point, I think.

As regards the kind of English –English for international studies, English as an International Language? It is that really. I used to tell my students in the methodology classes, don't forget that in the future you may not just be speaking English to native English speakers or native American speakers, or native Australian speakers, but to Swedes and Germans and French and whatever –and I must insist that our students have to be able to talk about *Spain*, their own culture, in acceptable English: the country, their region, the ways people live, etc. etc., which means, among many other things, knowing how to explain what a “plato

alpujarreño” is! Therefore, what I feel is necessary, and I'll finish with a paradox, is what you could call something like “simplified authentic English”. You've got to have simplified authentic language, it's got to be lexically as authentic as reasonably possible, syntactically, phonologically as simplified as reasonably possible, so it's clear, and that's the kind of combination I think perhaps we should aim at.

And as Bugs Bunny, I think, says “That's all, folks.”

**J.N. OK. Thank you very much, Neil, it's been a real pleasure.**

**When I finished this interview with Neil, on a warm, sunny February afternoon, facing the Alhambra from his flat in Granada, I had the impression that his words, and ideas, were as modern, as fresh, as they seemed to me in an October morning, back in the early 1980's, in what was then a brand new Arts Faculty, in “Cartuja,” as we used to call it. It certainly is a luxury we can, and must, afford.**

# COLLABORATIVE E-LEARNING IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA (EHEA): TOWARDS A PEER-ASSISTED CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

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*In this essay, I consider the use of virtual forums as didactic tools that foster peer-interaction and collaborative learning, and which contribute to a non-hierarchical construction of knowledge in the classroom. Online forums enhance students' interactive, rhetorical and problem-solving skills –abilities that will be crucial to them in their subsequent professional careers. I also propose several methods to activate and monitor such forums in a positive, time-efficient manner for the lecturer, and which strengthens many of the learning skills put forth by the EHEA (European Higher Education Area).*

## INTRODUCTION: DEVELOPING NEW LEARNING SKILLS WITHIN THE EHEA

The EHEA (European Higher Education Area) and its resulting academic manifestation, the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System), are dramatically changing the way we envision teacher/student learning dynamics at university level. Overall, students are encouraged, more than ever, to be responsible for their own learning practices, as instructors devise new modules that strengthen a student's autonomous ability to search for, organise and assess information. This information is then put to use in creative processes of knowledge-construction. In this manner, students do not merely acquire or learn content but actively build it up, producing cognitive output that is solidly grounded in their field of studies, and of scholarly and social value in their future professional careers.

One of the social skills that is often highlighted in the EHEA plans of studies is the ability to work as part of a team, to collaborate actively with others, putting resources and efforts together in order to enrich the process of knowledge construction in a manner that is multidirectional. Thus, the exchange of data does not merely go from teacher to student, but is actively initiated and shared by all members of the *classroom team* – including the teacher, who is often seen as a *facilitator* or *guide* in the discussion.

Small group or team work (usually consisting of two or three members) is one of the traditional methods instructors have used to foster this practice of peer-assisted learning. Group work and peer-tutoring practices are, without doubt, extremely beneficial, as students establish non-hierarchical, trust-based relationships with their classmates and are thus able to disclose to them many cognitive difficulties and misunderstandings

that are often embarrassing to admit in front of a lecturer (McLuckie and Topping, 2005: 568). However, in my experience, unmonitored group or pair work often leads to *classic* situations where one or two students perform all the tasks, and the remaining students (in a parasitic, rather than collaborative relationship) exploit their peers' efforts and get undeserved credit.

### VIRTUAL FORUMS: STRENGTHENING COLLABORATIVE E-LEARNING

During the past year, I decided to introduce a different method to foster collaborative work in an open space that all students could access at any time, and where they could *all* learn from one another (not just from a peer-tutor) in an altruistic manner.<sup>1</sup>

I proceeded to set up a *virtual forum*, a tool available in most blackboard e-learning systems (*Aula Virtual* or similar software products, provided by universities in the EHEA group), but that is, understandably, often disregarded by instructors, who either favour face-to-face exchanges in the classroom, or who are dissuaded by the amount of time and effort that is required to activate and monitor such forums.

In October 2007, I created a virtual forum for each of my 2<sup>nd</sup>-cycle literary modules in the Department of English and German Philology, at the University of Valencia (*Pre-19<sup>th</sup> Century British Theatre*, *Translation of English Literary Texts* and *World Literatures in English*), and found them to be easily-accessible, user-friendly, and inexpensive tools that became instantly popular among a surprising majority of students. For the most part, online forums functioned as a dynamic and interactive space that fostered cognitive engagement, critical literacy, as well as autonomous and collaborative learning. The forum also provided students with further opportunities to strengthen language acquisition and argumentation skills in a creative and flexible manner beyond the classroom setting. Furthermore, as it is an inherently flexible and fairly intimate space, the forum proved to be particularly beneficial for students who tend to be more reserved in face-to-face settings, and for those who could not attend classroom lectures and seminars on a weekly basis due to

professional or personal reasons. Thus, as McLuckie and Topping have previously suggested (2005), these online forums helped to redistribute power relations, which in a virtual environment tended to be more peer-based than in the classroom (where they can be dominated by unidirectional exchanges with the instructor), and fostered collaborative interactions among students who had barely talked to one another before.

Although they share many characteristics, *collaborative* e-learning is not the same as *peer-assisted* learning (PAL, where one student assists another, and thus functions as a tutor of sorts), nor *cooperative* learning, where the work is subdivided into specialised tasks. As Slotte and Tyunjäla (2005: 193) underline,

*Collaboration [...] involves the production of a joint outcome and thus demands sharing and generating new knowledge together with one's peers. In this way, it provides individuals with better opportunities to use higher-order thinking skills and problem-solving skills in the construction of their ideas about practice.*

As I mentioned above, although the potential of collaborative learning through virtual forums is well-known by most faculty, many instructors are dissuaded from using it by the fact that moderation of such forums can be extremely time-consuming and that the forums themselves may have "*limited effectiveness*" (McLuckie and Topping, 2004: 563). As Thomas has pointed out, learners in such forums often have to navigate through many incoherent structures and mistaken interpretations (Thomas, 2002). I argue, however, that students can also learn from each other's mistakes by having to ponder and resolve clashing voices and expositions of data, which in turn makes them consider the relativity of interpretation, and the need to assess data in context. They thus develop critical thinking skills with some help from the instructor and from more advanced classmates who often act as spontaneous moderators/cognitive guides.<sup>2</sup> One of the most positive advantages of virtual forums is that students often improve their rhetorical skills by mimicking each other's syntactic structures, discursive transitions, and choice of vocabulary. Last year, I noticed that many

students using the forum in a habitual manner slowly improved their expository skills and gained useful vocabulary and expressions that they later used in their final papers and exams. They were immediately aware of which students exhibited more complex critical capacities, and a higher level of lexical and syntactic expression, and then proceeded to adopt, in several cases, many of these advanced students' rhetorical tricks.

We should also consider that collaboration and interactivity, as Thomas points out, are social and academic skills that students do not possess inherently. Therefore, interactivity –that is, students actively engaging each other's postings in a coherent manner that leads to the construction of personal and collaborative meaning, so that discussion threads do not become what Thomas (2002: 359) denominates “*poorly interrelated monologues*”–, needs to be learned. In fact, interactivity and collaboration are skills that will be of wide use in students' subsequent and professional careers regardless of the field they choose to work in (academic institutions, private firms, etc.). Furthermore, beyond the acquisition of specific curricular content and the construction of meaningful output, collaboration in the forum strengthens social relationships, builds the students' self-confidence, and heightens their trust in one another and in the instructor. Trust and self-confidence among the participants are key elements in fostering an appropriate learning environment (Slotte and Tynjälä, 2005: 203), and are often difficult feelings to foster when managing groups of over 80 students.<sup>3</sup>

I found that setting up a virtual forum was an efficient tool in initiating the sharing of experiences and insights, as it encouraged students to be motivated and interact with each other, and with me, from week one. This year –and following Lam (2004)–, I have also opened an informal thread that functions as a literary café of sorts, where students can exchange information that is not strictly academic, as a way of breaking the ice, and in the hope that social interaction will contribute to enhance their motivation and, therefore, their level of cognitive engagement with the subject matter.<sup>4</sup>

## FORUM GUIDELINES: INCREASING PARTICIPATION IN THE FORUM

Encouraging collaborative practices is crucial to building knowledge collectively, out of a body of information units/core contents, which are thus assimilated in a more effective manner. Moreover, team work enhances values such as tolerance, generosity and non-competition to reach a common goal.

In order to increase the number of argumentative interactions that lead to the construction of academic knowledge and the negotiation of an informed viewpoint, the instructor needs to be an active *facilitator* of the discussion in the forum. For example, it is convenient to implement some guidelines of forum use, user protocols or, as Richards calls them, “*group etiquette*” (2000), which shows students how they ought to interact with one another in the virtual space. These guidelines will obviously be adapted to the objectives set by the instructor regarding the forum, and the role that this tool may play in the module. The instructor should also be clear with his/her expectations from the start, emphasizing to students that they must avoid plagiarism and any offensive remarks and keep their contributions non-repetitive, respectful, focused, engaged with previous comments, and concise. Students who open new threads should also label them in a descriptive manner, detailing the overall content and purpose of their comment, so it opens, rather than blurs, a discussion.

Whether it is the instructor or any student-assistants who act as *facilitators* of the discussion, having forum moderators is the keystone that enhances the dynamism of the forum and determines its potential success or its failure. Moreover, to encourage intelligent forum use from the beginning, the teacher also has to provide ice-breaking tasks that guide the students towards the fulfilment of specific course objectives. This can be done by means of questionnaires, case-studies, problem-solving activities, or exercises that compel students to find and share textual evidence in assigned readings or in the core bibliography. Additionally, the forum can be used to continue

and wrap up discussions that are left unfinished in face-to-face classroom debates. The virtual forum can also be deployed as a warming-up platform where students can brainstorm ideas prior to the composition of written assignments and essays or, as Warschauer points out, as a “*prelude to oral discussion*” (1996: 22).

Furthermore, Moore and Marra (2005) suggest giving students specific problem-solving activities to develop constructive argumentation. For example, students may categorize their postings and insert them within previously organized, scaffolded discussions where each student contributes to the argument in a constructive manner by modifying, supporting, or challenging the main lines of thought proposed by the instructor. In the appendix to their article “Transferable skills for online peer learning”, McLuckie and Topping also provide a series of questionnaires and suggestions that can be extremely useful when teaching our students interactivity and “*process skills*” to build e-learning in a productive and equal manner (2004).

## CONCLUSION

Virtual forums are extremely useful tools to foster collaborative and multidirectional e-learning in the classroom. They are also effective

in building the students’ self-confidence and trust in one another and in the instructor. For example, students who lack confidence in their judgement or in their critical thinking skills are often rewarded with direct answers to their postings from other students and from their teacher –a positive confirmation that encourages them to proceed with their ideas.

I have also observed that peer-tutoring also develops spontaneously in the forum, with one student actively assisting another after a plea for help. Thus, students take active responsibility in the success of their peers’ cognitive progress together with their own. In this respect, forum participation seems to benefit students with two types of personality traits: insecure and unmotivated (as the latter may be dragged into the discussion by the heightened engagement of their classmates). It also provides students who cannot attend face-to-face discussions with a platform where they can communicate easily with their classmates, take part in the collective construction of knowledge, and learn from one another. Overall, forums strengthen interactive and problem-solving skills, help to build a classroom environment governed by trust and collaboration, and enhance students’ active involvement in class discussion, which is often limited in modules taught to large groups.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I should point out that such *altruism* was greatly facilitated by the fact that meaningful participation in the classroom and/or the forum was assessed. Through the forum, the instructor was also able to monitor which students were being more collaborative and generous in their contributions, and which students were more open and honest about their points of confusion in requesting peer/instructor-help –requests which, in turn, activated further sharing of information/advice from fellow classmates that, in most cases, led to collective constructions of knowledge.
- <sup>2</sup> It is convenient, in fact, to spot these advanced, more engaged students early in the semester, and to encourage them to help actively with forum facilitation. When in doubt, students should also be reminded that information must be well researched and compared with texts from their core bibliography.
- <sup>3</sup> For example, in my experience, participation in the forum clearly contributed to an increased participation in face-to-face discussions. Forum comments encouraged students to enrich classroom discussion with further contributions, and thus enhanced three language learning skills: writing, reading and oral expression. See my unpublished study “From the Virtual Forum to the Classroom: Developing Cognitive Engagement and Critical Thinking Skills through Online and Face-to-Face Student Discussions”, where I provide statistical evidence regarding this matter, focusing on one of these modules (*Pre-19<sup>th</sup>-century British Theatre*). Suffice it to say that most students who participated often in the forum (29 out of 31 forum contributors) passed the module comfortably, clearly improved their expository skills, and mastered the subject matter.
- <sup>4</sup> For a study that focuses on the building of a social dynamic that leads to collaborative learning in online (distance) education, see Betty and Becky Cox (2005).

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# CÓMO TRABAJAR CON LA LITERATURA INGLESA Y NO SUSPENDER EN EL INTENTO

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*El presente artículo no pretende más que compartir una experiencia que viene siendo objeto de ensayo-error y revisión constante desde hace cuatro años. La asignatura de Comentario Literario de Textos Ingleses comienza su andadura en el curso 2004-2005 con la implantación de la experiencia piloto del crédito europeo en la titulación de Filología Inglesa de la Universidad de Cádiz, una de las primeras universidades andaluzas en sumarse a dicha experiencia. En dicha asignatura, de forma general, y partiendo de la evaluación continua (y además de fomentar el hábito y la familiaridad con la lectura en inglés), se persigue que el estudiante aprenda a reconocer posibilidades de comprender, analizar e interpretar la representación de significados culturales en diversas formas de textualidad, subrayando que la experiencia del mundo está siempre de alguna forma mediatizada por textos de diverso tipo.*

## INTRODUCCIÓN

El 25 de marzo de 2001, la convención de estudiantes europeos reunidos en Göteborg concluyó con las siguientes palabras recogidas en la Declaración de los Estudiantes: *"Finally, it must be stressed that students as competent, active and constructive partners, must be seen as one of the driving forces for changes in the field of education"* (ESIB, 2005: 3). Igualmente, en la Declaración de Graz del 4 de julio de 2003 se afirmaba que:

*Students are key partners within the academic community. The Bologna reforms will: facilitate*

*the introduction of flexible and individualised learning paths for all students; improve the employability of graduates and make our institutions attractive to students from Europe and from other continents* (EUA, 2003: 7).

Con frecuencia, los profesores universitarios, al hablar desde nuestras altivas cátedras y modernos atriles de las aulas universitarias, olvidamos que los verdaderos agentes del conocimiento y la información son precisamente los que tenemos frente a nosotros y a quienes aburrirnos con tremendas clases magistrales que, en su inmensa mayoría, no sirven absolutamente para nada. Quizá nuestro ego se vea más

reforzado, pero poco más. A menudo, damos por sentado que los estudiantes son sólo los receptores de lo que nosotros, profesores doctores universitarios depositarios del saber y el conocimiento, innovemos en el Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior (EEES). Y es ahí donde cometemos el primer error. Son los alumnos y alumnas los que nos dirán hacia dónde debemos mover nuestros esfuerzos en la mejora metodológica de nuestros planes de estudio europeos y cuáles son sus necesidades para capacitarlos dentro de un voraz y competitivo mercado laboral. No debemos ser más que indicadores, los que les señalemos dónde está la herramienta que necesitan o hacerles ver que tienen las capacidades necesarias para ser protagonistas de su propia formación. De lo contrario, puede que después, al cabo de los años, comenten que les dimos mucha información pero que nunca les enseñamos ni a usarla ni a buscarla.

En este orden de cosas, las letras, y en particular los estudios filológicos (tan denostados y despreciados en el mundo en que vivimos dado el utilitarismo y pragmatismo del que hace gala) tienen una palabra muy importante que decir por lo que incluyen de análisis, discusión, trabajo en equipo e investigación.

Concretamente, en nuestras aulas, y en los tiempos que corren, la literatura como materia obligatoria dentro de los estudios filológicos carece del interés de una gran mayoría de los estudiantes, quienes aducen motivos muy válidos desde su punto de vista para considerarla ardua, pesada e inútil. Ante esta realidad, es preciso ponerse manos a la obra para innovar y reformar.

### EL CONEJILLO DE INDIAS: COMENTARIO LITERARIO DE TEXTOS INGLESES

Este artículo quiere romper una lanza en favor de esta materia y, a través de la asignatura que imparto (*Comentario Literario de Textos Ingleses*),<sup>1</sup> demostrar en primer lugar que los alumnos acaban amando la literatura inglesa; que no sólo aumenta su interés por la lectura de los clásicos sino que también, y sobre todo, terminan sabiendo analizar, discutir, investigar y trabajar en equipo para compartir información. De forma general, partiendo de la evaluación

continua (y además de fomentar el hábito y la familiaridad con la lectura en inglés), se persigue que el estudiante aprenda a reconocer posibilidades de comprender, analizar e interpretar la representación de significados culturales en diversas formas de textualidad, subrayando que la experiencia del mundo está siempre de alguna forma mediatizada por *textos* de diverso tipo. Así, los estudiantes desarrollan su capacidad de apreciar su influencia en la cultura y de comentarlos literariamente. De forma más específica, se revisa y amplía el conocimiento de los estudiantes en lo que constituye el campo de los estudios literarios - tanto aspectos más tradicionales como más contemporáneos. En cuanto a las destrezas que esta asignatura desarrolla, habría que mencionar aquellas relacionadas con el análisis de textos literarios a un nivel léxico-semántico y sintáctico (comprensión escrita) en un primer momento, y las relacionadas con la expresión escrita en inglés al destacar los principales rasgos estilísticos de un texto dado.

Durante los cuatro cursos que he impartido la asignatura de *Comentario Literario de Textos Ingleses* (2004-2008), ha sido precisamente el *feedback* de los alumnos el que ha provocado el constante ensayo-error en el diseño de la misma.<sup>2</sup> Ha habido que pulir y simplificar los objetivos generales de la asignatura; diversificar la tutoría universitaria dándole un nuevo sentido más útil, aprovechando los tiempos y necesidades de los alumnos; incorporar a la asignatura proyectos de innovación referidos a la búsqueda de información; suprimir mucho conocimiento teórico superfluo; reestructurar las clases prácticas de una forma más comunicativa, participativa y didáctica; considerar innovaciones multimedia y técnicas útiles para la transmisión y gestión de la información; reformar constantemente el sistema de evaluación; modificar en cada curso el conjunto de fragmentos literarios motivo de análisis; elaborar e incorporar materiales didácticos para incentivar las destrezas a desarrollar; y revisar con minuciosidad las capacidades, destrezas y habilidades a desarrollar, útiles para el cumplimiento de los objetivos, adaptándolas a la realidad cambiante de cada grupo de alumnos en cada año académico.

La forma de evaluación en la que se basa la estructura de la asignatura, ya mencionada más arriba, es la evaluación continua; por ello, todo lo que el alumno realiza para la asignatura es evaluable según los parámetros que marcan los acuerdos de Bolonia al respecto del crédito europeo, en el que se tiene en cuenta el número de horas de trabajo que emplea el alumno.

#### **a. La asistencia y participación**

Comenzando por el primer aspecto evaluable —la asistencia y la participación activa—, la evaluación de los alumnos pasa, en primer lugar, por la presencia en clase y la participación en los distintos tipos de sesiones (tanto individuales como grupales), que no sólo es tenida en cuenta y puntuada, sino que viene al mismo tiempo a desterrar la idea preconcebida y extendida entre el alumnado universitario de que la asistencia a clase es *libre*. Así, dichas asistencia y participación activa tanto a clases teóricas como prácticas, a las tutorías individuales, grupales y virtuales, a las sesiones de trabajo grupal, y en los foros de opinión en el campus virtual de la asignatura vienen a reforzar el trabajo personal del estudiante y, a su vez, a persuadir a los alumnos de que su tiempo tiene un valor.

En cuanto a la participación virtual, al introducir en la universidad como herramienta novedosa la utilización de una plataforma electrónica, se consiguen dos objetivos simultáneamente: por un lado, se aprovecha el manejo de elementos informáticos con los que ya está familiarizado el estudiante, y, por otro, su trabajo se ve reforzado con el acompañamiento del profesor fuera de clase. Su participación virtual en esta asignatura se cifra en términos del uso del correo electrónico dentro la plataforma,<sup>3</sup> como herramienta de comunicación profesor-estudiante y estudiante-estudiante (incluso aprovechándolo para la entrega de ejercicios y comentarios de textos como archivos adjuntos), de su opinión y respuesta a las preguntas propuestas en los foros referidas a cada texto a comentar, y de su participación activa en el *chat* (tutoría virtual), al que se dedican dos horas semanales en una franja

horaria (de 19 a 21 horas) que les resulta cómoda a los estudiantes para seguir y participar desde la tranquilidad de su lugar de estudio. La forma de controlar dicha participación virtual es sencilla, dado que la plataforma *Moodle* permite al administrador controlar exactamente qué herramienta ha consultado el alumno, cuántas veces y en qué momento.

En este mismo orden de cosas, la presencia del alumno en las horas de clase es al mismo tiempo evaluada, mensual o semanalmente, por el profesor, mediante un sencillo control de firmas, utilizando para ello diversos formatos dependiendo del tipo de sesión. Por otro lado, su participación, al preguntar y comentar en público y de viva voz en las sesiones teóricas, prácticas y tutorías grupales es igualmente fácil de evaluar por el profesor, al hacer empleo de notas específicamente dedicadas a este aspecto y que se toman a pie de aula en el mismo momento de la intervención de los estudiantes. Dichas intervenciones no sólo ayudan a aclarar cuestiones de dificultad que puedan surgir, sino que también constituyen la manera en que la expresión oral (*speaking*) se desarrolla y ejercita también en clase. Toda la participación y presencia del alumno en la asignatura tiene asignado un valor del 25% del total de la misma.

#### **b. La tutoría grupal**

Dentro de esta participación, como ya se ha mencionado, la tutoría grupal constituye otro tipo de sesión que considero clave para el acompañamiento del alumno en cuanto a su formación y consecución de los objetivos de la asignatura. Como exponen Serranos y Oliva (1989: 41):

*La tutoría grupal es el proceso de acompañamiento de un grupo de alumnos con la finalidad de abrir un espacio de comunicación, conversación y orientación grupal, donde los alumnos tengan la posibilidad de revisar y discutir junto con su tutor temas que sean de su interés, inquietud, preocupación, así como también para mejorar el rendimiento académico, solucionar problemas escolares, desarrollar hábitos de estudio, reflexión y convivencia social.*

Si bien los autores se refieren a una tutoría basada en dinámicas de grupos orientadas básicamente a la consecución de habilidades sociales, en nuestro caso, adaptamos dicho concepto referido a los contenidos que se tratan en clase, dando así un nuevo sentido a los antiguos *seminarios*. Por lo tanto, en este proceso, el grupo de estudiantes también es responsable de que la tutoría que se les brinde sea exitosa, es decir, una tutoría adecuada depende tanto de los estudiantes como del tutor y la estructura del centro. La función que deben realizar en el proceso de tutoría cada uno de estos elementos es la siguiente: los alumnos deben mostrar interés, cooperación y disposición; el tutor debe ejercer un papel de guía, proporcionando la información necesaria e indicada al sujeto, y debe tener una preparación adecuada y mostrar las cualidades de aceptación, comprensión e interés. A su vez, el tutor como profesor debe relacionar su enseñanza con el estudiante de manera individual; es decir, reconocer que está trabajando con estudiantes, al mismo tiempo que imparte su programa. Por su parte, la estructura del centro debe proporcionar los espacios, tiempos y personal adecuados para esta tutoría y otorgarles un seguimiento desde la coordinación de la titulación.

Descendiendo a niveles más concretos, el gran grupo se divide en dos para asistir a estas tutorías; en ellas, al contrario que en los seminarios (por ser agrupaciones más pequeñas), la finalidad que se persigue es la de asegurar y fijar conceptos ya explicados en las clases teóricas y la de completar y aclarar dudas sobre los ejercicios propuestos en las clases prácticas. La asistencia a las tutorías grupales es valorada al mismo nivel que la participación en las mismas tal y como se ha observado anteriormente. Este sistema de tutorías no sustituye en ningún caso a las tutorías individuales, dado que en estas últimas el estudiante confía al profesor de manera privada aspectos relacionados con sus propias capacidades, su ritmo de asimilación de la dinámica del comentario de textos y sus dificultades en la metodología seguida, algo que no tiene cabida en las tutorías grupales.

### c. La evaluación continua de ejercicios

Un segundo aspecto evaluable de la asignatura de *Comentario Literario de Textos Ingleses* es

precisamente la elaboración de cinco comentarios de textos literarios propuestos y que son entregados al profesor para su corrección cada quince días. Dichos textos son elegidos por el profesor de entre los 24 que forman parte de los manuales *English as a Second Language and its Literature* (tanto el *Student's Book* como el *Workbook*), propuestos como bibliografía básica y que están estructurados de tal modo que “*The exercises and activities will help you to work and to improve your speaking, writing, reading and listening skills. The nature of the exercises and activities changes gradually through the book*” (Ceballos, 2005: 13). De esta forma, al respetar la gradación del nivel de dificultad que presentan los textos (dependiendo del género literario al que pertenecen, de la época o movimiento literario en el que fueron escritos y del léxico y sintaxis que emplean), el alumno afronta en primer lugar una tarea de comprensión escrita (*reading*). Los estudiantes se encuentran con su capacidad de análisis. Se trata de despertar esta habilidad que tienen aletargada, proporcionándoles las herramientas necesarias para enfrentarse con un texto escrito, siendo la primera dicha lectura comprensiva. Los glosarios, ejercicios y actividades que figuran en los manuales mencionados ayudan a los estudiantes a comprender el texto desde un primer nivel léxico y semántico, para concluir con el nivel gramatical y sintáctico. Los tipos de ejercicios varían desde el *multiple choice* hasta la resolución de sopas de letras y crucigramas, con los que los estudiantes encuentran amena la incorporación de nuevos términos a su léxico, al mismo tiempo que comprenden el texto literario en cuestión.

Un segundo paso en relación al análisis literario del texto viene dado por la segunda serie de ejercicios que se ofrece en el manual para cada fragmento: las *questions for textual analysis*. Éstas se configuran como breves pistas de reflexión (dada la redacción de los enunciados), de cuya respuesta dependerá la redacción de su comentario posterior y que son puestas en común en la clase práctica. Antes de esta sesión de puesta en común, los estudiantes han recibido en la clase teórica una serie de

conceptos básicos, no sólo en cuanto al manejo de la terminología literaria, sino también útiles para la redacción de su propio comentario del texto. A cada uno de los cinco textos que se analizan y comentan en las clases prácticas corresponden otros tantos para ser entregados al profesor; es decir, si un fragmento de *Gulliver's Travels* es trabajado en clase con los ejercicios que sobre él se presentan en el *Workbook*, el alumno deberá entregar su comentario de otro fragmento perteneciente a la misma obra y que figura, con sus ejercicios previos correspondientes, en el *Student's Book*. La comprensión oral de los textos (*listening*) viene asegurada y garantizada con la audición que de los mismos se hace en clase, ya que cada manual viene acompañado de un CD en el que se encuentran grabados dichos textos; asimismo, el alumno puede trabajar esta destreza de forma individual reproduciendo en su ordenador dicho CD.

Tras las ocho sesiones en las que los textos son trabajados en clase, el alumno entrega al profesor su comentario elaborado. La expresión escrita (*writing*) es la destreza empleada y puesta en práctica en esta actividad y supone otro 25% de la calificación global de toda la asignatura. Dicho porcentaje se divide en dos: un 25% dependerá de la corrección léxico-sintáctica que emplee el alumno en su redacción y el 75% restante dependerá de su habilidad a la hora de comentar literariamente el texto, siguiendo los pasos explicados para ello. Como no podía ser de otra forma, el profesor devuelve corregido dicho comentario para favorecer el *feedback* del alumno y subsanar los errores cometidos.

