ICTs’ role in the Teaching & Learning of Academic Literacy

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OUTLINE

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2. Goal and subjects of the study
3. English for Academic & Professional Purposes (Teacher’s training Degree)
4. Methods: The questionnaire
5. Results & Discussion
1. Bologna Process in Europe

Bologna’s process (1999) towards the convergence of the *European Higher Education Area* (EHEA) aimed at the creation of a coherent, compatible and competitive framework, capable of attracting both European and Overseas students as well as scholars from all over the world… *(Erasmus Exchange Program)*
In this sense, this new Higher Education paradigm included as its 3 main goals: competition, employability and mobility of learners and teachers besides from implying a crucial change in methodology, such as moving from a teacher-oriented tuition to a student-oriented one by 2010.
Teachers’ roles and tasks had to change as besides from being responsible for contents learning and specific discipline abilities, they had to help students develop essential and key competencies within and for the professional world.
Therefore, the formative and educative university of this “new” *knowledge-based* society requires:

Teaching practice evolves, then, from being *content-oriented* to aiming at student’s comprehensive formation and towards *long life learning*.

PROFESSIONALS
CITIZENS
INDIVIDUALS

WITH:

INTEGRAL FORMATION,
EDUCATED,
RESPONSIBLE,
REFLECTIVE, CRITICAL
AND ADAPTABLE.
Methodological changes in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

BEFORE

- Teaching objectives
- Learning information
- Teacher-oriented
- Passivity
- The teacher as “the main character”
- Summative assessment
- Individualism

AFTER

- Learning objectives
- Learning competencies
- Student-oriented
- Activities to learn
- The teacher as a “Guide”
- Formative assessment
- Teaching team
So which are the **basic competencies** that better describe our current university **teachers’ profile** in this new teaching **paradigm** scenario?
Teachers’ “new” competencies

- **Interpersonal**: promoting criticism, motivation and trust, cultural diversity awareness and considering individual needs.

- **Methodological**: applying learning and assessment tools suitable to students’ needs and according to the learning objectives. And, very specially, considering the use of ICTs to improve the teaching and learning processes.
**Communicative**: developing efficient and correct bi-directional processes by receiving, interpreting, producing and transmitting messages through a wide range of possibilities within the learning and teaching context (use of Virtual Campus)

**Management & Planning**: by designing, orientating and developing contents and formation and assessment activities to later evaluate outcomes and seek improvement.
- **Teamwork**: Cooperating and participating in groups, taking responsibilities and commitments towards the fulfilment of tasks and functions related to the common objectives of the teaching staff by following protocols and using the available resources.

- **Innovation**: Creating and applying new knowledge, approaches, methods and resources in education practices so as to achieve excellence in the learning and teaching processes.
Therefore, language curricula have been reoriented, language departments have been reconfigured, and study plans have been revamped, all with the ultimate aim of bringing about a much yearned-for revitalization of language teaching at tertiary level (Yu, 2008).

And formation has evolved into generic, specific and cross-curricular competencies, the latter concerning the implementation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) inside and outside the classroom dynamics.
“We are living what Mehisto (2008) terms a period of disjuncture, characterized by the tension between the previous order and a new approach which changes the status quo. Indeed, this intense period of reform in Higher Education necessitates a change of perspective in both stakeholders involved—teachers and students—as the transition needs to be made from learning by instruction to learning by construction, and teachers need to pull back from being the donors of knowledge in a passive learning context to become facilitators in a student-led scenario” (Pérez-Cañado, 2011:21)
In this sense, didactic materials and resources with **ICTs figuring prominently** among them-are pivotal in bringing about this **reconfiguration of teacher and student roles** and in operating the shift to a learner-centered pedagogy of **autonomy** (Pérez Gómez et al. 2009c).

