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**Special Issue: Multimodality and the digital turn in teaching business
discourse**

Guest Editors

Judith Ainsworth | Virginia Pulcini

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Multimodality and the digital turn in teaching business discourse. An Introduction to the Special Issue

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1. Digital technologies and multimodal discourse

The study of digital discourse emerged through the use of diverse mediated discourses to communicate information. The discourse analytical tools that had been originally formulated to analyse language use were then extended to the analysis of digital discourse and to studies on digital business discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2009; Darics, 2015, 2016). However, common patterns of interaction in the digital world are changing and new patterns of interaction have emerged, particularly those concerning socio-semiotic resources for online configurations of forms of interaction such as video, blogging and social networking (Sindoni, 2013). The dynamic combination of multiple symbols and semiotic resources within a specific communication context has resulted in the emergence of multimodal discourse (Liu et al., 2024). Thus the analysis of discourse includes various semiotic resources and the study of a diverse array of mediated communication modalities including words, images, colour and sounds in the interactive and compositional meaning-making process (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). These new interactive modalities blur the distinction between oral and written discourse in digital texts. They challenge the current way of conducting linguistic analysis as simply analysing oral and written texts, and require multimodal frameworks of analysis (Sindoni, 2013).

In many ways, multimodality should always be part of digital discourse studies, as it has been considered a core concept in sociocultural linguistics and discourse analysis for some time (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Given the increasingly multimedia and multimodal nature of digital communication and the growing complexity of multimedia formats and media, the study of language symbols, both verbal and non-verbal, provides a broader socio-semiotic perspective to digital discourse studies (Thurlow et al., 2020). In this way, speech and writing are considered language modes and, as semiotic resources, on a par with image, colours, sound, etc. (Sindoni, 2013).

Liu et al. (2024) stress that discourse is a core research object with language as a key component of multimodal discourse studies (MDS). The authors find that applying semiotic resources across social media, identity, literacy, politics, education and gender illustrates MDS's broad scope and focus on knowledge construction and cognition, thus demonstrating interdisciplinary trends. While the literature in the field of multimodal studies is wide and varied for a number of disciplines, Liu et al.'s (2024) bibliometric analysis of MDS revealed that the study of multimodal discourse emerged gradually over the last 25 years. In fact, 2012 was the year when publications in multimodal discourse studies started to noticeably increase. On the other hand, of the most frequently discussed topics, only 17 publications concerned business disciplines compared to the top category, linguistics, with 496 publications. Overall, social sciences and humanities benefitted the most from multimodal discourse studies. Thus, this Special Issue fills this gap by providing a collection of activities for teaching and learning multimodal business discourse that are specifically tailored to the business communication context.

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One example of a multimodal business discourse study is Garzone's (2009) exploration of multimodal corporate communication in the Campbell Soup website. She discovered the extensive and effective use of multimodal resources that depict the company's distinctive American identity. Another example is Portman's (2020) social semiotic analysis of Instagram, which is used for corporate marketing focussing on food visualisation by two grocery chains in Switzerland. Although the depicted food was banal, the semiotic resources employed by the two grocery chains gave the impression that the food was more related to social hierarchies of taste and privilege. Drawing on the social semiotic approach to multimodality, Xia (2023) analysed how visual and verbal resources are strategically employed and combined in TED talks to explain complicated scientific knowledge to lay audiences. The results offer strategies for disseminating more engaging and accessible knowledge, as well as expanding semiotic and communicative repertoires that are increasingly crucial in the digitally driven world we live in.

Furthermore, students must understand these socio-semiotic resources and their meaning making in specific communicative contexts in order to produce effective multimodal communication for the digital age, and to be able to respond to the digital demands of the job market. Instructors need new pedagogical tools to help them move from conventional teaching practices, such as the curricula and qualitative assessment measures that categorise and judge individual performance, to more fluid learning and teaching practices in the context of multiliteracies and new pedagogies oriented towards multimodal digital texts, practices and communities (Sindoni & Moschini, 2022). Therefore, this Special Issue fills this gap by providing studies of innovative multimodal pedagogical practices.

2. Challenges for teaching multimodal business discourse

A growing number of university students, both native and non-native speakers of English, expect to acquire high-level digital communication skills and competences to successfully handle business communication in their future careers. These students belong to the so-called 'generation Z' (born between 1997 and 2012), an age group with innate digital fluency, active use of social media and expert consumption of visual and aural communication. In the digitalised information age, workers need to manage strategic collaboration activities and information flows within and across organisations (Pfeffermann & Gould, 2017). Indeed, digitalised information has led them to reassess management discourse, particularly the use of multimodal discourse. Thus, lecturers and trainers in higher education are faced with new pedagogical challenges to answer the needs and expectations of these new cohorts of highly digitalised learners.

The manifold facets of business communication and the great variety of genres, both written and oral (Garzone & Gotti, 2011) have been strongly impacted by the overwhelming power of the visual component and by the use of digital technologies. Remediation of traditional channels of communication (ranging from brochures to web based genres) and resemiotisation (from verbal texts to a range of semiotic resources) have modified the way communication takes place today. Lecturers and trainers are challenged by the rapidly evolving media and the new forms of digital communication more than ever, and are therefore called upon to reshape their materials and methods. These redesigned materials and methods must train students to identify and analyse the grammar of visual discourse (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) and how business communication takes shape through new media. Without previously analysing the discourse of online genres such as emails (Roshid et al., 2022), blogs, text messages, forums (Angouri & Tseliga, 2010) and networked interactions (McKee & Porter, 2017), students may run the risk of appearing impolite (Decock & Depraetere, 2018), miscommunicating, reducing productivity and harming business relationships (Davis et al., 2009), or sending the wrong signals (Skovholt & Svennevig, 2013).

Another ongoing issue is declining literacy (Sindoni, 2013). Only in the last ten years have multimodal discourse studies emphasised solving social and educational issues. Recent developments in multimodal literacy suggest that the integration of multimodal discourse analysis in various disciplines, as well as the broad application of multimodal resources and pedagogies, have a positive effect on digital literacy in social media and language learning contexts (Liu et al., 2024; Sindoni, 2013). Thus students and instructors need to understand various symbols, both verbal and non-verbal, and their collective influence on the construction of effective multimodal discourse.

In spite of the need for new forms of digitalised communication pedagogies, previous research into teaching business communication has mainly focused on business discourse (Ainsworth, 2020; Alessi & Jacobs, 2016; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2009; Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2013; Darics, 2015; Mautner & Reiner, 2017; Pfeffermann & Gould, 2017), genre approaches and models to teach business communication (Ainsworth,

2021; Daly & Davy, 2016; Jonsson & Blåsjö, 2020; Szanajda & Ou, 2017) and language for business (Darics & Koller, 2018). Less attention has been paid to teaching semiotic strategies that take into consideration the multimodal dimension of business communication (Hartle et al., 2022). Even less emphasis has been placed on pedagogical approaches for teaching business discourse (Ilie et al., 2019; Mautner, 2016). Thus, students need to learn new discourse strategies for effective online communication in business contexts (Darics, 2016; Jensen, 2009). They need to understand the role of online discourse and methods to socially and professionally construct appropriate discursive interactions in the evolving digital business economy (Pfeffermann & Gould, 2017).

Other elements to consider are broader developments in society, particularly societal values, attitudes and beliefs, which bring new ideas and new contents involving profound changes in discursive practices and patterns of interaction. The complexities of teaching business discourse have increased as communication flows have intensified (Pfeffermann & Gould, 2017). Moreover, different organisational and professional discourse communities need to be considered when developing teaching methods and materials (Brueckner et al., 2018). Therefore, academics need to consider the impact of different contexts on new teaching modes and practices in multimodal business discourse that mirror the evolving socioeconomic environment of this digital age.

3. Contributions

Drawing from scholars, teachers and practitioners in the fields of business discourse and business communication, the papers included in this Special Issue exploit the impetus of digital technology and multimodal resources in communication to propose the application of innovative pedagogical approaches and materials to the ESP classroom. The project was initiated on the occasion of the ABC Europe, Africa and Middle East Conference held in Naples in January 2023.

The paper by Basanta, Vangehuchten and Van Herck addresses the goal to teach ESP students to handle professional email messages in response to online complaints, a professional skill also known as 'webcare' that requires specific pragmatic-discursive competence. On the basis of a corpus of authentic responses to complaints about products or services in the field of telecommunications, the authors first present a theoretical framework to identify the presence of defensive and/or accommodating response strategies as well as, at the rhetorical level, the content of the conversational human voice (CHV). Then they propose the application of this analytical model to the teaching of language mediation strategies specific to the genre of email messages in the cultural context of Spanish business discourse. This paper contains a wealth of example activities leading students to recognize discourse moves and submoves in email discourse, learn to use defensive vs accommodating strategies, safeguard the company's reputation, show empathy and propose an effective resolution for the customer's complaint.

In order to meet the learning needs of MA students in a Department of Modern Languages specializing in international communication, Giacosa and Pulcini describe a course in English Language and Linguistics in which students study corporate crises. The authors redesigned the course combining the observation of language patterns through the use of professional communication language corpora and the multimodal analysis of company websites. The teaching method was task-based to stimulate student engagement and critical thinking through practical group activities. This paper particularly examines students' feedback obtained by tutors through an end-of-course questionnaire, a common practice in higher education to provide quality assurance. The results confirm that the modules of CMC and multimodality helped the most to develop students' professional skills; the module on corpus linguistics contributed to the development of English competence; the choice of this course's content and pedagogical framework greatly contributed to the refinement of students' digital skills. Overall, the strong interdisciplinary nature and relevance to the world of business were the most appreciated characteristics of this course.

Meredith's paper deals with and stresses the importance of blended mobility for training students in international business communication. In the face of increasingly AI-driven work environments, the benefits of a course aimed at developing 'human intelligence' skills such as intercultural competencies, communication skills, problem-solving, critical and analytical thinking are presented and discussed. The outcomes of the blended program that involved business students from universities in the United States and Hungary in 2022, 2023 and 2024 emerge from the analysis of students' self-reflection narratives. Digital media literacy appears to be the starting point for the learning of a much wider range of 'employability skills' that are fostered by the combination of technology-based and short-term physical contact, including 'real world' experience, self-

awareness, adaptability, conflict resolution and increased confidence to successfully face an increasingly interconnected and globalized world.

Parini proposes the introduction of audio-visual material with automatic subtitles in the ESL/ESP classroom to improve students' listening, translation and post-editing skills. After an exhaustive overview of audio-visual translation and of technological advances in the generation of interlingual and intralingual subtitles through the application of automatic speech recognition and machine translation, the author presents a microteaching experience with a TED talk video on the topic of marketing, broadcast by YouTube. Students were first encouraged to identify, classify and correct mistakes in the intralingual subtitles generated by the speech recognition system and subsequently to analyze the 'cascading' errors in the automatic intralingual Italian subtitles. The benefits of this activity may not only impact on students' language competence but also on their exposure to and engagement with sophisticated digital technology, which, despite its remarkable progress, cannot do without human supervision to guarantee high standards.