#### d. El portafolios

Si algo tiene el ser universitario es el prurito por la investigación. Los estudiantes de primer curso de esta asignatura son animados a ejercer como investigadores mediante la elaboración de un portafolios a lo largo del cuatrimestre. El portafolio tiene la finalidad de ejercitar a los alumnos en una doble vertiente. Por un lado se fomenta la práctica, tan universitaria, de la toma de notas y apuntes en las clases teóricas, prácticas y tutorías grupales; por otro, se les exhorta a consultar la bibliografía recomendada

que acompaña al programa de la asignatura y que tienen en su haber desde el comienzo del curso. De esta forma, el portafolio es una simbiosis de sus propias notas de clase, ampliadas con la consulta de los diferentes manuales a los que tienen acceso en la biblioteca del centro. Dicha actividad les permite adquirir la práctica de la toma de notas que luego servirá para su estudio y asimilación personal, y a la vez cumplir con uno de los requisitos característicos de ser universitario: la investigación. Cada concepto que se explica en la clase teórica o cada texto propuesto para el comentario literario es susceptible de ser completado con la bibliografía recomendada para la asignatura. El portafolio es entregado al final del cuatrimestre como producto final del trabajo realizado durante el curso y tiene precisamente ese carácter de continuidad y progreso en la asimilación de la información. En otro orden de cosas, los alumnos aprenden, al emplear bibliografía especializada, a adquirir hábitos académicos como citar de forma adecuada, a discernir la información esencial de la superflua, a comparar y contrastar las opiniones de diversos autores críticos, y a ordenar y clasificar la información que obtienen. Inmersos en la era de la información, es cierto que los alumnos tienden a recabarla de Internet de una forma rápida y eficaz, acariciando, al mismo tiempo, la tendencia a economizar tiempo; es preciso, por tanto, que sepamos disuadir a los estudiantes de que la elaboración de un portafolio utilizando la información obtenida en la red de redes adolece de la profundidad y seriedad requerida a estos niveles y al mismo tiempo les impide adquirir hábitos que nada tienen que ver con la investigación. La capacidad de búsqueda y discernimiento de la información y el afán de completarla mediante su propio trabajo investigador pone las bases para un futuro mercado laboral en el que tendrán, con toda seguridad, que perfeccionar el producto del que sean responsables. La entrega del portafolio al final del cuatrimestre constituye el tercer 25% de la calificación global de la asignatura.

#### e. El trabajo en equipo

Por último, y como cuarto aspecto de la evaluación de esta asignatura, se tiene en cuenta

la capacidad de los estudiantes de compartir la información que obtienen y la de trabajar en equipo, sin duda capacidades que serán demandadas por cualquier empresa que en el futuro los emplee. Hacia la mitad del cuatrimestre y utilizando tiempo de clase, los alumnos se dividen en pequeños grupos de no más de 6 miembros. Las diez sesiones (de dos horas cada una) dedicadas a la elaboración de este trabajo grupal tienen como objetivo la adquisición de habilidades tales como la capacidad de planificación del trabajo a acometer, la capacidad de organización de tiempos y recursos, la distribución justa y equitativa de tareas, el fomento de la discusión y el debate, todos útiles para el ejercicio de cualquier empleo que en el futuro desempeñen.

Concretamente, los propios alumnos son los responsables de la formación de los grupos que nunca debe ser superior a 6 miembros por razones de operatividad. El trabajo que acometen en dicha actividad no es más que comentar al menos 4 textos literarios de entre 6-8 que se les proponen. Se trata, al mismo tiempo, de que realicen esta labor teniendo como referencia las dificultades encontradas en la misma actividad cuando era llevada a cabo de forma individual. La monitorización constante del profesor durante las sesiones de reunión es fundamental para el proceso del trabajo de los grupos. Los estudiantes no sólo aprenden a debatir la información que obtienen, sino a poner en común y verbalizar en público la asimilación de los conceptos tanto teóricos como prácticos que han ido adquiriendo hasta el momento. Durante la primera sesión, se les entrega una ficha en la que deben hacer constar la distribución temporal del trabajo y la planificación del mismo, así como un breve esquema de las principales ideas que desarrollarán en el comentario de los textos que ellos mismos eligen de entre una gama ofertada por el profesor. Al no haber para estos textos elegidos ejercicios o actividades que ayuden a su comprensión, la capacidad organizativa de los estudiantes se pone también a prueba, así como el reconocimiento en el otro de determinada capacidad que sumará eficacia al proceso de elaboración del producto final. Concretamente deben aparecer explícitos en la ficha los

siguientes aspectos: distribución temporal del trabajo en las sesiones presenciales y en las no presenciales, bibliografía prevista y empleada realmente, esbozo de un índice del trabajo (apartados, sub-apartados, aspectos teóricos aplicados y títulos de los textos a comentar), material complementario, incidencias y observaciones, y miembros que forman el grupo con sus respectivos datos. La entrega de los cuatro comentarios de textos producto del trabajo en equipo constituye el cuarto y último 25% de la calificación final de la asignatura.

#### f. ¿Un examen? ¿Para qué?

Con esta distribución porcentual de la evaluación de la asignatura, cabe con toda posibilidad la pregunta que puedan hacerme mis colegas: ¿Y no hay examen? A esta lógica pregunta quisiera responder con más preguntas que los mismos alumnos hacen: ¿Por qué los alumnos no podemos elegir entre tener examen o no? ¿Por qué no se pueden hacer preguntas en los exámenes, si en la vida real la persona no estará, en general, aislada y podrá pedir ayuda? ¿Por qué no se permite el uso del diccionario si cuando salga lo podré y tendré que usar? ¿Por qué el examen tiene que ser una instancia tan *ritual*, que a la mayoría nos genera nervios, tensión y desvelo, si luego, en la vida real, cuando tengamos una *situación problemática* no vamos a estar tan aterrorizados? ¿Por qué los problemas requieren de astucia para resolverlos si nadie me enseña cómo adquirir esa astucia? ¿No es como una especie de engaño, de estafa, de abuso?

Un examen final, en primer lugar, no nos va a aportar mucha más información sobre el progreso del alumno del que ya hemos obtenido durante el cuatrimestre con los cuatro aspectos anteriores; un examen en la universidad no es más que seguir contribuyendo y asintiendo al obsoleto sistema clase magistral-toma de apuntes-examen, que no hace sino regresar a esquemas de aprendizaje ya superados; un examen, en el fondo, ¿no pone evidencia nuestros propios miedos y desconfianzas del proceso de aprendizaje del alumno? Y si resulta que el alumno al final no ha aprendido realmente, o mejor, no tiene conocimientos (los que a mí como profesor me interesó que tuviera), cabría también preguntarse: ¿Cuál ha sido la causa de

que no los haya adquirido? ¿Su desidia y pereza o mi falta de entusiasmo y planificación de la asignatura? ¿Se tratará quizá de mi deseo de *despachar* de un plumazo la evaluación de un grupo numeroso de estudiantes aduciendo razones de tiempo para luego tener el mismo número de suspensos y hacer gala de la *importancia de mi asignatura*?

Por todos estos motivos, un examen final carece de razones de peso como para mantenerlo dentro de un sistema de evaluación moderno y movernos en los parámetros del Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior. Tienen más valor las herramientas que hayamos enseñado a utilizar, el haber despertado las capacidades dormidas que los estudiantes ignoraban que tenían, el fomento de las destrezas que han adquirido y que posiblemente les sirvan para otras asignaturas y el comprobar que es capaz de llevar a cabo las

habilidades adquiridas en una futura profesión demostrando competitividad y eficacia.

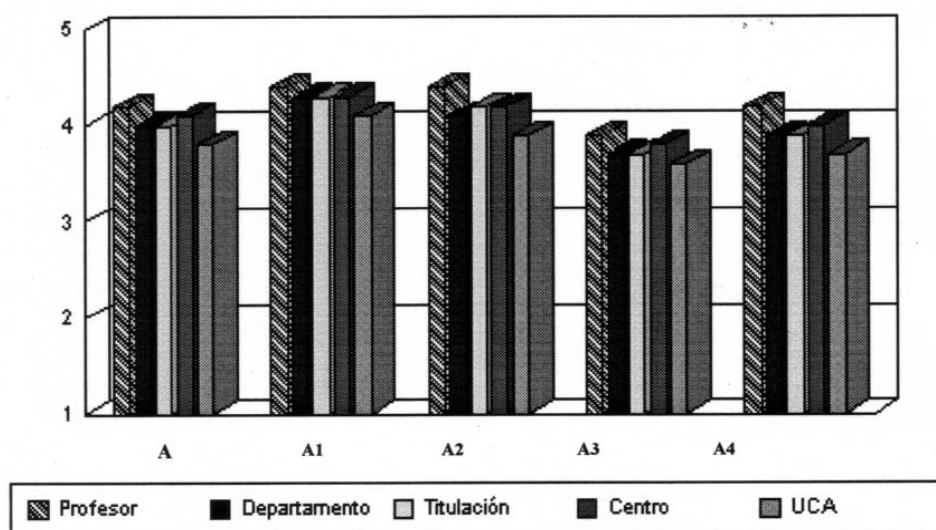
### REFLEXIÓN FINAL

Lo aquí expuesto, tal y como pretendía al comienzo, no es más que comunicar una experiencia. Si su utilidad se queda en estas páginas, poco habré contribuido en la lucha por hacer de la Universidad (con mayúsculas) un lugar distinto del que ahora conocemos. Ante la actual reforma de los planes de estudio y la inminente implantación del sistema de nuevos grados en la convergencia europea, no cabe sólo una reforma nominal de nuestras actuales titulaciones, ni podemos permanecer impasibles ante el constante absentismo y el frecuente abandono de las carreras de letras. Somos los de dentro los que debemos reformar sin esperar a que nos venga impuesto.

## ANEXO 1

### RESULTADOS DE LA EVALUACIÓN DEL ALUMNADO Curso 2005-2006

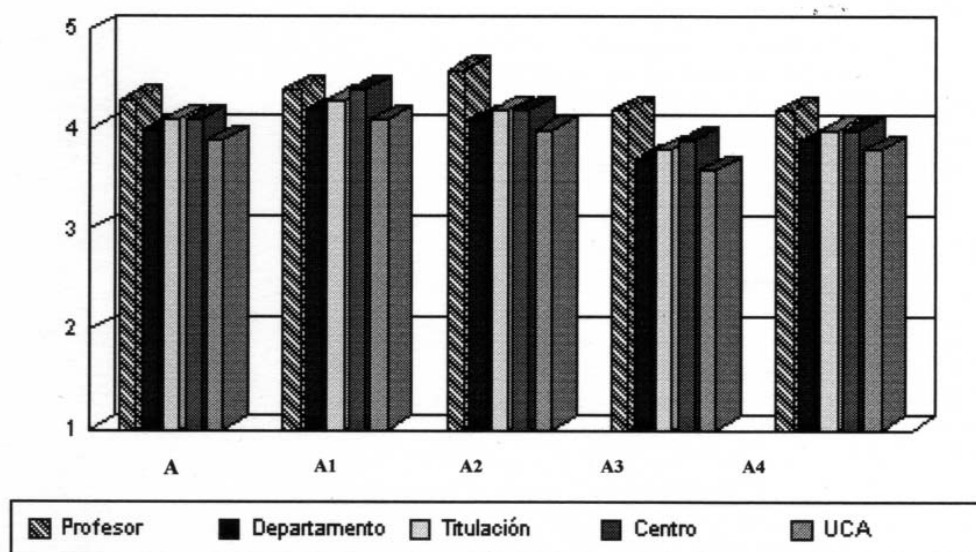
|                                               | DEP.       |             | TIT.       |             | CEN.       |             | UCA        |             |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
|                                               | Med        | D.T         | Med        | D.T         | Med        | D.T         | Med        | D.T         |
| <b>A - OPINIÓN SOBRE LA ACTUACION DOCENTE</b> | <b>4,0</b> | <b>1,06</b> | <b>4,0</b> | <b>1,08</b> | <b>4,1</b> | <b>1,03</b> | <b>3,8</b> | <b>1,11</b> |
| A 1 - CUMPLIMIENTO DE LAS OBLIGACIONES        | 4,3        | 0,92        | 4,3        | 0,96        | 4,3        | 0,95        | 4,1        | 1,06        |
| A 2 - ACTITUD DEL/DE LA PROFESOR/A            | 4,1        | 1,01        | 4,2        | 1,03        | 4,2        | 0,97        | 3,9        | 1,08        |
| A 3 - DESARROLLO DE LAS CLASES                | 3,7        | 1,11        | 3,7        | 1,12        | 3,8        | 1,09        | 3,6        | 1,13        |
| A 4 - OPINIÓN GLOBAL                          | 3,9        | 1,07        | 3,9        | 1,12        | 4,0        | 1,04        | 3,7        | 1,09        |



## ANEXO 1 (cont.)

Curso 2006-2007

|                                               | DEP.       |             | TIT.       |             | CEN.       |             | UCA        |             |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
|                                               | Med        | D.T         | Med        | D.T         | Med        | D.T         | Med        | D.T         |
| <b>A - OPINIÓN SOBRE LA ACTUACION DOCENTE</b> | <b>4,0</b> | <b>1,12</b> | <b>4,1</b> | <b>1,03</b> | <b>4,1</b> | <b>1,02</b> | <b>3,9</b> | <b>1,10</b> |
| A 1 - CUMPLIMIENTO DE LAS OBLIGACIONES        | 4,2        | 1,02        | 4,3        | 0,93        | 4,4        | 0,91        | 4,1        | 1,04        |
| A 2 - ACTITUD DEL/DE LA PROFESOR/A            | 4,1        | 1,11        | 4,2        | 1,02        | 4,2        | 0,97        | 4,0        | 1,06        |
| A 3 - DESARROLLO DE LAS CLASES                | 3,7        | 1,15        | 3,8        | 1,07        | 3,9        | 1,08        | 3,6        | 1,12        |
| A 4 - OPINIÓN GLOBAL                          | 3,9        | 1,16        | 4,0        | 1,07        | 4,0        | 1,05        | 3,8        | 1,09        |



## Notas

- <sup>1</sup> Esta asignatura es obligatoria. Se imparte en el primer curso del primer ciclo de la titulación de Filología Inglesa y tiene 5 créditos ECTS (6 créditos UCA).
- <sup>2</sup> Véase ANEXO 1. Resultados de la evaluación del alumnado.
- <sup>3</sup> La plataforma electrónica a la que hago referencia aquí es *Moodle*, que actualmente es la que se utiliza en toda la Universidad de Cádiz.

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# RUSSIAN DOLLS: USING PROJECTS TO LEARN ABOUT PROJECTS

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*This article will discuss the development of a teaching unit designed for Initial Secondary Teacher Training (specialising in foreign languages) which not only exemplified the theory of project-based learning (PBL) for the students, but also involved the student-teachers in a hands-on experience, thus fully engaging them in the development of the necessary management skills to be able to implement PBL in their own future classrooms. The unit was designed to help shift student-teachers' understanding of teaching approaches towards pedagogies that promote autonomous language learning and collaborative problem-solving. In this article, we consider how English language teachers can capitalize on the language learning benefits of project work, first, by examining the characteristics of project-based learning and, then, by presenting a case study designed for future foreign language teachers. Finally, we consider how this can be integrated into EFL training.*

## WHAT IS PROJECT-BASED LEARNING AND WHAT ARE ITS BENEFITS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING?

It is becoming an increasingly common expectation that teachers adopt pedagogies which promote collaborative learning and independent problem-solving into their teaching, especially as these factors are more and more widely-recognised as an effective means of learning. This is also true for foreign language

teachers, as different frameworks for cooperative learning (e.g., Slavin, 1990; Sharan and Sharan, 1992; Cohen, 1994; Johnson *et al.*, 1994) are incorporated into language teaching. Studies in project-based learning (PBL) show that it is an effective means of promoting student learning (Bennett and Dunne, 1992; Sharan, 1999). Furthermore, research into language teaching shows that PBL results in authentic communication and fosters collaborative language learning (Kitao and Kitao, 2001; Kitao, 2002).

It might be pointed out that project-based learning is fast becoming a *buzz term* in the realm of education and in language teaching. Although the exact timing and duration of project-based language projects vary, a project is generally considered to be “a *long-term (several weeks) activity*” (Beckett, 2002: 54) which is integrated into language teaching in order to “*promote the simultaneous acquisition of language, content, and skills*” (Beckett and Slater, 2005: 108). The basic concept hinges on the idea that language learning should be designed in such a way that it engages students and empowers them with the responsibility of their own learning. Their learning is engendered through an approach that connects the content and target language to their own lives, through activities that are intellectually and emotionally challenging, set within the framework of collaborative projects. According to Sharan (1998), PBL is a type of contextualised cooperative learning framed within phases (student participation in the phases is essential). These phases are: selection of a topic, planning of the project, finding information about the topic, developing and implementing the plans, and presenting and evaluating their output and own efforts.

One of the main goals (and justifications) for PBL in language learning is the opportunity it provides for *situated learning*. The idea behind situated learning is that, in order for learners to come to know and understand something, tasks should be embedded in the target context and incite thinking that is similar to what would be done in real life (Brown *et al.*, 1989; Lave and Wenger, 1991). This is a move away from language instruction based on pre-defined goals (without taking into account either the learners or the situation) and which attempts to reinforce the chosen language content through decontextualized practice. In decontextualized language learning, students often end up knowing about the language but not how to use it (Short *et al.*, 1996). In contrast, through situated language learning contexts –as occurs in PBL– teachers can bridge the gap between language learning and the need to create authentic use of the target language, thereby constructing an

understanding of language as it would be used in realistic, outside-the-classroom contexts.

Inevitably, this shifts the focus away from the language form and places it on the content. Moreover, apart from the *content* learning that takes place, students have the opportunity to take the initiative and assume responsibility – thus promoting learner autonomy. Project-based learning also affords *social learning* (e.g., group construction of knowledge, collaboration, etc.) and students are exposed to the *higher-order thinking skills* of synthesizing and analyzing information – how to derive knowledge and how to communicate their new knowledge.

Language is not ignored in PBL, however. A relevant factor of project-based instruction is comprehensible output (Swain, 1993; 1995), which generally occurs both during the project and as the final product of the project, which in some way or other focuses the students’ attention on the language used (Beckett, 2002). In terms of the final product, Stoller (1997) outlines several variations such as production projects, performance projects and organizational projects, all of which yield qualitatively different end products. However, regardless of the variation selected, several studies into effective project-based learning (e.g., Tomei *et al.*, 1999; Lee, 2002; Ho, 2003; Allen, 2004; Gu, 2004; Levine, 2004) reveal that the project should focus on real-world subject matter (e.g., in the case discussed herein, student-teachers creating and implementing their own video-based teaching materials) and should involve the students and ensure collaboration (e.g., the distribution of roles in the entire process of video-making). Furthermore, effective project-based work will promote individual student autonomy and independence; accommodate a purposeful use of the target language (e.g., brain-storming, discussing and writing, filming, editing and producing the video in English); and focus on integrated skills and end-of-project reflection (both of which were components in this project). As Fried-Booth (1997) has pointed out, PBL can play a particularly important role in language teaching, because the learners must

use the language communicatively to plan, organize, negotiate, design and implement the desired output.

### WHY IS PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IMPORTANT FOR TEACHER TRAINING?

As has already been discussed above, a critical aspect of project-based learning for language teaching and learning is the way in which activities are highly interactive and integrated, so that, while students are practising and developing language skills in the five macro language learning areas (reading, writing, speaking, listening, interaction), they are also developing intrapersonal skills such as team-work and organization. This concept of integrated language teaching –with its focus on communicative purpose– is hardly new to language teaching, nor is the idea of using PBL in the language classroom. Significantly, despite the fact that project-based learning is not a new concept to language teaching, the acceptance of PBL as a teaching approach is often met with scepticism, especially by novice language teachers. Research shows it is difficult to change teachers' established practices and beliefs (Lortie, 1975; Florio-Ruane and Lensmire, 1990; Mayher, 1990; Schmidt and Kennedy, 1990; Rogoff, 1991; Agee, 1998; Kennedy, 1998; Porter and Brophy, 1998) and that, to a great extent, student-teachers' previously held knowledge and assumptions about teaching are based on their own learning experiences (Pajares, 1992). Evidence also shows that the beliefs teachers may say they have are not always consistent with the way they teach (Hart, 1999), and that it takes considerable time for teachers' beliefs to change (Richardson, 1996). As Porter and Brophy (1998: 76) have written, *"Personal experiences, especially teachers' own experiences as students, are represented as important determinants of how teachers think and what they do"*. This creates an intriguing challenge for teacher training: how to get student-teachers to adopt teaching approaches that they themselves have perhaps not experienced as learners?

There are other challenges facing teacher training, not least of which is the fact that teachers are under increasing pressure to use

new information and communication technologies (ICT) in order to teach students diverse knowledge and skills of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is especially true for language teachers – as the prices of technology become more accessible, they are able to use videos and computers in the classroom in order to provide opportunities for students to engage in authentic and purposeful language use, through video-making, computer-mediated communication, or podcasts. Again, research demonstrates that only those student-teachers who learn to use technology during their pre-service studies are likely to incorporate technology in their future classes (Goldsby and Fazal, 2000). Without doubt, project-based learning is easily compatible with the use of new technologies, but at the same time, for education to reap the full benefits of ICT in learning, it is essential that pre- and in-service teachers are able to effectively use these new tools for learning.

Thus, when asking ourselves how teacher educators can address changing paradigms in language teaching and learning, we felt it was also important to help the students see the relationship between their teaching practices –which are often focused on language and teaching concepts developed in the 1980s and 1990s– and the 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy practices and context of their students. For this reason, the project presented to the student-teachers was based on the use of videos and movie-making in the language classroom. This decision was, in part, influenced by our previous experience in the use of videos in teacher training and our participation in a European Minerva project (Project 223249-CP-1-2005-1-NL-Minerva-M), whose target goal was to study how digital video is used in teacher training programmes.

Research shows that the use of video in teacher training can provide significant input to the overall development of future teachers (Cullen, 1991). Considering the fact that several studies in this field have proved the effectiveness of using video with language learners (e.g., Dodson, 2000; Carlin, 2004; Hardison and Sonchaeng, 2005), having teacher knowledge of how to use student-produced video is crucial. This type of work provides an excellent framework for

foreign language learning because it requires learner participation in a variety of ways. It is our belief that within the framework of PBL, mixed media (e.g., videos combined with Information and Communication Technologies) in educational contexts can further increase the possibilities of improving the teaching-learning process, as well as preparing student-teachers for the educational system of the future.

Just as adopting the new pedagogical approach of PBL often meets with resistance because of lack of knowledge and personal experience on behalf of the student-teacher, the use of technology is often met with reservations because student-teachers are unfamiliar with the pedagogical implementations of ICT (whether they routinely use technology in the personal lives or not). Considering that research shows that the teacher is key to effective use of technology in the educational system (Zhao *et al.*, 2001), a mixed-media PBL experience for the student-teacher can help them make the connection between the underlying language learning theories and constructivist instructional strategies they can implement.

To sum up, language teaching is more than transmitting information about the target language and organizing activities for its practice, implying that language teacher training requires more than knowledge about the language and theoretical knowledge of teaching. Through PBL in language teacher training, student-teachers can gain the type of leadership skills required to “*help a group of learners to move in the direction that they want to go, pointing out potential pitfalls or making suggestions without getting defensive when students decide they like their own ideas better*” (Spruck Wrigley, 1998:1). Student-teachers must learn to pay more than lip-service to the concept of communicative language teaching (CLT), which emphasizes interaction as opposed to grammar instruction; they must begin to focus on interactive approaches that develop their students’ ability to understand and to express themselves in a foreign language, and to foster students’ positive attitudes towards communication in the target language. Considering the difficulties inherent in changing

teaching paradigms which are largely based on one’s own previous experience as a student, getting student-teachers to move from more common teacher-centered methodologies requires a powerful strategy, such as introducing PBL in an EFL learning environment. Doing so can help student-teachers discover the need to teach not only language, but also how to use it for their purposes. Sarwar, when discussing the use of PBL in EFL teaching, has described the advantages of such a student-centered approach with the following words:

*It’s like a person discovering that she can walk without a crutch. She will never want to use a crutch again and give up freedom to walk independently. The same paradigm can be used for a language learner released from the shackles of rote learning.* (Sarwar, 2000: 51)

## DISCUSSION OF THE PROJECT AND RESULTS

The project-based teacher training unit was implemented in the module for integrated language skills in the Masters in Didactics of Language and Literature for Secondary Education, taught at the Faculty of Education, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Within this framework, it was our intention to get our students to contextualize how to teach integrative language skills through video clips, how to make their own teaching materials and how to implement project-based learning with their students. Additionally, the student-teachers were asked to reflect on their own learning experiences in an online forum and to consider how these diverse skills can help them work with their own pupils in the future. Finally, they were required to write their own lesson plan, based on the newly acquired knowledge of PBL in EFL.

In the first part of the project (see Figure 1), students, in groups of three, worked together to create a three-minute video clip to be used in their lessons during their school placements. It was decided to devise the plans for the project-based unit on the competences outlined in the Catalan National Curriculum for secondary students, based on the assumption that the teachers should have a complete mastery of the competences that their students are expected to achieve. The three areas

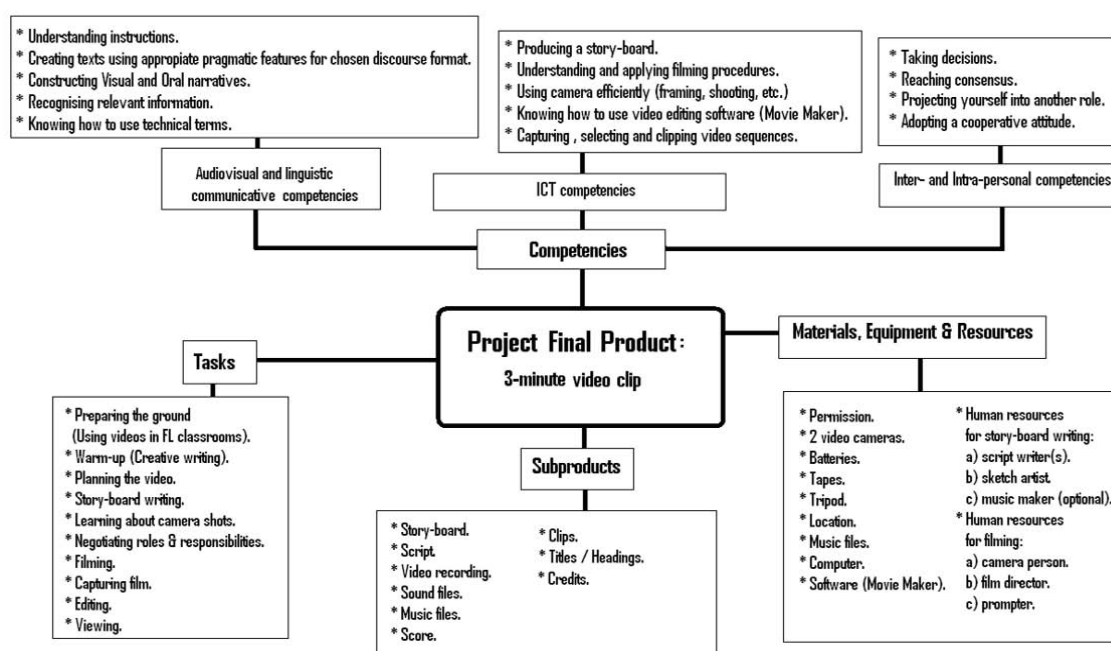


**Fig. 1. Phase 1: Creating a video clip to be used as a class material**

listed in the curriculum that we felt we could cover most efficiently were communicative competences in English, ICT competences and inter- and intra- personal competences. As the target group was composed of student-teachers with a good command of the English language, it was not necessary to focus the project on developing their communicative competence, and since they were mature students, we took for granted that they already possessed inter- and intra-personal competences required for project-based learning. As a consequence, we principally designed the tasks to enable our target students to acquire ICT competences (movie-making and materials design) and project-based learning methodology.