However, the **potential of technological or digital competence** for enhancing the student-centered learning process has been underscored by the official **EHEA** literature.
2. Goal and subjects of the study

**AIM:** To explore how the European process of Bologna-with less teacher’s contact hours of tuition and more autonomous and guided learning for the students has been aided by the use of Technology. More precisely, how this new way of approaching subjects has affected not only teacher’s planning and delivery of contents but also students’ way of learning and acquiring a foreign language (English).
In this vein, the aim of this study is to observe the methodological changes occurred since the implementation of the ICTs and the ECTS and their significant impact on Academic Literacy practices in terms of both enhancing linguistic skills and increasing oral and written communication competencies and, very especially, in facilitating the acquisition of English as a foreign language.
SUBJECTS

In particular, we are going to focus on the use of ICTS by a group of learners (N=40) in the Faculty of Education of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain), who currently study Teachers’ Training (Specialization in English) and in their fourth (and last) year at University they undertake an English for Academic and Professional Purposes course.
PROFILE

- Teacher’s Training Degree (Specialization)
- Faculty of Education (UAB), BCN, Spain
- 6 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)
- Age: 22-43
- N=40
- Semester 1 (16 weeks of tuition)
- Contact hours with the teacher (3.5h weekly)
3. English for academic & professional purposes

Academic written discourse has become a central topic of study in recent years and it is, especially, in scientific and academic communication where the argumentative-rhetoric component characterizes many of the discourses in use. One of the main research concerns has been the analysis of interpersonal features and, within this broad scope, the analysis of the socio-pragmatic phenomenon called hedging.
In this sense, although discourses have been traditionally studied from their mainly informative function, it is obvious the key role they play in the academic-professional communities, namely persuading about the knowledge being conveyed through the text or the way the authority of the writer is, more or less, veiled. As a matter of fact, the appropriate use of hedging by writers presenting their knowledge within an academic discourse community seems a difficult device to acquire for learners of English as a foreign language.
Swales & Feak (2009): Academic genres

Figure 1. Academic Genre Network

- **Open Genres**
  - Conference and other talks
  - Research articles
  - Conference posters

- **Technical reports**
  - Books and monographs

- **Job applications**
  - Fellowship applications

- **Curricula vitae**

- **Job interviews**

- **Research paper reviews and responses to reviewers**

- **Submission letters**

**Supporting Genres**
“I find that there is nothing more tedious than papers that go on and on, with no obvious point”

Richard Malkin (University of California-Berkeley)

“Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts” Strunk, Jr. In Elements of Style.
OBJECTIVES

To produce quality oral and written productions within the academic and professional fields.

To show proficiency in producing coherent and cohesive contents in specialized discourses.

To be familiar with self-assessment and peer-assessment and be able to work with language registers and textual typologies.

To show communicative proficiency in English in international and multilingual settings (oral and written)

To critically analyze professional and academic discourses (formal register of the English language)

To apply the theoretical framework into the communicative practice (oral and written) from a contrastive and multilingual approach.

To show linguistic and communicative skills in English equivalent or superior to a B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)
CONTENTS

1. Discourse **genres and textual typologies** applied to **professional and academic settings**.

2. **Objectivity and subjectivity** in the text. The author's visibility in discourse.

3. **Critical discourse analysis** in English.

4. **Organization and presentation techniques** for effective oral and written productions in English.

5. **English language use for specific purposes**: *English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP).*
EAP main features

APPROACH
• Analytical
• Objective
• Intellectual
• Rational

Rather than:
• Impressionistic
• Subjective
• Emotional
• Polemical

TONE
• Serious
• Impersonal
• Formal

• Conversational
• Personal
• Colloquial
The academic writer makes frequent use of:

- **Passive** forms of the verb
- **Impersonal** pronouns and phrases
- **Qualifying** words and phrases
- **Complex** sentence structures
- **Specialised** vocabulary

and avoids

- **Contractions** (e.g. *it’s*, *hasn’t*)
- **Phrasal verbs** (e.g. *look into* vs investigate, discover)
- **Colloquialisms/slang** (e.g. *you know*, *lots*)
- **Personal pronouns** (e.g. *I*, *you*)
- **Vagueness in word choice** (e.g. *thing*: be more specific!)
We focus instead on:

✓ Audience and purpose
✓ Concise writing
✓ Fluid writing
✓ Formal vocabulary
✓ **Hedging**
✓ Nominalisations
✓ Unambiguous writing
✓ Writing conventions: abbreviations, acronyms and compound labels
✓ Grammar and punctuation
TASKS

1. ABSTRACT WRITING
- Select a topic/field
- Search for information
- Organize ideas following Swales’ Moves (1990)
- Consider study design, research questions, goals and IMRAD pattern
- Length: 200-300 words

**FOCUS on:** Macrostructure features and genre, consider text typology (argumentative) and text flow.

2. HEDGING ANALYSIS
- Select a good example of academic writing (book review, abstract, etc.)
- Analyze macrostructure and microtextual features
- Consider *hedging* devices, *boosters* and *linkers*
- Describe language functions
- Explore author’s visibility in the text and its implication
- Provide a critical view, an opinion paragraph.
TOOLS

1. SWALES’ MOVES (1990)

“A move is part of a text that plays a functional role (phrase to paragraph in length)”

In the **Abstract** section of a paper you can find:

**Move 1**- Background, intro, situation
**Move 2**- Present research, purpose
**Move 3**- Methods, materials, subjects, procedures
**Move 4**- Results, findings
**Move 5**- Discussion, conclusions, implications, recommendations
### 2. Hedging Taxonomy (Oliver, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pragmatic Categories</th>
<th>Functions in Discourse</th>
<th>Linguistic Items</th>
<th>Linguistic Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1. Shields**       | To protect the subject and anticipate negative feedback or the so called “boomerang effect”. Allows scientists to present their knowledge cautiously and introduce claims (Salager-Meyer, 1994) | 1.-modal verbs  
b) semi-auxiliaries  
c) probability adjectives  
d) probability adverbs  
e) epistemic verbs | LEXICAL          |
| **2. Approximators**  | To make things vague and to indicate probability. It is related to the author’s avoidance of personal involvement and the impossibility of reaching absolute accuracy (Salager-Meyer, 1994) | 2. Adjectives and/or adverbs of:  
a) quantity  
b) degree  
c) frequency  
d) time  
Non personal forms* |                  |
| **3. Author’s Personal Doubt & Involvement** | To emphasize the interpersonal dimension: evaluate & assess one’s material and negotiate the status of one’s claims. Encourages dialogue with the audience and facilitates discussion. (Hyland, 1998) | a) conditional  
b) 1st person markers | MORPHOLOGICAL     |
| **4. Agentless Strategies** | 1) They are used to modify or even hide the author’s attitude towards the content. (Lewin, 1998)  
2) To fulfill academic conventions, to seem more precise, more scientific. (Salager-Meyer, 2003) | a) agentless passive  
b) despersonalisation (active verbs with inanimate subjects and nominalisation) | SYNTACTICAL       |
Difficulties encountered…

- Lack of **planning**, drafting, revising and proofreading (peer-reviewing, etc.). **Process**
- Problems while **structuring the text**, organizing ideas into paragraphs/moves, linking them, using cohesive devices, sequencers and using the appropriate **register of language** (General English vs EAP or ESP and **genre conventions**).
- Hybrid texts: mixture of expository, descriptive, narrative and **argumentative** fragments.
- Wrong use of quotations, references, emergence of **patchwriting**, confusing fact vs opinion.
- **Grammar mistakes**: use of the definite/indefinite article, pluralisation, verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, wrong word order, word choice, prepositions, connectors, coordination/subordination, coherence & cohesion, etc.

- **Text typology**: Argumentative, positioning oneself. Use of hedging devices and/or boosters.

