E-LEARNING AND ESP. TEACHING ENGLISH FOR TOURISM

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Abstract

The paper describes a module of online collaborative reading within a large class of students of English for Tourism at the University of Turin. Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) is an instructional practice combining cooperative learning and reading comprehension strategies. We discuss the pros and cons of this practice by evaluating students' responses, comments, and notes. The analysis shows that CSR promotes joint enterprise. Comments and questions encourage a shared understanding of the professional text. Students were asked to extract keywords, while summaries were carried forward into new discussions, thus building a hypertextual net of ideas around the texts. In this way, the course could change from being a mere knowledge provider to a real collaborative learning environment. This study offers insights for instructors about new approaches for developing community in online educational contexts and suggests the need to make students aware of methodology.

Keywords: eLearning 1; ESP 2; Tourism 3; Collaborative Strategic Reading 4; Academic English5.

1   INTRODUCTION

The paper describes the integration of online collaborative reading in a course about tourism discourse at the University of Turin. Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) allowed networking and improved the understanding of the texts used during the course. CSR is a well-known practice that combines cooperative learning and reading comprehension strategies. In this context, it improved the management of specialised and academic texts that require advanced language competence and basic knowledge of the profession (Klingner and Vaughn, 1998).

Students accessed the course on Moodle, which provided all the course material, e.g. readings, self-assessment grids, tests and recorded lectures. Moreover, the Amanote software was used as an integrated Moodle tool to support pre-reading, brainstorming activities and the reading of texts themselves (Hiver, Al-Hoorie, Mercer, 2020). Students were divided into small groups (max. five students) in parallel Webex sessions. They read part of an academic paper describing tourism-related genres or a sample of a professional text and used Amanote to share annotations, ideas and comments within the group and with the rest of the class (fig 1). As a post-reading activity, students were also asked to fill in a grid of analysis that will be illustrated in the following paragraphs to show typical behaviours.

The integration of the three tools created a learning environment built online but is currently accessible to all the students enrolled as a MOOC inspired course for revision and self-study (Gao et alii, 2013). We discuss the pros and cons of this practice having evaluated students' responses, comments, and notes. We believe that the concept of sharing is a motivating element in developing professional English. In particular, collaborative tasks lower anxiety that hinder students participation and performance. Amanote proved especially useful in managing the collaborative reading activities (Yu-jie, 2016; Stognieva, 2019).
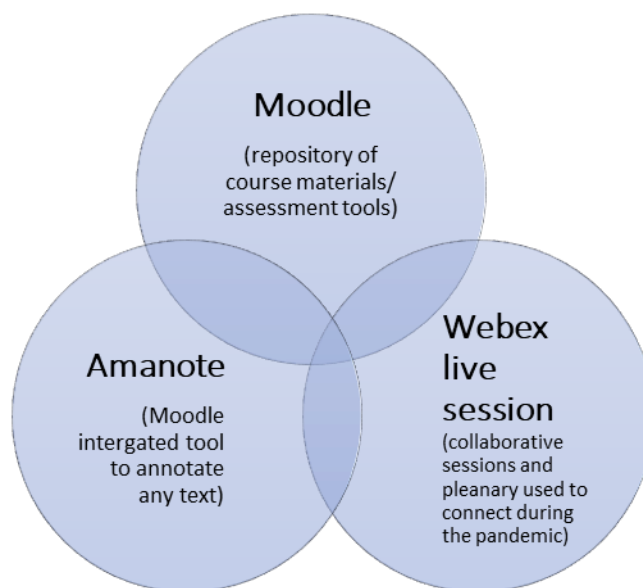
Figure 1 Integration of teaching tools to optimise the learning environment.

