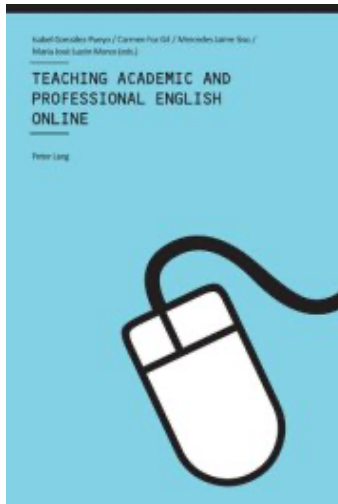


## Book Review

### *Teaching Academic and Professional English Online*



**Eds. Isabel González-Pueyo, Carmen Foz Gil, Mercedes Jaime Siso & María José Luzón Marco (2009)**

***Teaching Academic and Professional English Online***

**Bern: Peter Lang AG**

**ISBN: 978-3-03911-582-2 (pb 229 pages)**

*Teaching Academic and Professional English Online* represents a clarifying and dynamic view of the way in which the integration of ICT is transforming teaching and learning contexts. ICT in education have motivated changes in learning materials, changes in the role of teachers as mediators, facilitators and guides, and changes in the strategies used in order to make education more efficient and functional. The volume consists of nine contributions from different educational contexts and institutions; a compilation which clearly represents how language teaching professionals are devoting their efforts and experience to creating and designing online tasks and materials while sharing their opinions and concerns, and their empirical and practical experiences during the phases of design and implementation of projects and materials design. The contributions focus on the fields of both academic and professional English, which provides a more complete and representative view.

María José Luzón, one of the editors, is also the author of the first chapter. Her contribution represents an introduction to the contents which are part of the book. She offers a dynamic and practical overview of some of the most relevant aspects concerning the field of learning academic and professional English online by dealing with the integration of technology, language learning, and disciplinary knowledge. This first part sheds light on the use of ICT in language learning contexts by dealing with all the factors which could affect the way in which English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is taught and learnt. Her contribution does not ignore the Bologna process. The aim of fostering mobility within the European Higher Education Area and "preparing students to become autonomous life-long learners" (p. 13) are seen as the main reasons why learning a second language, particularly English, has become one of the major demands within European students' curricula. New technologies and online resources are seen as the most useful and efficient alternatives to make language learning and practice easier and more functional.

María José Luzón considers possible challenges and limitations, but also reflects on the flexibility and achievements accomplished during recent years. "Interaction and collaboration with authentic audiences and for authentic purposes while increasing students' motivation" (p. 16) and "the potential contribution to the development of autonomy and higher order thinking" (p. 18) are seen as the main advantages. The

author also considers pedagogical principles that are relevant when designing learning environments such as the choice of technical features, methodological principles and conditions with the aim of setting goals and choosing the strategies to achieve them. The author also includes an overview of a number of online environments and tools for communication and collaboration which would increase the possibilities and benefits when learning a language by incorporating innovative solutions.

Ruth Trinder reflects on the potential of blended learning environments and the way they could benefit language learning conditions. She very helpfully offers an explanatory definition and background information which clarifies the "blended learning" concept. The author also sets the basis for her research; the university context where the study has been conducted, as well as the participants' attitudes and expertise. She also offers a structured and personal overview of the materials which are part of the project, and schematically fixes language learning conditions and her research interest: "exploring those factors which impact on students' choices in a BL environment" (p. 39) and an attempt to "identify a set of criteria that potentially promote language learning" (p. 39). After this, the reader finds a dynamic presentation of the empirical case study, the procedure which has been followed and the results obtained, distributed according to scales by following a comparison between traditional or computer mediated interaction; interaction and negotiation of meaning, tasks, sources, learner choice and control, atmosphere, feedback and cognition. A combination of traditional and innovative possibilities seems to be the perfect option for language learning contexts according to the research study. After the results, the reader finds a section devoted to the discussion of the main issues and final conclusions, in which both premises and results are taken into consideration.

Elisabet Arnó Macià, Carmen Rueda Ramos and Antonia Soler Cervera contribute with their experience in designing a virtual learning environment for students of English for Academic Purposes through the Quantum LEAP project (funded by the Catalan regional government - Generalitat de Catalunya). This group has devoted great effort in designing and developing teaching materials as an attempt to improve communication skills in a language learning context (complying with the Bologna guidelines of the European Higher Education Area). The aim of the project was to create a "flexible ICT tool that could be adapted to different learning modalities" (p. 58). The contribution shows the framework for the creation of this versatile tool by setting the basis and explaining the aims of a project which would support both face-to-face tuition and self-access learning. Among its multiple functionalities, students have access to an electronic portfolio allowing them to keep a record of their oral and written production, an important resource when trying to foster communication and oral production skills. Screenshots permit the reader to clearly visualise the tool's interface and distribution of content, which helps to better understand the theoretical issues. According to authors, the development of online materials can be seen as a way of promoting autonomy by means of "motivation, integration of web-based activities with other course activities, learner-centredness and scaffolding, and engagement in higher-level thinking and development strategies" (p. 62). This section also pays special attention to the way in which linguistic skills can be developed through innovative web-based teaching and learning environments. An overview of the way the tool could promote learning and develop reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. The authors mention some of the key factors which could promote student autonomy and offer some useful guidelines and recommendations for anybody interested in developing online materials.