- **Register**: Academic English, specialized terminology.

- **Genre conventions**: use of passive voice, modality, nominalizations and *moves* structure.
Competencies involved
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formal-oriented cultures</th>
<th>Content-oriented cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus of responsibility</strong></td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>Reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main concern</strong></td>
<td>How knowledge is transmitted</td>
<td>Amount of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extensive knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Negatively evaluated</td>
<td>Positively evaluated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Notion of relevance</strong></td>
<td>Restrictive Digression is avoided</td>
<td>Non-restrictive Digression is allowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text development</strong></td>
<td>Deductive Linear Symmetric</td>
<td>Inductive Not necessarily linear Not necessarily symmetric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manner of expression</strong></td>
<td>Direct Perspicuous Concrete</td>
<td>Not necessarily direct Complex General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Syntax</strong></td>
<td>Short sentences Repetition of pronouns and lexical items</td>
<td>Complex sentences Avoidance of lexical repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social dimension</strong></td>
<td>Public (community controlled) Empirically based</td>
<td>Individual Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rhetoric</strong></td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Implicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive aspects</strong></td>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td>Variety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tabla 9. Estilos de escritura
4. Methods: *The questionnaire*

It consisted of **3 main parts:**

a) The subject (typology, length, contents…)

b) Academic Literacy (main difficulties, student’s previous knowledge, skills…) and

c) ICT’s role
1. In your view, how has **Bologna process** influenced nowadays teaching?

2. Has the use of **technology helped** your learning process and/or your academic writing outcomes? In what ways?

3. Which **virtual resources** are more useful for your academic literacy?
   
a) **On-line multilingual dictionaries** (wordreference.com, Babel, Linguee, for example.)

b) **Self-learning websites** (Mansion del inglés, British Council…)

c) **On-line translation engines** (Google Translator, Newspapers…)

d) **UAB intranet materials**: Nomenclator, Argumenta program, etc.

e) **Others**: Please specify!
4. Do the steps that you follow during the writing process involve **the use of the ICTs**? How exactly?

5. Do you proofread before handing your assignments using **multilingual spell-checkers**, for example?

6. Grade 1-5 (min-max) the importance of ICTS in **foreign language learning**.

7. Can you **recommend any link, website, resource, etc.** that you consider essential for any language learner (especially foreign language ones)?

8. Do you **use ICTs** in the same way and with the same frequency when dealing with your **mother tongue** (Spanish/Catalan) acquisition and practice as when learning a **foreign language**?
5. Results & Discussion

95% of students find ICTs **useful** for their learning process and grade its importance in 4/5 points.

99% of students use ICTs when dealing with **foreign language acquisition** (English)

**Only 10%** of students use ICTs when dealing with their mother tongue (**Spanish/Catalan**) academic literacy.
Students make **frequent use** of multilingual dictionaries, *Google* translator and self-learning websites. However, the use of **spell and grammar-checkers** is not so popular among students’ academic practices.

They **complain** about some teachers not using the virtual environment suitably: not posting notices or useful materials in the CV, not providing on-line feedback or appointments. **Scarce** use of power points and prezi …
Students’ voices

“I think that Bologna process aims to improve university education and to unify it in Europe but I think that this will not be possible if the resources devoted to Education are becoming fewer every year (as it happens in Spain now)”

“The use of ICTs has helped my writing outcomes: by using the PC I can write and rewrite, correct and modify my writings easily and quickly. The translator is also a useful tool to revise and to find synonyms”
“The use of the Internet always helps me to find journal articles, book chapters, presentations or other resources to complete the information given at lessons”

“The use of Technology has helped my learning process as it makes the communication between the teacher and the student and among students much easier”

“I use ICTs in almost all the steps of the writing process except for the brainstorming of ideas, where I use a paper and a pen...”
“Instead of a pay raise, I’m adding you to my friends list on Facebook.”
THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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