2   TEACHING TOURISM AS ESP: STUDENT'S NEEDS

The teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) requires targeting students' level and, consequently, setting their goals to effectively select the course materials (Huyon, 2018, pp. 112-129). Ideally, students should be at least B2 speakers with knowledge of the professional field sufficient enough to have a general understanding of the job and its communicative needs. In fact, students may have rather diverse levels of language and professional competence, especially in large courses, yet acknowledging diversity may stimulate student's collaboration rather than being an obstacle. In other words, diversity can be turned into a stimulus to overcome emotional issues and establish confidence. Therefore students may be more likely to accept a challenging syllabus. In practice, discussing with students their background knowledge may create a more relaxed atmosphere where students feel free to ask for support and share. Collaborative activities can play a role in building confidence.

CSR aims at promoting mutual engagement through the cooperative reading of a complex text with or without teacher management. Students act roles and are responsible for construing one single aspect of text understanding. They focus on one task at a time and share their interpretation. In this way, they feel supported by peers and are not overwhelmed by the complexity of the whole text (Mulligan, Garafolo, 2011). A complex text presents lexical obstacles, complex grammatical and textual organisation and needs metalinguistic competence to be understood. Students are asked to work out the content and bypass textual elements that may impair understanding depending on their level of fluency. Lexical density, morpho-syntactical complexity, implied knowledge, and length are obstacles that need to find appropriate strategies to avoid drop-outs. In this perspective, collaborative reading activities can help both in cognitive and linguistic terms to face the difficulty of professional readings.

In general, an ESP course may address vocabulary and terminology or may focus on broad communicative skills. Alternatively, it may focus on understanding professional genres and using linguistics to make sense of professional discourse. In the case of tourism, both perspectives are crucial given its multidimensional nature. Tourism communication draws from diverse settings, discourse communities and hence different genres − often hybrid genres. Tourism genres range from written legal/corporate documents, professional meetings, video-phone conversations, websites, and press releases along with tourist guides, brochures, emails, advertising texts, (e-)tickets, (phone/zoom/skype/webex) conversations, blogs, promotional videos, and reviews (Maci 2020). The richness of tourism discourse needs a vast set of competencies and compels teachers to balance authenticity and readability.

As a matter of fact, authenticity is necessary for Tourism teaching as it prepares students to deal with a global, varied and unmediated language. They must be acquainted with the complexities of

pragmatics, intercultural communication and discourse, i.e. they have to learn both the language *for* tourism and the language *of* tourism (Hunyon, 2018, p. 157; Ennis, 2020). Therefore, readings should be selected with a more holistic vision of tourism. Rather than starting from terminology, course planning should work on genres' overall structure and then develop a more analytical in-depth understanding of individual texts and vocabulary in context. Language for specific purposes can be engaging if focused on the analysis of professional genres in relation to a professional community, as aspects of pragmatics and genre conventions can be transferred and reused in other contexts and taken in as individual skills. In other words, students need to see that by learning specialised language and studying (tourism) genres, they are acquiring abilities such as reading that will impact them as this is deeply motivating (Kelly, 2020).

3   CASE STUDY

In the context here analysed, students learned tourism language as ESP via two channels: the so-called *lettorato* (80 hours language classes) and a course in linguistics (60 hours). The *lettorato* developed B2 grammar knowledge with a focus on specialised vocabulary. The linguistics course required students to grasp the basics of genre analysis and tourism discourse. Students were in their second year (BA) and built on previous knowledge of linguistics to understand the structural mechanisms of (multimodal) texts (fig 2).

Figure 2 Second Year English Language Course.

The first part of the course was delivered in the form of traditional lectures. Students were taught how to recognise lexical and grammatical cohesion; identify theme and rheme; understand specialised discourse, identify specimens of meta-discourse, author visibility, and moves. Six hours were spent on specific ESP features relevant in tourism discourse, i.e. popularisation, Legal English and multimodality.

The second part of the course focused on academic articles that described tourism communication. Here CSR was applied to develop a more independent understanding of the content and overcome academic writing complexities. The articles were selected on the basis of both content and conciseness, while topics ranged from EU tourism normative guidelines, press releases, destination branding, promotional websites to multimodality, e.g. travel videos, and tourism blog writing.