The digital format of Annual Corporate Reports is an example of genre migration in business communication to the digital environment, moving away from a traditional paper or static pdf format to a multimodal artifact. A collection of video CEO statements is analyzed by Ruiz-Garrido and Palmer-Silveira from a multimodal perspective in order to pursue the attendant goal of exploiting these materials in the ESP classroom to enhance students' business communication skills. Videos are indeed a new digital genre and a powerful medium to inform stakeholders about the company's performance and present a positive narrative of its identity. Moreover, the authors claim that "the humanized discourse fulfilled by the CEO's emotions and attitudes is an asset of multimodal discourse that the written statement can hardly achieve". The authors suggest that the use of these materials may greatly contribute to the development of students' public speaking competence, engagement strategies and leadership skills.

The final paper by Strong presents a model to assess digital multimodal communication literacy, based on 4ML (four meta-literacies), i.e. digital literacy, multimedia skill literacy, multimodal design literacy and rhetorical literacy, which she summarizes using the descriptive labels of 'responsibility', 'skill', 'design' and 'audience'. In order to evaluate the efficacy of this model, a case study conducted in a business communication course in the United States in 2022 and based on the evaluation of student-created presentation slides, is described in detail. The researcher used a scoring rubric to evaluate two sets of students' slide decks in different semesters, to which a visual analysis of multimodal content was added. The results of this study show that digital literacy (the ability to present information in digital format) was the initial lowest skill, while rhetorical literacy (the appropriate and audience-centric use of language) was the initial highest skill. The intervention of explicit instruction determined an overall growth of all meta-literacies, but digital literacy was the skill that scored the most significant improvement. This study shows that a model for a structured, systematic evaluation of users' digital and multimodal skills may have a strong diagnostic power to implement adequate training of digitally literate workforce and content creators for communication in the new digital business landscape.

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La competencia pragma-discursiva en las respuestas por correo electrónico a reclamaciones: una propuesta didáctica para el aula de español de los negocios

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ABSTRACT

ES En el actual contexto B2C (Business to Consumer, de negocio a consumidor), y pese al auge de los nuevos medios de comunicación, las empresas optan por gestionar las reclamaciones de manera individual a través del correo electrónico y originan, de esta manera, un género de comunicación profesional único. En este estudio, analizamos los rasgos pragma-discursivos de este género para facilitar su aprendizaje en el aula de español como lengua extranjera para fines profesionales. Examinamos tres aspectos de un corpus de español peninsular: la estructura discursiva específica de estos mensajes de respuesta; las estrategias defensivas y acomodativas o complacientes que se usan en ellos y la realización lingüística de la Voz Humana Conversacional. Presentamos una propuesta didáctica que aborda estas particularidades mediante ejercicios que incrementan el espíritu crítico del alumnado su conocimiento de la lengua así como de la cultura que transmite. Así, se les capacita para tomar decisiones comunicativas adaptadas a la situación lingüística y cultural, sin limitarse a una mera traducción automática desde su primera lengua.

Key words: LENGUAS PARA FINES ESPECÍFICOS, ESPAÑOL PARA LOS NEGOCIOS, RESPUESTAS ELECTRÓNICAS A QUEJAS, ANÁLISIS DE CORPUS

EN Despite the rise of new means of communication, in the current B2C (Business to Consumer) context, businesses opt to individually handle complaints via email, thus giving rise to a unique professional communication genre. In this study, we analyze the pragma-discursive characteristics of this genre to facilitate classroom learning of Spanish as a foreign language for professionals. We examine three aspects of a corpus of Peninsular Spanish: the specific discursive structure of these response messages; the defensive, accommodating, or helpful strategies that are used in them; and the linguistic production of the Conversational Human Voice. We present a didactic proposal that approaches these aspects through exercises that increase the critical attitude of learners and their knowledge of the language and culture that it conveys. In this way, they will be prepared to make communication decisions that are adaptable to linguistic and cultural situations and not limited to a mere automatic translation from their first language.

Palabras clave: LANGUAGE FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES, SPANISH FOR BUSINESS, ELECTRONIC RESPONSES TO COMPLAINTS, CORPUS ANALYSIS

IT Nell'attuale contesto B2C (Business to Consumer, dall'impresa al consumatore), nonostante l'ascesa dei nuovi mezzi di comunicazione, le aziende scelgono di gestire i reclami individualmente tramite posta elettronica, e in tal modo creano una tipologia di comunicazione professionale unica. Nel presente studio, analizziamo le caratteristiche pragmatico-discorsive di questa tipologia per facilitarne l'apprendimento nella classe di spagnolo come lingua straniera per scopi professionali. Esaminiamo tre aspetti di un corpus dello spagnolo peninsulare: la struttura discorsiva specifica per tali messaggi di risposta, le strategie utilizzate, difensive ed espansive oppure accomodanti, e la realizzazione linguistica della Voce Umana Conversazionale. Si presenta una proposta didattica che tratta tali peculiarità attraverso esercizi che incrementino il pensiero critico degli apprendenti, la loro conoscenza della lingua e della cultura che veicola. In questo modo si è formati nel prendere decisioni comunicative adatte alla situazione linguistica e culturale, senza limitarsi ad una mera traduzione automatica dalla propria lingua.

Parole chiave: LINGUAGGI SPECIALISTICI, SPAGNOLO PER LE IMPRESE, MAIL DI RISPOSTA A RECLAMI, ANALISI DI CORPUS

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1. Introducción

Desde hace algún tiempo, en la enseñanza de las lenguas con fines específicos, tanto L1 como L2 y Ln, se afirma que la renovación curricular es indispensable (Breeze, 2020; Darics, 2019; Darics & Clifton, 2019; Darics & Koller, 2019). En este sentido, la adquisición de los aspectos discursivos y pragmáticos de la comunicación profesional resulta primordial. Con la creciente digitalización y multimodalidad de la comunicación, también aumenta la hibridación de los géneros y discursos profesionales, por lo que precisamente en estas competencias debería centrarse la nueva generación de cursos de lenguas con fines específicos (LSP, por su sigla en inglés) (Gee, 2014; Hyland, 2002). Como subrayan Hartle, Facchinetti and Franceschi (2022), la enseñanza eficaz de las LSP requiere un enfoque dinámico que tenga en cuenta estas necesidades comunicativas cambiantes de la práctica profesional. Esto requiere considerar el desarrollo de las competencias transversales, la mediación, la alfabetización informacional, el multilingüismo y la multiculturalidad. En efecto, los estudiantes no solo deben aprender a comunicarse eficazmente en distintas lenguas, sino también a adaptarse a las diversas formas y canales de comunicación utilizados en los entornos profesionales modernos. Además, deben ser capaces de participar en interacciones interculturales complejas y comprender cómo los matices culturales pueden afectar al significado y la eficacia de su comunicación (Sanz Gil, 2021). De hecho, el aumento de los contactos internacionales en la mayoría de los ámbitos de la vida social, académica y económica contribuyen al incremento de la necesidad de una enseñanza especializada de idiomas. El trabajo de Márquez Reiter & Hidalgo Dowling (2020) corrobora esta afirmación al argumentar que la globalización ha incrementado significativamente las demandas de competencias comunicativas profesionales, tanto en la necesidad del dominio de la lengua, como en la flexibilidad comunicativa intercultural.

Ahora bien, la enseñanza de LSP en lenguas extranjeras, al igual que la educación en general, está viviendo tiempos disruptivos. GenAI ha provocado un verdadero cambio de paradigma (Muñoz-Basol, Fuertes Gutiérrez & Cerezo, 2024). Los estudiantes son ahora capaces de preparar un texto prácticamente sin errores. Naturalmente, esto plantea a los profesores de LSP el reto de adaptar su docencia. Las investigaciones de Hsu & Ching (2023) y Rashid, Duong-Trung & Pinkwart (2024) sugieren que las tecnologías de IA están cambiando tanto la forma de aprender de los estudiantes como el papel de los profesores en la enseñanza. De ahí que este reto también encierre una oportunidad. Como muestra el estudio de Gil de Montes Garín & Oliva Sanz (2023), es crucial que los profesores y departamentos responsables de la enseñanza de las LSP actualicen sus propios conocimientos y habilidades, rediseñen sus cursos y aprovechen esta oportunidad para convertirse en expertos en comunicación profesional. El uso de GenAI como asistente lingüístico para sus alumnos ofrece a los profesores el tiempo y la oportunidad de desplazar su atención de la corrección lingüística hacia análisis más profundos de la pragmática y el discurso. Anthony (2018) apoya esta actitud al enfatizar cómo la integración de la tecnología en la enseñanza de idiomas LSP permite a los profesores dedicar más tiempo a desarrollar habilidades de otro orden en sus estudiantes. Esta situación permite guiar mejor a los estudiantes en el desarrollo de habilidades de pensamiento crítico y de comunicación estratégica, indispensables en un entorno profesional.

Esta disrupción en el mundo de la educación subraya más que nunca la necesidad de una enseñanza basada en la investigación, que parta del análisis de datos auténticos e involucre al alumnado. Johns (2013) sostiene que el uso de materiales auténticos en la enseñanza no solo incrementa la relevancia y el compromiso de los estudiantes, sino que también mejora su capacidad para utilizar la lengua en contexto. En este sentido, el trabajo de Flowerdew (2008) ofrece ideas sobre cómo los enfoques basados en corpus y el análisis de datos del lenguaje natural pueden integrarse en la enseñanza de LSP y proporcionar a los alumnos las herramientas necesarias para abordar retos comunicativos complejos. Al implicar activamente a los estudiantes en el análisis y la interpretación de estos datos, se les puede formar para que reflexionen de forma crítica sobre su uso del lenguaje y tomen decisiones estratégicas que aumenten su eficacia comunicativa. De este modo, comprenderán mejor de qué manera funciona la lengua en distintos contextos profesionales y cómo pueden adaptar y mejorar sus propias competencias lingüísticas para responder mejor a las exigencias de su futuro entorno profesional.

En este artículo, compartimos una propuesta concreta para el aula de LSP que profundiza en el funcionamiento del correo electrónico profesional de respuesta a una reclamación. Este tipo de discurso y, en particular, este género digital de respuesta a quejas, precisa de una competencia pragmático-discursiva para comunicar, el *webcare*. Así se denomina la atención al cliente en línea y la gestión de la reputación a través de las redes sociales y otras plataformas digitales, que desempeña un papel crucial en las operaciones empresariales modernas (Kelleher & Miller, 2006). Según Van Noort & Willemsen (2012), un *webcare* eficaz es esencial para mantener la satisfacción y la lealtad de los clientes, especialmente en un momento en el que los consumidores utilizan cada vez más los canales digitales para expresar sus quejas y opiniones. Las empresas

que gestionan con éxito las opiniones y quejas de los clientes mediante *webcare*, resuelven problemas inmediatos, además de mejorar la reputación general de su marca y contribuir al éxito a largo plazo (Einwiller & Steilen, 2015; Van Vaerenbergh, Varga, De Keyser & Orsingher, 2018). Esto supone que el *webcare* constituye un género relevante y valioso para los estudiantes que cursan estudios empresariales a nivel académico. Se trata de formar profesionales capaces de responder con rapidez y precisión a las consultas de los clientes y adoptar un enfoque comunicativo estratégico que respalde los valores de marca y la reputación de sus futuros empleadores.