Contrary to common practice, in project-based learning, we did not want to reveal our real objective of the teaching unit (learning how to plan projects through the experience of participating in a project), since we wanted them to *live* the project as students participating in a project, not as student-teachers *learning* about the theoretical use of projects. This meant proposing a secondary objective – learning to make their own short clips to fit the exact needs of their own classes. Thus, for the student-teachers, the general project aim had to do with developing materials –

not learning about PBL. Nonetheless, in the second phase of our project, students viewed a video about how they had created their own clips and the objective of understanding and knowing how to implement PBL in their teaching was eventually revealed to them, as part of the reflection and assessment on what they had done and learnt.

As can be deduced from the above description, all the project sessions were recorded and relevant extracts were transcribed. These were consulted when creating the video used to get students to reflect upon what implementing a project entails, but, perhaps even more importantly, the transcripts provided insight and led to additional knowledge for the teacher trainers. Preliminary analysis of the data from those recordings indicates that there was a noticeably positive effect on the trainees' attitudes about project-based learning. The evolution of the student-teachers' attitudes and general engagement was evident – indeed, the students were reticent at the beginning of the project. Through peer interaction and teacher feedback and support, the student-teachers could see that they were synthesizing practical and theoretical knowledge and became more engaged and enthusiastic as the sessions went on.

Finally, each student had to develop a lesson plan based on the clip produced by his/her team and put it into practice during their subsequent school placement. At the end of the practicum period, student-teachers and their trainees met again to discuss the work done. At this point, they all stated that the clip-making project had been interesting to do, but it was not until they were required to reflect upon how to use the clip in their lessons and provide a rationale for doing so that the entire project-based learning process really made sense to them. Interestingly, the groups had discussed these topics (e.g., how they could use the videos they were making in their own classes) when they were creating their storyboards, but it was only upon completion of the project, when the purpose of the final product was fulfilled, that it become relevant and generated knowledge.

One of the challenges of PBL work is reaching a balance between excessive teacher control versus an absence of teacher feedback and guidance during the process. In order to avoid dictating each step of the process, the entire project procedures were carefully designed to give freedom and student voice in defining the final video product, thus ensuring a sense of ownership and engagement. At the same time, providing enough support at different stages in the project was essential in order to avoid producing a feeling of being lost. This was not always easy, since the main objective could not be revealed to the student-teachers until after their video had been completed. Still, through the end-of-project discussion, reflection in the forum and integration of socially constructed knowledge about project-based learning methods, the end result for these future teachers was authenticity of experience, and increased metacognitive awareness of what integrated teaching really signifies.

In essence, the teaching unit can be understood through a simile of Russian nesting dolls – several projects packed within a main project. Once unpacked, it is evident that the teaching unit consisted of an overall project of providing student-teachers with the opportunity to learn about and experience PBL, but this project was carried out through another project implemented

by the student-teachers – the construction of their own teaching materials. Thus, in parallel to acquiring knowledge about PBL, upon completion of the unit, the student-teachers were able to create a storyboard for their video clips; understand and apply filming procedures; use a camera effectively; capture, select and clip video sequences and use video editing software (*Movie Maker*). This knowledge, in turn, can be taught to their own students in similar video-producing projects. Additionally, the student-teachers acquired subject content knowledge related to the development of ICT competences such as storyboards as a text genre, and types of shots and camera moves. Finally, they were asked to design a learning unit of their own, based on the knowledge gleaned from their experiences.

An essential part of PBL is to encourage students to reflect on their own learning experience. In this case, the student-teachers could comprehend what it means to be a language learner in a project-based learning context and to gain an awareness of the management skills, sensitivities and confidence that they need in order to implement similar approaches. More importantly, the student-teachers came to see that, as teachers, they can share some of the responsibility of teaching with their students. They now comprehend that they can propose self-directed tasks and let their students choose for themselves, just as the student-teachers were given the liberty to choose the content and type of the materials that they wanted to produce.

While the use of student-produced video can be considered an enjoyable activity, it is important to underline that the project work was not considered to be merely a source of entertainment. The focus was on real-world subject matter (the creation of their own teaching materials, which they had to use for lesson-planning) and, at the same time, the student-teachers achieved significant gains in specific language knowledge (related to teaching and video-making) and content learning (also related to teaching). The integration of the video they produced into their own lesson plan also reinforced the idea that, as future language teachers, they must pay attention to content and language in their project-based lessons.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Previous research supports the positive experience described herein; that is, project-based language learning has the potential to provide foreign language learners with optimal conditions for language learning. It offers the possibility of enhancing student motivation by engaging them in a task of interest to them. To the numerous advantages of PBL in language learning (exposure to authentic materials, plentiful opportunities to use the target language, and plausible, authentic reasons for using it), we should add that, in a teacher training course such as ours, the student-teachers were immersed in a context in which they used the target language meaningfully and, at the same time, learnt how to use technology and how to implement projects by being active participants in the development of a real project. Thus, learning was possible because it was situated and allowed linguistic, technical and pedagogical knowledge to emerge from practice.

In our project, the combination of individual work, group discussions and the use of technological resources meant moving away

from a traditionalist perspective of using new technologies as mere complements of existing classroom practices and curriculum content. PBL in teacher education, particularly at Masters level, is not a widely used methodology, but we felt that, as teachers, we must be prepared to adapt our teaching styles and methods to new developments in technology in education, especially since they will inevitably have repercussions in the classroom (Masats and Dooly, 2008).

Indeed, the preliminary analysis indicates that the unit design was successful in achieving the intended learning outcomes. It is hoped that the experience will result in future implementation of project-based learning by our student-teachers. Admittedly, project-based learning presents challenges for both teachers and students (Beckett, 2002); nonetheless, we feel that the underlying idea is worthwhile and merits further research and implementation in teacher training, especially considering the multiple benefits that the incorporation of innovative teaching paradigms can provide student-teachers for their professional lives ahead.

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# 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.<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup> 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<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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 particular 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.<sup>5</sup>

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,<sup>6</sup> the students' evaluation differs significantly. In the section entitled *Class development*,<sup>7</sup> 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<sup>8</sup> 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

- <sup>1</sup> 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.
- <sup>2</sup> I would like to thank the two students - Aranzazu Fernández Giles and Rocío Facio Romero - for their time and devotion to their projects.
- <sup>3</sup> 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.
- <sup>4</sup> Our Project was entitled "Creación de ejercicios interactivos para la asignatura de Historia de la Lengua Inglesa, Modalidad B".
- <sup>5</sup> 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.
- <sup>6</sup> 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.
- <sup>7</sup> 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.
- <sup>8</sup> 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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# INTEGRATING THE OLD AND THE NEW: DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN THE EFL LANGUAGE CLASSROOM<sup>1</sup>

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*With the advent of new technologies and their consequent integration within the curriculum, teachers need to find attractive activities to substitute and complement more traditional ones. Digital storytelling is one possibility since it contributes to: a) the enrichment of the ePortfolio and b) the use of Web 2.0 technology for language learning. Digital storytelling engages students in both traditional and innovative ways of telling a story, since they learn how to combine basic multimedia tools (e.g., animations) with activities as varied as doing research, writing and delivering presentations (cf. Robin, 2005; Barrett, 2006a, 2006b). In this article, I pay attention to one type of digital story: Personal-Educational Digital Storytelling. I will expand on the adequacy of educational stories as a language learning and teaching tool in EFL and indicate some ways of using them in different subjects by sketching out some activities designed for such a purpose.*

## INTRODUCTION

With the advent of new technologies and their consequent integration within the curriculum, it has become a real challenge to provide both teachers and students with attractive activities to substitute, or at least complement, more traditional ones (cf. Pennock-Speck *et al.* on conditions for the use of ICT in this volume). As argued in Gregori-Signes (2008a), I see digital storytelling as a good candidate to do this since it contributes to: a) the enrichment of the ePortfolio, which is a need that is imposing itself and therefore should be developed, and b) the use of Web 2.0 technology for language learning. As argued by many authors (Robin, 2005-2008; Barrett, 2004, 2006a, 2006b), digital storytelling is a good way to engage students in both traditional and innovative ways of telling a story, since students learn how to combine

some basic multimedia tools (e.g., graphics or animations) with activities as varied as doing research, writing, delivering presentations, using technology, interviewing, improving interpersonal skills, learning problem-solving techniques, and assessment expertise (cf. Robin, 2005; Barrett, 2006a, 2006b).

Meadows (2003), cited in Robin (2008: 1), defines digital stories “as short personal multimedia tales told from the heart [...] the beauty of this form of digital expression is that stories can be created by people everywhere, on any subject, and shared electronically all over the world”. The result is a 2-5 minute film that has emerged from bringing together photographs, images, music and a narration usually in the author’s voice.

The type of digital storytelling that I have been attempting to develop moves away somewhat

from the original purpose of digital storytelling (cf. Center for Digital Storytelling, since 1993; Lambert 2007). I refer to this type of digital story, following Robin (2005-2006), as Personal-Educational Digital Storytelling (EDS from here onwards), in order to make it easier to differentiate it from the many different possibilities offered by the genre itself. That is, although EDS shares all the characteristics of digital storytelling as such, the difference is that it is created with an educational purpose in mind (Robin, 2007), thus being used not only as a tool for personal expression (cf. Meadows, 2003; Center for Digital Storytelling), but as a tool for teaching and learning.

In this article, I will expand on the adequacy of digital storytelling as a language learning and teaching tool and indicate some ways of using digital storytelling in different subjects by sketching out some activities designed for such a purpose in the field of English Studies.

#### DIGITAL STORYTELLING WITHIN THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK

As argued in Gregori-Signes (2008b: 1), in Europe, the Bologna Process is promoting innovation in teaching with great emphasis on technology. Technology is forcing faculty (cf. Pennock-Speck *et al.*, forthcoming) to rethink the curriculum in most academic disciplines in terms of content and teaching, and EDS is one genre that seems to fit these demands, since it is a flexible and adaptable tool which may suit diverse purposes. The adequacy of EDS as an educational genre in line with the principles laid out by the Common European Framework (CEF) can be summarised as follows (cf. Gregori-Signes, 2008a):

##### **i) Innovating in teaching materials.**

EDS brings together new technologies with more traditional means of teaching and learning, therefore fulfilling one of the objectives proposed by the Common European Framework (CEF) for Language Learning, allowing both teachers and students to innovate in the treatment and presentation of teaching and learning material.

##### **ii) Motivation.**

For most of our students, EDS is a brand new activity, with a very attractive final product. This may help raise motivation.

##### **iii) Creativity.**

The possibilities offered by the multimedia tools that are used in digital storytelling certainly invites students to be more creative and thus may help introduce and encourage different ways of learning/teaching English. Additionally, with regard to technology, its main advantage is that the basic multimedia tools (e.g., *Photostory 3*, *Windows Movie Maker*, *Ulead videostudio 11*, *Audacity*, *Free CD ripper*, etc.) used to build educational digital stories are easy to use (graphics, animated graphics, video, animation, text, photos, synchronous/asynchronous audio transmission; Paul and Fiebich, 2005) and are available to everyone, since a lot of the software used to build a digital story is freeware.

##### **iii) Flexibility.**

As argued above, EDS can adapt to a great variety of subjects which will, accordingly, demand a different use of the genre and a different response on the part of the students.

##### **iv) A new view on more traditional ways of learning/teaching.**

In terms of both oral and written narrative, EDS may demand from the student the use a wide range of stylistic devices such as bringing into play different registers (formal, informal, jargon, slang, formulaic expressions, specific vocabulary), different techniques of narration and dramatization, and more refined or general discursive structures of genres, to mention but a few; all in a different medium with new possibilities that were not possible before the advent of digital media.

#### TOWARDS A CHARACTERIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL DIGITAL STORYTELLING AS A TOOL FOR TEACHING EFL

In this section, I will outline some relevant aspects that make EDS a useful tool for the teaching and learning of EFL.

### Personal vs. instructional dimension

As mentioned above, EDS will have to include the student's personal point of view, apart from the instructional content. That is, in creating educational stories, we do not expect the student to merely reproduce a summary report, and turn the EDS into a mere recollection of facts previously written by other authors, but to include their own personal dimension. The final product will necessarily have to reflect, in one way or another, the student's way of perceiving, interpreting and transmitting the knowledge s/he has acquired or is still acquiring, thus bringing to light the idiosyncrasy of a student or a group of students (the activity can be designed as a group or individual activity).

This is what differentiates EDS from other similar genres that have been with us for a long time, such as objects of learning or mere PowerPoint presentations. In this sense, Porter (2004: 13) refers to digital storytelling as the art of designing information, which he defines as follows: *"Designing information means going beyond the facts. What point are you making, what perspective do you want to present that hasn't been thought of before?"*. Consequently, by creating educational digital stories, students are given the chance not only of expressing different points of view about how to teach or learn about one particular topic or language feature (e.g., how do we express orders in English, what is the degree of imposition we want to express and how do we do so?), or how difficult a phonological feature may be for students of different mother tongues (e.g., stress on function words, or how young people nowadays interpret Shakespeare's ideas); but, most importantly, they are given the chance of making themselves heard. Before the coming of the Internet and digital storytelling, a lot of ideas worth considering and new points of view ended up dead and buried after a hot classroom discussion. This can be solved by publishing the best digital stories on the web, since this only requires asking the student's permission.

### Skills development

When introducing a new activity, one has to look at the rationale for doing so. In the case

of EDS and as reported by several authors (cf. Barrett, 2006a, 2006b; Robin, 2006), there are a number of skills that are brought together during the process of creating a digital story. These include research and writing skills, organization skills, technology skills, presentation skills, interpersonal skills, or problem-solving skills, which, in turn, develop digital literacy, global literacy, technology literacy, visual literacy, or information literacy.

Although they are all important, one of the novelties and challenges for our students – presumably this will become less of a challenge as the tendency in education is to mix and promote the development of different skills in all subjects – is that EDS demands from the language student a synchronization between sounds, words and images, a combination that had hardly ever – if ever – before been demanded from them. That is, they are forced to *design information* rather than just write it. In the words of Davidson and Porter (2005: 12):

*Each digital story is no more than 3-5 minutes based on a script that is no more than one (1) page or five hundred (500) words. The art of shortening a story lies in preserving the **essence** of the tale—using the fewest words and images to make your point. By holding clarity about the essence of the story, the additional narrative can be pared down.*

That is, as has often been argued, in terms of writing skills, it is sometimes (depending on the purpose of the activity) more demanding to ask them to be concise than prolific. Moreover, the fact that EDS allows you to use a lot of *decorative* artifacts does not, by any means, make the task easier. As argued by Porter (2004):

*A story should be remembered for its soul, not the bells and whistles. If you don't have a good or powerful story, script, and storyboard, then there will never be enough decorating that technology can do to cover it up. On the other hand, demonstrating exemplar craftsmanship with mixing the technical elements in artful ways to unfold your story creates compelling, insightful, original and memorable pieces of communication. The*

*richness of a good story can be diluted when technical elements are overused, distracting, or just plain annoying.*

## GOOD GRAMMAR AND LANGUAGE USAGE

In describing what elements are important for EDS, Robin (2006) adapted the seven-element list provided by the Center for Storytelling and expanded it to ten elements, i.e., the overall purpose of the story, the narrator's point of view, a dramatic question (or questions), a choice of content, the clarity of voice, the pacing of the narrative, a meaningful soundtrack, quality of the images, economy of the story detail and good grammar and language usage.

The last one is particularly relevant in the field of EFL, since one of the main purposes in making students create an EDS is to provide them with the means to improve their command of English, and to do so, if possible, with a variety of activities that help them improve other skills apart from merely linguistic ones. Moreover, and due to the nature of the activity, EDS allows practice in written and spoken language (the students will have to write a script, previous to narrating the story), with one additional complication: when writing the script, they will have to bear in mind that they are writing a text to be read out loud. This can be taken as a good opportunity to demand from students a thorough review of spoken vs. written discourse features that may be useful to include in storytelling or, for the same purposes, of academic/instructional spoken vs. written discourse.

## INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AMONG PEERS

One of the purposes of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (2001) is to facilitate co-operation and communication between cultures. EDS, due to its easy production and the possibility of immediate web publishing, implies a fast exchange of information and access to the final products, thus facilitating in a way not previously possible a user-friendly tool that may serve the purpose of exchanging students' ideas and points of view

on the same topic; with no borders regarding distance, time, or accessibility. On the other hand, EDS is a tool that can be used to help students overcome the shock of getting to know other cultures. For example, in the project I initiated with the UVEG (Gregori-Signes, 2006), one of the sections is Erasmus. In this section, I hope to upload more digital stories that will share experiences of Erasmus international exchange students. The idea is to include digital stories from both incoming and outgoing students. These will serve as a reference to get to know more about the people they may find in the University of Valencia and in Spain, in general, and also to talk about how some of them felt when going abroad. Figure 1 shows the layout of the webpage at the moment.



**Fig. 1. UVEG. Digital Storytelling / Relato Digital. Valencia 2006**

As can be seen in Figure 1 above, the web page provides access to the different categories: personal narratives, educational stories, Erasmus, digital stories in Spanish. The last one

has been included as a prompt for visitors to start creating examples of digital stories in Spanish, especially in the field of education and language teaching, since the genre is hardly being exploited yet in Spain. Each category provides, in turn, access to the individual stories, which can be viewed on any computer using *Windows Media Player*, *Real Player*, or *Media Player Classic*, among others. The stories have been uploaded to the University server, which converts them to *flv* format previous to publication on the Internet.

### Content-based vs. English-usage subjects

In the Spanish university system, English Studies is organized so that there is a division between subjects devoted to the teaching of more general aspects of English usage (English language I, II, III) and subjects that pay attention to concepts as such (Phonology, Stylistics, History of the English Language, Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis, and literature-based subjects).

As is the case with other activities, different types of digital stories may suit different subjects. In principle, the types of digital stories could be said to correspond with any of the traditional genres that have been long in use in the language classroom (personal stories, historical events, narratives, persuasive discourse, etc. – cf. Robin, 2006 for a detailed description of the different types of digital stories). On the other hand, however, the (traditional) genre itself will have to adapt to the characteristics of the digital medium (cf. Rodríguez Ruiz, 2007), which will support the final version of the narrative, a fact that may cause an alteration of some of the generic conventions. Let me illustrate this with an example. A student is faced with the task of making a digital story on a critical analysis of the content of a poem. What tools does digital storytelling offer? The student will find that, in addition to words, she can express her ideas with images; that those images, can, in turn, be accompanied with her choice of music – music that is helping to transmit the impact that the poem had on her –; and on top of that she will also have to include her own voice and manipulate it according to what she wants to express (anger, happiness, disagreement). All these new elements certainly enhance or at least

change quite radically the possibilities that a written report has offered up to now.

Notwithstanding, there are also limitations (but those may also be changed if both teacher and student agree to do so), such as trying to keep the story within the limits of 500 words, the duration in time of the digital critical essay (4-5 minutes), the impossibility of including copyright material, etc. These limitations may not exist in the written version that the students have been providing up to now.

### EXAMPLES OF EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

I will now outline some of the projects that are being (or will be) put into practice in different subjects in the Universitat de València (cf. Gregori-Signes, 2008a for more examples). The projects could be gathered under the following headings:

#### Peer to Peer Database

The purpose of this macro-project is to develop a series of personal-educational stories in different subjects, which will help students to understand some of the more complex or difficult aspects related to the English language. Examples may include: 1. Phonology: difficulties encountered when learning about English pronunciation (segmental and suprasegmental features); 2. Second Language Acquisition: e.g., how do I face a first encounter with secondary school students? 3. Discourse analysis: how can I make my friend understand the use of linking, or discourse markers in spoken discourse?

#### Personal Development

In subjects such as English Language, the student will be asked to do self-presentations, self-development, opinions about one particular topic, guides for job interviews, etc.

#### Intercultural values

Digital stories may help incoming students integrate into the Valencian and Spanish way of life in general, both at academic and socio-cultural levels. This type of stories could be developed as part of subjects such as History and Culture of English-speaking countries, Pragmatics, and Sociolinguistics.

## Discourse organization and structure

Digital stories may also help in grasping genre and subgenre conventions (e.g., poetry, theatre, novel, persuasive discourse, advertisements, academic papers, etc.). They will try to synthesize and extrapolate the characteristics of different genres so that they can be used as a starting point of reference for a more in-depth study (reception and interpretation) of literary works or other types of discourse (e.g., advertising, sitcoms, newspaper articles). Once produced, they will also be useful for assisting

the students in the production of mini-examples of several genres. This is the case with Stylistics, where students are producing digital versions of detective stories (cf. Alcantud Díaz, 2008).

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to illustrate some of the advantages of introducing educational digital stories within the EFL classroom, as a multi-purpose tool that can help students to enjoy the learning process.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This article is the result of the research carried out for the *Programa d'Incorporació i Potenciació de les Noves Tecnologies de la Informació i de la Comunicació (NTIC) en la Docència*, funded by the Universitat de València.

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# PROPUESTA PARA LA PRÁCTICA Y EVALUACIÓN DE LA COMPETENCIA ORAL EN LOS ESTUDIOS DE TURISMO A DISTANCIA DE ACUERDO CON EL EEES

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*Durante años, una de las competencias menos tratadas en la enseñanza de idiomas en la universidad ha sido la competencia oral, debido principalmente al número de alumnos por aula. A día de hoy, y en puertas de los nuevos planes de estudio que dicta Bolonia, la práctica de actividades orales sigue siendo el caballo de batalla de la metodología de enseñanza a distancia (EAD). Este artículo pretende ofrecer una propuesta para la enseñanza y evaluación de la interacción y producción orales dentro del contexto de la educación abierta y a distancia de idiomas. Todo ello será posible gracias a la comunicación mediada por ordenador (CMC), basada principalmente en la utilización de herramientas de comunicación sincrónica como la mensajería instantánea (MI) o los webinars.*

Durante años, una de las competencias menos tratadas en la enseñanza de idiomas en la universidad ha sido la competencia oral, debido principalmente al número de alumnos por aula. A día de hoy, y en puertas de los nuevos planes de estudio que dicta Bolonia, la práctica de actividades orales sigue siendo el caballo de batalla de la metodología de enseñanza a distancia (EAD). Este artículo pretende ofrecer una propuesta para la enseñanza y evaluación de la interacción y producción orales dentro del contexto de la educación abierta y a distancia de idiomas. Todo ello será posible gracias a la comunicación mediada por ordenador (CMC), basada principalmente en la utilización de herramientas de comunicación sincrónica como la mensajería instantánea (MI) o los webinars.

Una de las principales preocupaciones de los futuros estudiantes de las universidades a distancia a la hora de matricularse en una asignatura de idiomas es precisamente cómo podrá aprender y practicar la lengua a distancia. Estudios como el de Hurd (2000) demuestran lo escasa que llega a ser la práctica que realizan en la L2, siendo precisamente ésta la segunda dificultad que encuentran los estudiantes de Lengua Francesa de la Open University a la hora de enfrentarse a su asignatura, después, eso sí, de la falta de tiempo. Pero ésta no es sólo una preocupación de los estudiantes, sino también del profesorado que imparte lenguas extranjeras a distancia:

*[...] it is oral proficiency that presents the main challenge.. Developing interactive skills is not*

*an easy goal to achieve at a distance, especially if students are unable to attend face-to-face tutorials or are reluctant to contact their tutor. This is an area in which the integration of ICT has much to offer [...]* (Ruiz Garrido et al., 2005: 184)

Durante años, el único medio que ha existido para impartir inglés oral a los estudiantes de la universidad a distancia era el impreso. Más tarde llegaron grabaciones de diálogos con ejercicios y programas de radio, pero en los últimos años, gracias al desarrollo de la tecnología, la posibilidad de ofrecer al estudiante prácticas de lengua hablada parece cada vez más asequible, dependiendo de las posibilidades del alumno (Jung, 2005). Así, factores como poder asistir o no al centro, tener acceso rápido a la red o contar con un equipo de profesionales formados en la materia condicionan en parte la formación global de alumno, ya que a mayor grado de exposición, mejor calidad del aprendizaje y de la competencia oral de éste.

#### EL PAPEL DE LAS COMPETENCIAS TRANSVERSALES Y ESPECÍFICAS EN LOS ESTUDIOS DEL GRADO EN TURISMO: UN OBSTÁCULO AÑADIDO Y UN ALICIENTE PARA ALUMNOS Y PROFESORES

En el complejo mundo de la educación a distancia, y más en concreto de la UNED, debido en parte al elevado número de alumnos y al complicado sistema de evaluación presencial (García Aretio, 2008), no se puede considerar, por el momento, una enseñanza activa ni una evaluación de las actividades orales de la lengua extranjera, particularmente las productivas o receptivas. Esto supone un gran problema, al observar que la competencia profesional “trabajar en inglés como lengua extranjera” ocupa el tercer lugar en la lista de prioridades propuesta por el *Libro Blanco del Grado de Turismo* (Majó, 2004), siendo “comunicarse de forma oral y escrita” en una lengua extranjera la que ocupa el puesto undécimo de un total de 35 competencias, tanto transversales como específicas.

A ésta se suman otras tantas, que serán comunes a todos los estudiantes, independientemente de la asignatura que cursen (Majó, 2004: 168):

- Capacidad de análisis y síntesis.
- Comunicación oral y escrita en lengua nativa.
- Resolución de problemas.
- Razonamiento crítico.
- Compromiso ético.
- Aprendizaje autónomo.
- Adaptación a nuevas situaciones.

#### NUESTRO PROYECTO

##### Objetivos

Analizados los aspectos anteriormente mencionados, se hacía casi obligatorio incluir todas y cada una de las competencias anteriormente descritas, ya que de ahora en adelante no basta sólo con formar a nuestros alumnos con fines meramente lingüísticos, sino que también hay que tener en cuenta otras posibles tareas a realizar, directamente relacionadas con su futuro profesional más inmediato, tales como saber tratar con el cliente en lengua extranjera de manera correcta o el manejo de la tecnología en el entorno laboral.

Tampoco hemos de olvidar las otras dos vertientes diferentes que dicta el Marco de Referencia Europeo para las Lenguas (MCER) y que están directamente relacionadas con las denominadas competencias pragmáticas y comunicativas, igualmente patentes en el proyecto planteado a continuación.

Teniendo en cuenta estas premisas, derivadas del EEES y el MCER, además del objetivo principal, consistente en la práctica y la mejora del inglés oral de los alumnos, el proyecto estaría encaminado a alcanzar otros objetivos listados a continuación:

- Practicar la interacción oral con estudiantes con una lengua materna diferente, de modo que sean capaces de entender otros acentos y otras culturas.
- Ser capaces de realizar una presentación oral delante de otras personas en lengua inglesa.
- Ser capaces de trabajar en equipo con responsabilidad y compañerismo en un medio de educación a distancia.
- Ser capaces de buscar y seleccionar información para transmitirla al futuro cliente de la mejor manera posible.

- Llegar a ser plenamente conscientes de que existen otras culturas, horarios y costumbres, de modo que puedan comprender mejor al futuro cliente.
- Ser capaces de realizar todos los objetivos anteriormente mencionados con el uso apropiado de las TIC (Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación).