The third part of the course examined authentic texts to apply the notions learned in the first two sections. The texts provided an additional set of examples that could be described and analysed by students independently. For example, a vacation home rental contract provided instances of legal English, the British Airways media centre provided examples of press releases, institutional sites like

Visit Bratislava and *Visit Tuscany* were used to retrieve itineraries, the *Lonely Planet Guide* to Rome was examined as an example of a tourist guide. A set of promotional videos were used to discuss sustainability and green tourism. Finally, a vlog allowed students to propose their views about post-pandemic tourism.

In other words, during each segment of the course, similar genres were seen from a different perspective: legal language was presented in its general characteristics, then a paper about EU normative guidelines was read within a CSR lesson to pick up examples of complex syntax, archaic language, jargon etc., then the same type of language was observed in the rental contract as the object of class discussion. In other cases, the basics of visual analysis were introduced in the frame of multimodal analysis and then observed in a paper analysing promotional videos. Students were then asked to write their observations about a given example of a travel video.

Adding layers of knowledge allowed students with low competence or familiarity with tourism language to revise and learn by building gradual expertise while stimulating students more confident with professional English to improve and expand their knowledge, either in the direction of the applied linguistic analysis or in the direction of discourse understanding. Students with specific knowledge (e.g. semiotics or photography, or video making) could also actively contribute to general understanding.

4   CSR IN PRACTICE: INTEGRATING MOODLE TOOLS

The integration of CSR developed collaboration in the e-learning environment and helped overcome the sense of isolation that is regarded as one of the challenging aspects of e-interaction. CSR was designed to teach students how to avoid lexical obstacles and understand ESP features such as encapsulation of meaning in long noun phrases or complex syntax. The background knowledge provided by the first part of the course enabled students to spot the problems and retrieve the functional tools to understand both the article content and the academic language.

Moreover, CSR improved meta-cognitive and self-monitoring skills that are especially relevant to implement fluency among intermediate students and stimulate more focused language learning in advanced students too. In our context, C1 students level were stimulated by the complexity of the texts, while B1 and B2 students found it hard to work within and around these texts but became conscious of their need to improve vocabulary and enhance reading to get used to authentic materials and 'real English'.

The activity comprising CSR was organised as follows: at first, the instructor enhanced a brainstorming and prediction moment (collecting ideas and making predictions about the content). Then the instructor provided basic scaffolding (pre-knowledge of specialised vocabulary) and a general overview of the parts of the text (focus on the title, paragraphs). Students were then asked to recognise the genre and the topic they were reading about by resorting to previous knowledge. At that point, they were divided into small collaborative sessions and became involved in cooperative learning. In each group, roles were assigned but with no obligation so that each could feel free to collaborate spontaneously and choose a role according to their preferences – something that appeared more appropriate with adult students. A student took the role of the reader. Some got the gist of the paragraph, while others monitored lexical obstacles and suggested fixup strategies by retrieving meaning from the context, observing word structure or suggesting bypassing the obstacle according to its relevance in the overall context.[1] Students then summarised the main idea of each paragraph. It was essential to identify keywords in each paragraph so that understanding was worked out gradually, layer after layer.

At the end of each session, the instructor ensured that students had recognised the essential ideas discussed in the text and/or identified their various components. Moreover, genre description, function, and the relationship between the addresser and addressee were also investigated. Texts were annotated with Amanote by every group member and shared in the software virtual workspace (fig.3).

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[1] We base comprehension on the understanding of syntax. Pre and post modifications may be non-essential at a first skimming but can be investigated at second reading.

Figure 3 Amanote page with students annotations.

Annotation and highlighting of the original text can be done on paper, of course, but with Amanote, students worked quickly during the session and ended up *sharing and visualising* what they had done. This visual representation of the reading process provided a form of text analysis that all the group members could easily understand and facilitated discussion. Furthermore, it provided more handy management of the text for revision and self-study.