Sin embargo, estos contenidos no se abordan suficientemente en los materiales de español con fines profesionales como lengua extranjera. Villalba Ibáñez (2021) señala en su estudio que resulta muy sorprendente que el énfasis se ponga exclusivamente en cómo el usuario formula la queja y en los medios lingüísticos necesarios para transmitirla. En ninguno de los materiales examinados se trata la respuesta escrita a la reclamación, pese a que estos cursos están dirigidos a formar a los futuros profesionales que se dedicarán a la atención de los clientes. Por lo tanto, es útil desarrollar actividades didácticas de aprendizaje basadas en investigaciones empíricas que cultiven las habilidades pragma-discursivas necesarias para formular una respuesta de manera efectiva. De ahí que en este estudio presentemos, en primer lugar, los resultados de un análisis de género de correos electrónicos de respuesta a reclamaciones en el sector español de las telecomunicaciones. y, más tarde, propongamos un enfoque didáctico basado en este análisis que ayude a los estudiantes a desarrollar estas competencias esenciales ya mencionadas.

2. La paradoja personal-profesional del *webcare* en español peninsular

2.1. Datos y metodología

Como base para este estudio, partimos de un corpus existente de respuestas a correos electrónicos de reclamación del sector español de las telecomunicaciones (Van Herck & Vangehuchten, 2024). Este corpus consta de 44 respuestas auténticas de correo electrónico a reclamaciones de clientes de siete empresas de telecomunicaciones diferentes de España. Los datos se recogieron en el periodo comprendido entre febrero de 2020 y marzo de 2020. Los temas principales de los correos electrónicos se refieren a problemas de facturación, cuestiones contractuales y problemas con la calidad de los productos o servicios. Elegimos específicamente centrarnos en el sector de las telecomunicaciones, al tratarse de un servicio muy utilizado, cuyo sector es conocido por el elevado número de reclamaciones de los clientes, especialmente en España (Gobierno de España, 2019). En total, está compuesto por 655 palabras, con una media de 83,1 palabras por correo electrónico. Estos correos electrónicos de respuesta a las quejas se encuentran publicados por los clientes en las redes sociales (Facebook y Twitter/X). Para garantizar la privacidad, sólo se seleccionaron las interacciones cliente-empresa públicamente disponibles y se anonimizaron todos los correos electrónicos. Después los sometimos a un análisis en tres partes: en primer lugar, examinamos la estructura genérica de estos correos, analizando los movimientos; a continuación, comprobamos la presencia de estrategias de respuesta defensiva y acomodativa o complaciente; por último, en el plano retórico, analizamos el contenido de la voz humana conversacional (CHV según las siglas en inglés). A continuación, presentamos brevemente los marcos teóricos que constituyeron la base de los análisis.

Para estudiar la estructura de los (sub)movimientos (*moves y submoves*) utilizamos el marco de Van Herck, De Cock & Fastrich (2022), que ofrece una visión detallada y sistemática de los elementos estructurales que caracterizan la gestión profesional de las reclamaciones por correo electrónico. Esta perspectiva resulta invaluable para desarrollar prácticas de comunicación eficaces en contextos empresariales, al ayudar a las empresas a abordar las interacciones con los clientes de forma estructurada y adaptada a sus necesidades. Este tipo de análisis de movimientos permite comprender la estructura del género, ya que cada movimiento corresponde a una unidad discursiva con una finalidad comunicativa bien definida en el texto (Upton & Cohen, 2009). Van Herck et al. (2022) determinaron en su estudio que los correos electrónicos de respuesta a reclamaciones se caracterizan por seis movimientos: Apertura, Reconocimiento de la reclamación, Posicionamiento de la marca, Tratamiento transaccional de la reclamación, Observaciones finales y Cierre. En cada uno de los movimientos pueden distinguirse submovimientos, que los investigadores clasificaron según su prototipicidad. Los submovimientos típicos, que aparecen entre el 76% y el 100% de los correos electrónicos, son el Saludo, el Agradecimiento, la Conclusión, la Despedida y la Firma. Estos elementos de comunicación clara y estructurada son esenciales para proporcionar la satisfacción del cliente. Los submovimientos convencionales, que aparecen entre el 51% y el 75% de los correos electrónicos, son la Disculpa y la Declaración. Estos submovimientos muestran la responsabilidad y transparencia de la empresa,

algo crucial para restablecer la confianza. Los submovimientos opcionales, que se producen entre el 26% y el 50% de los correos, incluyen Expresiones de empatía, Referencia al contenido, Mejora de servicios/productos, Consulta y Contacto futuro. Aunque se producen con menos frecuencia, desempeñan un papel importante para mostrar la orientación al cliente y el esfuerzo por mejorar. Los submovimientos menos frecuentes, que solo aparecen en el 25% de los correos electrónicos, son Identificación, Motivo del contacto, Confirmación de recepción, Referencia a normas, Llamada a la acción, Futura compra/marketing y Solicitud de *feedback*. Estos submovimientos se aplican para fines comunicativos específicos, como fomentar una mayor interacción o recoger las opiniones de los clientes, y aportan información valiosa para mejorar los productos y servicios.

En cuanto al análisis de las estrategias de respuesta, partimos del estudio de revisión de Lopes, Dens, De Pelsmacker & Malthouse (2023). Los autores hacen una distinción básica entre las defensivas y las complacientes. Entre las estrategias defensivas, se encuentran la Denegación, la Culpabilización de la víctima, la Culpabilización de un tercero y el Autoelogio o realce de los propios méritos. Estas estrategias se deben manejar con cautela, ya que pueden conducir a una escalada de la queja, a una menor fidelidad del cliente y a un daño a la reputación a largo plazo. Las estrategias complacientes, por otro lado, resultan bastante más recomendables y pueden consistir en una Derivación a un servicio especializado, una Medida Correctiva y/o Compensatoria, Disculpas y una expresión explícita de Empatía. Investigaciones anteriores, citadas en Lopes et al. (2023), han demostrado que los clientes que reciben un trato empático y orientado a la búsqueda de soluciones tienen más probabilidades de convertir sus experiencias negativas en un boca a boca positivo y de repetir sus compras. Aunque las disculpas y la empatía ya se contemplan en el análisis genérico de los (sub)movimientos, volvemos a incluirlas en esta sección para disponer de un análisis exhaustivo de las estrategias presentes en el corpus.

La tercera parte del análisis se refiere al uso de la voz humana conversacional (CHV, en inglés). Resulta evidente que uno de los inconvenientes de la comunicación digital es su escasa riqueza mediática en comparación con los canales tradicionales. La falta de estrategias de comunicación no verbales y paraverbales, como las expresiones faciales y el tono, dificulta que los trabajadores de la web transmitan empatía y comprensión. Así pues, para superar este reto, los empleados pueden emplear estrategias comunicativas alternativas que les permitan enfatizar su conexión personal y su compromiso con el cliente. En este estudio, nos basamos en la operacionalización de este concepto adaptada al español peninsular por Van Herck & Vangehuchten (2024). Las tres categorías principales son Personalización del mensaje, Uso informal del lenguaje y Retórica invitadora. La personalización incluye el uso del nombre del cliente; el uso del nombre del empleado; el dirigirse directamente al cliente en lugar de fórmulas impersonales; y el dirigirse personalmente en nombre del empleado en primera persona, singular o plural, en lugar de impersonalmente en tercera persona con el nombre de la empresa. El uso informal del lenguaje se identifica a partir de la presencia de abreviaturas; elementos tipográficos no verbales como mayúsculas y signos de puntuación; expresiones informales, incluso en saludos y frases de despedida; y, or último, característico del español, el uso de la segunda persona del singular. La tercera categoría, la retórica de invitación, se centra en propiciar activamente un diálogo con el cliente, afirmando que el empleado volverá a ponerse en contacto (directamente), proporcionándole la posibilidad al cliente (indirectamente) o emplazándole a una acción inmediata (llamada a la acción).

2.2. Análisis y resultados

La siguiente tabla (Tabla 1) presenta los resultados del análisis de submovimientos, mostrando la presencia en números absolutos y en porcentajes, calculados sobre el total de correos. También proponemos un ejemplo del corpus en cada caso.

Tabla 1
Movimientos y submovimientos

1 Apertura	%	Example
Saludo	95.5% (42)	Estimado Cliente:
Identificación	2.3% (1)	Soy Pablo, su asesor personal.
2 Acuse de recepción		
Motivo del contacto	43.2% (19)	Nos ponemos en contacto contigo para pedirte disculpas por las molestias ocasionadas
Acuse de recibo	4.5% (2)	Hemos recibido (sic) tu reclamación
Gratitud	47.7% (21)	Por último, le agradezco la confianza que mantiene con nosotros.
Disculpas	56.8% (25)	Disculpa las molestias.
Empatía	2.3% (1)	Son muchos los clientes que opinan lo mismo que usted que no es justo que tenga que pagar la persona que llama y no la que tiene contratado este servicio; es cierto que la locución le avisa, pero muchas veces este aviso llega demasiado tarde y es muy fácil que se le cobre si no está muy atento.
Referencia de la reclamación	27.3% (12)	Me dirijo a Vd. en contestación a la reclamación que nos ha formulado sobre el importe de las facturas [...]
3 Posicionamiento de la marca		
Referencia a estándares	0.0% (0)	/
Mejora	4.5% (2)	[...] e informarte que dejamos registrada tu queja para seguir mejorando en todo lo posible.
Marketing	15.9% (7)	Queremos aprovechar la ocasión para recomendarle que visite dos secciones en www.razónsocial.es , que pueden resultarle de utilidad: [...]
4 Tramitación		
Investigación	36.4% (16)	Hemos analizado tu caso en detalle.
Explicación	61.4% (27)	ya que no nos consta apertura de ninguna incidencia en nuestro sistema
Conclusión	86.4% (38)	Por este motivo, no podemos estimar su reclamación.
Acción necesaria del cliente	27.3% (12)	para enviar reclamación escrita debe enviarnos una carta (mejor certificada) a: [...] Indique también el CIF de su empresa, su nombre y explicar bien todo. [...]
5 Conclusiones		
Contacto futuro	50.0% (22)	si tiene alguna u otra (sic) consulta, no dude en contactar con nosotros.
Compra futura	0.0% (0)	/
Solicitud de comentarios	0.0% (0)	/
6 Cierre		
Despedida	81.8% (36)	Un saludo,
Firma	72.7% (32)	Departamento de Atención al Cliente

Aunque la estructura prototípica de los submovimientos del corpus es en gran medida similar a la del marco de Van Herck et al. (2022), se constatan algunas diferencias notables. En primer lugar, en este corpus, la Gratitud representa solo un submovimiento opcional, aunque el marco lo considera típico. En segundo lugar, la mención de Razón de contacto, poco frecuente según el marco, en nuestros datos aparece como un submovimiento opcional y, por tanto, considerablemente más presente. Por último, el submovimiento Empatía solo consta una vez en todo el corpus, mientras que es opcional según el marco. Se constata la importancia de tener en cuenta la *linguacultura* del estudio, en este caso, el español peninsular. En efecto, aunque la investigación ha demostrado que, en general, la estructura de un correo electrónico de respuesta a una queja presenta la misma estructura genérica, aparecen diferencias culturales en los submovimientos. Así, por ejemplo, la menor frecuencia del submovimiento de Gratitud es coherente con la tendencia del español

peninsular a no dar las gracias en los encuentros profesionales, como confirman los estudios pragmáticos sobre la ausencia de gratitud ritual en el español peninsular (Hickey, 2005; Pablos-Ortega, 2010; Placencia & Mancera Rueda, 2010). En cuanto a los resultados anómalos relativos a los submovimientos Razón de contacto, por un lado, y Empatía, por otro, podemos atribuirlos a la denominada paradoja Personal-Profesional del mundo comercial español peninsular (Lorenzo-Dus, 2014). Es cierto que España suele asociarse a un estilo de comunicación cálido y empático, pero existen investigaciones empíricas que demuestran que los hablantes de español peninsular muestran una tensión, en determinados contextos, profesionales entre la disyuntiva de parecer comprometidos y personales, por un lado, pero seguir utilizando un lenguaje que se perciba como suficientemente profesional y comercial, por otro (Fernández Amaya, 2022). Esta paradoja puede explicar la menor frecuencia de la Empatía como submovimiento autónomo, mientras que el Motivo del contacto, un submovimiento práctico y repetitivo que suele expresarse con expresiones formulaicas, resulta más presente.