Ana Gimeno devotes her contribution to this compilation to presenting one of the major achievements of the CAMILLE Research Group (Universidad Politécnica de Valencia), the *InGenio* Project. She reflects upon the rapid expansion of teaching online in the 21st century, especially in terms of teaching languages, and particularly English. She also includes a very interesting issue directly connected with the learners' level of proficiency: it is thought that those who are "beginners or elementary learners prefer face-to-face tuition and classroom contact, whereas intermediate and advanced learners are more willing to explore autonomous learning scenarios" (p. 83). This idea could

represent an explanation of the limited number of language teachers who try to create their own materials as a response to their specific needs. But the main aim of this article is geared towards presenting the InGenio tool as a pioneer "online authoring shell and an entirely web-based multilingual tool" (p. 84) which enables teachers from all around the world to develop and implement their own language courses and be able to respond to their specific teaching and contextual demands. The time of focusing on the learner rather than on the teacher when designing (web-based) materials has arrived. This is the reason why InGenio is presented as a robust and flexible tool which can "suit a large number of teaching methodologies" (p. 87), enabling its graphical user interface and its content to be translated and adapted into as many source languages as need be. The creation of different types of exercises is possible by means of the multiple exercise templates available when using this authoring shell. Ana Gimeno also presents some other utilities and functionalities of the tool; the possibility of providing reference materials in order to make the learning process more dynamic, an explanation of how assessment is conducted, different feedback modalities, and the existence of an online tutor interface, which allows a personal control over students' progress. Screenshots and the presentation of an existing course for students of "Intermediate Online English" are the final points of a clearly structured presentation of the InGenio online tool.

M<sup>a</sup> Luisa Carrió Pastor analyses the fact of enhancing Learner-Teacher collaboration by using online activities. She reports about the positive clues of this collaborative attitude between the participants taking part in the learning process. The focus has been two-fold as there are two bases of study; learning and teaching. In the case of learning, "students would collaborate in the update of specific material, which would be appropriate to their needs" (p. 107). In the teaching section, the study would focus on the fact that "teachers from different areas of knowledge would collaborate in developing tasks that would reinforce language skills" (p. 107). The author remarks that combining the benefits of technology, the usefulness of a collaborative learning process and appropriate content and language integrated learning would increase the possibilities of succeeding in the final results as it would allow us to obtain "communicative, active, and professionally-oriented materials for specific contexts" (p. 108). Maria Luisa Carrió sets the theoretical bases of the collaborative language learning process and its connection with the context of CLIL (content and language integrated learning). Her work tries to be not only a clarifying view of the importance of collaboration between learners and teachers, but also a space for sharing experiences and recommendations in an attempt to "improve second language awareness and social interaction skills" (p. 113). This article includes other sections devoted to the process of material design and some real examples of practice through the implementation of CSCL and CLIL tasks. At the end, the fact that the efficiency of the research is proved by mentioning that not only second language teachers but also content teachers make use of the resulting material is emphasized. Some other positive aspects are included in the final remarks, as is the case of students who considered activities as authentic and the additional "flexibility and user-friendliness" experienced by them.

M<sup>a</sup> Camino Bueno Alastuey presents a real case of study and focuses on the context of English for Agriculture. After paying attention to some of the benefits and excellences of introducing technology into English learning contexts, particularly into the EFL environment, she remarks that its integration into the curriculum has usually been arduous. She also presents the general ideas which define a context characterized by students who need to face an individualised learning process in order to cater for specific needs (p. 128). The aim of her study would be to explore "the possibilities of WebCT and the effect different organization, layouts and tools have in students and teachers" (p. 129). Firstly, the author sets the general WebCT and language learning bases to go on with an overview of a real language course focused on the context of English for Agriculture (connected with the areas of English for Specific Purposes and Content and Language Integrated Learning). A report about the way in which the course started and the changes introduced during recent years is also included. The article concludes by presenting both teachers' and students' perceptions, showing the strong and weak points in each case, which is really useful for the reader to have a global overview of the process presented. The conclusions are seen as an attempt to respond

to several questions which are formulated as the main challenges of combining WebCT with language learning and the consideration of the contribution that they could make by "promoting motivation, increasing the exposure to both authentic oral and written texts, tasks and exchange and providing meaningful language use" (p. 149). The main and detailed recommendation would be fostering changes in a progressive and continuous way.