Como se puede ver, los objetivos aquí descritos están en consonancia con el aprendizaje del idioma extranjero contextualizado en un ámbito concreto (Council of Europe, 2001), como es el profesional, definido, en este caso, por los perfiles descritos en el Libro Blanco del Grado de Turismo (Majó, 2004).

### Destinatarios

La experiencia que se describe a continuación fue planteada en el año académico 2005-6 a los alumnos de primer curso de *Lengua Inglesa I* de la Diplomatura de Turismo. Tuvo lugar durante el segundo cuatrimestre, consiguiendo así que ya estuvieran familiarizados con la asignatura y con la metodología de estudio de la UNED. Se ofreció de forma voluntaria a alumnos que tuvieran acceso a Internet de alta velocidad en su casa, ya que, de lo contrario, no se podrían utilizar las aplicaciones de voz más apropiadas para el experimento.

El nivel de idioma se correspondía con los niveles A2 (37%) y B1 (35 %) establecidos en el Marco Común Europeo y el conocimiento de TIC, de usuario intermedio bajo (40%). Casi todos compatibilizaban trabajo y estudio, situándose entre los 23 y los 45 años, en algunos casos con cargas familiares, aunque la característica que mejor definía a nuestro alumnado era la heterogeneidad. Resulta destacable el hecho de que entre el grupo de alumnos que participó en el proyecto (un total de dieciséis), algunos tenían un nivel de inglés correspondiente al de Formación Profesional, mientras que otros eran Licenciados en Filología Inglesa.

### Justificación dentro del programa de la asignatura

Con el fin de motivar a los alumnos a practicar las destrezas orales, se propuso una actividad

que fuese factible dentro del contexto de la enseñanza a distancia y que potenciase a la vez la práctica de estas destrezas y el aprendizaje colaborativo e intercultural, permitiendo la posterior evaluación por parte del profesorado. En este sentido, es importante mencionar que en la calificación final de la asignatura se ofrece la oportunidad al alumno de poder mejorar su nota hasta en un 10%, realizando pequeños proyectos de forma individual o grupal sobre temas turísticos en inglés (por ejemplo, presentando un producto turístico en el que ponen en funcionamiento los conocimientos de lengua extranjera aprendidos durante el curso). Se les da a elegir de manera voluntaria entre un total de ocho, de forma que el proyecto que aquí presentamos sea una opción más, siendo éste el proyecto número nueve, con la peculiaridad de que su presentación es oral, mientras que los otros son escritos.

### Descripción

El proyecto que se propuso a los estudiantes de Lengua Inglesa I de Turismo, y que se espera seguir implementando en el futuro, consistía en incorporar las ventajas que ofrecen las TIC para comenzar a practicar las actividades orales de la lengua, ya que hasta ese momento no se había hecho nada semejante en el contexto anteriormente descrito. Con esto, nos referimos a poner en práctica tal experiencia en un contexto de enseñanza a distancia – dentro del ámbito de la UNED – y con alumnos de primer curso de una lengua para fines específicos (Turismo). Para tal fin, se propuso hacer uso de diversas herramientas de comunicación sincrónica, tales como el chat (para la interacción) y el webinar (para la posterior evaluación de la producción).

Se crearon cuatro grupos de trabajo que estuvieron trabajando a su vez con alumnos de universidades de países diversos, con la finalidad de obtener de forma oral la información que necesitaban para preparar cada trabajo grupal. Para conseguir los datos requeridos para realizar la presentación, los alumnos de la UNED se sentían “obligados” a comunicarse con los alumnos de la universidad

invitada. Este proceso es una forma de adquirir los conocimientos socioculturales y pragmáticos de la cultura meta.

Para ello, se propusieron a los alumnos distintos temas relacionados con la materia del curso, que habían de ser tratados en cada proyecto. Estos temas eran: *Hotels & Business Points, Transport & Shops, Events & Entertainment* y *Culture & Monuments*.

### Etapas del proyecto

A continuación, se detallan las tres fases que se han seguido en la implantación del proyecto. El desarrollo fue gradual (Salmon, 2000), ya

que el hecho de aprender a manejar nuevas tecnologías a distancia supone un gran obstáculo para la mayoría del alumnado. Asimismo, se siguió en todo momento el método de la simulación global (Cabré y Gómez de Enterría, 2006) aplicado a la enseñanza de lenguas para fines específicos, así como otras teorías e investigaciones sobre la comunicación mediada por ordenador (CMC). Ésta última se afrontó desde la perspectiva del aprendizaje basado en tareas y problemas, ya que ofrece mucha más motivación que si se aplica sin ninguna finalidad implícita.

A continuación se muestra la tabla de progreso:

|                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1ª Etapa: Familiarización con las herramientas y el país elegido       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1º día: presentación en WebCT</li> <li>• 2º y 3º día: elección de grupo/país</li> <li>• 4º día: búsqueda de información en la red sobre el país elegido</li> <li>• Primer chat de voz<sup>1</sup> con la herramienta desarrollada para tal fin de la compañía Yahoo. Se pasa un listado con todos los alumnos aceptados en el proyecto para que se vayan invitando a su herramienta de Mensajería Instantánea (MI)</li> <li>• 2/3 días siguientes: se dan a conocer los grupos con correos electrónicos y profesores de contacto de los profesores invitados</li> <li>• Al mismo tiempo, se incluyen todos los integrantes en Alf<sup>2</sup> (alumnos y profesores de contacto)</li> <li>• Comunicación basada en el chat escrito con el profesor de la UNED y los de las universidades invitadas</li> </ul> |
| 2ª Etapa: Práctica de la interacción mediante preparación del proyecto | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Puesta en contacto con los compañeros del grupo</li> <li>• Puesta en contacto con los compañeros de las universidades externas</li> <li>• Elección del portavoz</li> <li>• Reparto de tareas/contenidos entre los integrantes del grupo</li> <li>• Utilización de la Mensajería Instantánea para completar información y pedir fotografías del lugar a los compañeros de las universidades externas</li> <li>• Reuniones semanales</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 3ª Etapa: Producción                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diseño de la presentación por parte de los participantes en el proyecto y posterior envío para evaluación</li> <li>• Exposición de cada una de las presentaciones (de forma oral) derivadas de las tareas realizadas en el webinar (Alado)</li> <li>• Punto de encuentro final para evaluación de la experiencia por parte de cada uno de los grupos</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

**Tabla 1. Etapas del proyecto**

Como se puede observar en la tabla, en un primer momento se les recomendó utilizar

solamente el chat de texto sin la opción de voz, debido a las dificultades que entrañaba

tanto desde el punto de vista lingüístico como tecnológico. De este modo, utilizando sólo texto, el estudiante iba perfeccionando su fluidez, de tal modo que cuando utilizara la voz tuviera más confianza en sí mismo y en el manejo de la nueva herramienta (Compton, 2004). A continuación, se les pidió que mantuvieran conversaciones orales y se les enseñó a grabarlas para subirlas a la plataforma, de forma que pudieran ser luego escuchadas y evaluadas con detenimiento.

### Descripción de las universidades invitadas

Aunque la primera intención fue proponer el proyecto a universidades a distancia y, a ser posible, con alumnos de estudios relacionados con el Turismo, finalmente se optó por enviar una invitación a varias listas de distribución de Internet que estuvieran interesadas. Para el buen funcionamiento de este proyecto era de vital importancia que los puntos de unión, es decir, los profesores de las universidades invitadas y los estudiantes de las universidades invitadas, poseyeran con anterioridad ciertos conocimientos en la aplicación de las TIC a la enseñanza de lenguas, ya que de no ser así, sería un inconveniente para el buen funcionamiento del proyecto. Finalmente, se escogieron alumnos universitarios, estudiantes o no de español, de los siguientes países:

- EEUU (Hawai<sup>3</sup>)
- Kuwait
- Japón
- Emiratos Árabes

Debido al desconocimiento cultural y turístico inicial de todos los países participantes por parte de los alumnos de la UNED que integraban el proyecto, se logró dotar a la experiencia de características muy importantes en el desarrollo profesional de éstos. Estas características podrían resumirse en la gran diferencia horaria existente entre los países participantes, en la diversidad de acentos o en el contraste entre culturas totalmente diferentes. Todo ello, junto con la necesidad por parte de los estudiantes de la UNED de interactuar oralmente con los alumnos externos, permitió que los objetivos marcados en un principio se cumplieran casi a la perfección.

### Herramientas de comunicación utilizadas en la realización del proyecto

Tal y como se ha mencionado anteriormente, la comunicación sincrónica se ha llevado a cabo por medio de dos tipos de herramientas: mensajería instantánea<sup>4</sup> y webinars.

### Mensajería instantánea (Práctica de la interacción)

Desde su aparición, la mensajería instantánea ha sido de gran ayuda para multitud de ejemplos de trabajo colaborativo realizado a nivel educativo y académico (Kadirire, 2007; Nardi, Whittaker y Bradner, 2000). En el campo de la enseñanza de idiomas, resulta muy útil por su facilidad de uso y su disponibilidad, ya que la mayor parte de ellos son de fácil acceso y gratuitos. De todos los programas que existían en el año 2005 en la red, se optó por Yahoo. Por ese motivo, se tuvo que dedicar parte de la primera sesión a enseñar las funciones básicas de Yahoo Messenger: entre otras, cómo invitar a los compañeros y cómo utilizar la opción “formar parte de una conversación para más de dos personas” (algo que muchos de ellos desconocían).

La principal función de este tipo de comunicación sincrónica en el proyecto era mantener a los participantes conectados el máximo tiempo posible. Muchos de ellos trabajaban con Internet, y para ellos era habitual tener siempre un sistema de mensajería instantánea conectado, de modo que así sería más fácil contactar con algún alumno de la universidad “compañera” a cualquier hora que éste pudiera aparecer. En el caso de los estudiantes de Hawai, la hora era justo la opuesta a la hora española. Es decir, que cuando el reloj en España marcaba las doce de la noche, en el citado estado era aún mediodía.

La Figura número 1 muestra la conversación de voz y texto mantenida entre cuatro personas: dos profesoras y dos alumnos, dos de éstos desde Los Emiratos Árabes Unidos (EAU). Los *smilies*<sup>5</sup> que aparecen con auriculares dibujados representan a los participantes preparados para hablar y escucharse mediante el uso de la voz.

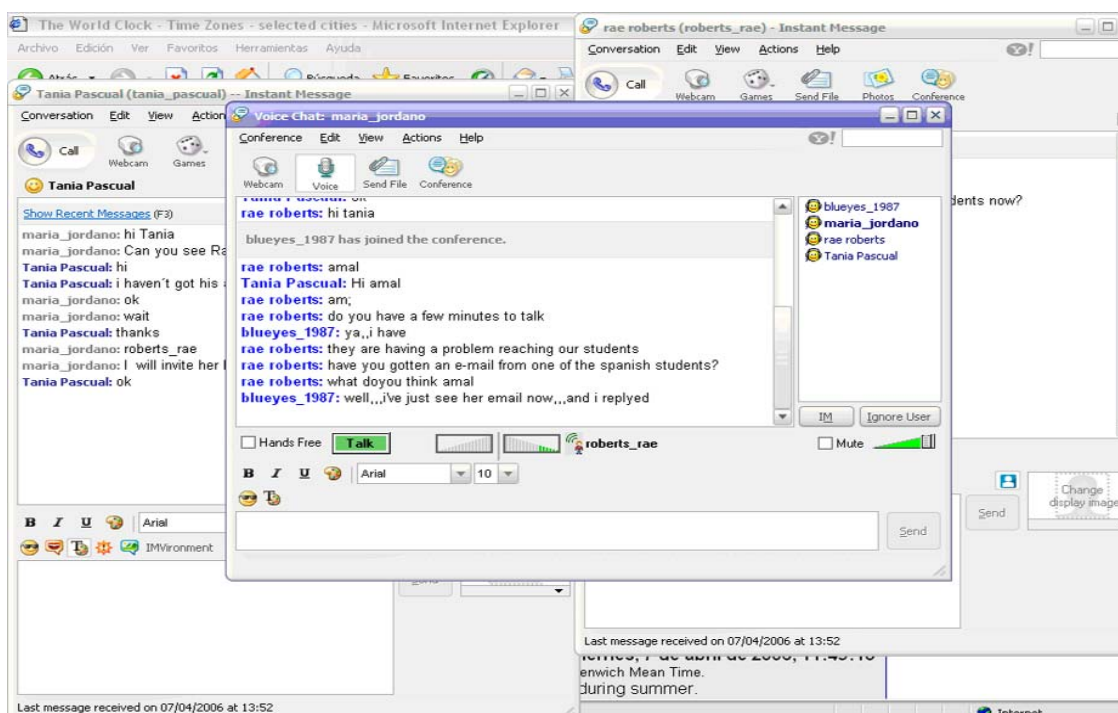


Fig. 1. Ejemplo de conversación de voz y texto

Sería interesante destacar el hecho de que, a día de hoy, muchos de los alumnos que participaron en el proyecto continúan utilizando la herramienta aún habiendo concluido ya la experiencia, lo que demuestra la utilidad de este tipo de herramientas en la vida diaria. Éste es un aspecto a tener en cuenta en la adquisición de la competencia en TIC común a todos los estudios de grado que se están diseñando y se han creado en la actualidad. Por primera vez en la corta andadura de esta asignatura (desde el año 2000), se pone en práctica de forma oral todo el inglés adquirido durante el proceso de aprendizaje de la asignatura. A día de hoy, esto es algo que se sigue pidiendo año tras año por parte de los alumnos de universidades a distancia como la UNED, y que se está teniendo muy en cuenta a la hora de diseñar los nuevos grados tanto en Turismo como en Estudios Ingleses.

### Webinars (Herramienta encaminada a mejorar y evaluar la práctica de la producción oral)

Etimológicamente, la palabra *webinar* se acuñó en 1998 y compone de dos partes *web* y *seminar*. El diccionario *Merriam-Webster* la describe como “a live online educational

*presentation during which participating viewers can submit questions and comments”.*

Los *webinars*, también denominados *virtual classroom systems* (VCS), ofrecen la posibilidad de incluir interacción textual además de la voz del conferenciante –utilizada habitualmente para formular preguntas–, mostrar una presentación con diapositivas e incluso permitir el turno de palabra a los asistentes al acto (Schullo, Hilbelink, Venable y Barron, 2007). Otra de las características más importantes de este tipo de herramientas es la de grabar todas las conversaciones que tengan lugar mediante su uso. Es por ello que los *webinars* sirven como complemento a los chats convencionales y a las aplicaciones de voz sobre IP (*Internet Protocol*) de la mensajería instantánea, ya que éstos no permitían hasta el momento la grabación de las conversaciones de voz.<sup>6</sup>

En este caso, después de haber estudiado otras opciones, se optó por un *webinar* llamado *Alado* para realizar tanto la presentación del proyecto final como las reuniones generales de cada semana. Existían dos modos de acceder a la plataforma *Alado*: una como *ponente*, que incluía

la posibilidad de sincronizar la presentación con la pantalla de cada invitado, y otra como mero *asistente*, que sólo tenía permisos para escuchar, escribir o grabar tanto el *chat* de voz como el apoyo escrito. La Figura 2 muestra el interfaz de *Alado* durante la presentación final de uno de los grupos de trabajo:

en herramientas como *Skype*<sup>7</sup> dos personas pueden llegar ya a hablar casi a la vez.

A la derecha, y ocupando la mayor parte de la pantalla, puede aparecer una página web con información sobre algún evento, o bien, como será nuestro caso, las diapositivas del trabajo

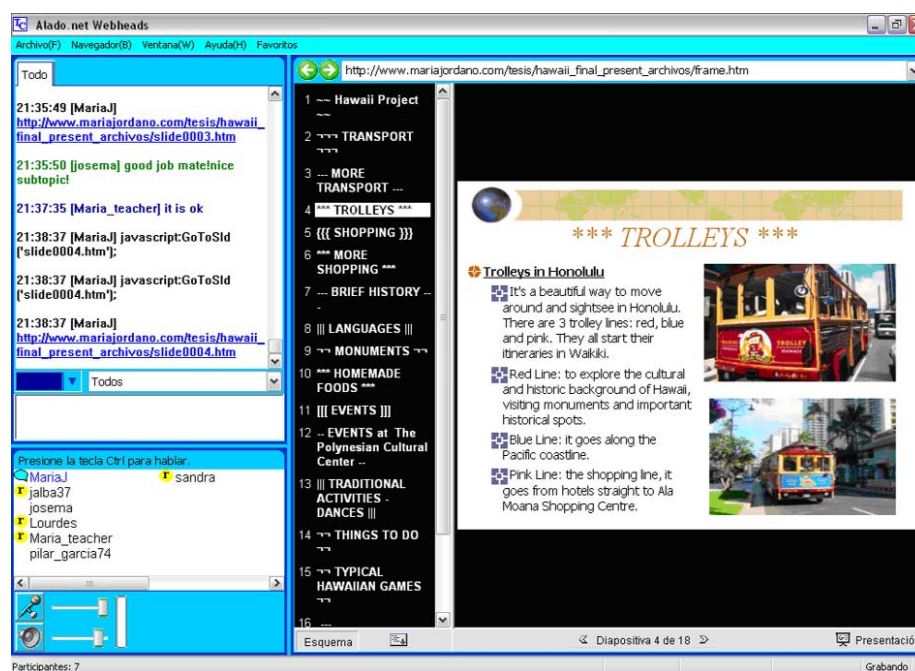


Fig. 2. Interfaz de Alado (versión 7.42)

En el cuadrante superior izquierdo, se muestra el espacio dedicado al *chat*. En él los participantes pueden ir dejando escritas sus preguntas y dudas, de modo que el conferenciante pueda ir respondiendo a medida que va hablando o cuando lo crea conveniente. Debajo de este espacio para *chat*, se observan los nombres de todas las personas que van apareciendo en él. A la derecha de cada persona van apareciendo iconos de colores: el amarillo con una “R” significa que está grabando la conversación, el verde significa que ha pedido la palabra y el azul, que está hablando. Al igual que en la mensajería instantánea, hay que tener mucho cuidado de respetar el turno de palabra y esperar a que la otra persona termine para poder hablar, lo que resulta bastante difícil de conseguir al principio. También habría que añadir que este problema se está solucionando poco a poco con el avance la tecnología y que

que deben ser mostradas. Previamente, el trabajo de cada alumno se alojaba en un servidor externo, con el visto bueno del profesor, de tal forma que pudiera ser posible para la persona con roles de presentador en el *webinar* guiar la exposición sincronizada. A la vez que la persona encargada de exponer lo hacía, el resto podían intervenir mediante el uso del *chat* escrito.

## CONCLUSIONES

El uso de este tipo de herramientas *online* ofrece posibilidades ilimitadas en la práctica y evaluación de la competencia oral (por medio de exposiciones en *webinars*), no sólo en la enseñanza a distancia, sino también en la presencial. Gracias a este tipo de acciones, se ofrece al alumno la oportunidad de presentar un trabajo delante de personas totalmente ajenas a su contexto educativo, lo cual es

claramente una apuesta más por formar al estudiante en el ámbito profesional que se va a encontrar cuando termine sus estudios.

Pese a todo, instituciones como la UNED se sienten obligadas a diseñar sus métodos de enseñanza a distancia asumiendo dos *handicaps* (que no dejan de ser bondades al mismo tiempo) presentes desde su creación:

el elevado número de alumnado -debido principalmente a su naturaleza de universidad pública y abierta-, y la brecha digital fruto de los avances informáticos de la era en que vivimos y de la heterogeneidad propia de los estudiantes que cursan sus estudios en ella año tras año, lo cual no dejará de ser nunca un reto en sí mismo.

## Notas

- <sup>1</sup> A nivel grupal, sólo como demostración.
- <sup>2</sup> *Alf* es una plataforma de enseñanza virtual a distancia desarrollada en un principio por el MIT y continuada por la UNED.
- <sup>3</sup> Es interesante resaltar el hecho de escoger Hawai por ser uno de los estados que puedan resultar más exóticos a los ojos de cualquiera de nuestros estudiantes de Turismo, así como por ser además uno de lugares más remotos y desconocidos para cualquier europeo.
- <sup>4</sup> Programas que utilizan el protocolo *TCP IP* que sirven para enviar y recibir mensajes instantáneos con otros usuarios conectados a Internet u otras redes, además de para saber cuando están disponibles para hablar.
- <sup>5</sup> Pequeños iconos utilizados en Internet para expresar los sentimientos de los interlocutores.
- <sup>6</sup> Aunque se pueden utilizar programas externos que cumplen funciones similares como *Audacity* (utilizado en el proyecto).
- <sup>7</sup> Herramienta de mensajería instantánea <http://www.skype.com>.

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# ASSESSING ONLINE LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

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*The increased use of online technologies and Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) in foreign language classrooms has led teachers to broaden the focus of learning to include intercultural understanding, the skills of intercultural interaction, as well as electronic literacy. However, while the development of e-literacy and intercultural communicative competence may be seen as inevitable outcomes of many of the activities of online foreign language learning, it is still debatable how these competencies should be formally assessed by foreign language educators. This paper looks at approaches to the assessment of competencies in the European Higher Education Area and discusses how online foreign language learning at university level can be assessed within this new framework of learning.*

"May you live in interesting times" – ancient Chinese curse

## INTRODUCTION

University-level foreign language educators in Spain and across Europe are working in educational contexts which are undergoing radical change and development. Over the past number of years, new frameworks have been established which are now shaping university education in general and foreign language education in particular. These are the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), with its methodological emphasis on student-centredness and the development of generic and subject-specific competencies (Tuning, 2002; González and Wagenaar, 2005), and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). Both of these frameworks provide insight into how educational curricula should be structured and

what the goals of learning should be. Significantly, even though the former is focussed on the convergence of university education in Europe and the latter on the description and development of foreign language proficiency in a European context, both coincide in the development of learner competencies as the central activity of student-centred learning. In the case of the EHEA, these competencies can be either generic (e.g. teamwork, working autonomously) or subject-specific (e.g. in *Filología Inglesa*, the ability to analyse literary texts from a comparative perspective). In the case of the CEFR, competencies are either general (e.g. sociocultural competence) or linguistic (e.g. grammatical accuracy).

However, problems emerge when one attempts to establish how these competencies should be

assessed. For example, while the EHEA underlines the importance of generic competencies such as teamwork, the ability to communicate and to work autonomously, work on the framework has not yet attempted to offer concrete guidelines as to how these should be assessed in a curriculum.

This can be particularly problematic when foreign language learning activity involves online activities such as engaging students in online intercultural exchanges or online publishing. Online activities require students to use intercultural skills to communicate and collaborate with members of other cultures in online environments. With this in mind, this paper sets out to explore what online foreign language education involves and how such activity is usually assessed by foreign language educators and then goes on to discuss how the assessment of online foreign language learning can be located in the EHEA.

## ONLINE FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

In recent years, the implantation of online and digital technologies in western societies has had a particularly significant impact on the sphere of foreign language education (Thorne and Payne, 2005; Kern, 2006). Language learners are engaged more and more in new types of learning activities such as online interaction with fellow learners and with members of other cultures using computer-mediated communication tools (O'Dowd, 2007), the development of online documents (e.g. blogs and podcasts) in the target language and the completion of collaborative project work using online resources and tools (e.g. webquests). All of these activities are located in a medium which has multimedia and multimodal dimensions, alters traditional discourse structures, introduces new notions of authorship and has a distinctly multicultural populace.

However, although online learning activity may be becoming part of the norm in foreign language education, there has been a distinct lack of attention paid to the question of how online foreign language activity should be assessed. There are various reasons why this may be the case. Lamy and Hampel (2007: 88)

speculate that it is due to the relative 'adolescence' of this area of foreign language education:

*In maturing, CMCL [computer mediated communication for foreign language learning] has taken little account of assessment. Possibly, early research needed to attend to procedures, tasks, perceptions and a host of other aspects of online learning before it could speak reliably about the assessment of such a new form of learning.*

But apart from researchers' and practitioners' having other priorities, it is fair to argue that there may be further reasons why the assessment of online activity has not been examined in greater detail. It may be the case, for example, that many foreign language programmes have failed to make any attempt to adapt assessment procedures to the new forms of learning. Authors such as Salmon (2000) and Levy and Stockwell (2006) have pointed out that, although many foreign language learning courses have integrated online activities, educators continue to evaluate students using traditional methods which ignore the new (virtual) contexts in which they are learning and the new skills and competencies which they are developing in these contexts. Levy and Stockwell (2006: 231-232) explain:

*...although students may make imaginative use of new technologies in their coursework – creating Web sites, developing portfolios, completing Webquests, participating in collaborative projects – all too often they are still required, individually, to complete examinations and assessment items that use very traditional techniques and technologies.*

A third possible reason for the neglect of online assessment methods may be related to the complexities of assessing the skills and competencies which online communicative activity involves. Online tasks engage learners in the development of linguistic competence and communicative language skills in much the same way as traditional communicative classroom activities do. But they also go much further than this. They also require to a much greater extent the use of the skills, attitudes and knowledge of

intercultural communicative competence and electronic literacy, as learners use the online medium to analyse and author *multimodal texts*<sup>1</sup> for a world-wide audience as well as to establish and maintain relationships with members of other cultures in a foreign language.

In the following section, we look briefly at what the literature on the EHEA has to say on issues of developing learner competencies and of assessment and we then relate them to the area of online foreign language education.

## ASSESSMENT IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

The Bologna Declaration, which was signed by 29 European countries in June 1999, proposed various objectives which would lead to the establishment of a European Higher Education Area by 2010. These included the design of a common framework of reference of easily readable and comparable degrees, the organisation of studies into undergraduate and postgraduate levels and the creation of the European Credit Transfer System. The EHEA also proposes the use of a generic and subject-specific competence-based model of curriculum development in order to facilitate transparency in educational programmes, as well as student mobility and employability.

The Tuning project has linked the political objectives set in the Bologna Declaration of 1999 to the higher education sector and has explored the consequences of the establishment of an EHEA for university education across Europe. Tuning identifies the use of competencies to describe and orientate university learning as being at the centre of a new teaching/learning paradigm, which is student-centred and which shifts the emphasis of learning from the transmission of knowledge to what students are able to do at the end of a period of learning:

*'Tuning' results make clear that Universities must not only transfer consolidated or developing knowledge, their traditional sphere of expertise, but also a variety of 'general' abilities. This implies that they must explicitly develop a novel mix of approaches to teaching and learning in order to*

*encourage, or allow to develop, valuable qualities such as capacity for analysis and synthesis, independence of judgement, curiosity, teamwork, and ability to communicate.* (2002: 128)

The White Paper entitled “*Título de Grado en Estudios en el Ámbito de la Lengua, Literatura, Cultura y Civilización*” (Agencia Nacional de Evaluación, 2007), which deals with the adaptation of English Philology to this new framework, does not identify any subject-specific or generic competencies for *Filología Inglesa* which specifically refer to the need for students of this degree to be able to interact online or to analyse or create multimodal documents. However, at the University of León, the proposed set of competencies for the revised degree of *Filología Moderna: Inglés* does include the following:

1. *Capacidad para comprender, analizar y elaborar textos de distintos tipos, registros y en distintos medios en lengua inglesa (lengua B).*
2. *Capacidad para utilizar tecnología informática aplicada al trabajo lingüístico y de comunicación en general y evaluar su utilidad en cada caso concreto.*
3. *Capacidad para reconocer las idiosincrasias de los entornos multilingües caracterizados por la diversidad social, cultural y étnica y ser capaz de asegurar la comunicación y mediación interlingüística e intercultural inglés-español.*
4. *Conocimiento de las técnicas de comunicación interlingüística e intercultural que afectan al inglés y al español.* (Rabadán, 2008)

Competencies 1 and 2 confirm the relevance of online foreign language communicative activity for this degree, as the reference to “*distintos medios*” in competence 1 can be understood to include the online medium, while competence 2 makes a clear reference to the use of new technologies for online communication. Competencies 3 and 4 highlight the importance of sociocultural knowledge and intercultural communicative competence for learners studying this degree and it is fair to suggest that this knowledge and competence should be applicable to all contexts – including the virtual.