Finally, there followed the wrap-up stage, which was meant to stimulate self-monitoring and a better understanding of the whole process (What have I learnt? What do I need to expand on? What obstacles did I face? How could I improve?). Students were allowed to revise their work. Ideas were collected in a 'traditional' chart that every student had to fill in and then submit on Moodle. The aim was to allow each student to focus on his/her own understanding and enhance self-evaluation. One of the aspects that were fore-fronted to the class was the importance of developing a methodology to read and understand textual complexity, whatever the context and channel. Moreover, they could list new vocabulary and tourism terminology in a specific section of the chart.

The chart ensured that even non-attending students had the chance to survey the methodology off-line. In this way, both group work and individual work could be subsequently discussed with the instructor to monitor and control course outcomes[2].

The examples below are taken from students charts that were filled in after reading an Academic paper about Legal English and Tourism. One of the problems with teaching tourism discourse is the hybridity of genres and embedded lexicon from other domains, especially Business English, Media language, Advertising and Legal English. Therefore the text presented a double layer of complexity, being a specimen of Academic English discussing legal English in EU directives. The results prove that students responded well even when the chart received the very basic filling. The collective work allowed students with low competence to participate and get the ideas to fill in the chart, highlighting issues in personal understanding or weaknesses in the reading process itself (Vaughn et al., 2013; Zoghi et al., 2010).

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[2] It should be noted that the get the gist moment and the final wrap up were also used to check the overall understanding by a direct discussion with the students and by the use of a Moodle forum that allowed them to interact after the end of the course.

In fig. 4, one can observe three examples of the pre-reading stage where students focused on their previous knowledge showing existing awareness and predicting the text's content retrieved by the instructor's feed and the overall observation of the text.

BEFORE READING	Preview	What I already know about the topic: nothing What I think I will learn: I think I will learn something more about concepts and aspects of legal language of tourism.

BEFORE READING	Preview	What I already know about the topic: I know Tourism is a specialized discourse but I don't know its relationship with Legal English What I think I will learn: - How to write properly in tourism discourse - Hoe to recognize legal formulae in tourism texts

BEFORE READING	Preview	What I already know about the topic: • Specialized language. • Complex syntax. What I think I will learn: • Normative guidelines given by European Union to avoid ambiguity and vagueness. • Legal English applied to tourism.

Figure 4. Samples of students' charts CSR stage 1.

In fig. 5 instead, one can observe how the first and second students identified general problems and solved them with three different strategies (contextualisation, dictionary and review of previous knowledge), although they provided only a general response. In contrast, the third student identified lexical obstacles and clunks common in the text and highlighted the complexity of Academic writing. The obstacles were then solved without using a dictionary but with the application of syntactic analysis.

In fig. 6, there are examples of how students filled in the wrap-up stage (metadiscourse). In all cases, the charts show that students become aware of their reading method. Moreover, students suggested rewritings and edited versions of paragraphs, others commenting on the necessity of clarity, transparency in communication, others showing their interest in plain style and clarity in professional contexts.

In general, the observation of student's charts and their feedback indicate the effectiveness of the integrated approach and collaborative work that overcome the passive listening-only method provided either by the traditional lecture or the passive listening/ viewing of a video/slides presentation with voiceover.

Quite obviously, some students provided inadequate responses. However, the overall engagement was positive.