La Tabla 2 muestra los resultados del análisis de las estrategias de respuesta, en números absolutos y en porcentajes, calculados sobre el total de correos. También proponemos un ejemplo del corpus en cada caso.

Tabla 2
Estrategias de respuesta

1 Defensivas	%	Example
Denegación	34.1% (15)	[...]le informamos que no podemos atender su solicitud, ya que no nos consta apertura de ninguna incidencia en nuestro sistema.
Culpar a la víctima	18.2% (8)	Le indicamos que le han cobrado la permanencia, Porque es usted quien ha solicitado la baja del ADSL y no por una incidencia en nuestro sistema.
Culpar a un tercero	9.1% (4)	Lamentamos comunicarle que por motivos técnicos ajenos a razónsocial no podemos activar su servicio de acceso a internet + llamadas.
Autoelogio de las mercancías	13.6% (6)	Le recordamos que en www.razónsocial.es encontrará las tarifas de movil mas competitivas del mercado, entre ahora y descubralas.
<i>Media</i>	18.8%	
2 Acomodativas o complacientes		
Redirección	27.3% (12)	Si necesita más detalle sobre este tema, le sugerimos contactar directamente con el Dpto. de Bajas.
Corrección y/o Compensación	15.9% (7)	Sigo realizando un seguimiento diario a tu caso y he puesto en marcha todas las herramientas de las que dispongo para poder resolver tu gestión.
Disculpas	56.8% (25)	Nos ponemos en contacto contigo para pedirte disculpas por las molestias ocasionadas, [...]
Empatía	2.3% (1)	Son muchos los clientes que opinan lo mismo que usted que no es justo que tenga que pagar la persona que llama y no la que tiene contratado este servicio; es cierto que la locución le avisa, pero muchas veces este aviso llega demasiado tarde y es muy fácil que se le cobre si no está muy atento.
<i>Media</i>	25.6%	

Las cifras de los análisis de las estrategias de respuesta, al igual que las de la estrategia genérica, muestran una doble imagen. Por un lado, aparece una clara voluntad de centrarse en el cliente, ya sea ofreciendo disculpas y buscando soluciones directamente, o redirigiendo. Las estrategias de respuesta complacientes se recogen entonces en un 25,6% de los correos electrónicos por término medio. Sin embargo, el porcentaje medio de estrategias defensivas también se constata como muy elevado, debido principalmente al alto porcentaje de correos que niegan la queja (34,1%) o que trasladan la culpa al propio cliente (18,2%). Aunque, como se ha mencionado anteriormente, la investigación en *webcare* desaconseja estas estrategias

defensivas, consideramos que la cultura de cortesía positiva que existe en España, acompañada de un estilo de comunicación directo y poco mitigado con el que el interlocutor pretende exculparse en la medida de lo posible, mostrando confianza en sí mismo y asertividad (Lorenzo-Dus, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Bou-Franch, 2011; Lorenzo-Dus & Bou-Franch, 2013), explica su amplia presencia en nuestro corpus. En resumen, observamos también en el análisis de las estrategias de respuesta la tensión entre el deseo de orientarse al cliente y un enfoque empresarial y orientado a los negocios.

Los resultados del análisis de CHV figuran en la Tabla 3. De nuevo, proporcionamos las cifras absolutas y los porcentajes, calculados sobre el total de correos, así como un ejemplo del corpus en cada caso.

Tabla 3
Voz humana conversacional (CHV)

1.PERSONALIZACIÓN	%	Example
Nombre del cliente	34.1% (15)	Estimado Sr. Hernández:
Nombre del empleado	25% (11)	P. Hernández / Atención al Cliente
Dirigirse al cliente con pronombres personales: <i>tú o usted</i>	100% (44)	Me dirijo a usted en respuesta a su reclamación de fecha 21/02/17,
Autor singular (con pronombre personal.): <i>yo</i>	25% (11)	He revisado tu reclamación con el número CC-2973214,
Autor plural (con pronombre personal.): <i>nosotros</i>	90.9% (40)	En cuanto sepamos algo, nos pondremos en contacto contigo
<i>Media</i>	55%	
2. DISCURSO INFORMAL		
Abreviatura	27.3% (12)	Nos dirigimos a usted en respuesta a su correo electrónico enviado el pasado mar., 13 de ene. de 2015 0:20.
Señales no verbales	9.1% (4)	en el caso de ser así, indicarle que la instalación del dispositivo NO es opcional.
Interjecciones	0% (0)	/
Expresión informal	52.3% (23)	respesto a tu desestimiento tiene (sic) 14 días para hacerlo, eso es verdad.
Trato informal (<i>tú</i>)	54.5% (24)	Disculpa la tardanza.
Saludo informal / despedida	43.2% (19)	Un saludo,
<i>Media</i>	31.1%	
3. RETÓRICA DE INVITACIÓN		
Estimular el diálogo: directo	6.8% (3)	lo he reclamado para que lo agilicen y se pongan en contacto cuanto antes contigo al número de teléfono que me has facilitado.
Estimular el diálogo: indirecto	36.4% (16)	Si tiene cualquier duda llame al 12345.
Estimular el diálogo: llamada a la acción	22.7% (10)	Para solventar el problema tienes que contactar con nosotros al 12345 y pedir hablar con el departamento de Averías.
<i>Media</i>	21.9%	

Respecto a la primera categoría, es decir, la personalización, se observa que en el 100% de los correos aparece una apelación personal con *tú* o *usted*, aunque solo se dirijan al cliente por su nombre en algo más de un tercio de los correos. Además, se constata que el empleado prefiere no destacar demasiado: solo se conoce su nombre en el 25% de los correos electrónicos y, en más del 90,9%, habla desde una perspectiva de "nosotros". Así pues, los autores de los correos parecen optar decididamente por una voz corporativa, incluso a expensas de un estilo más personal y atractivo. En cuanto a la segunda categoría, la informalidad, los datos parecen divididos y reflejan la paradoja Personal-Profesional mencionada anteriormente: la mitad de los correos utilizan el tuteo en combinación con expresiones informales, mientras que la otra mitad se ciñe al lenguaje formal. Por último, en la categoría retórica de invitación, se recurre de forma muy limitada a que el empleado mantenga activamente la comunicación (6,8%), y a que se llame al cliente a la acción (22,7%). Esto constituye una forma indirecta de informar al cliente de cualquier otra opción de comunicación (36,4%). Además, en dos correos encontramos la solicitud explícita y reforzada con elementos paralingüísticos de no

seguir comunicando, una manifestación totalmente en contra de los propios principios de la CHV, cuyo objetivo es mantener el diálogo, mostrando compromiso:

Estimado Cliente: En referencia a su petición 8345582, le informamos que no podemos atender su solicitud, ya que no nos consta apertura de ninguna incidencia en nuestro sistema. POR FAVOR NO RESPONDER A ESTE EMAIL. Para cualquier petición o consulta debe dirigirse a hola@razónsocial.com o llamando al 12345. Un saludo Equipo razónsocial

Podemos concluir que la escasa presencia de la retórica invitacional en los datos también ilustra que, aunque la cultura española peninsular sea de acercamiento, caracterizada por relaciones solidarias y estrechas, manifestarlo en un contexto profesional se siente inapropiado y da lugar a un estilo de comunicación orientado al trabajo, más bien formal y distante o poco implicado. Aunque debemos ser prudentes a la hora de generalizar los resultados de este análisis al tratarse de un corpus de tamaño muy modesto, creemos que su potencial didáctico es considerable. De ahí que presentemos en la siguiente sección una propuesta didáctica diseñada para descubrir los rasgos pragma-discursivos de este género en español peninsular.

3. Propuesta didáctica

3.1. La perspectiva postcomunicativa en la enseñanza para fines específicos

Como sostienen González Sánchez & Andiñ Herrero (2021), la era postcomunicativa también ha llegado a la enseñanza de las Lenguas para Fines Específicos (LSP) con el objetivo principal de formar a los estudiantes para que lleguen a ser profesionales internacionales críticos, capaces de enfrentarse a contenidos discursivos diversos, así como a las complejidades de los entornos laborales multilingües y multiculturales. De este modo, se pasa de formar comunicadores de éxito a formar actores sociales que puedan asumir sus responsabilidades en la sociedad cada vez más diversa, como también se argumenta en el volumen complementario del MCER (2018). El método comunicativo sigue siendo un elemento clave, pero cada vez más se integra en enfoques que se centran en el desarrollo de competencias transversales, tales como el razonamiento crítico, la alfabetización informacional y la mediación (Atienza & García, 2024; Sánchez Cuadrado, 2022; Sanz Gil, 2021). El dominio de los géneros y la comprensión de sus propiedades, como las estructuras textuales específicas y las formulaciones discursivas pragmáticas, y el conocimiento de los matices socioculturales, se consideran aspectos cruciales del uso profesional de la lengua que pueden ayudar a desarrollar estas competencias (Bhatia, 2016).

La elaboración didáctica de este estudio propone un enfoque pragma-discursivo basado en la investigación, con tareas lingüísticas construidas a partir de datos auténticos¹ seleccionados a según los resultados de la investigación y su relevancia. Esto refuerza el compromiso de los estudiantes al trabajar con ejemplos desafiantes que también podrán encontrar en su futura vida profesional. Este enfoque garantiza que los actos comunicativos se produzcan en un contexto significativo. Para que sea eficaz, las tareas deben alcanzar un cierto nivel de complejidad, para estimular a los alumnos a pensar de forma estratégica y crítica sobre su uso de la lengua en contextos profesionales, y a utilizar sus destrezas comunicativas de forma óptima para este fin. Por este motivo, recomendamos que las actividades se lleven a cabo con un público que disponga de, al menos, el nivel B2 del MCER, con los conocimientos necesarios de vocabulario y gramática ya adquiridos.