However, it is unclear from the EHEA documentation how such competencies should

be evaluated. The 2002 Tuning report limits itself to the following comments on assessment:

*Changing teaching and learning approaches and objectives implies corresponding changes in assessment methods and criteria for evaluating performance. These should consider not only knowledge and contents but also general skills and competencies [...] Of course, transparency and comparability of assessment methods and criteria for evaluating performance are essential if quality assurance in a European context is to be developed.* (2002: 128-129)

Apart from attributing importance to the evaluation of general competencies, the report also calls for a “...greater wealth of assessment strategies (portfolio, tutorial work, course work...)” (2002: 18). A more recent Tuning report adds to this by providing an overview of the different formative as well as summative assessment procedures<sup>2</sup> which are currently in use in European universities, but does not actually provide suggestions as to which of these may be most suited to assessing competencies (González and Wagenaar, 2005: 207-209). However, the authors do warn that generic competencies are often interpreted in very different ways, depending on the subject areas and the national contexts in which they are taught.

In summary, the EHEA provides a new framework for university education within which foreign language degrees can be located. Its methodological approach is based on the development of learner competencies – both subject-specific and generic - and which requires assessment methods to be transparent, to take on both formative and summative roles and to be sufficiently varied in order to reflect the different possible outcomes of learning. The form which this approach to assessment will take appears to be very much open to interpretation.

## CURRENT APPROACHES TO ONLINE ASSESSMENT

Although the guidelines proposed by the EHEA as regards teaching and assessment have yet to become the norm in university foreign

language education, it is interesting to establish how online foreign language learning activity is currently being assessed by educators around Europe and to what extent ‘generic’ or ‘non-linguistic’ competencies are being attended to in assessment procedures. As there is a dearth of literature on the area of assessing online foreign language learning, I carried out a survey among 20 experienced university level foreign language educators who regularly use online activities such as telecollaborative exchange and online publishing in their courses. The results of the survey are combined here with the few reports which do exist in the literature on this area.

The survey was aimed at establishing, firstly, what educators evaluate when they engage their students in online interaction and, secondly, how they evaluate these aspects. The subjects were asked to respond to the following questions via email:

What do you assess of your students' online activity when they take part in online exchanges?

Levels of Participation (e.g. no. of posts written)?

The linguistic level of their writing/speaking in the L2?

Their ability to interact?

Their electronic literacies (e.g. ability to produce a blog)?

Their Intercultural Competence (skills, attitudes, cultural awareness)?

Secondly, how do you assess their online exchanges?

Proof of participation? (e.g. print-outs of their interaction)

Products of interaction (blogs, websites, essays)?

Reflection on learning (portfolios, diaries)? Any other methods?

Out of the twenty educators who were contacted, nine responded to the questions. Despite the relatively low number of responses, the survey enabled me to make some initial observations as regards how online assessment is carried out and what is actually being evaluated.

Firstly, it was observed that a great deal of online assessment is linked to participation. Many educators reported giving marks depending on the number of times a student sent emails, posted messages in online forums or wrote entries in their blogs. Two representative comments demonstrating this approach are the following:

I consider how much and how often they interact with each other. I usually say something like: 'You have to at least respond to two or three posts and make comments or ask questions.' You kind of need to do this because most of the students are not very motivated. [Respondent 1]

For a base grade I assess their level of participation in terms of posts of original sentences each week. In other words, if they are saying the same thing over and over again, it doesn't count. [Respondent 3]

This tendency to evaluate the quantity of participation has already been identified in the literature and has received considerable criticism for various reasons. For example, writers have questioned the inherent assumption that participation is equivalent to learning and that students who do not write will not learn. In other words, little sympathy is shown for 'receptive-only' participation (Lamy and Hampel, 2007). Goodfellow (2007) also questions the quality of a learning activity which needs to oblige learners to participate:

*[...]Look at the widespread practice of linking participation to assessment. 'You must contribute at least 5 messages in order to pass the course.' Why would we need to say this, if we had an engaging and effective tool for interaction to offer them?*

A second significant finding from the survey is the great importance attributed in online assessment to what could be referred to as 'affective aspects' of online interaction. Many respondents mentioned marking students' online performance according to their ability to interact with others in a sensitive way, to develop positive relationships and to develop dialogic exchanges which referred to and expanded

previous messages. Some examples of this emphasis on the type of interaction which students engage in can be found in the following extracts of my survey:

I look to see if they have demonstrated social competence, *responding to people thoughtfully, expressing interesting ideas [...]* [Respondent 4] (My italics)

How much did they exchange and *how well they do it*. Did they push the envelope or did they stay with the tried and true (and trite)? Did someone *share a personal experience* (not touchy feely, but 'this happened to me when I was in a foreign country'...) [Respondent 7] (My italics)

Further evidence of this approach can be found in research reports in the literature which describe the assessment criteria used in their studies. Anderson-Mejias (2006) proposes a scheme, for example, in which the content of online messages is judged according to which of the following characteristics they contain: a) new ideas, b) restatement of previous ideas with changes, c) restatement of previous ideas without changes, d) acceptance of ideas of others, e) rejection of others' ideas and suggestion of new ideas or e) rejection of others' ideas with proposing new ideas. Arnold and Ducate (2006) awarded a quarter of the marks for an online discussion task for the ability of students to explicitly respond to group members' postings and integrate them into their own responses. Similarly, Weasenforth, Biesenbach-Lucas and Meloni (2002) explained that students were evaluated on the following criteria:

*Each message that you write should be a response to previous messages. This means that each contribution must build on previous contributions. Your contribution should not be a separate, independent message without a relationship to messages from others in your group.*

A final outcome of the survey was an admission of the problems which practitioners are encountering with regards the evaluation of intercultural communicative competence. It is

clear that, while educators contribute great importance to this area, they are finding great difficulty in establishing how it can be assessed appropriately. One of the comments reflecting on this issue included the following:

Question: Do you assess their Intercultural Competence (skills, attitudes, cultural awareness)?

Response: It is the main topic of the course and the scenario is built around it. However the "measure" of IC skills is only done posthoc and by researchers. It is still a research issue. [Respondent 2]

Generally, educators seem to use portfolios as the most effective approach to assessing intercultural competence. This evaluation tool enables learners to reflect at length on cultural issues and to demonstrate growth and development of intercultural awareness:

First, I should mention that all assessment in my course was done via portfolio - both formative and summative portfolio. The main emphasis of the portfolio assessment was "development" - students could choose their own areas in which they wanted to develop and then they needed to document that development in their portfolio entries by showing change over time. Usually students used annotated email and chat transcripts as entries in their portfolios to document their change over time. [Respondent 9]

## CONCLUSION

This short paper has aimed to highlight the need to identify how online foreign language learning activity can be effectively and accurately assessed within the new approaches to education outlined

in the EHEA. It is clear that further research is necessary in various areas.

Firstly, there is a need to identify in greater detail the different approaches to assessment of online foreign language interaction and to investigate the theoretical, ethical and practical issues which foreign language educators face in this area. This will be achieved by carrying out a more comprehensive international survey of online foreign language teaching practitioners and establishing what are the current trends in the assessment of online foreign language learning activity.

Secondly, it is important to identify the areas of intercultural communicative competence and electronic literacy which make up some of the non-linguistic competencies which are inevitably the focus of online communicative activity. Using the guidelines offered by the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) and the European Language Portfolio (Council of Europe, 2000), empirically validated descriptors for the assessment of levels of certain (non-linguistic) skills and online communicative activities could be drawn up. Descriptors for such areas have not yet been developed even though they are widely considered as important aspects of the modern foreign language curriculum.

Although the literature on the EHEA rightly acknowledges that competencies will be assessed differently according to local and national educational contexts, I believe that the establishment of common guidelines for assessment procedures in this and other areas of foreign language education will facilitate student learning across borders and lead to greater cohesion in European approaches to foreign language education.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> These are online texts that integrate writing, speech, images, colour, sound, animation and thereby combine logics of time and space – e.g. blog entries, webpages, etc. (Kern, 2006).
- <sup>2</sup> *Summative assessment* refers to assessment which takes place at the end of a course of study. Its aim is to measure a learner's performance and thereby to provide information as to how much learners have progressed during the course. In contrast, *formative assessment* refers to the ongoing process of gathering information on the processes of learning, the extent of learning, and on strengths and weaknesses and which provides learners and tutors with information for future planning to meet an individual's needs (Hunt, 2001).

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# THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ICT IN THE SECOND-CYCLE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE MODULE AT THE UNIVERSITAT DE VALÈNCIA

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*In this article, after a short overview of the use of ICT in English Studies at the Universitat de València and the conditions I think teachers should comply with when planning, designing, creating, monitoring and evaluating activities using ICT, I detail two of the activities I have carried out using new technologies in the obligatory fourth-year module History of the English Language. Although this has traditionally been a very theoretical subject, the activities introduced through the medium of ICT have given it a more practical focus which attempts to give the students the opportunity to learn discipline-specific content, improve their English and acquire subject-specific and general competencies.*

## OVERVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ICT IN ENGLISH STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITAT DE VALÈNCIA

This article focuses on a description of several activities I have implemented in my *History of the English Language* module using ICT (Information and Communication Technologies). In that regard, it can be seen as a practical guide on how to implement ICT in what has been, up to very recently, a very theoretically based subject. However, I also look at the more general implications that using these new technologies has had for our teaching practices. Before looking at the subject I have taught, I will start with a short overview of the use of ICT in the

English Studies (*Filología Inglesa*) degree at the *Universitat de València* in the last three or four years. In almost every subject, ICT has been used in one way or another to enhance our teaching and improve the acquisition of discipline-specific content and general and specific competencies on the part of our students. Our remit is clear: ICT is an aid to more traditional teaching and learning; not a replacement for it - that is, we focus on blended rather than distance learning not only because it is institutional policy, but because our research has shown us that students prefer it (Gregori Signes and Pennock-Speck, 2007). Most of the work done in ICT has been through our learning platform, *Aula Virtual* (AV), but increasingly

lecturers have turned to software and tools outside this platform when the need has arisen. At first, our attempts to use the AV were quite timid. The platform is free and has several technical limitations with regard to the delivery and inclusion of multimedia content in the online questionnaires, which have meant that it is not used as much and as creatively as it could be. On the other hand, the difficulties that we have had with the platform have obliged us to use our initiative and imagination to overcome the obstacles we have been faced with. In any case, it is being continually upgraded to make it more user-friendly.

As the coordinator of a project aimed at increasing the use of ICT that started in 2007 and which was renewed in June 2008<sup>1</sup>, I have found that the members of the project have created numerous exercises and activities which have spurred non-members of the project to use the AV either because they shared the same subjects or because they attended talks and workshops we have given on ICT in the classroom. Thanks to this project, we have been able to build on our knowledge of ICT and to learn from other members of the project. In fact, one of the activities I carried out in the *History of the English Language* subject was suggested by activities designed by another teacher who had students create blogs in her Stylistics module (Alcantud Díaz, 2008). This is exactly the kind of knock-on effect that the project was designed for.

The AV has several tools and in what follows I will describe the most important of them. The first, and probably most useful, is the bulk mail tool. It is easy to underestimate how useful this is and how it has revolutionized our communication with both students who regularly attend class and those who do not. The second most used tool is resources where we can leave the programme for the course, notes, sound and video files, etc. The third is the assessment tool that the students can access to keep abreast of their progress. The fourth tool, to generate questionnaires, due to its complexity and limitations, is the one used least by the teachers. At this moment, unlike other platforms, we are only able to generate multiple choice and true/false questionnaires. The forum tool can be

used to create and administer forums and has been used to good effect by one of the Project members (Alcantud Díaz, 2008).

### CONDITIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING ICT IN A THEORETICAL MODULE IN THE CONTEXT OF A BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

We all know that employing ICT frequently requires several hours of our planning and designing that might be employed in other activities that have more immediate and tangible effects, i.e., writing and publishing articles. Moreover, it also eats into the time we have for planning and preparing for lessons and correcting work done by the student using traditional means. For this reason, my colleagues and I have imposed a series of conditions on ourselves with regard to the use of ICT to avoid wasting time, money and considerable effort. This is especially relevant in English Studies at the UVEG due to the large numbers of students per group. The first is to only use ICT if it adds something to our teaching that traditional teaching cannot or at least cannot without, again, too much effort. I call this the “*if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it*” condition. The second is to make sure that using ICT does not involve spending too much money or the “*money doesn’t grow on trees*” condition. There are cases where a lot of money has been invested in computer programmes that are hardly used by teachers or students. The third is that engagement with ICT should not mean massive amounts of work for either teachers or students. This condition also applies to traditional teaching. If this happens, it can condition the attitude of both groups towards these technologies in education. This final condition is the “*all work and no play ...*” condition. Contravening any of these conditions will mean the ICT activity will either be superfluous, redundant or counterproductive –or all of the above.

Teaching through ICT in *History of the English Language* has only been possible because it is part of our Innovation in Education Project<sup>2</sup>. As we switched from an assessment system with one final examination to continuous assessment, it became clear to us that computers would be necessary in order to lighten our teaching load

while maintaining high assessment standards. Each of the two semesters that make up this year-long module consists of three tests that each individual student sits during classroom time, three portfolio activities carried out in groups of five, and a classroom presentation also in groups of five. The main reason for asking for the portfolio and presentation to be carried out in groups, apart from giving the students the possibility to acquire or develop skills in team-work, is that the total number of students in this subject is 120, which meant that assessing individual presentations was out of the question.

In addition, I created three online questionnaires for each of the three units in the second semester. These are posted a week before each test and are self-assessment tests, although their completion was part of each student's portfolio

Students were informed that at least one of the questions in each self-assessment test would appear in the examination to make it more appealing to them. There was a balance between individual work –the three in-class tests and three self-assessment tests– and group work consisting of portfolio activities and the presentation. Individual work accounted for 70% of the mark and group work, for 30%. In what follows, I will describe two other activities that I carried out in 2007-2008.

## E-PORTFOLIOS THROUGH WRITEBOARD

During the academic year 2007-2008, I maintained the same assessment system but required all the students to do all the portfolio activities through a programme called *Writeboard* (see Fig. 1). I chose this programme



Fig. 1. Writeboard

mark. Essentially, apart from the bulk mail and resources, the questionnaires were the only ICT activities I used in the subject during the academic year 2006-2007, but they proved valuable as a way of showing what kind of questions I would ask. It is important to note that I do not correct the self-assessment questionnaires and thus comply with condition three. The students get feedback on their answers and are able to do the test again.

rather than the AV forum due to the former's ease of use. To create a forum/blog, all that is needed is to give the *Writeboard* a name, a password and supply an email address. The forum/blog is automatically created and then you can invite as many members as you wish by including their emails. To be able to follow the students' progress, I asked them to include me as a member of a group. The three portfolio exercises or activities, the answers to which

were posted to each group's *Writeboard*, consisted of translations from Early Modern to Contemporary English and questions on notes left in the resource tool in the AV.

On using *Writeboard*, I had effectively switched to an e-portfolio approach. The reason I did this was because it was easier and more convenient for the students to pick up and deliver the finished activities and for me to correct and give them back. It was also possible to ascertain when the actual work had been done. Another important consideration of an ecological nature was that students did not have to use too much paper. Importantly, I could also see which students were doing what. This is an important issue for both teachers and students, as one of the reasons why the more active students do not like group work is that they complain that some students let the rest do the work. Knowing which students are working is almost impossible in traditional teaching, as you generally only have one student's word over another, but using

*Writeboard* I could discern which students were pulling their weight, as each member of the group had to hand in a part of each assignment. As many students work while doing their degree, this also meant that they could do the work and hand it in without coming to the university (Barbour and Collins, 2005).

Another activity I asked students to do through *Writeboard* was to keep a kind of log of their progress in planning and designing their presentation. This was because I was interested not only in the final product, but in the process of creating the presentation. Thus, I was acting according to conditions 1, 2 and 3. Writing the log gave students the opportunity to practice informal written English, something they would not normally be required to do in what is classed as a theoretical-practical subject such as *History of the English Language* (see Fig. 2). The students had to arrange meetings, plan what they were going to do in the presentation and discuss contents. In this way, they acquire rather

but I think that the correct translation is eggs.

Another thing: is the present, past and past participle tenses of understand in this way:understande/understode/ understonden

 sara  said... (14 Apr 08, looking at [version 4](#) )

Eyren is correct because in the text it is trying to show the different ways of referring to the same things depending on the dialect or origin:  
From OE is "eyren" and "eyrene"  
From ON is "egg" and "egges"  
So Caxton writes both to show the controversy and misundertood of the waitress as a way of irony maybe.

 Romina  said... (18 Apr 08, looking at [version 4](#) )

Girls, we will see on Monday in order to put Hamer and Milroy's answers in common!

 sara  said... (24 Apr 08, looking at [version 4](#) )

Ok and next Tuesday at 9h we'll meet at the hall? let's talk about the presentation and the questions of Milroy and Hamer.  
bye  
Horte I'm sending to you now the mail with the first semester files! Just add what you scanned

**Fig. 2. Informal conversation in English in Writeboard**

than learn the language (Krashen, 1982), as the main focus is communicating, not language form (see also Zaragoza Ninet and Clavel Arroitia, 2008 for a discussion on acquisition in a blended learning environment in this volume). The preparation for the presentation in this asynchronous forum was assessed by taking into account the frequency with which the students used *Writeboard* and also the relevance of the students' comments. I provided feedback on content and form through the medium of *Writeboard* and at the end of the term, when I sent a document listing the most common mistakes and ways of avoiding or correcting them.

### MULTIMEDIA PRODUCTS CREATED BY STUDENTS

Another innovation that I put into practice during the last academic year was to ask the students to create a video as part of their presentation using mostly *Microsoft* programmes such as *PhotoStory* and/or *Movie Maker*, which are both free (Robin, 2006; Gregori Signes, 2008). The rationale behind this was to coax the students into acquiring computer skills and to allow them to be more creative. Logically, this kind of activity complied with condition one, as one cannot create digital presentations using traditional methods. The programmes cost nothing, which complies with condition two. However compliance with condition three is a question of opinion, but no students complained of excessive work in this respect and several voiced the opinion that they had enjoyed doing this kind of activity. Ease of use and keeping costs down can conflict at times, as *Movie Maker* is not the easiest programme in the world to use and, depending on what one wants to do, might be somewhat limiting. However, the fact that students are unwilling or unable to buy software probably means that in the making of the films there exists a level playing field. In order to give the students the skills necessary to make a digital presentation, I gave a seminar on the use of the programmes mentioned above to one of each of the 24 groups of five that I had. The students who attended the seminar then had to teach the others how to use the programmes. Fortunately, students will have more input on new technologies as ICT skills for teaching and learning will become a subject in

English Studies when our new degree structure comes into force in 2009-2010.

Without going into too many details, *Photo Story* is a programme which allows you to make a series of images into a digital narrative. The first thing to do is to choose the correct order for the photos. Once that is done, you can add captions, music and voice-overs to the photos and finally save the completed project as an avi movie. The only drawback to the program is that you cannot insert videos. *PowerPoint* slides can be saved as images too, which proved very useful in making the type of movies we had envisaged. The finished product can actually be quite sophisticated and depends not only on technological prowess but personal creativity (see Gregori Signes on educational digital storytelling (EDS) in this volume). *Movie Maker* has similar capabilities to *Photo Story* and allows you to insert either photos or movies, but is less user-friendly. Many students opted for videos downloaded from the *YouTube* site. Although the flash videos in this site are not compatible with *Movie Maker*, they can be downloaded and converted into a compatible format using programmes like *YouTube Downloader*. Students had to be made aware that their video presentation could not consist solely of a downloaded video no matter how interesting it was, as this meant that their input would be minimum. Several students used screenshot software such as *ScreenPilot* and software to capture moving images on the screen such as *CamStudio*. In this way, they were able to use the zoom-in feature of *Google Maps* to show, for instance, where a particular dialect was spoken (see example in Fig. 3).

The creation of the movie for the presentation was a test of the students' ability to include a digital product of their own making with the rest of their oral presentation. The theme of the presentations was language attitudes in English from a diachronic point of view. Most of the students placed their movies at the end of the presentation as a kind of grand finale, and they normally dealt with language attitudes at the present time using their own material and videos downloaded, normally from *YouTube*. The movie was assessed using quality, content and relevance and was part of the assessment for the presentation itself.



**Fig. 3. Movie made by a group of students**

## FINAL REMARKS

ICT in the field of education is an exciting opportunity for teachers and students. With more and more teachers being expected to apply more student-centred teaching, even if they do not particularly want to (Bailey, 2008), practically all teachers will end up using ICT to teach or at least to communicate with or evaluate students to a greater or lesser extent. The more free, user-

friendly programmes that emerge, the easier this will become, but we should all be aware of the advantages and problems involved in using ICT, some of which I have outlined above. My feeling is that using new technologies is a very efficient and effective way of giving students the opportunity to acquire discipline-specific content and competencies, including the ability to communicate confidently in English, and also for us as teachers to assess the work they do.

## Notes

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- <sup>2</sup> *Projecte d'Innovació Educativa de Filologia Anglesa*. [<http://www.uv.es/oce/faseactualprojectes.htm>]

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# LAS NUEVAS TECNOLOGÍAS EN EL ECTS: EL DESARROLLO DE LA COMPETENCIA LÉXICA EN INGLÉS A TRAVÉS DE LOS PODCASTS

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*El presente proyecto tiene como objetivo principal la introducción y utilización en el aula de una novedosa metodología aplicada a la enseñanza del inglés basada en los podcasts. Se persigue comprobar si su utilización con alumnos/as de 1º de Filología Inglesa produce una mejora significativa en su aprendizaje del léxico y aumenta su motivación. En la introducción se hace un breve recorrido a lo largo de diferentes estudios relacionados tanto con la enseñanza de léxico como con la utilización de esta tecnología en el aprendizaje de idiomas. A continuación, se detallan los objetivos principales, así como la metodología seguida y el programa de ejecución. También se proporcionan los datos de la muestra, variables y diseño del proyecto y se comentan los principales resultados obtenidos en un estudio tanto cuantitativo como cualitativo.*

## INTRODUCCIÓN

La implantación de las nuevas tecnologías en el aula, y más aún en el mundo de la educación universitaria, es uno de los objetivos principales de cualquier organismo comprometido con la innovación docente. Podemos ver reflejada esta afirmación, por ejemplo, en uno de los principios de enseñanza incluidos el informe CIDUA (2005: 29), que habla de la necesidad de "utilizar las TIC y la enseñanza virtual para facilitar los procesos de intercambio de información, comunicación de experiencias y expresión de la creatividad individual y grupal". La elaboración de documentos en Word, presentaciones PowerPoint, webquests y páginas

web ya forma parte de nuestra vida cotidiana, por lo que este proyecto propone dar un paso adelante y utilizar una novedosa herramienta que tiene el potencial necesario para revolucionar el mundo del estudio de los idiomas, beneficiándose tanto alumnos como profesores.

Los *podcasts* son archivos de sonido, generalmente en formato *mp3* u *ogg*, que el usuario puede escuchar en el momento que quiera, utilizando su reproductor portátil. Algo a tener en cuenta es que los *podcasts* están a nuestra entera disposición ya que, además de ser fácilmente descargables de la red, son gratuitos. Éstos se asemejan a programas de

radio realizados tanto por profesionales de la comunicación como por gente aficionada de cualquier zona del mundo. De este modo, nuestra tarea es la de aprovechar la oportunidad de tener contacto con diferentes acentos y, primordialmente, estudiar la aplicación de las funciones del inglés en la vida real basándonos en estas conversaciones naturales y cotidianas.

Tal y como Cohen (2008) afirma, el área auditiva (*listening*), a pesar de ser una de las más utilizadas, es frecuentemente pasada por alto a la hora de investigar nuevas formas de aprendizaje léxico. Al contrario, las actividades de lectura (*reading*) siempre se han visto como la razón principal de éxito para la adquisición de vocabulario. Tengamos en cuenta el dato arrojado por Cohen (2008) – en el que cita el descubrimiento de Schwartz (1998) – que afirma “*que los alumnos obtienen hasta un 90% de información tras escuchar a sus profesores o a sus compañeros*”. Ciertamente, el aspecto auditivo en la enseñanza presenta una importancia indudable, y en ésta se basa el presente proyecto.

Desde hace años se ha escrito sobre cómo puede adquirirse vocabulario para ser hablante de una lengua extranjera, comenzando por intentar definir el concepto de competencia léxica (Jiménez Catalán, 2002) – lo cual es una tarea de indudable complejidad –. De igual modo, se han investigado las diferentes estrategias para la adquisición de vocabulario en el aprendizaje de una segunda o tercera lengua. En el artículo firmado por Suárez Suberviola y Varela Méndez (2002), podemos encontrar una relación de las principales estrategias de aprendizaje de vocabulario y, de nuevo, la información que llega a los alumnos (*input*) vuelve a hacerlo a través de una lectura tradicional. Así, la idea principal de este proyecto (el aprendizaje léxico a través de *podcasts*) se ve justificada al ser un ejemplo de la utilización del medio auditivo en la recepción de vocabulario de la lengua extranjera.

Debemos tener en cuenta que, a pesar de que los *podcasts* no sean comúnmente conocidos por la sociedad española, en otros países como, por ejemplo, Estados Unidos, Inglaterra e Irlanda, ya se han llevado a cabo proyectos

basados en su inserción en la vida académica. Uno de ellos tuvo lugar en 2004, en la Universidad de Duke – Carolina del Norte, Estados Unidos – (Flanagan and Calandra, 2005), en el que se repartieron cerca de 1650 *iPods* entre los estudiantes de primer curso. Se distribuyeron *podcasts* principalmente con debates y conferencias para que los alumnos pudieran volver a escucharlos y así poder revisar conceptos que no captaran en su momento. Además, los profesores de idiomas extranjeros vieron abierto un mundo de oportunidades al encontrar *podcasts* para sus alumnos creados por hablantes nativos. Al finalizar el proyecto, como podemos observar en el informe de evaluación final (Duke University iPod First Year Experience Final Evaluation Report, 2005), se comprobó que, efectivamente, los *ipods* son una poderosa herramienta tanto de difusión de contenidos académicos como de grabación de debates o conferencias. Asimismo, se comprobó que la posibilidad de reproducir cada archivo cuantas veces sea necesario aporta a los alumnos un apoyo en su estudio.

El mundo de los *podcasts*, por tanto, ofrece innumerables posibilidades tanto para el aprendizaje de idiomas como para el disfrute personal. De hecho, tal y como Campbell (2005: 33) menciona, para el estudiante que utiliza *podcasts* “*es natural que el material de clase se mezcle con otros aspectos de su día a día*”. Este punto de fusión entre aprendizaje y vida diaria es, junto a la implementación de las TIC en el aula, uno de los más defendidos por el informe CIDUA (2005).

De este modo, el presente proyecto está dirigido, por una parte, a la investigación de una de esas innumerables posibilidades que ofrecen los *podcasts*, es decir, al hecho de aprender gracias a ellos, y por otra, a la corroboración de que mediante este soporte auditivo se observa el aprendizaje de vocabulario en una segunda lengua.

## OBJETIVOS

A continuación se detallan los objetivos principales que se tuvieron en cuenta antes, durante y tras la realización del proyecto.