		Text sections/ paragraphs	Clunks (obstacles to understanding)	Gist (how to solev the problem)
DURING READING	Clunks & Gists	ABSTRACT: Summary of the main topics covered in the text	/	/
		1) INTRODUCTION: History of the relationship between tourism and the European Union and introduction to analysis of if and how much the languages of legal and tourism discourse are interrelated.	1) I had difficult in understanding the sentence "On the other hand, legal language has been extensively analysed, with particular regard to the analysis of metatextual markers, of questioning and from both a forensic perspective as well an ethnographic viewpoint."	1) I solved the clunk by searching difficult words on vocabulary and reconstructing the sentence in context.
		2) LEGAL LANGUAGE IN TOURISM: THE CORPUS: Description of the corpus located in the Euro – lex search – engine.	2) "The Euro – lex search – engine"	2) I searched the expression on the dictionary.
		3) RESULTS: LEGAL TOURISM IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY: Text forming legal genres are very different from everyday speech.	/	/
		3.1. Macro – level analysis: Sentences and cross – references : Types of sentences, readability, text cohesion.	3.1. The clunk is the sentence " (…) against the interests of the party responsible for drafting the guidelines.	3.1. I solved the clunk by breaking down the sentence in small parts to improve its understanding.
		3.2. Micro – level analysis		
		3.2.1. Lexis : technical		

		Text sections/ paragraphs	Clunks (obstacles to understanding)	Gist (how to solev the problem)
		3.1 Macro-level analysis: Sentences and cross-references	Cross-references	Observing the context and reading the examples given by the author
		3.2.1 Lexis	Annex	Using the dictionary
		3.2.3 Modality	Illucutionary	Reading previous lessons

		Text sections/ paragraphs	Clunks (obstacles to understanding)	Gist (how to solev the problem)
DURING READING	**Clunks & Gists**	- "Until the 1990s … regulation of related activities" (p. 2) - "The important role of tourism … not relevant in tourism text" (p. 3) - "From the applied linguistics perspective … characteristic of the tourism industry" (p. 4) - Chapter 2. "Legal language in tourism: the corpus" (p. 4/5) - Chapter 3. "Results: legal discourse in the tourism" (p. 5) - Subchapter 3.1. "Macro level analysis: sentences and cross-references" (p. 5 – 9) - Subchapter 3.2 "Micro-level analysis" (p. 9 – 18): lexis + doublets, binomials, archaisms and technical terminology+ modality and examples - Conclusions (p. 18, 19)	- length of sentences	- divide them into smaller and more understandable parts

Figure 5 Samples of students' charts CSR stage 2.

AFTER READING	**Wrap Up**	**What I learned (key concepts):** By reading this document, I learned that: 1. Some genres of tourism writing are easily recognizable as specialized discourse; it is characterized by complex sentences, modality, technical terminology, ancient crystallized legal forms whose purpose is to convey an impression of semantic objectivity and legal impartiality. The generic conventions deriving from legal discourse convey a more ruled image of the tourist community. 2. The important role of tourism has been recognized since the early 1980s. 3. The EU provides guidelines meant to be "locally-translated" by each member state. 4. Legal texts express regulation creating, modifying or terminating the rights of and obligations towards individuals and institutions. 5. A text so schematically organized, and apparently easier to understand from a semantic viewpoint, is actually denser and more cognitively demanding because of the frequent use of nominalized forms in pre-modifying position. 6. The legal register is called "legalese".
		Questions about the important ideas in the passage (to clarify/ understand more in depth):
	Vocabulary	**New Vocabulary:** By analyzing the text, I learned new general technical vocabulary and the meaning of the term "legalese".
		Tourism terminology: I was not able to extrapolate vocabulary related to tourism that I did not know before reading; I have found more technical vocabulary related to the language, and less about tourism.
		My notes and observation (was it difficult? Why? How could I improve my reading strategy?): As this is the first time I analyze a text in this way, I have found it a little difficult, especially for the fact that I am not used to reading complex English texts. I could improve my reading skills by keeping the focus all on the sentences I am reading at each moment. As you can read above, in some passages I did not find any clunks, because the sentences could all be understood by reading them more times.

AFTER READING	**Wrap Up**	What I learned (key concepts): Legal Language in Tourism Definition of Modality Analysis of EU guidelines related to Tourism Characteristic of the language of legal documents
		Questions about the important ideas in the passage (to clarify/ understand more in depth):
	Vocabulary	New Vocabulary: Legalese Wordsmith Tool Doublets Modals expressing deontic obligations
		Tourism terminology: Protocol, hotel, tourist, accomodation My notes and observation (was it difficult? Why? How could I improve my reading strategy?): Understanding this paper was not difficult at all but I think I need to improve my reading skills and my knowledge of both legal and tourism terms

Figure 6 Samples of students' charts CSR stage 3.