Para la elaboración concreta de las tareas, nos basamos principalmente en la metodología utilizada en Muñoz-Basols & Pérez Sinusía (2021, el enfoque por géneros en LSP), Pérez & Schnitzer (2022, el enfoque por tareas en LSP) y Arroyo Martínez (2022, multimodalidad en LSP). Proponemos una estructura que permite descubrir inicialmente el género de forma inductiva y sondear sus conocimientos previos indirectos sobre el mismo. A continuación, presentamos una serie de actividades dirigidas a aprender a reconocer y analizar activamente las características relevantes del género en cuanto a estructura de movimientos, estrategias de respuesta y tono de voz humana conversacional. La tercera fase se centra en ejercicios comunicativos, trabajando progresivamente de lo receptivo a lo productivo. En la cuarta y última fase, se enuncian algunas tareas de reflexión para transferir los conocimientos y destrezas adquiridos, de modo que los alumnos sean capaces de aplicarlos en nuevas situaciones comunicativas. Todos los ejercicios se basan en datos auténticos, principalmente del estudio presentado en la sección anterior, pero también ofrecemos ejemplos del sector de la aviación. El tiempo estimado para realizar los ejercicios de las cuatro fases son cuatro horas. No obstante, se

¹ Al tratarse de textos auténticos, aparecen frecuentemente faltas de acentuación, ortografía o puntuación.

recomienda tratar los contenidos en dos clases diferentes para que los aprendices dispongan de un periodo de asimilación de los contenidos y agudicen su reflexión crítica al respecto. Todos los ejercicios están concebidos para ser trabajados en pequeños grupos. Dejamos a consideración del profesor crear subgrupos si se ajusta mejor al perfil del alumnado y a los objetivos del curso. En el Anexo se pueden consultar nuestras sugerencias de corrección y algunas notas para ampliar la información

3.2. Entrar en materia: exploración inductiva

En la primera fase, los alumnos descubren el género de forma inductiva y se les reta a activar sus conocimientos previos indirectos sobre el género. Esto crea una base para el análisis y la comprensión posteriores.

3.2.1. Aquí tienes dos correos electrónicos auténticos.

¿Cuál te parece mejor? ¿Por qué? ¿Comunica claramente su mensaje, es coherente, el lenguaje es correcta, está ordenado, resulta cortés, no es agresivo? ¿Otras razones?

Estimado cliente.

El servicio [nombre servicio], se oferta junto con la contratación de su plan Fusión, siendo gratuito durante un año, no obstante, si usted no desea disfrutarlo debe gestionarlo a través de la página web de [nombre servicio], "nombreservicio.razónsocial.es", accediendo con su clave y seleccionando el botón de baja.

Le saluda atentamente.

*Centro de Reclamaciones razónsocial
Su satisfacción, nuestro objetivo*

Figura 1. Correo 1

Buenos días [Nombre],

ante todo pedirle disculpas por lo que ha sucedido. Son muchos los clientes que opinan lo mismo que usted que no es justo que tenga que pagar la persona que llama y no la que tiene contratado este servicio; es cierto que la locución le avisa, pero muchas veces este aviso llega demasiado tarde y es muy fácil que se le cobre si no está muy atento.

Como le he dicho antes yo no puedo anular o hacer que desaparezca este servicio, ya que supondría cambiar todas las líneas de [razónsocial]. Sí que es verdad que si hace la reclamación y la hacen más clientes tendrá más peso para que esto cambie pronto.

Para enviar reclamación escrita debe enviarnos una carta (mejor certificada) a:

*[Razónsocial]
Servicio de Defensa del Cliente
[dirección]*

En este escrito exprese su queja sobre el servicio "Llamadas Perdidas. Mensajes dictados". Indico escriba un teléfono contacto móvil. Indique también el CIF de su empresa, su nombre y explicar bien todo. Puede indicar también u correo electrónico.

Atentamente.

[Nombre Apellido]

*Em@il: razónsocial.pymes@telefonica.es
Tel: 12345
www.razónsocial.es/empresas*

Figura 2. Correo 2

3.2.2. ¿Has escrito alguna queja electrónica? ¿Mediante un formulario en la página web correspondiente o con un correo electrónico? ¿Has recibido una respuesta? ¿Te ha parecido correcta?

3.2.3. Busca en internet un correo electrónico en español que exprese una queja por un producto o por un servicio y la respuesta recibida. Puedes mirar en las páginas oficiales de una empresa en Facebook o en Twitter y usar estas palabras clave: #queja, #reclamación, #reclamar, #insatisfecho o #respuesta.

Si lo has encontrado, posiblemente es que el usuario no quedó satisfecho. Y a ti, ¿te parece correcta la respuesta? ¿Por qué? ¿Tiene una estructura apropiada? ¿Se trata de una cuestión de estilo? ¿Crees que el tono que se usa en la respuesta es correcto? ¿Qué elemento te parece que falla?

3.3. Actividades de análisis y comprensión crítica

En la segunda fase, las actividades se centran en reconocer y analizar activamente las características relevantes del género, incluida la estructura de los (sub)movimientos, las estrategias de respuesta y el tono de voz humana conversacional. Este análisis refuerza la comprensión crítica de cómo puede utilizarse eficazmente el lenguaje en contextos profesionales específicos y qué características presenta un correo electrónico de respuesta a una queja para ser considerado correcto.

Aquí proponemos un resumen de los resultados del análisis para su uso didáctico en el aula:

La estructura del movimiento genérico de los correos electrónicos muestra diferencias importantes con otras *linguaculturas*, por ejemplo, la menor frecuencia de agradecimientos y empatía, la mayor frecuencia de indicación del motivo del contacto y el acuse de recepción; también suelen aparecer una mención de comercialización y una indicación de futuro contacto. Estas conclusiones subrayan la importancia de las diferencias culturales en la comunicación profesional y la necesidad de incorporarlas a la enseñanza. Permiten a los estudiantes aprender cómo los factores culturales afectan a la manera de comunicarse en los negocios y cómo adaptar sus propias habilidades comunicativas a diferentes contextos.

El análisis de las estrategias de respuesta muestra que existe una tensión entre las estrategias defensivas y las complacientes. Aunque las estrategias complacientes, por ejemplo, disculpas y otras medidas orientadas a la solución, se prefieren por su orientación al cliente, las estrategias defensivas, como negar la queja o desviar la culpa, están muy presentes en el corpus español. Esto brinda una excelente oportunidad para enseñar a los estudiantes el impacto de las distintas estrategias de respuesta en el nivel de satisfacción del cliente y en la reputación corporativa, además de ayudarles a desarrollar prácticas de comunicación eficaces. Es importante que los estudiantes comprendan que, pese a que las estrategias complacientes sean generalmente las recomendadas, las estrategias defensivas manifiestan su utilidad en ciertas situaciones. Así, por ejemplo, las estrategias defensivas pueden reducir la percepción negativa del cliente sobre el agravio y proteger la imagen de la empresa en casos donde la responsabilidad no está claramente definida. Además, las estrategias defensivas pueden valerse de recursos de atenuación para evitar una negación directa, como i) la impersonalidad, que oculta a los participantes en la interacción (por ejemplo, *Hay un problema en la cumplimentación de su solicitud* en lugar de *Se ha equivocado al cumplimentar su solicitud*); ii) las estructuras concesivo-opositivas (por ejemplo, *Entendemos su malestar, sin embargo, en estos momentos no disponemos de la opción que solicita*); iii) el uso de palabras neutras o eufemísticas como *algún tiempo* o *situación* en lugar de *retraso* o *problema*.

Por último, el análisis retórico sugiere que, a pesar del estilo de comunicación cálido y empático característico de la cultura española, los contextos profesionales requieren a menudo un enfoque más formal y orientado al trabajo. Esto constituye una importante oportunidad de aprendizaje para los estudiantes, que pueden explorar cómo equilibrar profesionalidad y empatía en su propio estilo de comunicación. El lenguaje CHV, con elementos de personalización como el uso del nombre del cliente o del empleado y de pronombres personales (*yo/nosotros/tú/usted*), así como elementos informales como el uso de la segunda persona del singular, fórmulas de saludos y despedidas, y la evitación errores para mostrar cuidado y atención, puede ser una herramienta eficaz. En este contexto, conviene llamar la atención sobre la repercusión de una redacción descuidada, ya que los errores tipográficos y lingüísticos restan calidad a la respuesta y provocan que el cliente se sienta tratado como de segunda clase, lo que reducirá el impacto positivo del "esfuerzo percibido" (Cambra Fierro, Melero Polo & Sesé Oliván, 2013).

3.3.1. Ejercicios para reconocer los movimientos

Ejercicio 3.3.1.1.

En el siguiente ejemplo hemos marcado en gris cuatro movimientos característicos de los correos en español peninsular. ¿Puedes seleccionar el nombre del movimiento en esta lista e identificarlo?

- Agradecimiento
- Acuse de recepción
- Disculpa
- Razón del contacto
- Mención de comercialización
- Referencia a las normas o estándares de la empresa
- Propone una acción posterior

Estimado/a [Nombre],

En respuesta a tu reclamación con número de expediente 180934039 realizada en 05 de septiembre de 2018, te informamos a continuación del detalle de las actuaciones que hemos efectuado hasta el momento:

Regularización de la factura con referencia J617058433:

- Periodo facturado del 15/07/2018 al 14/08/2018
- Importe facturado: 43,43 €
- Conceptos regularizados:
Regularización sobre el importe total facturado
- Importe Regularizado total: 41.75 €. Impuestos indirectos incluidos
- Importe Regularizado que verás en tu factura: 34.50€. Impuestos indirectos no incluidos

Estas regularizaciones se verán reflejadas en tu próxima factura correspondiente al periodo facturado del 15/12/2029 al 15/01/2030.

Recuerda que para cualquier otra consulta o sugerencia puedes ponerte en contacto con nosotros en nuestra página web www.razónsocial.com o a través de nuestro teléfono gratuito de Atención al Cliente, 12345 desde cualquier fijo y móviles razónsocial, o en el 12345 desde móviles de otros operadores.

Recibe un cordial saludo,
razónsocial

Figura 3. Correo 3

Ejercicio 3.3.1.2.

Pon en orden las ocho partes de este correo de respuesta:

Me dirijo a Vd. en contestación a la reclamación que nos ha formulado sobre el importe de las facturas que se relacionan en el pie, para informarle de que se ha analizado su caso en detalle y no hemos encontrado incidencia alguna relacionada con las cuestiones que nos plantea.

En consecuencia, sentimos comunicarle que el importe es correcto.

Director Territorio Sur

Le saludo atentamente,

Estimado Cliente:

[firma]

Nombre Apellido

Por último, le agradezco la confianza que mantiene con nosotros y quiero aprovechar esta ocasión para comunicarle que si dispone de acceso a Internet, podrá consultar sus facturas en www.razónsocial.es/factura y conocer día a día la evolución de su consumo antes de ser emitidas.

Figura 4. Correo 4

Ejercicio 3.3.1.3.