- Desarrollar la competencia léxica del alumnado a través del uso de *podcasts* que contribuyan al aprendizaje autónomo.
- Aumentar la motivación del alumnado en el aprendizaje léxico utilizando *podcasts* muy recientes y de su interés que le familiaricen con un léxico que se utiliza actualmente en países anglófonos.
- Crear un banco de materiales que permita la aplicación de las TIC a la enseñanza del vocabulario y que responda directamente a las necesidades, intereses y expectativas del alumnado.
- Determinar si la utilización de los *podcasts* en el sistema ECTS con alumnos de 1º de Filología Inglesa produce una mejora significativa en su aprendizaje del léxico (*gambits* y funciones).
- Diseñar un cuestionario válido y fiable para recoger las opiniones, actitudes y motivación del alumnado en cuanto a la utilización de los *podcasts* para ampliar la competencia léxica en la experiencia piloto ECTS. Complementar los datos cuantitativos obtenidos en el estudio con la administración de dicho cuestionario al final de la experiencia.

## METODOLOGÍA

El proyecto se desarrolló al comienzo del curso académico 2008-2009 en la asignatura de Inglés Instrumental Intermedio de 1º de Filología Inglesa (Universidad de Jaén). El alumnado escuchó y trabajó sobre un *podcast* en cada sesión (4 en total), cada uno de ellos especialmente seleccionado por estar directamente relacionado con uno de los bloques temáticos de la asignatura cuyo léxico se estudia (i.e., familia, tecnología, salud y hábitos alimenticios). Se hizo especial hincapié en el aprendizaje de las funciones (*expressing preferences; asking for and giving opinions; agreeing and disagreeing; interrupting; backchannelling; giving, accepting, and rejecting advice; making and responding to suggestions; asking for and giving permission; making requests; giving and responding to compliments; asking for clarification or repetition; describing places, objects and people; giving oral presentations*) y de las frases léxicas de inglés actual.

La experiencia utilizó una pluralidad metodológica muy en la línea de la recomendada en el Informe CIDUA (2005: 26, 29), ya que integró el uso de las nuevas tecnologías en su ejecución. Tal y como indica dicho informe, en el panorama de la educación universitaria cobran importancia “*los sistemas de enseñanza que se focalizan en que las tareas de aprendizaje de los estudiantes utilicen los agrupamientos presenciales y/o las nuevas tecnologías de la comunicación para el desarrollo de relaciones de trabajo basadas en la cooperación de los alumnos*” (2005: 26). Así, con este proyecto, se pretendió incluir novedades metodológicas como las anteriormente citadas tanto en el trabajo de los alumnos y las presentaciones en clase, como en el mismo diseño de materiales. Se procuró proveer a los alumnos de *podcasts* ante todo motivadores y que además, en algunos casos, incluyeran secuencias de vídeo – es decir, también se utilizaron *videopodcasts* – para así incorporar un aprendizaje tanto auditivo como visual.

Centrándonos en los motivos de elección de cada uno de los *podcasts* utilizados en la experiencia, el primero ofreció apoyo al bloque temático de ‘viajar’ y se tituló “A Year in Europe”. El segundo *podcast* se centró en el bloque temático de ‘ropa y complementos’ y se tituló “2008 Academy Awards Fashion Wrap”. El tercer *podcast*, titulado “Fitting It In”, correspondió al bloque temático de ‘nutrición y salud’. El cuarto y último *podcast*, relacionado con el bloque temático de ‘la familia’, se tituló “Hot Hollywood Mamas”.

La elección de cinco aspectos léxicos (vocabulario, *phrasal verbs*, expresiones actuales del inglés, *collocations* y *gambits*) para el desarrollo de la competencia léxica en inglés se basa en las teorías de “*what it means to know a word*”. Según Richards (1976), Nation (1990), o Schmitt y Meara (1997), conocer una palabra conlleva dominar las palabras que suelen acompañarla, sus limitaciones en el uso según la situación y la función, el comportamiento sintáctico asociado con ella, sus formas subyacentes y derivadas, su valor semántico y sus diferentes significados. Asimismo, trabajamos no sólo con vocablos

aislados, sino también con grupos de hasta ocho palabras (*phrasal verbs*, expresiones actuales del inglés, *collocations* y *gambits*) o *lexical chunks*, siguiendo el llamado Enfoque Léxico (Nattinger y DeCarrico, 1992; Lewis, 1997a, 1997b, 2000), que considera que dichos *chunks* son la unidad ideal para la enseñanza de vocabulario en inglés. La diferencia entre hablar inglés bien y muy bien, según este Enfoque, radica en la cantidad de frases hechas que tengamos almacenadas en nuestro léxico mental.

## PROGRAMA DE EJECUCIÓN

Como se detalla en el siguiente programa de ejecución, el estudio en sí y el desarrollo del proyecto de innovación docente se realizaron entre septiembre y octubre de 2008.

- Diseño del tratamiento estadístico y determinación del diseño de la investigación: septiembre de 2008
- Determinación de los 4 *podcasts* que se van a utilizar en la experiencia, de acuerdo con su temática y contenido léxico: septiembre de 2008
- Diseño de la batería de actividades para cada *podcast*: septiembre de 2008
- Articulación de los contenidos de la experiencia en plataforma virtual ILIAS: septiembre de 2008
- Diseño de la prueba que se utilizará como *pre-test* y *post-test*: septiembre de 2008
- Explicación del Proyecto al alumnado de la Licenciatura en Filología Inglesa y solicitud de su colaboración: septiembre de 2008
- Aplicación del *pre-test* al alumnado de las dos titulaciones participantes: octubre de 2008
- Desarrollo de la experiencia: octubre de 2008
- Corrección del *pre-test*: octubre de 2008
- Elaboración de un cuestionario con escala modalidad Likert para la recogida de la opinión del alumnado: octubre de 2008
- Validación de dicho cuestionario: octubre de 2008
- Aplicación del cuestionario: octubre de 2008
- Aplicación del *post-test* alumnado de la titulación participante: octubre de 2008
- Corrección del *post-test*: octubre de 2008
- Análisis de los datos obtenidos: octubre de 2008

## MUESTRA

En esta experiencia, trabajamos con un total de 58 alumnos/as, 15 en el grupo experimental (1º de Filología Inglesa) y 43 en el de control (1º de Filología Inglesa y Turismo).

## VARIABLES

- a) *Variable dependiente*: Resultados del alumnado en la prueba específicamente diseñada para medir su rendimiento en aspectos de vocabulario antes y después de la intervención.
- b) *Variables independientes*: El proyecto de enseñanza de vocabulario a través de *podcasts* y la metodología tradicional utilizando el libro de texto.

## DISEÑO

- a) Cuasi-experimental, cuantitativo, pre-test/post-test, grupo experimental y control.
- b) Investigación en el aula.
- c) Aspectos cualitativos: cuestionario.

## METODOLOGÍA ESTADÍSTICA (SPSS, VERSION 15.0)

- a) Medias, porcentajes y desviaciones típicas.
- b) Prueba de T para muestras relacionadas.
- c) Prueba de T para muestras independientes.

## RESULTADOS Y DISCUSIÓN

### Estudio cuantitativo

Al implicar este proyecto no sólo en el desarrollo de una experiencia de innovación docente, sino también en la realización de un estudio con un diseño de investigación cuasi-experimental, los indicadores previstos para valorar la experiencia fueron pruebas de carácter tanto cuantitativo como cualitativo.

De una parte, se diseñó una prueba que se administró como *pre-test* y *post-test* antes y después del programa de intervención con *podcasts*. Para garantizar la validez de contenido de la prueba, se incluyeron los mismos tipos de actividades y contenidos utilizados en dicho programa. La prueba de T para muestras relacionadas e independientes nos permitió comprobar si existían diferencias estadísticamente significativas intra- e inter-grupales.

Al inicio de la experiencia, se constató que no existían diferencias estadísticamente significativas entre los grupos en el *pre-test* general ( $p = .594$ ). Por tanto, se dieron las circunstancias idóneas para el desarrollo del proyecto, dado que ambos grupos eran homogéneos al inicio del mismo.

Del *pre-* al *post-test*, es muy interesante observar que el grupo experimental mejoró significativamente tanto en la prueba global como en todos los aspectos léxicos considerados (verbos frasales, colocaciones, significado de palabras, funciones y expresiones de inglés real). Y lo que es más, lo hizo en todas las ocasiones a niveles de confianza del 100%. Sin embargo, el grupo de control tan sólo mejoró significativamente en el significado de palabras. Su rendimiento léxico permaneció igual que en el *pre-test* en las colocaciones y expresiones de inglés real, y empeoró significativamente en los verbos frasales, los *gambits* que expresan funciones y en la prueba global (véase Tabla 1). Por tanto, el programa de intervención contribuyó indudablemente a mejorar el aprendizaje del léxico del grupo experimental.

| Aspectos léxicos             | p (grupo experimental) | p (grupo de control) |
|------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Verbos frasales              | ,000*                  | ,000***              |
| Colocaciones                 | ,000*                  | 1**                  |
| Significado de palabras      | ,000*                  | ,027*                |
| Funciones                    | ,000*                  | ,019***              |
| Expresiones de inglés real   | ,000*                  | ,875**               |
| Prueba de vocabulario global | ,000*                  | ,042***              |

**Tabla 1. Prueba de T para muestras relacionadas**

\*Mejora/ \*\*Igualdad/ \*\*\*Empeora

Existen, además, diferencias estadísticamente significativas entre ambos grupos al final de la experiencia, a favor del grupo experimental (véase Gráfico 1). En todos los subaspectos muestreados, así como en la prueba global, el rendimiento léxico del grupo experimental fue superior al del grupo de control, una vez más a niveles de confianza del 100% en todos los casos (véase

Tabla 2). Por tanto, la experiencia de enseñanza de vocabulario a través de *podcasts* frenó la preocupante tendencia de empeoramiento léxico detectada en el grupo experimental en cursos anteriores. Logró que éste mejorase su rendimiento léxico de forma significativa y muy superior al rendimiento del grupo de control. Sería muy conveniente, por tanto, que se continuaran desarrollando experiencias de este tipo, a ser posible, de forma más prolongada, en cursos posteriores.

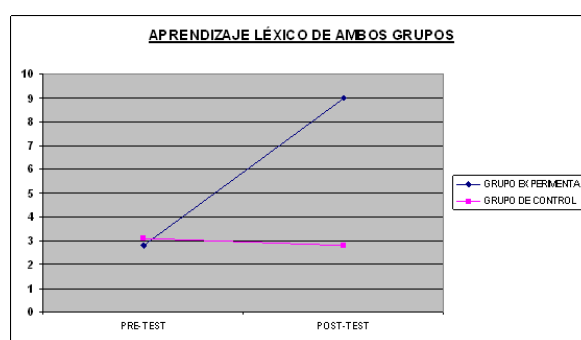


**Gráfico 1. Aprendizaje léxico de ambos grupos**

| Aspectos léxicos             | p       |
|------------------------------|---------|
| Verbos frasales              | ,000*** |
| Colocaciones                 | ,000    |
| Significado de palabras      | ,000    |
| Funciones                    | ,000    |
| Expresiones de inglés real   | ,000    |
| Prueba de vocabulario global | ,000    |

**Tabla 2. Prueba de T para muestras independientes en el post-test**

### Estudio cualitativo

Se obtuvieron resultados igualmente positivos en la parte cualitativa del estudio. Para ésta, se diseñó y administró un cuestionario con ítems tanto cerrados como abiertos, con el fin de constatar la satisfacción y motivación del alumnado participante en la experiencia.

A la pregunta *¿En qué aspectos del inglés te han ayudado más las actividades?*, el 93.3% del

alumnado que participó en la experiencia respondió que los ejercicios de vocabulario le ayudaron considerablemente. El 66.7% también consideró que las actividades de *phrasal verbs* le ayudaron a mejorar. De igual modo, un 93.3% estimó que los ejercicios relacionados con expresiones de inglés actual le ayudaron en su aprendizaje. El 46.7% de los alumnos afirmó que las actividades de *collocations* resultaron igualmente útiles y, por último, los ejercicios relacionados con las técnicas de conversación (*gambits*) resultaron provechosos para un 60% de los participantes. En resumen, tanto los ejercicios de vocabulario como los de expresiones de inglés actual son los que más ayudaron a los alumnos en su aprendizaje, seguidos por las actividades de *phrasal verbs*, *gambits* y, en último lugar, *collocations*.

Con respecto al cuestionario final, en el cual los alumnos expresaron su grado de satisfacción con los principales aspectos del proyecto, el grado de satisfacción fue predominantemente alto o muy alto en prácticamente la totalidad de los aspectos cubiertos en el cuestionario (véase Tabla 3). Se constató que el alumnado consideró que el proyecto contribuyó a mejorar su competencia léxica y que fue claro en sus diversas fases. Aumentó la motivación e interés de los participantes en la clase de inglés e hizo que la asignatura en la que se desarrolló fuese más divertida. Se mostraron, asimismo, muy favorables a que proyectos de este tipo se incorporen con regularidad en el aula.

Otro de los datos que obtuvimos tras la evaluación del cuestionario es que la totalidad de los alumnos prefieren *videopodcasts* (*vodcasts*) a los tradicionales *podcasts*, ya que son más atractivos, divertidos y hacen que la comprensión del contenido sea más fácil al contar con apoyo visual.

Por último, se les preguntó si consideraban que su nivel de inglés había mejorado gracias a este proyecto, a lo respondieron casi unánimemente que sí. Además, algunos mencionaron que los *podcasts* deberían utilizarse en el aula durante todo el año, ya que necesitan continuar mejorando y este método les parece adecuado para ello.

|                                                                                                                                               | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4     | 5     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Los aspectos logísticos del proyecto han sido claros (tareas, expectativas, etc.)                                                             | 0%   | 0%   | 6.7% | 60%   | 33.3% |
| El aprendizaje de vocabulario a través de <i>podcasts</i> debería formar parte de las clases de idiomas.                                      | 0%   | 0%   | 0%   | 46.7% | 53%   |
| El hecho de participar en este proyecto ha mejorado directamente mi conocimiento de vocabulario.                                              | 0%   | 0%   | 20%  | 46.7% | 33.3% |
| Considero que los diferentes <i>podcasts</i> (viajar – ropa y complementos – salud y comida – familia) son adecuados y fomentan la discusión. | 0%   | 0%   | 20%  | 53%   | 26.7% |
| La clase de inglés me interesa más después de este proyecto.                                                                                  | 6.7% | 6.7% | 20%  | 53%   | 13.3% |
| El proyecto de <i>podcasting</i> ha hecho que mi motivación ante aprender y practicar inglés aumente.                                         | 0%   | 6.7% | 0%   | 87.7% | 6.7%  |
| La asignatura ha sido más divertida gracias al proyecto de <i>podcasting</i> .                                                                | 0%   | 0%   | 6.7% | 40%   | 53%   |
| Si tuviera la oportunidad, participaría en otro proyecto de <i>podcasting</i> en el futuro.                                                   | 0%   | 6.7% | 6.7% | 53%   | 53.3% |

**Tabla 3. Resultados del cuestionario de satisfacción**

## CONCLUSIÓN

El presente estudio nos permitió cumplir todos los objetivos que nos marcábamos a su inicio. En primer lugar, al tratarse también de una experiencia de innovación docente, el proyecto nos permitió crear un banco de materiales que ha aplicado las TIC a la enseñanza del vocabulario y que respondió directamente a las necesidades, intereses y expectativas del alumnado. El diseño de materiales se basó en las principales teorías de aprendizaje de léxico en inglés como lengua extranjera e incorporó *podcasts* y actividades que el alumnado consideró útiles y motivadoras.

Para recoger dichas opiniones, diseñamos un cuestionario válido y fiable que nos permitió constatar que la utilización de *podcasts* muy

recientes que familiarizan al alumnado con un léxico que se utiliza actualmente en países anglófonos aumenta la motivación del mismo.

Por último, el estudio empírico nos permitió confirmar que la utilización de los *podcasts* en el sistema ECTS con alumnos de 1º de Filología Inglesa produce una mejora significativa en su aprendizaje del léxico.

### LIMITACIONES DEL ESTUDIO Y SUGERENCIAS PARA FUTURAS INVESTIGACIONES

A pesar del interés del estudio y de los datos tan positivos que arrojó, nos gustaría señalar

las que consideramos son sus principales limitaciones y sugerir futuras líneas de investigación a seguir para subsanarlas.

El tiempo de intervención de nuestro proyecto fue muy limitado, por lo que sería conveniente llevar a cabo un estudio longitudinal más prolongado en el tiempo y añadir una prueba de seguimiento para determinar si se mantienen las diferencias entre ambos grupos. Otra limitación importante tiene que ver con el hecho de que el estudio no tuvo en cuenta variables oréticas o cognitivas, por lo que sería aconsejable incluir variables moduladoras de estas características en investigaciones futuras.

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# ICT IMPLEMENTATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH DIALECTOLOGY

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*The aim of our paper is to show how we have implemented the use of ICT and competence teaching in two different modules in the degree of English Philology at the University of Valencia. We also try to demonstrate how their implementation has improved teaching and learning and how it has acted as a powerful catalyst for higher achievement. Using an Innovation and Education Programme (IEP) methodology has helped teaching methodology go beyond the bounds of the classroom. Another change brought about by the IEP is the defence of a cross-cultural teaching method. Furthermore, it has been a useful tool in the integration of the development of student competences. The implementation of the Innovation in Education Programme has strengthened teacher-student contact and promoted students' class attendance.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the following article our aim is to describe the most relevant aspects of the application of an *Innovation in Education Project* (IEP) methodology together with the implementation of ICTs in two modules in the Degree of English Philology at the University of Valencia, namely *English Language II* and *English Dialectology*. We first provide an overview of the theoretical and methodological basis on which we ground our teaching approach. This is based on the main linguistic theories regarding the acquisition of a second language and on the teaching/acquisition of competencies. Then we explain the nature of the modules and shift to a brief explanation of their characteristics. In most theoretical classes in both modules, we make use of a range of class units delivered through

PowerPoint slides, which are presented and explained in class or even uploaded to our e-learning platform, *Aula Virtual*. In the practice sessions, students are split into small groups so they can practise the activities designed by the teachers and voice all their problems and doubts in connection with the subject.

The role of *Aula Virtual* is essential in the development of this methodology: we explain its structure and focus on how we have taken advantage of the tools it offers. More specifically, we describe the exploitation of the "Resources", "News" and "Assessment" folders. We also detail in this section the role of the "portfolio" for both teachers and students, and its weight in the final mark. Finally, the conclusion deals with future possibilities such as, for instance, the

development of multimedia activities with computing education programmes such as JCLIC. We also offer a series of proposals for future enhancement of *Aula Virtual*.

Even though the implementation of this methodology had to overcome different obstacles, such as for instance, excessive class size, our experience was overall very positive. Two facts have been confirmed: that using a methodology that is less teacher-centred makes our modules more practical and that it improves the relationship between teacher and student.

### METHODOLOGICAL AND EMPIRICAL BASIS

The implementation of our methodology is based on a series of theoretical principles and methodological theories that we will describe in this section. Following Krashen (1982) and his Monitor Model, we can claim that there are two differentiated processes which this author describes in the first of the hypotheses in his language acquisition model: acquisition and learning. Whereas learning is a conscious process through which we focus on several linguistic aspects and usually takes place inside the classroom, the acquisition process occurs naturally and subconsciously as long as we receive messages that we can understand, which is what he calls *comprehensible input*. This is a key concept in his theory since, according to Krashen, comprehensible input is the only way language is acquired. Through the acquisition process, people are able to develop their first language and a second language and thus it has a vital role in the language learning process. Therefore, this is the method we attempt to apply in class in order for our students to learn through a series of varied activities dealing with different topics so that they are exposed to language as much as possible, which is the only way in which they will eventually acquire it. We could say that ideally our students would be learning language in particular and concepts in general without really noticing that they are doing so, whereas in the classical classroom context, everything is pre-planned and controlled and the more formal aspects of language are foregrounded and so learning is promoted over acquisition.

We can add, following Gee (1992), that we acquire a language subconsciously by exposure to a model, through a trial and error process, and practice within social groups, normally without formal teaching. This is exactly what we want to promote through the methodology we use. We want our students to answer questionnaires, give specific information, etc. and receive immediate feedback in their answers. These types of activities are usually related to a specific context that gives the students the opportunity to acquire meaningful, real and useful knowledge which can be applied to specific functions. As the students can choose when and where to do these activities, they will be learning without the pressure of the formal classroom context and we will be able to improve their motivation, which, together with other affective factors, is a vital element in their learning process. We consider that meaningful learning is a crucial concept since, as Mayer (1997) explains, it takes place when the student is able to select the most important information in a particular context, to organise it into a logical mental picture and to integrate the new information with existing information.

If we take into consideration that the use of new technologies can improve the acquisition of this type of knowledge, we can then assert, following Mayer's (1997) Generative Theory of Multimedia Instruction, that when we apply mixed modes of delivery (texts, graphics, audio, video, animation, etc.), we are offering our students different ways of employing cognitive processes in order to acquire knowledge. We can thus claim that multimedia learning takes place when our students are able to construct mental representations through words and images presented to them in a text format containing illustrations, narrations and animations. This type of learning lends weight to the hypothesis that students learn to a greater degree when the messages they receive are well-designed multimedia material than when they are exposed to more traditional types of material based merely on texts. According to Mayer (2003), an educational multimedia message is a type of presentation that includes words and images and that has been designed to foster meaningful learning. This is the type of

presentations that we pursue in our project, i.e., material that has been designed to contain and transmit a message, often discipline-specific content, that, at the same time, can be used to promote the type of learning that can be more beneficial for our students.

Mayer's (2003) research in this field has led him to claim that students learn best when they have access to visual and verbal representations and they interact simultaneously in their memory. According to what he defines as The Multimedia Effect, students can learn better from well-designed multimedia messages through which students can build mental representations from words and pictures that are presented to them than from more traditional modes of communication involving words alone.

Another author who follows this line of research is Sweller (1999), who explains that multimedia products used in the educational background can be beneficial only if they are carefully designed and do not unnecessarily overload human information processing. In this vein, in recent years, media-based listening comprehension activities have evolved from a purely audio-only approach to one that is more holistic and multi-sensory. Materials no longer focus on nonsensical sentence structures. Instead, students now experience more authentic audio passages embedded in video, interactive CD-ROMs, or websites. This, together with interactive self-checking exercises, provides them with an opportunity to examine their output in terms of recall of the target language material.

As the development of L2 multimedia increases, researchers must find out more specifically how the attributes of multimedia can enhance listening and reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. The increasing use of new technologies in the classroom has brought about a new teaching approach which promotes a total change in the teaching-learning process in the classroom. We have evolved from a traditional perspective based on the final product and centered on the teacher, to a model which is process-oriented and centered on the student. In this new learning model, the interaction is not only between the teacher and the student, but also between different students.

This is related to the notion of collaborative learning which posits that students learn best when they are actively involved in an activity and that students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats. It can be claimed that the active exchange of ideas within small groups not only increases interest among the participants but also encourages critical thinking. This type of shared learning gives learners an opportunity to engage in discussion, take responsibility for their own learning and thus become critical thinkers. Therefore, one of the main aims of our methodology is to offer our students activities and tasks that must be tackled in groups and where negotiation, dialogue and participation should be the most important factors fostered by them.

We must promote interaction among our students, or peer interaction, which, as Toussaint Clark and Clark (2008) explain, is a key concept whose importance was already acknowledged in the 1972 convention of the International Communication Association (ICA) and has evolved remarkably since then. Group dynamics can act as a catalyst to obtain better results in the final product of a particular task, in the interpersonal relation among students and in their psychological health.

One final aspect that must be taken into account is the fact that our students must be treated as adults and thus we have to make them aware that they are responsible for their own learning process. As the teaching directed to children and adolescents has its own characteristics, so does teaching adults. Knowles' (1975) Andragogy Theory attempts to develop a context which is specifically aimed at adult learning. This author emphasizes that adults are self-directed and are expected to take responsibility for the decisions they make. Thus, we must consider those aspects when planning our methodology. We must take into account that adults need to know why they need to learn something, that they need to learn experientially, that they approach learning as problem-solving and that they learn best when topics are of immediate value. This implies that instruction for adults needs to focus

more on the process and less on the content being taught. Activities centred on case studies, role-playing, simulations, and self-evaluation are probably the most useful. In activities of this type, the instructor adopts the role of facilitator rather than lecturer or grader.

Having offered a general view of the most important premises on which we base our methodology, we will now explain how we have applied it to two specific modules in the degree of English Studies.

## THE CASE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE II

In the particular case of the subject *English Language II*, we are going to focus our attention on a specific project designed for this module, but also used in a cross-curricular way in other modules in the degree. Apart from exploiting our e-learning platform and using activities designed to be used in the classroom, we have created a specific web-based project called *Sing a Song, Learn Along* (Clavel Arroitia and Zaragoza Ninet, 2008).

This series of web pages has been developed by three lecturers (Carmen Gregori, M<sup>a</sup> Goretti Zaragoza and Begoña Clavel) and our objective was to create extra material for the students of English Language. However, due to the cross-curricular nature of the material, it can be also used in subjects such as English Dialectology, History and Culture, Phonology and others. The site revolves around different songs for which we

have created a series of activities. We chose classic pop/rock songs as they are less ephemeral than the latest top-twenty hits; songs that deal with broad topics which refer to cultural and historical aspects that were relevant at the time they happened but could also be applied to today's society. They include a historical and cultural moment in the history of a specific country (*Sunday Bloody Sunday*), an issue that affects all human kind (*A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall*), socio-cultural legacy (*American Pie*), or problems arising from consumerism, conforming or lack of fight (*Pretty Fly for a White Guy*). This is just the first selection of songs and in further stages we plan to include songs that centre on other topics such as love, war, friendship, etc.

The type of activities created around the songs include more traditional activities, such as vocabulary, grammar, translation and writing, and also multimedia activities, such as web quests, video, audio, etc. Both types of activities can be answered on line using the tools of our e-learning platform. The material was designed in order to be exploited on-line, as traditional tasks (use of downloadable handouts and photocopies) and as blended learning tasks (some activities in the classroom and others as autonomous work). Both teachers and students can use the material in these three ways. Our e-learning platform (*Aula Virtual*) is essential for this project, especially the Multimedia Server which allows us to upload the songs and the necessary material.



Fig. 1. Sing A Song, Learn Along



students' performance and grades in the different phases of the evaluation process; the questionnaires section, where we upload the online questionnaires above described; and, finally, the resources folder where we upload a wide range of material related to the subject. This material is aimed primarily at facilitating students' acquisition and at developing the teaching process. For instance, we have uploaded the different power point presentations on several curricular topics, to help students revise for the final exam, additional articles on specific curricular material, and, finally, the different audio files used in the lectures accompanied by their transcriptions for the students to be able to listen to these again in a more stress-free context.

### TEACHING COMPETENCES

Another change brought about by the IEP methodology is the defence of a cross-cultural teaching method: *English Dialectology* has given the students the opportunity to practice the four competences which make up the communicative competence of any second language speaker (Canale and Swain, 1980). Therefore, the students have improved their grammatical competence (words and rules) through reading articles and the creation of *PowerPoint* team presentations and their accompanying written handouts. Moreover, their sociolinguistic competence (appropriateness) has been exercised through a study of the different registers associated with the different varieties of English. Discourse competence (cohesion and coherence, attention to the reader's needs) was highlighted both during the making of their presentations and the written handouts aimed at providing students with written summaries of every presentation. Finally, we tried to ensure strategic competence (appropriate use of communication strategies) through the oral delivery of presentations. All in all, as the focus is on the delivering content, the students were less aware that they were using a foreign language and more concerned with getting their ideas across which, we hope, fostered the acquisition of English vocabulary, structures, pronunciation and prosody.

Furthermore, the IEP has been a useful tool in the development of additional student

competences and skills. For instance, students' team presentations have helped acquire interpersonal competences –such as critical and respectful attitudes towards other students and their opinions– and systemic competences –autonomous learning, summarising skills and the transmission of ideas. Besides, learning to use questionnaires, *Aula Virtual* and other software has proved useful in the building of technical or instrumental competences, such as using computers and audio and video material. Finally, the general test has facilitated the teaching of disciplinary and academic competences –such as aptitude for oral communication– and professional skills, such as being able to identify problems and select research topics.

### CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the methodologies which are part and parcel of the IEP has brought about radical changes in our teaching and the way students learn/acquire content and competences. We have made extensive use of ICT inside and outside the classroom; we have used our e-learning platform extensively as an essential tool within our methodological approach and we have promoted the use of different types of activities, thus changing class dynamics in general. This has meant a change in approach, from a teacher-centred one to numerous and different types of interaction (teacher to a single student, teacher to a group of students, student to student, student to a group of students and a group of students to another group). This new style of class dynamics gives students the opportunity to participate, negotiate, discuss, give opinions and develop many other types of competences which we find essential for the learning process and which did not exist before IEP methodology was introduced. Moreover, the implementation of the *Innovation in Education Programme* has strengthened teacher-student contact and promoted students' class attendance, having 60 students on average per class in both modules.

With the implementation of the IEP and the ICT Projects, we have attempted to promote a learning process that does not end once the

lecture is finished, but goes on through the medium of online activities permitting the students to be in permanent contact both with the subject and with the English language. As to the assessment processes, traditionally, these two modules used to be difficult subjects consisting of only one examination at the end

of the year. At present, individual and group work is assessed, which makes the process a more feasible and engaging one. In *English Dialectology*, especially, the change has been very promising. Out of 110 students, 72 (65%) chose this type of methodology and no student failed the module.

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# NET IDEAS: ECTS LINKS<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

When the acronym ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) is googled, the number of hits (6.650.000) is higher than that of EHEA (91.500), which stands for European Higher Education Area. However, both concepts have become increasingly popular nowadays not only within the tertiary education context, but also at primary and secondary levels.

The vast amount of information available may make it hard for the reader to become familiarized with the different concepts associated with the Bologna Process. For this reason, the paper will be divided into different sections concerned with some of the main aspects related to the ECTS.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

The following sites are updated very often and do not only include general information on the ECTS, but also resources, downloads, materials, pieces of news, further links, and even clips.

- The official Bologna Process website:  
<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>. Within it, we find the existence of links to previous official websites and documents, which are included in chronological order: <http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/> (Berlin conference), <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/> (Bergen conference), and <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/londonbologna/> (London conference).
- Department for Children, Schools and Families:  
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/bologna> (British site).



[www.ond.vlaanderen.be](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be)



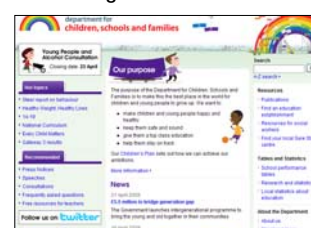
[www.bologna-berlin2003.de](http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de)



[www.bologna-bergen2005.no](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no)



[www.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk)



[www.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk)

- Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation: <http://web.micinn.es/>. Within this official site, there are different interesting links in Spanish:

<http://bolonia.fecyt.es/>: *Bolonia: Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior*. Apart from many interesting sections, it includes an interactive area with a forum in which questions can be asked and answered. There is also a FAQs section, with some of them being answered by the Spanish Minister himself.

<http://www.queesbolonia.es/>. The very address is self-explanatory; it is highly informative and, among its features, it offers the chance to suggest what other sections should be included, what type of information is considered missing, etc.

<http://www.boloniaensecundaria.es/>. This site is highly recommendable for both secondary teachers and students. The information is displayed in a very visual, precise, and intuitive way, so that it is very easy to find the kind of information you are searching for (e.g. “Ten reasons for being in favour of Bologna”).

[http://web.micinn.es/contenido.asp?menu1=4&menu2=0&dir=04\\_Universidades/022EdUnSu](http://web.micinn.es/contenido.asp?menu1=4&menu2=0&dir=04_Universidades/022EdUnSu). This is the official EHEA site in Spanish and contains information on workshops, courses, seminars, documents, etc.

- Conferencia de Rectores de las Universidades Españolas* (CRUE): <http://www.crue.org> (in Spanish). A specific site has been created for the EHEA. Apart from the typical sections, special attention should be paid to the “Antecedents” and the “Adaptation of Spanish legislation to the EHEA” sections.

- <http://www.ects.es/> (in Spanish). Although the amount of resources is not very outstanding, specific mention should be made to its “News” section (in which the different pieces of news are included in chronological order) and to the FAQs section (it caters for the needs of all the people involved in the teaching-learning process).

- European University Association (EUA): <http://www.eua.be/>. In its home page, it is possible to find a link to “Bologna & Universities Reform” (<http://www.eua.be/bologna-universities-reform/>), with information about the EUA involvement in the Bologna process.

- English Studies in the European Credit Transfer System (ESECS): <http://www.esecs.eu/>. This is the website of a research group based at the University of Jaén which is focusing its investigation on the adaptation of English Studies to the ECTS. The information is provided in both English and Spanish.



web.micinn.es



www.queesbolonia.es



www.boloniaensecundaria.es



web.micinn.es



www.crue.org



www.eua.be



www.esecs.eu

## SPANISH UNIVERSITIES

In the last years, most Spanish universities have created specific offices and institutions to cope with all the ECTS matters. Due to the initial lack of information about which both teachers and students have complained very recently, it has been decided to design powerful websites to provide answers to all those questions. This is the case of the following, to name a few:

- *Universidad de Alicante*: <http://www.eees.ua.es>. A glossary is provided with the main ECTS concepts in both Spanish and Valencian.
- *Universidad de Cádiz*: <http://www.uca.es/web/estudios/eees>. The most outstanding aspect is the so-called “Europe Project” (whose main aim is to adapt the University of Cádiz to the EHEA following different strategies).
- *Universidad de Jaén*: <http://viceees.ujen.es/node/9>. Students can send their questions concerning the ECTS via the internet and the answers are provided online. Since everybody benefits from others’ doubts and comments, the principle of “sharing knowledge” is fostered.
- *Universidad Politécnica de Valencia*: <http://www.upv.es/entidades/VECE>. The most relevant features are the PACE program (Plan de Acciones para la Convergencia Europea), which consists of different projects that can be found at [http://www.upv.es/entidades/VECE/menu\\_592108c.html](http://www.upv.es/entidades/VECE/menu_592108c.html). In addition, there is a blog at <http://tupreguntas.blogs.upv.es/> for students to ask their questions concerning the Bologna process. They are answered by experts and broadcast online with the help of UPV Radio and Television.



www.eees.ua.es



www.uca.es



viceees.ujen.es



www.upv.es



www.upv.es

## RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

Most European documents can be found at the above-mentioned site:

<http://www.eua.be/>. More specifically, they are included within the “Publications” section: <http://www.eua.be/publications/#c398>.

They can be classified into two main groups: Ministerial Documents and Communiqués, on the one hand, and European University Association Trends Reports, on the other. Most of the former can be found in [http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/en/main\\_documents/index.htm](http://www.bologna-berlin2003.de/en/main_documents/index.htm). That is the case of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997), the Sorbonne Declaration (1998), the Bologna Declaration (1999), the Prague Communiqué (2001), and the Berlin Communiqué (2003). The Bergen Communiqué (2005) is available at [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main\\_doc/050520\\_Bergen\\_Communique.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050520_Bergen_Communique.pdf) and the London Communiqué (2007), at [http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/MDC/London\\_Communique18May2007.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/MDC/London_Communique18May2007.pdf).



www.eua.be



www.bologna-berlin2003.de

The five EUA Trends Reports can be found at [http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/EUA\\_Trends\\_Reports.htm](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/documents/EUA_Trends_Reports.htm) and they are published every two years (June 1999, April 2001, July 2003, April 2005, and May 2007).

The four EUA declarations are also available at <http://www.eua.be/publications/#c398>: Salamanca Convention (2001), Graz Declaration (2003), Glasgow Declaration (2005), and Lisbon Declaration (2007).

Two Spanish national reports (2005 and 2007) should be mentioned: [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Spain/National\\_Reports-Spain\\_050114-Sp.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/Spain/National_Reports-Spain_050114-Sp.pdf) and [http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/links/National-reports-2009/National\\_Report\\_Spain\\_2009.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/links/National-reports-2009/National_Report_Spain_2009.pdf).

There are many more relevant documents, among which the ECTS Users' Guide (2004) should be highlighted: [http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/ECTS\\_DS\\_Users\\_guide\\_en.1094119167134.pdf](http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/ECTS_DS_Users_guide_en.1094119167134.pdf).

Furthermore, the main national and regional documents are included in the special websites created by most Spanish universities under a heading typically entitled "Legislación" or "Documentación". That is the case of crucial documents, such as the "Report on Teaching Innovation in Andalusian Universities" (*Informe sobre la Innovación de la Docencia en las Universidades Andaluzas*), which was published in April 2005: [http://viceees.ujaen.es/files\\_viceees/CIDUA.pdf](http://viceees.ujaen.es/files_viceees/CIDUA.pdf).

## CONFERENCES

Both forthcoming and past events can be found at <http://www.eua.be/eua-events/>. In addition, the *Universidad de Jaén* includes within its website a very complete section with information about seminars, courses, conferences, and workshops dealing with the ECTS (<http://viceees.ujaen.es/node/60>). Such is also the case of the *Red Estatal de Docencia Universitaria* (RED-U): <http://www.redu.um.es/> (this kind of information can be found following the "Activities" link) and of the *Proyecto de Innovación Educativa de Química at the Universidad de Valencia* (<http://www.uv.es/~giequim/>). A specific page has been included with the links to past and forthcoming events in chronological order (<http://www.uv.es/~giequim/enlaces/congresos.html>).

In the last few years, many conferences, workshops, and seminars which were aimed at sharing information about the Bologna Process have taken place. Some of them were of regional scope: *I y II Jornadas de Trabajo sobre Experiencias Piloto EEES en las Universidades Andaluzas* (<http://www.uca.es/web/estudios/eees/jornadas/> and [http://prensa.ugr.es/prensa/expe\\_ects/index.htm](http://prensa.ugr.es/prensa/expe_ects/index.htm)), which took place in Cádiz (2006) and Granada (2007), respectively.

Others were of national nature: *I y II Jornadas Nacionales de Intercambio de Experiencias Piloto de Implantación de Metodologías ECTS*



[www.ond.vlaanderen.be](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be)



[www.ond.vlaanderen.be](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be)



<http://viceees.ujaen.es>



[www.uv.es](http://www.uv.es)



[www.uv.es](http://www.uv.es)



[www.uca.es](http://www.uca.es)



[prensa.ugr.es](http://prensa.ugr.es)



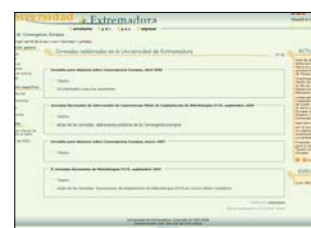
[www.redu.um.es](http://www.redu.um.es)

(<http://www.unex.es/unex/oficinas/oce/funciones/jornadas>), organized by the Universidad de Extremadura (2006, 2007); Jornadas Universitarias de Innovación y Calidad: Buenas Prácticas Académicas para la Innovación del Proceso de Aprendizaje en el EEES (<http://www.buenaspracticadeusto.es/>), organized by the Universidad de Deusto (September 2008); and Seminarios de Reflexión RED-U-USC: La coordinación mediante equipos docentes en ES: fortalezas, recursos y necesidades (<http://www.redu.um.es/>), in Santiago de Compostela (February 2009).

Some international conferences have been organized by Spanish universities. Although the titles in many cases do not refer explicitly to the ECTS, nowadays whenever “innovation” is mentioned, it often implies the idea of “innovation within the new education framework”:

- Congreso Internacional sobre Profesores Principiantes e Inserción Profesional a la Docencia:  
[http://prometeo.us.es/idea/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=250&Itemid=129](http://prometeo.us.es/idea/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=250&Itemid=129) (Universidad de Sevilla, June 2008).
- Congreso Internacional de Docencia Universitaria e Innovación (CIDUI):  
<http://www.ice.upc.edu/cidui2008/cast/index.html> (Universidad de Lleida, July 2008).
- Congreso Internacional de Intercambio de Experiencias de Innovación Docente Universitaria: <http://dim.usal.es/eps/mmt/congreso/> (Universidad de Salamanca, September 2008).
- Congreso Nacional e Iberoamericano de Pedagogía:  
<http://www.congresopedagogia2008.com/index.html> (Universidad de Zaragoza, September 2008).
- Congreso Iberoamericano de Docencia Universitaria. Enseñar y aprender en la universidad del siglo XXI: propuestas y condiciones: <http://www.cfp.upv.es/v-cidu/> (Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, October 2008).
- II Jornadas Internacionales de Innovación Educativa y Convergencia Europea (INECE 2008): <http://www.upm.es/innovacion/inece2008/> (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, December 2008)

Other international conferences have taken place or will do so in different European countries:



www.unex.es



www.buenaspracticadeusto.es



www.redu.um.es



www.ice.upc.edu



dim.usal.es



www.cfp.upv.es



www.upm.es



prometeo.us.es



www.congresopedagogia2008.com

- ECER 2008 Gothenburg: "The European Conference on Educational Research": <http://www.ipd.gu.se/english/ecer2008> (University of Gothenburg, Sweden, September 2008).
- 23rd ICDE World Conference on Open Learning and Distance Education, including the 2009 EADTU Annual Conference: <http://www.ou.nl/eCache/DEF/80/137.html> (Maastricht, The Netherlands, June 2009).

## PROCEEDINGS

Sometimes, in the case of past events, it is possible to download all or some of the abstracts or papers in .pdf format. Such is the case, for example, of the proceedings of the above-mentioned *I Jornadas de Trabajo sobre Experiencias Piloto de Implantación del Crédito Europeo en las Universidades Andaluzas* (<http://www2.uca.es/orgobierno/rector/jornadas/>) and the *II Jornadas de Trabajo sobre Experiencias Piloto en las Universidades Andaluzas* ([http://prensa.ugr.es/prensa/expe\\_ects/index.htm](http://prensa.ugr.es/prensa/expe_ects/index.htm)).



[www2.uca.es](http://www2.uca.es)



[www.ipd.gu.se](http://www.ipd.gu.se)



[www.ou.nl](http://www.ou.nl)



[prensa.ugr.es](http://prensa.ugr.es)

As far as the *Universidad de Extremadura* is concerned, it is not only possible to download the proceedings of both the first and second *Jornadas Nacionales de Intercambio de Experiencias Piloto de Implantación de Metodologías ECTS*, but also to become familiarized with the point of view and opinions of the students that took part in the *Jornadas para alumnos sobre Convergencia Europea* in April 2006. All the information can be found at <http://www.unex.es/unex/oficinas/ocf/funciones/jornadas>.



[www.unex.es](http://www.unex.es)

## EUROPEAN JOURNALS

There are plenty of journals which focus on European Higher Education and which have recently published a vast amount of papers on the Bologna process concerning not only its teaching and learning implications, but also political, strategic and institutional issues.



[www.springerlink.com](http://www.springerlink.com)



[www.cepes.ro](http://www.cepes.ro)

Such is the case of:

- *Higher Education* (<http://www.springerlink.com/content/102901/>)
- *Higher Education in Europe* ([http://www.cepes.ro/publications/hee\\_eng.htm](http://www.cepes.ro/publications/hee_eng.htm))
- *Higher Education Policy* (<http://www.palgrave-journals.com/hep>)
- *Higher Education Quarterly* (<http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/hequ>)



[www.palgrave-journals.com](http://www.palgrave-journals.com)

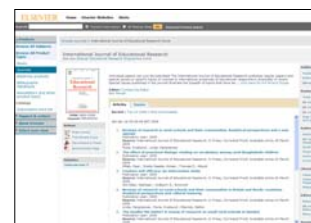


[www.blackwellpublishing.com](http://www.blackwellpublishing.com)

- *Higher Education Research and Development* ([http://www.hersda.org.au/?page\\_id=25](http://www.hersda.org.au/?page_id=25))
- *International Journal of Educational Research* ([www.elsevier.com/locate/ijedures](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/ijedures))
- *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (<http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/>)
- *Journal of Further and Higher Education* (<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713430659~db=all>)
- *New Directions for Higher Education* (<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/86011349/home>)
- *Studies in Higher Education* (<http://www.srhe.ac.uk/publications.she.asp>)
- *Teaching in Higher Education* (<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713447786~db=jour>)



[www.hersda.org.au](http://www.hersda.org.au)



[www.elsevier.com](http://www.elsevier.com)



[www.isetl.org](http://www.isetl.org)



[www.informaworld.com](http://www.informaworld.com)



[www3.interscience.wiley.com](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com)



[www.srhe.ac.uk](http://www.srhe.ac.uk)



[www.informaworld.com](http://www.informaworld.com)

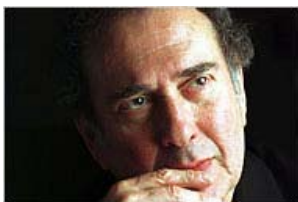
## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The author wishes to thank Dr. María Luisa Pérez Cañado for her help in preparing this paper and for her invaluable comments and suggestions.

## OBITUARIES

2008 has been a year of particular loss for Literature and Cinema.

One of the most significant figures who has said goodbye this year is the British playwright, essayist, poet, scriptwriter, actor and director **Harold Pinter** (78), who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2005. In Gussow and Brantley's words (*New York Times*, 2008) Pinter's gifts "*for finding the ominous in the everyday and the noise within silence made him the most influential and imitated dramatist of his generation*". He

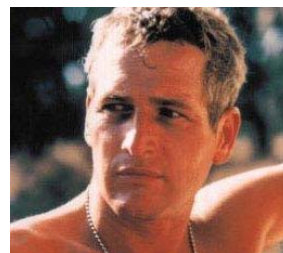


wrote more than 30 plays – *The Room*, *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming*, *Betrayal*, *Family Voices*, *The New*

*World Order*, among others – which "*captured the anxiety and ambiguity of life in the second half of the 20th century with terse, hypnotic dialogue filled with gaping pauses and the prospect of imminent violence*"

Another significant figure who has left us is the famous American actor **Paul Newman** (83). The list of his movies includes *Cool Hand Luke*, *The Hustler*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *The Sting*, *Exodus*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (film

adaptation of Tennessee Williams's play), *The Long Hot Summer*, *The Verdict*, *Torn Curtain* (directed by Alfred Hitchcock), *The Color of*



*Money* (this movie brought him the Academy Award for best actor), or *Road to Perdition*. He also directed his wife, the actress Joanne Woodward, in several films. According to

Aljean Harmetz (*New York Times*, 2008), "*if Marlon Brando and James Dean defined the defiant American*

*male as a sullen rebel, Paul Newman recreated him as a likable renegade, a strikingly handsome figure of animal high spirits and blue-eyed candor whose*

*magnetism was almost impossible to resist, whether the character was Hud, Cool Hand Luke or Butch Cassidy*".



2008 has also seen the loss of prominent worldwide figures in different cultural fields:

**Charlton Heston** (84), Academy Award-winning American actor, famous for his roles in epic movies, like *The Ten Commandments*, *Ben-Hur* and *El Cid*; **Heath Ledger** (28), Australian Hollywood actor who won a Hollywood award nomination for his role in *Brokeback Mountain* and whose last role was the Joker in *The Dark Night*, the sequel to *Batman Begins*, directed by Christopher Nolan; **Michael Crichton** (66), a well-known writer, film director and film and television producer; **Pauline Baynes** (85), an English book illustrator, most known for her illustrations in *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis and in some of J.R.R. Tolkien's works; **Mel Ferrer** (90), American actor, director and producer, who was married to the actress Audrey Hepburn from 1954 until 1968; **Yves Saint Laurent** (71), the famous French fashion designer; **Arthur Charles Clarke** (90), science fiction author, famous for his 1968 novel 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, written in collaboration with

the film director Stanley Kubrick and which was later adapted into a movie; **Sydney Pollack** (73), the Academy Award-winning film director, producer and actor who directed unforgettable films such as *Out of Africa*, *The Way We Were* and *Tootsie*; **Robert James Fisher (Bobby Fischer)** (64), the American chess player who was considered one of the greatest chess players in history; **John Michael Hayes** (89), Academy Award nominated screenwriter who worked with Alfred Hitchcock in several films such as *Rear Window*; **Roy Scheider** (75), American actor, most famous for his role as police chief Martin Brody in the Steven Spielberg film *Jaws*; **Anita Page** (98), silent film actress who was the leading lady to Buster Keaton, Robert Montgomery, and Clark Gable; and **Estelle Getty** (84), American actress who won an Emmy and a Golden Globe for her role as Sophia Petrillo, the mother of Dorothy Zbornak in the famous TV series *The Golden Girls*.

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<http://www.famousdeaddb.com/>

## SUCCESSSES

### The 2008 Prince of Asturias Awards

Letters award winner: Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian novelist and poet. Her novel *The Edible Woman* (1969) brought her international recognition. This novel was followed



by many others: *Surfacing* (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Cat's Eye* (1988), *The Robber Bride* (1993), *Alias Grace* (1996), *The Blind Assassin*

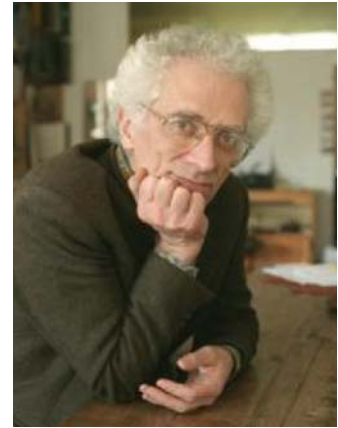
(2000), and *Oryx and Crake* (2003), among others. She has also written poetry and short fiction collections. Some of her novels have been adapted for the cinema and the theatre.

The Jury for the 2008 Prince of Asturias Award for Letters decided to bestow the award on Margaret Atwood “for her outstanding literary work that has explored different genres with acuteness and irony, and because she cleverly assumes the classic tradition, defends women’s dignity and denounces social unfairness”.

### Social Sciences Award winner: Tzvetan Todorov

The Jury for the 2008 Prince of Asturias Award for Social Sciences unanimously decided to bestow the 2008 Prince of Asturias Award for Social Sciences on Tzvetan Todorov. His work as literary critic, philosopher, historian and semiotician has been translated into 25 languages. He is a well-known theorist of the structuralist movement, which he applied to literary criticism. He is also devoted to cultural analysis and defines himself as a “historian of

ideas”. The Jury claimed that “[h]is intellectual concern, his wisdom and erudition, surpasses all frontiers and seeks the middle ground, allowing him to study great issues of our time, such as the development of democracies, understanding between cultures, rootlessness, appreciation of others and the impact of violence on collective memory”.



Source:

<http://www.fundacionprincipedeasturias.org/index.html>

### The 2008 Pulitzer Prizes

**-Fiction:** *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz. Finalists *Tree of Smoke* by Denis Johnson and *Shakespeare’s Kitchen* by Lore Segal.

**-History:** *What Hath God Wrought: the Transformation of America, 1815-1848* by Daniel Walker Howe. Finalists: *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* by Robert Dallek and *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* by the late David Halberstam.

**-Biography:** *Eden’s Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father* by John Matteson. Finalists: *The Worlds of Lincoln* by Martin Duberman and *The Life of Kingsley Amis* by Zachary Leader.

**-General nonfiction:** *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945* by Saul Friedlander. Finalists: *The Cigarette Century* by Allan Brandt and *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* by Alex Ross.

**-Drama:** *August: Osage County* by Tracy Letts. Finalists *Yellow Face* by David Henry Hwang and *Dying City* by Christopher Shinn.

**-Poetry:** *Time and Materials* by Robert Hass and *Failure* by Philip Schultz. Finalist: *Messenger: New and Selected Poems, 1976-2006* by Ellen Bryant Voigt.

**-Music:** “*The Little Match Girl Passion*” by David Lang. Finalists “*Meanwhile*” by Stephen Hartke and “*Concerto for Viola*” by Roberto Sierra. Special Citations: Bob Dylan.

Sources:

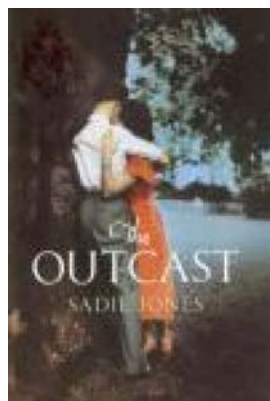
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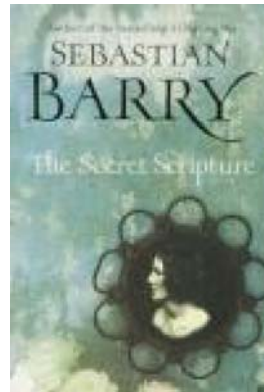
### Costa Book Awards (The former Whitbread Prize)

The Whitbread Prize, originally established in 1971 by Whitbread Plc., is since 2006 known as Costa Book Awards. Costa, the UK’s fastest-growing coffee shop chain, announced its takeover of the sponsorship of the UK’s most prestigious book prize in 2006, the year both Costa and the Book Awards celebrated their 35th anniversary.

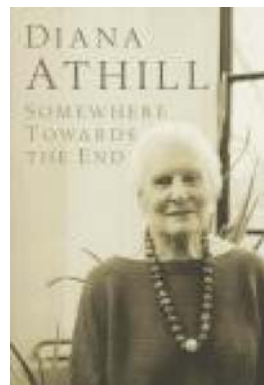
**- Costa First Novel Award:** *The Outcast* by Sadie Jones. The judges claimed that “*the repressive society of ordinary people is elegantly portrayed in an assured novel of great note*”.



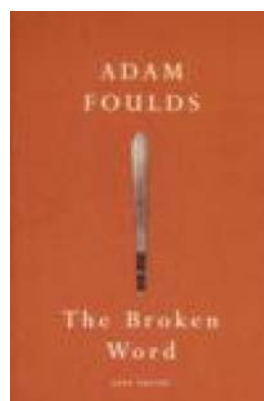
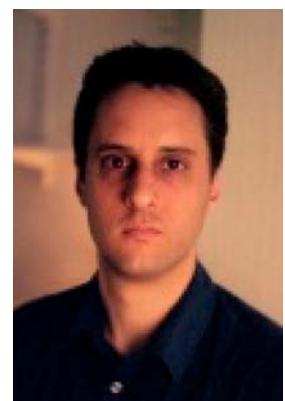
**- Costa Novel Award:** *The Secret Scripture* by Sebastian Barry. The judges described the novel as “*a heartbreaking and lyrical tale of loss, betrayal and redemption*”.



**- Costa Biography Award:** *Somewhere Towards the End* by Diana Athill. According to the judges, this biography is a “*graceful, clear-sighted and brave memoir entirely lacking in self-pity*”, “*a wise and wry take on exactly what it’s like to grow old*”.



**- Costa Poetry Award:** *The Broken Word* by Adam Foulds. The judges pointed out that “*this heart-stopping story about the Mau Mau uprising*”.



*brings hidden conflicts of conscience, race and class to the surface in a brutally compelling narrative”.*

- **Costa Children’s Book Award:** *Just Henry* by Michelle Magorian. The judges described the book as “a gripping and masterful tale of the power of cinema, photography and friendship in one boy’s life”.