Antonella Elia focuses on the role of a collaborative Wiki Weblish Dictionary Project as an attempt to help academic writing of ICT language learners. Her work is devoted to presenting "a world of collaborative opportunities" offered by the Internet (p. 153). The author offers a rapid overview of some of the developments and innovations belonging to the Web 2.0, such as of blogs, wikis, etc. which are usually seen as motivating tools when dealing with language learning. Antonella highlights wikis as the most representative case among collaborative devices in an attempt to offer a clarifying definition and some real examples of what they are and how they work. The main issue is the role of wikis as communities of practice, which would provide "excellent collaborative environments" specially when considering that "learning is a fundamentally social phenomenon" which demands practice, participation, reification, negotiation, etc. The author emphasizes the advantages of trusting students not only as receivers of information, but also as participants in a context which offers them answers and questions, a context which would enable students' exchange of ideas, group interaction, shared knowledge, etc. Weblish is presented as a new variety of ICT language and "one of the most creative domains of contemporary English". Some of its linguistic features are also highlighted by following a very clear, complete and consistent distribution of content. Antonella Elia also tries to verify whether Weblish is a danger for academic writing by presenting a study which shows that "younger generations are undoubtedly familiar and comfortable with the use of Weblish" (p. 167) but which also alerts about different points of view when referring to the degrading or enriching role of Weblish when combined with English language learning. After the theoretical introduction, the issues, bases and results concerning the experimental *Wiki Weblish Dictionary* are presented. Conclusions show that "students have demonstrated new metalinguistic awareness and expertise" when they are asked to distinguish the appropriate register to use according to the chatting or formal composition demands.

Philippa Mungra devotes her contribution to analysing the online delivery of a writing course, in this case, a blended language course integrated into medical studies. Decisions concerning implementation were made as an attempt to comply with the pedagogical aims, taking into account that receivers of the course would be students belonging to the final years of English at Rome University Medical School. Time is seen as a central issue when considering the importance of developing courses such as these, specially when addressed to medical students who are not always able to attend face-to-face lessons due to the large number of clinical hours. According to the author, these facts had an important effect on implementation issues, i.e. "student autonomy, integration with subject teaching and time-flexibility for students" (p. 181). Philippa Mungra addresses the fact that "effective pedagogy requires learning in the most stimulating environment" (p. 182). This is a significant idea when referring to delivering an online language (writing) course. The article offers a presentation of the structure and distribution of contents in modules for four different academic years. The description of the writing course includes different academic genres, highlighting the fact that the main intention is to foster "skills in communication in a future professional setting" (p. 188). The author presents a final discussion and assessment about this teaching experience by taking into consideration the tools which were used, the types of tasks included and the degree of efficiency of the employed model. In spite of mentioning many advantages such as timetable freedom and additional motivation for students to improve their reading and writing skills, Philippa Mungra also alerts about some important areas of concern such as possible plagiarism and the copy-paste feature.

Jaroslav Krajka closes the compilation by writing about promoting discovery learning in English for academic and professional purposes (EAP/ESP). The author considers that “the lack of properly developed materials provided by publishers make some English teachers find and adapt appropriate teaching resources” (p. 209). Corpora and concordances are seen as the scaffolding for this particular approach to curriculum development. The impact and popularization of internet has also helped to proliferate corpora resources while making them more flexible to the requirements of different teaching contexts. Jaroslav Krajka presents the project as an attempt to promote this kind of innovative learning by “involving students to a much greater extent” in some of the important phases of the learning process (p. 212). The concordancing procedures are presented as a significant teaching aid in many aspects. The author does not forget about the psychological, logistical (technical) and administrative considerations when developing innovative learning approaches and methodologies. Jaroslav Krajka addresses the need for also preparing teachers as learners of new utilities and functionalities, which would make the whole process feasible with their future students. The article also presents some screenshots which allow the reader to see what the interface is like and how information and contents are distributed. A training proposal to introduce ESP students to online concordancing-based learning is one of the last and most clarifying sections in this article, as it does not only include an explanation of the general concepts but also real experiences of ICT training for ESP students, as well as a structured list showing the stages for in-class and also self-study work. A brief conclusion section alerts about the need to find applications of technology that would allow a successful integration of the components which take part in the learning process.

The nine contributions compiled in this volume can be seen as an elucidating mixture of challenging cases and innovative solutions which are very different if compared with each other but which share an sole aim; that of improving and making more efficient the language learning process. Finding such a complete and interesting repertoire presenting multiple research scenarios sheds light on a field which is followed by an important research community and helps to encourage them to continue working and searching for solutions which can respond to some of the challenges proposed. Contributors show divergent research methodologies and interests of study, but share the will of taking advantage of recent technological developments to improve education. They also share a non-conformist point of view which leads them to create new materials, to adapt tools and developments to their real needs, always bearing in mind the figure of the learner, the one who would notice the final benefit and improvement in education, usually achieved through compilations of research studies like *Teaching Academic and Professional English Online*.

**Antonio Martínez Sáez**  
**Universidad Politécnica de Valencia (Spain)**