Marca en este correo el acuse de recepción, mención de la razón de contacto, mención de comercialización y la propuesta de acción posterior que caracterizan a los correos de respuesta a una queja en español peninsular:

Estimado cliente:

Nos dirigimos a usted en respuesta a su correo electrónico enviado 30/05/2016.

En primer lugar, le agradecemos por ponerse en contacto con nosotros vía correo electrónico

Hemos recibido su solicitud para trámites de los servicios contratados con razónsocial, sin embargo es necesario que usted se dirija a nuestros canales habituales de atención al cliente o bien a través de Mi razónsocial.

Finalmente deseamos agradecerle la utilización del servicios que razónsocial pone a su disposición en nuestra página WEB recordándole que estaremos encantados de atenderle para los procesos correspondientes a la línea de bajas.

Sin otro particular aprovechamos la ocasión para enviarle un cordial saludo.

Atentamente departamento de atención al cliente razónsocial.

Figura 5. Correo 5

Ejercicio 3.3.1.4.

Señala en este correo los movimientos que caracterizan a las respuestas a una queja electrónica:

- ¿Tiene acuse de recepción?
- ¿Menciona la razón del contacto?
- ¿Termina con una mención de comercialización?
- ¿Propone una acción posterior?

Si no te parece apropiado, haz las correcciones necesarias.

Buenos días Nombre.

Hemos recibido tu reclamación confirmamos entonces que el cobre de los 24€ es correcto, en este caso importe generado adicional por la baja de la línea sin aviso previo para amortización del terminal registrado a venta a plazos, te indicamos que no hay penalizaciones de la línea ya que no hay compromisos de permanencia, si no que en este caso se debió proceder a gestionar a este tramite cuando la línea ya no estaba activa.

De igual forma si presentas alguna duda adicional : te pedimos que te pongas en contacto con el servicio de Soporte online de razónsocial.com.

Cordial saludo

Servicio razónsocial.com

Figura 6. Correo 6

3.3.2. Ejercicios para reconocer las estrategias de respuesta (defensiva/complaciente)

Ejercicio 3.3.2.1.

Verifica si este correo dispone de buenas estrategias de respuesta:

- ¿Correcta ortografía y puntuación?
- ¿Se usan palabras de significado positivo o neutro?
- ¿Se reconoce el problema del cliente, aunque se descargue a la empresa de responsabilidad?
- ¿Se propone al cliente una solución o se le ofrece una compensación?
- ¿Se proporcionan disculpas?
- ¿Se agradece al cliente su iniciativa?

Hola,

En contestación a tu reclamación número 1-21080975083 hemos verificado en sistemas y se ha desestimado tu solicitud por los siguientes motivos: ya que se confirma el estado de la velocidad en la parte del adsl esta correcta su velocidad no hay problemas algunos y esta todo correcto y se enviar un tecnico alli en un plazo de 7 a 15 dias

Un cordial saludo,

Figura 7. Correo 7

Ejercicio 3.3.2.2.

¿Encuentras en este correo elementos defensivos como el autoelogio, la negación de la responsabilidad o del problema, la atribución de la culpa a la víctima o a terceras personas?

Estimado cliente,

Mediante la presente, confirmamos recepción de su reclamación de fecha 09/07/2018 15:46:12.

En primer lugar, lamentamos el retraso de su vuelo AB1234 operado desde GVA a BCN en fecha de 02/07/2018.

[Nombreempresa] hace todos los esfuerzos para operar sus vuelos puntualmente, no obstante, determinados vuelos quedan afectados por circunstancias fuera del control efectivo de [Nombreempresa] que son impredecibles e inevitables, causando retrasos y cancelaciones en los vuelos.

En relación con su reclamación de compensación, [Nombreempresa] ha realizado un análisis profundo de su caso, el cual queda dentro del ámbito de aplicación del Reglamento (CE) N° 261/2004 (el "Reglamento") y la jurisprudencia de desarrollo dictada por el Tribunal de Justicia de la Unión Europea.

En su caso, no obstante, lamentablemente debemos informarle que no procede el pago de ninguna compensación en tanto que el vuelo llegó a su destino con un retraso inferior a las tres (3) horas respecto de su horario previsto.

Una vez más, rogamos acepte nuestras más sinceras disculpas por los inconvenientes causados debido al retraso de su vuelo.

Atentamente,

Departamento de Atención al Cliente

[NOMBREEMPRESA]

Figura 8. Correo 8

Ejercicio 3.3.2.3

¿Puedes reconocer en este correo elementos de estrategia complaciente, como disculparse, mostrar empatía, redireccionar el problema o proponer una acción de corrección o compensación?

Estimado Cliente,

Gracias por contactar con nosotros a través del Canal On Line.

En relación al e-mail recibido, te informamos que la resolución de tu reclamación es no procede, ya que el departamento encargado no evidencio reporte de avería para sus servicios.

Atentamente te saluda

Inicial. Apellido / Atención al Cliente

Figura 9. Correo 9

Ejercicio 3.3.2.4

Y en este, ¿puedes reconocer elementos de estrategia complaciente?

Estimado cliente:

Nos dirigimos a usted en respuesta a su correo electrónico enviado 30/05/2016.

En primer lugar, le agradecemos por ponerse en contacto con nosotros vía correo electrónico

Hemos recibido su solicitud para tramites de los servicios contratados con razónsocial, sin embargo es necesario que usted se dirija a nuestros canales habituales de atención al cliente o bien a través de Mi razónsocial.

Finalmente deseamos agradecerle la utilización del servicios que razónsocial pone a su disposición en nuestra página WEB recordándole que estaremos encantados de atenderle para los procesos correspondientes a la línea de bajas.

Sin otro particular aprovechamos la ocasión para enviarle un cordial saludo.

Atentamente departamento de atención al cliente razónsocial.

Figura 10. Correo 10

Ejercicio 3.3.2.5

Lee estos dos correos de respuesta a una queja con estrategias diferentes.

- ¿Cuál te parece más efectivo?
- ¿Puedes reconocer elementos defensivos como el autoelogio, la negación de la responsabilidad o del problema, o culpar a la víctima o a terceras personas?
- ¿Puedes reconocer elementos de estrategia acomodativa o complaciente, como disculparse, mostrar empatía, redireccionar el problema o proponer una acción de corrección o compensación?

Estimada Sra [APELLIDO],

Nos ponemos en contacto con usted con respecto al vuelo AB1234 DME - BCN del 28/08/2019.

En respuesta a su petición, le informamos que usted esta reclamando el vuelo incorrecto, los datos correctos serían: AB1234 17/08/19 BCN-DME

Reciba un cordial saludo.

Departamento de Atención al Cliente

[NOMBREEMPRESA]

Figura 11. Correo 11

Apreciado Sr. [APELLIDO]:

En respuesta a su reclamación por daño en equipaje, le informamos de que, según las condiciones de la compañía (a las que puede acceder en el apartado "Información útil" de nuestra página web [www.\[nombreempresa\].com](http://www.[nombreempresa].com)), no se aceptan artículos considerados como frágiles, valiosos o perecederos.

Permítanos aclararle que todos los artículos que son transportados en bodega tienen que ir debidamente embalados para que puedan soportar eventuales golpes durante el viaje y/o la manipulación en la zona aeroportuaria.

Así pues, rechazamos cualquier tipo de responsabilidad al respecto si usted tomó la decisión de facturar algún objeto considerado como frágil, valioso o precedero. Le recordamos que usted leyó y aceptó explícitamente las condiciones descritas en el momento de realizar su reserva de vuelo.

Finalmente le hacemos saber que para atender cualquier duda o comentario deberá dirigirse por correo postal a:

[NOMBREEMPRESA] Equipajes

[Calle] [NÚMERO]

[CÓDIGOPOSTAL] [CIUDAD]

O bien contactarnos al número de teléfono 123456789.

Reciba un cordial saludo.

Atentamente,

[NOMBREEMPRESA] Equipajes

123456789

Figura 12. Correo 12

Ejercicio 3.3.2.6

Mejore este correo con alguno de estos recursos:

- Mitigar el error del cliente con una forma impersonal en lugar de la acusación directa *no debió haber recibido el terminal*.
- Usar una estructura del tipo *Entendemos su malestar, sin embargo, el plazo de devolución se ha sobrepasado*.
- Escribir palabras neutras o eufemísticas como *excedido* o *sobrepasado* en lugar de *cerrado*.
- Verificar la ortografía y la puntuación.
-

Estimado a/ Sr. [oculto]

Gracias por ponerse en contacto con el servicio de atención al cliente de razónsocial. De antemano pedimos excusas por el tiempo de respuesta a su solicitud indicamos que: Hemos verificado en el sistema que la ot de entrega esta cerrada, como se lo han informado anteriormente usted tenia un plazo de 14 días, así mismo no debio haber recibido el terminal, debio haberlo devuelto. Ya no puede hacer devolución Le recordamos que estamos encantados de atender sus consultas .

Reciba un cordial saludo

Departamento de atención al cliente de razónsocial.

Figura 13. Correo 13

3.3.3. Ejercicios para reconocer el lenguaje CHV (personal, informal, invitador)

Ejercicio 3.3.3.1

Aquí tienes una parte de un correo de respuesta a una queja con elementos que cortan la comunicación con el cliente.

- ¿Puedes identificarlos?
- ¿Te parece apropiado?
- ¿Puedes proponer una mejora o corrección?

POR FAVOR NO RESPONDER A ESTE EMAIL.

Para cualquier petición o consulta debe dirigirse a hola@razonsocial.com o llamando al 12345.

Un saludo

Equipo razonsocial

Figura 14. Correo 14

Ejercicio 3.3.3.2

Señala qué elementos son más apropiados para personalizar un correo de respuesta:

1. *Estimado cliente:*
2. *Estimado [nombre]:*
3. *Estimado señor [apellido]:*
4. *Hola:*
5. *Le saluda atentamente,*
Servicio de atención al cliente de razón social
6. *Le saluda atentamente,*
Nombre + apellido
7. *Le saluda atentamente,*
Nombre
8. *Por favor, no responda a este correo, es meramente informativo.*
9. *Un saludo,*
Atención al Cliente Online
10. *Recibe un cordial saludo,*
Razón social

Figura 15. Saludos y despedidas

Ejercicio 3.3.3.3

Señala qué elementos de CHV encuentras en el siguiente correo:

- ¿Es personalizado? ¿Aparece el nombre del cliente y del empleado?
- ¿Es formal o informal? ¿Qué saludo y despedida utiliza? ¿Usa el tuteo o la forma de *usted*? ¿Hay expresiones informales, contracciones o abreviaturas? ¿Aparecen emoticonos o mayúsculas? ¿Hay faltas de concordancia o errores?
- ¿Crees que se invita al cliente a mantener el diálogo o a hacer alguna acción que solucione su problema? ¿Muestra empatía con el cliente? ¿La empresa o el empleado se compromete de alguna manera?

Hola, Hemos abierto la gestión número MM-[oculto] para que deje de recibir de comunicaciones de [razón social]. Este proceso tiene un tiempo de gestión que puede tardar más de diez días laborables, en los cuales, puede recibir alguna llamada, ya que requiere de una intervención en sistemas.