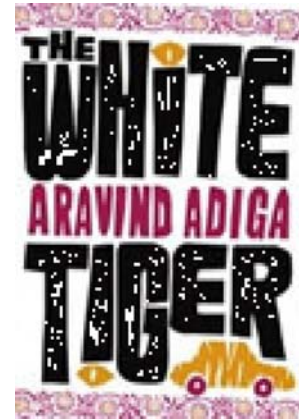


Source:

[http://www.costabookawards.co.uk/awards/category\\_winners.aspx](http://www.costabookawards.co.uk/awards/category_winners.aspx)

#### **The Man Booker Prize for Fiction 2007**

Aravind Adiga was named the winner of The Man Booker Prize for Fiction 2008 for his novel



*The White Tiger*. He is the fourth debut novelist, and the second Indian debut novelist, to win the award. Michael Portillo, Chair of the 2008 judges, described the novel with the following words: “*The novel undertakes the extraordinarily difficult task of gaining and holding the reader's sympathy for a thoroughgoing villain. The book gains from dealing with pressing social issues and significant global developments with astonishing humour*”.

Source:

<http://www.themanbookerprize.com/prize/man-booker-prize>

# SAYING GOODBYE TO HAROLD PINTER

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His loss plunged the literary scene into deep mourning on Christmas Day, when the media all over the globe spread the news, leaving no room for doubt: at the age of 78, on Christmas Eve, Harold Pinter had died in London of cancer, thus putting an end to a struggle that began in 2001. Praise for the recently deceased winner of the 2005 Nobel Prize for Literature flooded in, and his achievements as a prolific playwright, screenwriter, actor, director and poet have again been applauded. In the days following his death, Harold Pinter was hailed as “*the most influential and imitated dramatist of his generation*” (Gussow and Brantley, 2008), “*the most important British playwright of the past half-century*” (Schudel, 2008), or as “*one of the world’s greatest playwrights*” (*The Independent*, 2008) greatly “*garlanded with high honours*” (*Times Online*, 2008). Indeed, in the last few years Pinter had been awarded, among others, the 2005 Nobel Prize; the Wilfred Owen Poetry Prize, 2005; the Frank Kafka Prize, 2005; the European Theatre Prize, 2006; and the Legion d’Honneur, 2007. It is no wonder that Broadway theatres dimmed their lights for one minute on December 30th in his honour.

As a playwright, he wrote around three-dozen stage plays and two-dozen screenplays, plus dramatic sketches, one novel, short fiction, essays, speeches, and poems. *The Birthday Party* (1957), *The Caretaker* (1959), *The Homecoming* (1964), *Old Times* (1970), and *Betrayal* (1978) stand out among his plays, many of which he later adapted to film. Pinter’s screenplay adaptations of other writers’ novels include *The Pumpkin Eater* (1963), *The Servant* (1963), *The Go-Between* (1969), *The Last Tycoon* (1974), *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1980), *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1987), *The Comfort of Strangers* (1989), and *The Trial* (1989). Moreover, despite the fact that in February 2005 he publicly announced his retirement from playwrighting and his focus on poetry and political activism, he continued acting until 2006, when he participated in a production of Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* for the 50th anniversary of the Royal Court Theatre.

Remarkably influenced by Beckett and Eugène Ionesco, Pinter’s works are very often set in a single room, many times involve very few characters, and typically convey feelings of doubt, ambiguity, mystery, dread, menace,

despair or anxiety. Pauses and silences are a constant in the dialogues, and they become a powerful communicative strategy that helps create a pervading tension and uncertainty. As has been pointed out, Pinter possessed an indescribable ability to create in the spectator a “*certain expectation of the unexpected*” (Hare, 2000: 21). His distinctive style has even made the *Online OED* (2006) include the term “pinteresque” in its lexicon, defining it as “*Of or relating to Harold Pinter; resembling or characteristic of his plays [...] typically characterized by implications of threat and strong feeling produced through colloquial language, apparent triviality, and long pauses*”. Nevertheless, Pinter himself acknowledged in a *Newsnight Review* interview in 2006 that he had no idea what the word meant: “*I can’t define*



*what it is myself [...] I have no explanation of any of that really. What I write is what I write*”.

Since the age of eighteen, when he became a conscientious objector, Pinter was concerned with politics, which he often reflected in his work as a playwright. In fact, the decade of the 80s witnessed the release of overtly political plays such as *Precisely* (1983) or *One for the Road* (1984), which openly criticize abuses of power and human rights. Later, he vehemently opposed the Gulf War, NATO’s bombing of Serbia, the US War in Afghanistan, and the more recent invasion of Iraq, proving to be highly critical on that occasion of both the then President of the United States, George W. Bush, and the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair.

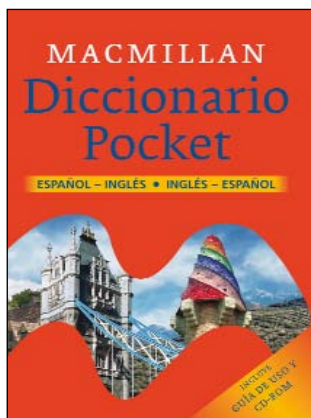
Pinter’s burial at a north-west London cemetery was attended by about 50 people, including his second wife Lady Antonia Fraser, and Sir Michael Gambon, who read an excerpt from Pinter’s play *No Man’s Land* in accordance with the Nobel Laureate’s wishes. Recalling the last sentence of the chosen extract probably remains the best way to end this modest goodbye to this outstanding renewer of 20th century British drama: “*And so I say to you, tender the dead as you would yourself be tendered, now, in what you would describe as your life*”.

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# MACMILLAN DICCIONARIO POCKET

VV.AA.  
Macmillan, 2006



When this dictionary first comes into our hands and just before we flick the pages back and forth, the most striking thing for the user is the number of chained illustrations that make a sort of wave that occupies the front and back cover. The photographs are representative of both cultures (Spanish and English): a tower by architect Gaudí, the London Bridge, some cottages from a village in the Cotswolds or somewhere else in Britain, a beach that is probably bathed by the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, or *La Ciudad de las Artes y la Ciencia* in Valencia. It is certainly an innovative design but, most significantly, a very important issue that reflects the roles that both languages and cultures play for the potential user.

*Macmillan Diccionario Pocket* (henceforth, *MDP*) falls within

the range of pocket dictionaries for an audience that may go from upper primary to lower secondary students, with more than 68,000 words, as the editors state on the back cover.

analyze other pocket dictionaries (Roldán Tapia, 2001: 40) and monolingual dictionaries (Roldán Tapia, 2002: 69), we can obtain the following picture:

|                                                        | MDP |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Spanish-English/English-Spanish order                  | ✓   |
| English-Spanish/Spanish-English order                  |     |
| Dictionary use pages                                   | ✓   |
| English grammar pages                                  | ✓*  |
| Spanish grammar pages                                  |     |
| Abbreviations and symbols pages                        | ✓*  |
| Cultural pages                                         | ✓   |
| Illustrations, maps, etc.                              | ✓   |
| Phonetics pages                                        | ✓*  |
| Word entries: (a) pronunciation of the word            | ✓   |
| Word entries: (b) grammar behaviour of the word        | ✓   |
| Word entries: (c) meanings of the word                 | ✓   |
| Word entries: (d) collocations (e.g., kick the bucket) | ✓   |
| Word entries: (e) register (e.g., informal)            | ✓   |
| Word entries: (f) associations (e.g., abandon-leave)   | ✓   |
| Word entries: (g) examples of use                      | ✓   |

The asterisks [\*] in the chart indicate that the information is either insufficient or found elsewhere, i.e. the inside covers.

The number of words is slightly higher than in other bilingual pocket dictionaries used by school students (Roldán Tapia, 2001), but very far from the much larger size of other bilingual or monolingual dictionaries that contain more than 100,000 entries.

If we try to analyze the different sections covered by the *MDP*, using the same criteria employed previously to

Further analysis of these issues reveals in detail what the real content of the *MDP* is. The order of languages is the most widely used one, starting with the potential user's native language. There are several pages on how to use the dictionary and interpret the information that is provided in the word entries. They are written in Spanish, which indicates that the publisher clearly knows what the users'

needs are. In this respect, the use of red for translations and black for collocations, idioms or examples attracts the user's attention and provides cues to understand the structure of the dictionary. The inclusion of 1-2-3 stars (★★★) to show the frequency of use also helps the user identify the words that are basic for communication.

There are no grammar pages, strictly speaking, but only a couple of pages devoted to irregular verbs at the end of the text. From time to time, pink boxes are included to clarify grammar issues that are relevant in some entries (for example, on p. 454, the entry for the pronoun *either* or, on p. 587, the entry for the modal *ought*), and grey boxes are used to offer additional information (for example, the box on p. 516 about the impossibility to omit the pronoun *I*, as is done in Spanish, or the one on p. 531 about the use in English of the word *jogging* instead of *footing*).

Information regarding abbreviations, symbols and pronunciation is presented on the inside covers of the volume, instead of occupying a set of pages at the beginning of the book. The cultural pages, together with illustrations, occupy the central pages of the dictionary.

Illustrations are very colourful and, in this case, they are abridged versions of illustrations that can be found in larger Macmillan dictionaries, for example the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*. The cultural pages are also written in Spanish, so that understanding of the message is not distorted by the use of the second language. Even though these pages are packed with information about British culture, they also include a few extra sections about the differences between the British and American culture and ways of life; for instance, about the most important cities in each country, their history, society and traditions or education systems. Perhaps a reason for criticism is the amount of stereotypical issues that are dealt with: the London tube, rugby, cricket or shopping at Harrods. Content related to the Internet, email and mobile phones is also the focus of this central section; this must be particularly attractive for teenagers because it contains some of the new coinages (L8R for later, PPL for people or RUOK for are you OK?) that are typical of information and communication technologies (henceforth, ICT).

Word entries are quite rich in terms of the information they

include, although word associations are not as frequent as in dictionaries with larger numbers of entries, in particular monolingual ones. On the other hand, collocations, examples and morphological issues (irregular plurals, 3rd person singular endings, past and participles, gerunds or doubled final consonants) are abundant in most entries. For example, page 390 calls our attention to several issues: 3rd person singular endings, such as *carries*, collocations such as *in any case*, or examples as in *take an umbrella in case it rains*.

Finally, the dictionary includes a CD-ROM that provides an extra touch of quality by integrating ICT with the traditional type of dictionary. It offers the text of the paper version, British and American pronunciation, pictures and sounds.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the *MDP* comes to play a difficult role in a market that is full of competitors, whose editorial teams constantly bring out new high-quality products. In any case, its large number of entries, its user-friendly format and design and the organization of lexis will help the *MDP* find its place in such a demanding market.

**Antonio Roldán Tapia**

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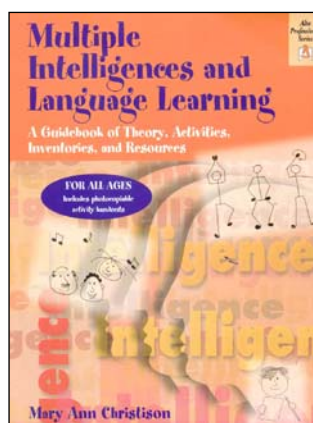
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# MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

## A GUIDEBOOK OF THEORY, ACTIVITIES, INVENTORIES, AND RESOURCES

Mary Ann Christison

Alta Book Center Publishers, 2005



As its name suggests, *Multiple Intelligences and Language Learning: A Guidebook of Theory, Activities, Inventories, and Resources* aims to help teachers to translate the theory of Multiple Intelligences into classroom practice. The main aim of the author, Mary Ann Christison, who is a Professor in the Linguistics Department at the University of Utah, is to provide flexible resource materials for second and foreign language teachers interested in Multiple Intelligences, emphasising that it is suitable for all teaching situations: from primary schools to university.

The book is divided into eight units. The first unit serves as an introduction to Multiple Intelligence Theory. Units 2 through 8 are devoted to the different intelligences. In each chapter, the author offers some activities to develop each intelligence, with handouts when needed. All the activities in the book include objectives, age group and level, materials required and procedure. They can be considered as lesson plans or supplementary material to a teaching unit. At the end of the book, there are five appendices with the answer keys, multiple intelligence inventories, all the activities indexed chronologically by age and language level, and a bibliographical list.

The first unit presents a brief overall view of the theory of Multiple Intelligences. The author writes in layman terms, which contributes to making the book reader-friendly. The author raises the question of how to define intelligence. She explains how intelligence had been traditionally defined as the ability to answer certain test items correctly (Intelligence Quotient). This traditional vision implied that intelligence is innate and does not change with age, training or experience. But in the last two decades, according to the author, researchers have offered support for a pluralistic view of the human mind and Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences (*Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, 1985) is an example. For him, intelligence is "the ability to solve problems

or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting or community".

Having presented the main ideas, the author points out how her interest in Multiple Intelligences started in the early 1990s. She realized how different her students were in terms of abilities and skills, how some students were 'good' at some subjects but 'not so good' at others. According to her experience, intelligence was not just one form of cognition that cuts across all human thinking. Gardner's theory supported her ideas and gave her the opportunity to know more about intelligences. The author also offers a brief summary of the characteristics of the eight intelligences defined by Gardner: linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, bodily/kinaesthetic, personal (interpersonal and intrapersonal), musical and naturalist.

As this is a practical book, she discusses the implications of Multiple Intelligence Theory for second language education. In general terms, each person possesses all eight intelligences, which work together in complex ways and can be developed to a high level of performance. If we, educators, want to apply this theory, we must first of all become acquainted with the basic theory. We could take a Multiple Intelligence inventory to connect our life experiences to the ideas presented in the theory. Inventories are included in one of the

appendices at the end of the book and can also be used with our students and trainees. The following step should be to identify the activities we normally use in our lessons as they relate to the different intelligences, and categorize them. The book includes photocopiable charts to help us classify them. We should go on by conducting a personal audit of our own teaching. Analysing what we do in our classes for a certain time, we could include more activities related to the intelligences we develop less. The last step would be to design assessment techniques that address the eight intelligences. This is a difficult challenge since not all learning content can be measured in a standardized way.

Unit two is devoted to linguistic intelligence: the ability to use words effectively both orally and in writing. This intelligence can be developed by reading and writing, answering questions, telling stories and jokes, enjoying word games and completing puzzles and mazes. In this section we find twenty-four activities - half of them with their photocopiable handouts. Perhaps this is the easiest intelligence to be developed by language teachers. The experienced teacher may not find anything new since the activities deal with vocabulary work, writing (questions, letters, stories) and a bit of speaking. Some activities require photographs, pictures, cardboard, markers, scissors and time to cut, glue and prepare materials.

Unit three focuses on logical/mathematical intelligence: the ability to use numbers effectively and reason well. This intelligence can be developed by solving problems, finding patterns, completing brain teasers, learning about how things work, thinking about and working with numbers, and categorizing and sorting. There are twenty activities in this unit – most of them with their photocopiable handouts. The activities involve counting, working with graphs, substractions, understanding prices, problem solving, encoding messages and changing recipes. Some of them are difficult to connect with language learning. The most useful activities are the ones which deal with problem-solving as they encourage reading comprehension and oral discussion.

In unit four, we have visual/spatial intelligence: the ability to have sensitivity to form, space, colour, line and shape. We can help to increase this intelligence by developing a good sense of direction, locating objects on maps, remembering visual details, working with mazes, recognizing visual patterns, paying attention to spatial relationships, and responding to colour and form. The author presents twenty-four activities – with sixteen photocopiable handouts. Vocabulary cards to be sorted or matched, map reading, wordsearches, studying pictures, or scrambled sentences and words are some of the activities we can find in this unit. Most of them require

previous preparation to look for pictures to illustrate vocabulary.

Unit five explores bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence: the ability to use the body to express ideas and feelings, and to solve problems. It can be developed by conducting experiments, participating in role plays, making crafts, following exercise routines, using manipulatives, following commands and playing games. We can find twenty-three activities, eleven of them with their photocopiable handouts, which range from following physical instructions to preparing a cake or a *piñata*. The main drawback is that there is no balance between preparation and language practice. As a secondary teacher, I must say that some students may also find them a bit childish.

In unit six, we read about personal intelligences. Interpersonal intelligence is the ability to understand another person's moods, feelings, motivations, and intentions. Intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to understand yourself, your strengths, weaknesses, moods, desires, and intentions. Both intelligences can be developed by working together with other students, learning to understand what other students think and value, accepting different roles and responsibilities in group work, learning how to evaluate one's own learning, and clarifying one's own values and beliefs. There are thirteen activities for interpersonal intelligence and

thirteen for intrapersonal. All the activities focus on group work: interviews, designing menus, small surveys, understanding group roles, problem solving, dream interpretations or talking about feelings. They are designed to help students communicate, so they encourage the main skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

Unit seven is concerned with musical intelligence, which can be developed by humming, chanting and whistling, identifying musical instruments, listening to and appreciating music, recognizing melodies and songs, singing and rapping, tapping and clapping in order to identify the rhythm of a song, and learning the structure of music. Twenty activities are presented in this unit, six of them with their photocopyable

handouts. Repeating chants and songs, playing instruments and even dancing are some of the proposals. But to develop musical intelligence we need more 'talent' than for the rest of the intelligences, so some knowledge of music is needed to recognize rhythms or play an instrument.

In the last unit, we find naturalist intelligence. It can be encouraged by developing an appreciation of plants and animals, discovering patterns and details in nature, recognizing different plants and animals, addressing environmental concerns, observing animals, and learning about the care and life of animals and plants. The last twenty activities deal with drawing animals and plants, collecting and observing leaves, classifying natural features,

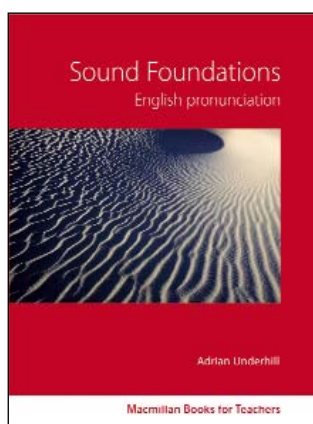
camping out or keeping a weather log.

In conclusion, although the author's purpose is to present easy materials to translate Multiple Intelligences into the classroom, her intention is not completely fulfilled. I certainly have the feeling that this book can offer something to anyone interested in the theory, but for the general secondary teacher it lacks practicality. Most of the activities require a great deal of preparation although they provide little language practice. In short, after reading the first unit on the general theory, you expect to find wonderful ideas for the classroom, but once you get to the activities you may feel disappointed as they do not necessarily meet your expectations.

**Pilar Córdoba Jiménez**

# SOUND FOUNDATIONS: LEARNING AND TEACHING PRONUNCIATION (2<sup>ND</sup> EDITION)

Adrian Underhill  
Macmillan, 2005



Due to the unfortunate dominance of classical perspectives in the area of teaching EFL pronunciation, quite often professionals feel they are lagging behind with respect to the advances in areas such as teaching grammar or vocabulary. Occasionally, however, we are happy to welcome contributions which really help teachers feel more confident in teaching the sounds of the English language. And this is one of those cases. First published in 1994, *Sound Foundations* hit the ground running with the idea that teaching people to speak should be based on first-hand experience of what should be spoken; “*success in pronunciation comes out from personal experimentation*” is

one of Underhill’s claims. In this sense, it was the perfect example of how to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice, and this second edition still continues to do so with the additional help of a CD containing excellent sample material. Together with Cunningham and Bowler’s *New Headway Pronunciation Course* (Intermediate and Upper-Intermediate, OUP, 1999) and Hancock’s brilliant *English Sounds in Use* (CUP, 2003), I find this book is another good example of the necessary struggle to achieve effectiveness and real communication in the teaching of pronunciation.

The first thing that should be said about the originality of Underhill’s perspective can be found explicitly displayed in the subtitle “*learning and teaching*”; the book is aimed at providing an insight into the two worlds and it is not intended to be a mere compilation of suggestions and materials. Secondly, another important aspect that must be pointed out is Underhill’s concern with humanistic teaching, a different way of conducting teaching in the classroom which aims for a shift of focus to a more learner-centred attitude. Similarly remarkable is his effort to promote, develop and use multisensory activities with the idea that learning the oral aspect of the language should become “*physical, visual, aural, spatial, and affective as well as intellectual*” (p. xii). In addition, the book fortunately embraces the “international mutual intelligibility” perspective,

escaping from the tight limitations deriving from following a ‘sacred’ model of pronunciation, moving the target on to a present, modern and more varied model. But the most outstanding characteristic of this book comes from the way it is structured and organized. Attention is paid to learning and teaching by dividing it in two parts: discovery toolkit and classroom toolkit. In doing so, Underhill differentiates between the indispensable knowledge of how sounds are produced and used, and the required methodology and techniques to accomplish successful teaching. Each of these sections covers pronunciation at three levels: sounds, words, and connected speech; a very practical division indeed because it helps the reader work separately with what Joan Morley (1975) and Underhill himself call the micro and macro levels, aspects related to practising precise articulation and use of sounds and aspects related to conveying meaning in a fluent and natural way.

Giving an account of the great deal of attractive and helpful things that this book offers, the importance it endows to the use of phonemic symbols is worth noting. Traditionally, the use of phonemic script was restricted to showing the dramatic discrepancies between letters and sounds in English, but Underhill turns the use of the chart into an intelligent way of introducing learners to the production of sounds. His “*point then speak*” and “*speak then point*” methodology

reveals itself as a simple and effective way of raising awareness. Diving into the discovery toolkit section, it is very noticeable to find a sensible selection of priorities. For example, specific attention is paid to making learners experience the origin of the different vowel sounds just by moving the tongue horizontally and vertically; or to some of the most significant aspects involved in vowel production. Tension and vowel length, experiencing place and manner of articulation with consonants, and the necessary work with fortis and lenis are all present. When dealing with stress, adequate introductory notions are provided, as well as a special interest in working with one of the most salient features of English pronunciation: the relation between stressed and unstressed syllables. The importance of shifting the stress, and the connection between intonation and word stress are also appropriately treated. Linking is also satisfactorily presented as a prerequisite for achieving the first stages of fluency. More than adequate is the distinction between careful colloquial and rapid colloquial speech, the first one to be used as the EFL model, and the second one being an indispensable tool for listening to and understanding all speakers; or the emphasis laid on strong and weak forms as representatives of what is meaningfully important vs.

what is meaningfully unimportant. Finally, in this section, we can find a selection of aspects intimately related to meaning and intelligibility and to effective highlighting of relevant information, mainly those associated with accent and prominence; rhythm and the correct use of stressed and unstressed syllables in the stream of speech; how pitch change is used to carry out changes of meaning; the inextricable relationship of intonation with grammar, attitude and discourse; and above all else, the realization of the tonic syllable, the key issue if we are to produce meaningful utterances.

As far as the classroom toolkit is concerned, if the aim is to turn experiencing into learning with activities you can do with your students in the classroom, we can say that the objective is totally fulfilled. Fostering creativity on the part of learners and teachers was one of the targets., objective accomplished again. It is a very attractive section, with a bevy of innovative and truly useful suggestions. For instance, I would strongly recommend the pages devoted to the seven modes of using the chart, an example of adaptable material as we can move from teacher control to autonomous learner control, and where teachers and learners will find guidelines and practice for all requirements and necessities. Another interesting

proposal is Underhill's concern for the internal imaging model (p. 110), similar to Catford's (1987) *silent introspection*, suggesting that students should listen to their mental registration before they are invited to say it aloud, an activity which has been demonstrated to provide learners with real benefits. Underhill's attitude to mistakes, with his "slip" vs. "error" difference, his three kinds of correction, and the difference between the traditional "I tell you" and his "I help you to tell yourself", together with the great variety of techniques he proposes, is to me one of the truly substantial contributions of this book. Extensive use of mime and gesture, and the importance of physical activity and body language to convey meaning if the purpose is to help students express themselves naturally, attention to the different degrees of simplifications, working with sense and nonsense groups as a prerequisite for gaining fluency in communication, specific activities to make the language have discursive value and make it present and real, or the very interesting pages devoted to "integrative activities" (human dictation, inviting visitors to the classroom or using a video camera) are some other examples of a section which will undoubtedly be of use to all teachers.

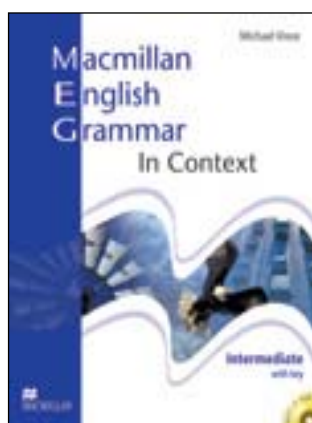
**Victor Pavón**

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# MACMILLAN ENGLISH GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT (INTERMEDIATE)

Michael Vince  
Macmillan, 2008



“A grammar reference book that takes students from the traditional practice of grammar forms through to topic-based practice exercises”. This is the description you can find on the back cover of this reference book by Michael Vince, first published in 2008 by Macmillan Publishers Limited. In fact, Essential and Advanced level books also exist, but this review is of the Intermediate level, which is intended to revise and consolidate grammar points at the Council of Europe Framework levels (CEF) B1 and B2 (the PET / FCE exams of the University of Cambridge, UK).

To start with, the layout of the book has been carefully planned, as such an acclaimed

author deserves -and you would not expect less of publishers such as Macmillan.

The table of contents at the beginning is clear, although in my opinion it does not follow a difficulty grading but rather a classification based on word/sentence sets, which should perhaps be pointed out to users who have no teacher guidance. Nevertheless, there is a **Grammar index** at the end which facilitates the location of the grammar point we are looking for. On the other hand, it would have been very useful to find which form and use corresponds to which CEF level or to which University of Cambridge ESOL exam in each unit. At present, the *Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas* (EE.OO.II.), my teaching context, teach level B1 in the so-called *Nivel Intermedio* (one or two years, depending on the Autonomous Education Authorities), and level B2 in the *Nivel Avanzado* (two years). Therefore, this book can be used in both those levels although not all students follow up the *Nivel Avanzado* after having passed the *Nivel Intermedio*. Likewise, some students may want to prepare one or the other level and take the exams as external students (*modalidad libre*), so it would have been nice to find a clear distinction as to what grammar items correspond to one level or the other. The same would apply to learners intending to take the PET or FCE exams.

As in other well-known grammar reference books on the market, the grammatical

point is clearly presented (form and use), followed by some exercises on the opposite page (to which the answers are provided in the issue with a key), making it easier for learners to check their progress.

Perhaps the novelty factor of this book is the inclusion of up to 74 texts related to different school or college subjects (nicely identifiable by colours in a quick glimpse through the book), aimed to place the grammar into context. Some criticism is due in this respect, as the author seems to use mostly texts related to Humanities disciplines (Geography 17, Social Studies 15, History 15, the Arts 7), but only a few related to scientific areas (Science 18, Maths 1, Computing 1). Furthermore, one or two texts are presented in each unit, and in some occasions they belong to the same discipline, rather than using two texts from different disciplines, which would have been very useful.

The **review section** at the end of the book is very practical, both to test what has been learnt and to assess one's knowledge of certain grammatical points before attempting to do the exercises.

The **wordlist** at the at the back of the book uses the asterisk system referring to the most common words, which can be very useful for students.

The **list of irregular verb forms** at the end presents them in the classical alphabetical order, failing to present them in a

more original way (as found in other grammar reference books), which would undoubtedly help students to learn them more easily (i.e. grouping them according to patterns of formation).

There is an accompanying **CD-ROM** which includes definitions of the highlighted words in the topic-based texts, which is undoubtedly of great

help, as long as learners have access to PCs or laptops in the classroom, if the book is used in class. It also has further practice exercises as well as a test section which is always helpful. It also has some listening practice.

All in all, a great, much-awaited and very welcome book, especially for teachers who work at the EE.OO.II. teaching

primary and secondary school teachers who attend the so-called CAL groups (*Cursos de Actualización Lingüística para el profesorado de centros bilingües*), and also for teachers who work at schools with a bilingual programme, when actually teaching their subjects in English.

**Paul Mrocek Delclós**

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#### Comunicaciones en Actas:

Adams, E. 1997. "Creativity in teaching: A practical session". *Actas de las II Jornadas de Estudios Ingleses*. Eds. C. Medina Casado y C. Soto Palomo. Jaén: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Jaén. 187-193.

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