5 CHALLENGES

Numerosity represented one of the main obstacles. In my case study, more than 270 students enrolled, but only about 85 attended regularly. The reason is that many students work full or part-time, some in tourism, and despite the pandemic, they continued to do so. In some cases, there may have been an overlapping of other academic activities. In both cases, the availability of recorded lessons made the course available to non-attendant students, yet only very motivated ones took part in the interactive sessions.

The heterogeneity of the language level was another issue. Scaffolding, foregrounding of themes, comments to text segments or direct reading by the lecturer were proposed as preparatory activities. Explanations were provided as feedback and discussed as a wrap up of the activity. However, despite the lesson's pre and post framing, it was clear that some of the students with low linguistic competence were somewhat reluctant to take an active part in the course.

Finally, there were problems linked to the online dimension, such as an inadequate setting/ connection reported as a reason for not attending the collaborative sessions.

Networking among students is undoubtedly one of the main problems and overcoming isolation needs lots of support. Tutors organised meetings and informal study sessions that were positively undertaken by a few, but for the most part, informal activities faced the overload of screen work and were perceived as demanding.

In general, the texts' complexity required a 'strong' presence of the teacher to either prepare the activity or provide adequate explanation and feedback. Students needed to be guided and trained to select the most relevant points in terms of content and text structure. Identifying keywords, recognising the paragraph as a unit of meaning and identifying moves as textual strategies prepared the ground for CSR with (positive) effort.

6   CONCLUSION

Karabuga and Kaya note that students face reading problems in a foreign language because of a lack of reading methods and a lack of awareness and independence (Karabuga and Kaya, 2013). As they rely on the teacher as in traditional lecturing, they are passive, which contradicts a core need of ESP teaching, i.e., being tailored to adults/ professional learning needs and participation.

In the case study examined, reading sessions stimulated comments, questions and encouraged a shared understanding of the texts. Students were asked to extract keywords, terminology, and concepts into the discussions of other readings for the course, thus building a net of ideas around the various genres analysed in the tourism discourse frame. Reformulation of what was displayed in the academic readings also enabled students to develop their own authentic texts analysis. In this way, the course changed from being a mere knowledge provider to a collaborative learning environment.

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

Finally, the structure of the course was based on a gradual development of genre awareness. Discourse rather than vocabulary was the focus, and institutional communication and web dynamics became the object of investigation by using academic readings, direct experience, and the analysis of authentic materials. Text linguistics was the starting point to construe complex forms of textuality. Academic readings provided models and the tools to understand tourism discourse. Collaborative practices were used to allow students to share their difficulties in understanding authentic professional texts and then retrieve textual, linguistics and contextual information to overcome them. Students were stimulated to search for more examples as a learning community, especially in blogs, vlogs, and multimedia items as a follow-up of their class activity.

The use of technology in University (in-class, hybrid and blended courses) will only increase, and this should be seen as an opportunity to activate students, develop their expertise and skills (Gani et al. ii, 2016; McLoughlin, Villarini, 2018; Sancassani et alii., 2019; Sallam, Martín-Monje, 2020).

Learning to read analytically and retrieve selected information should be integrated with language learning to develop a critical understanding of communication *per se* (Bruce, 2019: chap. 8). From this point of view, CSR proves to be an excellent strategy to combine soft skills and instruction.

For this reason, the teaching of Tourism English and the understanding of Tourism Discourse should integrate and not offered as a separate option, as students need to get used to a multidimensional, multimodal communicative environment. Traditional classroom teaching is teacher-based and somewhat 'autocratic': a more participatory style where learners play an active role can be but motivating and can be seen as a form of professional training via language awareness.

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