Lamentamos las molestias ocasionadas.

Un saludo,

[oculto]

Equipo [razón social]

Figura 16. Correo 15

Ejercicio 3.3.3.4

Señala qué elementos de CHV encuentras en el siguiente correo:

- ¿Es personalizado? ¿Aparece el nombre del cliente y del empleado?
- ¿Es formal o informal? ¿Qué saludo y despedida utiliza? ¿Usa el tuteo o la forma de *usted*? ¿Hay expresiones informales, contracciones o abreviaturas? ¿Aparecen emoticonos o mayúsculas? ¿Hay faltas de concordancia o errores?
- ¿Crees que se invita al cliente a mantener el diálogo o a hacer alguna acción que solucione su problema? ¿Muestra alguna empatía con el cliente? ¿La empresa o el empleado se compromete de alguna manera?

Hola.

He revisado tu reclamación con el número CC-2973214 y todavía está pendiente de revisión, lo he reclamado para que lo agilicen y se pongan en contacto cuanto antes contigo al número de teléfono que me has facilitado. Disculpa la tardanza.

Un saludo.

Figura 17. Correo 16

Ejercicio 3.3.3.5

Lee este correo de respuesta a una queja y busca qué elementos del lenguaje CHV

- lo convierten en una respuesta personalizada
- lo convierten en una respuesta que transmite informalidad
- lo convierte en un correo que invita al cliente a reaccionar

Estimado [Nombre],

Gracias por utilizar en canal online de razónsocial.

Nos ponemos en contacto contigo para pedirte disculpas por las molestias ocasionadas, e indicarte que para obtener dicha factura de cancelación debes de acercarte a una tienda razónsocial para hacer la entrega del Ruter y podrás solicitar un albarán de comprobación de cancelación del contrato.

Te pedimos disculpas por las molestias ocasionadas.

Atentamente te saluda,

[Inicial, Apellido]/ Atención al Cliente

Si necesitas contactar nuevamente conmigo puedes hacerlo pulsando aquí: <http://www.razónsocial.es/on/cac/respuesta.htm?id=aed6289-0001539785137670>

Figura 18. Correo 17

Ejercicio 3.3.3.6

Lee este correo de respuesta a una queja y busca qué elementos del lenguaje CHV

- lo convierten en una respuesta personalizada
- lo convierten en una respuesta que transmite informalidad
- lo convierte en un correo que invita al cliente a reaccionar

Estimado cliente:
Ya hemos solucionado tu reclamación.
Hemos analizado tu caso en detalle y hemos comprobado que no procede indemnización por interrupción del servicio ya que la avería ha sido resuelta en el plazo establecido.
Lamentamos sinceramente las molestias que hayamos podido ocasionarte.
Gracias por tu confianza y recuerda que estamos a tu disposición para aclararte tus dudas o comentarios sobre este o cualquier otro asunto.
Equipo razón social

Figura 19. Correo 18

3.4. Actividades comunicativas

La tercera etapa consiste en ejercicios comunicativos que van progresivamente de las destrezas receptivas a las productivas. Esto garantiza que los estudiantes amplíen y perfeccionen sus competencias comunicativas paso a paso.

Ejercicio 3.4.1

Aquí tienes un correo de respuesta:

- Añade los movimientos necesarios, como el acuse de recepción, mención de comercialización, explicación del motivo de contacto.
- Escribe elementos de CHV como personalización del cliente o el empleado, saludo y despedida correctos, invitación a interactuar, muestra de empatía, o compromiso de la empresa o el empleado, etc.

Buenos tardes,
Para solventar el problema tienes que contactar con nosotros al 12345 y pedir hablar con el departamento de Avería.
Saludos.

Figura 20. Correo 19

Ejercicio 3.4.2

Este correo de respuesta no ha satisfecho al cliente. Escríbelo de nuevo teniendo en cuenta las características del género textual: los movimientos, las estrategias y los elementos de CHV.

Hola,
después de revisar tu caso, lo único que podemos hacer es remitirte a tienda. Desde aquí no podemos hacer nada ya que es la misma persona encargada en ella la que a través de una denuncia nos pidió el bloqueo de tu terminal y otros muchos.
Tienes que ir hablar con ella.
Hasta la próxima!

Figura 21. Correo 20

Ejercicio 3.4.3.

Este correo de respuesta no ha satisfecho al cliente. Escríbelo de nuevo teniendo en cuenta las características del género textual: los movimientos, los elementos de CHV y las estrategias apropiadas.

En cuanto sepamos algo, nos pondremos en contacto contigo.

Un saludo.

Figura 22. Correo 21

Ejercicio 3.4.4.

Trabajas con el equipo de atención al cliente en una empresa de telecomunicaciones y tienes que responder a la siguiente queja con la ayuda del Chat GPT.

- Prepara un *prompt* para solicitar una respuesta que respete las características del género de respuestas a quejas por correo electrónico, con los movimientos, estrategias y uso de lenguaje con CHV que hemos analizado.
- Analiza si la respuesta se ajusta a estas características.
- Si es necesario, modifica el *prompt*.
- Verifica y ajusta la respuesta.
- Motiva los cambios.

Buenos días:

Mi mujer [nombre y apellido + documento de identidad] y yo, [nombre y apellido + documento de identidad], teníamos un vuelo el día 12 de abril de 2023 desde el aeropuerto de [ciudad + país] con salida prevista a las 21.45 hora local y llegada prevista a las 13.10 a [ciudad + país], después de una conexión en el aeropuerto de [ciudad + país].

Aquí le envío la referencia de los billetes: [XXXXXXXX].

El primer vuelo [referencia del vuelo] salió con un retraso de tres horas y diez minutos, de manera que perdimos la conexión prevista en [ciudad + país] con referencia [número de vuelo]. Allí nos asignaron un nuevo vuelo [referencia del billete y del vuelo] que también sufrió un retraso de cuatro horas y quince minutos.

Llegamos a nuestro destino con un retraso total de siete horas y media.

Debido a la larga espera en el aeropuerto de [ciudad + país], que además se encontraba lleno de pasajeros y sin sitio para sentarse o comer, accedimos a un lounge que nos supuso un coste de 50€ por persona.

Con este correo solicitamos una compensación por los trastornos que nos supuso el retraso de las siete horas y media, así como el reembolso de los 100€ de la entrada en el lounge.

Gracias por adelantado.

Un saludo,

[nombre + apellido]

Figura 23. Correo 22

3.5. Actividades de reflexión

En la cuarta y última fase se introducen tareas de reflexión para transferir los conocimientos y destrezas adquiridos. Esto permite a los estudiantes aplicar estos conocimientos de forma creativa y flexible en nuevas situaciones comunicativas, como por ejemplo de interculturalidad, lo que resulta esencial para su desarrollo como profesionales internacionales con sentido crítico.

Ejercicio 3.5.1

Aquí tienes una parte de correo de respuesta a una queja con elementos de informalidad que también muestran descuido.

Relacionado con su servicio le informamos que los descuentos son un beneficio adicional de razón social los cuales son sensibles a cambios modificaciones e incluso aboliciones no están implícitos en ningun contrato

Figura 24. Correo 23

- ¿Qué impresión te causa este correo? ¿Te parece profesional? ¿Transmite respeto hacia los grupos de interés?
- ¿Puedes proponer una mejora o corrección? ¿Qué herramientas *online* puedes encontrar para evitar este tipo de faltas?
- Utilízalas para corregir este ejemplo.

Ejercicio 3.5.2

Aquí tienes una respuesta a una queja en inglés y la traducción al español usando una herramienta de traducción automática.

- ¿Te parece correcta la traducción?
- ¿Qué elementos no te resultan naturales en español?
- ¿Cómo puedes cambiarla para que resulte más apropiada?
- ¿Has observado que las respuestas a quejas por correo electrónico de Gran Bretaña se orientan a la persona, con movimientos de empatía, agradecimiento y disculpa, y las de España se orientan al negocio, mencionando a la razón de contacto, al contacto futuro y a la comercialización?

Dear Miss Firstname Lastname,

I'm sorry you've had to contact us about the issue with your companyname account.

This clearly isn't the kind experience we want you to have with us, and I can imagine you're probably feeling quite frustrated by now.

As a manager in the CEO's office, I'm going to take care of this for you from here.

The first thing I need to do is really understand what's happened, and to do this, I'd like to speak to you and hear your point of view. Please expect a call from me in the next 24 working hours.

I have two numbers for you: your home number and your mobile number. If you'd prefer me to ring you on a different number, please e-mail me with this number and when you're free to talk. If you'd rather call me, my direct line is 0123456789. If I'm not at my desk I'll endeavour to return your call as soon as possible.

Thanks for your patience, and I look forward to speaking to you soon so I can get this sorted for you.

Kind regards,

Firstname Lastname

Companyname

Figura 25. Correo 24

Estimada Sra. Nombre y Apellido:

Lamento que haya tenido que ponerse en contacto con nosotros por el problema con su cuenta de nombredelacompañía.

Está claro que esta no es la clase de experiencia que queremos que tenga con nosotros, y puedo imaginar que probablemente se sienta bastante frustrada en este momento.

Como gerente de la oficina del CEO, voy a ocuparme de esto por ti desde aquí.

Lo primero que tengo que hacer es entender realmente lo que ha pasado, y para ello me gustaría hablar contigo y escuchar tu punto de vista. Por favor, espera una llamada mía en las próximas 24 horas laborables.

Tengo dos números para ti: el de tu casa y el de tu móvil. Si prefieres que te llame a otro número, envíame un correo electrónico con ese número y cuándo estás libre para hablar. Si prefieres llamarme, mi línea directa es 01234566789. Si no estoy en mi despacho, intentaré devolverte la llamada lo antes posible.

Gracias por tu paciencia y espero poder hablar contigo pronto para solucionarlo.

Un cordial saludo,

Nombre Apellido
Nombre de la empresa

Figura 26. Correo 25

Ejercicio 3.5.3

Piensa en lo que has aprendido sobre cómo responder adecuadamente a una queja. ¿Crees que este conocimiento también puede aplicarse a las quejas que no provienen de particulares, sino de otros grupos de interés de la empresa?

- Identifica y lista los diferentes grupos de interés que pueden presentar quejas, además de los clientes particulares (ej.: accionistas, proveedores, empleados, competencia, etc.).
- Utiliza GenAI para generar ejemplos de quejas provenientes de diferentes tipos de grupos de interés para el sector de la telecomunicación y de la aviación. Solicita que la IA cree quejas específicas para cada grupo identificado.
- Analiza las quejas generadas y discute las diferencias y similitudes entre los distintos grupos de interés. Considera el impacto potencial en la empresa.
- Selecciona una de las quejas generadas y escribe una respuesta utilizando las estrategias y el lenguaje que has aprendido.
- Comparte tu respuesta con tus compañeros de clase y discute la efectividad de tu enfoque.

Ejercicio 3.5.4

Lo que has aprendido para responder a quejas por correo electrónico, ¿se puede aplicar a quejas de otro tipo, por ejemplo, las reseñas en plataformas como Booking.com o Tripadvisor? Aquí tienes una reseña con una queja y su respuesta. ¿Es igual que una queja por correo electrónico y su respuesta? Comenta aspectos similares y diferentes respecto a destinatario, estilo y estructura.

HABITACIONES PEQUEÑAS PERO CORRECTAS Disliked El parking es muy incómodo (a parte de que por la obra de la calle el acceso se hace bastante complicado). No merece la pena pagarlo, aunque el recepcionista que nos atendió a la llegada nos presionó bastante con el tema. **Liked** Habitación muy reducida en tamaño, pero con todos los servicios requeridos. La cama es muy cómoda. Las frases motivacionales por todo el hotel tienen su gracia, y me gustó mucho el árbol de la autoestima junto al ascensor.

¡Buenos días Nombre! Muchas gracias por habernos elegido en tu estancia en Madrid. Observo que reservasteis las habitaciones dobles pequeñas. Estas habitaciones son más pequeñas que las dobles (de ahí que el precio sea mucho más barato), intuyo que por eso mismo reservasteis este tipo de habitación :) En cuanto al parking es un poco estrecho, pero maniobrando bien se aparca sin problemas. Nuestro compañero te indicó que era mejor aparcar en el hotel que fuera, puesto que si no se tiene la etiqueta medioambiental la comunidad de Madrid puede multarte. De ahí las recomendaciones de nuestro recepcionista. Esperamos volver a verte muy pronto para que vuelvas a disfrutar de todos nuestros servicios. Que tengas un día fantástico, y recuerda: te mereces ser feliz :)

Figura 27. Reseña de queja y su respuesta

4. Conclusión

Con este estudio, pretendíamos demostrar el potencial de un enfoque basado en la investigación para la enseñanza académica de la comunicación con fines específicos, que aspira a convertir a los alumnos en usuarios críticos del discurso y prepararlos para la complejidad y diversidad de la comunicación profesional en un mundo global y digitalizado. Para ello, realizamos un análisis pragma-discursivo de género de un modesto corpus de *webcare* en español peninsular. El análisis brindó valiosas perspectivas sobre la estructura, las estrategias y el estilo comunicativo de los correos electrónicos de respuesta a reclamaciones dentro del sector español de las telecomunicaciones, así como algunos rasgos lingüísticos específicos. La integración de la investigación aplicada en la enseñanza de LSP puede enriquecer el enfoque didáctico y el contenido del plan de estudios, concretamente en lo que respecta a las estrategias de comunicación digital y multimodal. Mediante el uso de datos auténticos de *webcare*, hemos desarrollado una aplicación didáctica concreta, en consonancia con la evolución de las demandas comunicativas del entorno profesional digital. Este enfoque, que se centra en el uso de tecnologías digitales y materiales multimodales, ofrece nuevos métodos y prácticas de enseñanza que forman a los estudiantes para las realidades de la comunicación profesional moderna. Pone de relieve la relevancia de la multimodalidad y el giro digital en la enseñanza de idiomas, además de subrayar el alcance de los factores culturales y contextuales para comprender y emplear diferentes formas de comunicación. Si seguimos aplicando estas innovaciones, podremos desarrollar un plan de estudios que prepare a los estudiantes de LSP para los retos actuales y futuros de la comunicación profesional.

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Anexo: Sugerencias de corrección y algunas explicaciones

3.3.1.1.

- Acuse de recepción: *En respuesta a tu reclamación con número de expediente 180934039 realizada en 05 de septiembre de 2018, ...*
- Razón del contacto: *Regularización de la factura con referencia J617058433:*
- Propuesta de acción posterior: *... puedes ponerte en contacto con nosotros ...*
- Mención de comercialización: *nuestra página web www.razonsocial.com o a través de nuestro teléfono gratuito de Atención al Cliente, 12345 desde cualquier fijo y móviles [razonsocial](http://razonsocial.com), o en el [12345](http://razonsocial.com)*

3.3.1.2.

Estimado Cliente:

Me dirijo a Vd. en contestación a la reclamación que nos ha formulado sobre el importe de las facturas que se relacionan al final de este correo, para informarle de que se ha analizado su caso en detalle y no hemos encontrado incidencia alguna relacionada con las cuestiones que nos plantea.

En consecuencia, sentimos comunicarle que el importe es correcto.

Por último, le agradezco la confianza que mantiene con nosotros y quiero aprovechar esta ocasión para comunicarle que, si dispone de acceso a Internet, podrá consultar sus facturas en www.razonsocial.es/factura y conocer día a día la evolución de su consumo antes de ser emitidas.

Le saludo atentamente,

[firma]

Nombre Apellido

Director Territorio Sur

3.3.1.3. Acuse de recepción: *Hemos recibido su solicitud para trámites de los servicios contratados con razonsocial...*

Mención de contacto: *Nos dirigimos a usted en respuesta a su correo electrónico enviado 30/05/2016.*

Mención de comercialización: *... servicios que razonsocial pone a su disposición en nuestra página WEB ...*

Propuesta de acción posterior: *... es necesario que usted se dirija a nuestros canales habituales de atención al cliente o bien a través de Mi razonsocial.*

3.3.1.4. Acuse de recepción con el verbo *recibir*.

Razón del contacto: *...que solicitaba la revisión del pago de 24€.*

Termina con la mención de comercialización después del saludo, en forma de firma.

Propone la acción posterior de ponerse en contacto con el servicio de Soporte online.

Lo podemos corregir así:

Buenos días Nombre:

Hemos recibido tu reclamación del xx/xx/xxxx que solicitaba la revisión del pago de 24€. Te confirmamos que ese cobro es correcto al tratarse del importe adicional para amortizar el terminal registrado a venta a plazos generado por la baja de la línea sin previo aviso. Nos complace indicarte que no hay penalizaciones de la línea dado que no hay compromisos de permanencia, sino que se debió proceder a gestionar este trámite cuando la línea no estaba activa.

Si tuvieras alguna duda más, por favor ponte en contacto con el servicio de Soporte online de razonsocial.com, será un placer ayudarte o darte una información más precisa. El objetivo de nuestra empresa es conectar a clientes satisfechos.

Un cordial saludo,

[Inicial apellido]

Servicio razonsocial.com]

3.3.2.1.

- Faltan comas (,) y puntos (.), acentos gráficos, hay errores de ortografía o de escritura descuidada.
- ¿Se usan palabras de significado negativo: *desestimar, problemas?*
- No se reconoce el problema del cliente y se descarga a la empresa de responsabilidad.
- No se entiende bien, pero parece que propone una solución y enviar un técnico.
- No se proporcionan disculpas.

- No se agradece la iniciativa del cliente.

3.3.2.2. Autoelogio: *[Nombre de la empresa] hace todos los esfuerzos para operar sus vuelos puntualmente, ...*

Negación de la responsabilidad: *... no procede el pago de ninguna compensación en tanto que el vuelo llegó a su destino con un retraso inferior a las tres (3) horas respecto de su horario previsto.*

Culpar a la víctima o a terceras personas: *... por circunstancias fuera del control efectivo de [Nombre de la empresa] que son impredecibles e inevitables, Etc.*

3.3.2.3. No aparecen elementos de estrategia complaciente.

3.3.2.4. Hay algunos elementos de estrategia complaciente, como mostrar empatía con el verbo *agradecer* y una despedida cordial; redireccionar el problema o proponer una acción de corrección o compensación redireccionando el problema *hacia los canales habituales o Mirazonsocial*.

3.3.2.5. Elementos de estrategia defensiva como negar la responsabilidad o el problema (*usted esta reclamando el vuelo incorrecto; según las condiciones de la compañía ...*); culpar a la víctima (*usted tomó la decisión, usted leyó y aceptó*).

Elementos de estrategia complaciente: como mostrar empatía (*Permítanos aclararle; le recordamos; los datos correctos serían ...*); redireccionar el problema (*para atender cualquier duda o comentario deberá dirigirse ...*).

3.3.2.6.

Estimado/a Sr(a) [Apellido]:

Gracias por haberse puesto en contacto con el servicio de atención al cliente de razonsocial. De antemano, le pedimos disculpas por el tiempo de respuesta a su solicitud.

Hemos verificado en el sistema que se sobrepasó la OT de entrega, pues como le han informado anteriormente, el plazo era de 14 días. Asimismo, no se debió haber aceptado el terminal. Entendemos su malestar, pero la devolución ya no sería posible.

Le recordamos que estamos encantados de atender sus consultas.

Reciba un cordial saludo,

[Inicial + Apellido]

Departamento de atención al cliente de razonsocial.com.

3.3.3.1. La instrucción de no responder escrita en mayúsculas.

Un ejemplo de mejora o corrección es: *En lugar de responder a este email, estaremos encantados de atender su petición o consulta en ...*

3.3.3.2. Algunos elementos apropiados para personalizar un correo de respuesta son estos saludos y despedidas, con sus correspondientes formas en femenino:

Estimado [Nombre]; Estimado señor [Apellido]; Le saluda atentamente, / Nombre + Apellido; Le saluda atentamente, / Nombre.

3.3.3.3.

- No aparece el nombre del cliente ni del empleado.
- Saludo y despedida informal con la forma *usted*; algunos errores (**recibir de comunicaciones*), faltan comas (,).
- Muestra alguna empatía con el cliente al lamentar la situación.

3.3.3.4.

- Sin nombre del cliente ni del empleado.
- Saludo y despedida informal; uso de tuteo.
- Muestra empatía con el cliente al disculparse. El empleado se compromete al solicitar a los servicios que actúen.

3.3.3.5. Elementos del lenguaje CHV para personalizar como la identificación del cliente y el empleado; el uso de la 2ª persona del singular (*contigo, te, necesitas*) transmite informalidad e invita al cliente a reaccionar con verbos modales *deber* y *poder*.

3.3.3.6. No hay elementos del lenguaje CHV para personalizar; usa la 2° persona del singular (*tu, te, recuerda*) para transmitir informalidad e invita al cliente a reaccionar con la fórmula *estamos a tu disposición para ...*

3.4.1. + 3.4.2. + 3.4.4. Aquí hay un ejemplo de un posible correo de respuesta con los movimientos necesarios (acuse de recepción, mención de comercialización, explicación del motivo de contacto), una estrategia de respuesta adecuada y elementos de CHV (personalización del cliente o el empleado, saludo y despedida correctos, invitación a interactuar, muestra de empatía o compromiso de la empresa o el empleado, etc.):

Buenas tardes [nombre]:

Hemos recibido tu correo del xx/xx/xxxx, gracias por haberte dirigido a nosotros.

Te escribimos para confirmarte que, aunque durante unas horas no estuviera disponible el servicio de internet en tu zona, se trata de un problema ajeno a nuestra voluntad. Por supuesto, lamentamos mucho que la conexión se mantenga irregular y te proponemos que contactes con el servicio de Averías a través del teléfono 12345. Sin duda, mis compañeros tendrán una solución para ti, ya sabes que nuestro objetivo es mantener conectados a clientes satisfechos.

Saludos cordiales,

Nombre y Apellido]

Equipo de [razonsocial]

www.razonsocial.com

3.5.1. Considera el principio del "esfuerzo percibido" (Cambra Fierro et al., 2013) que mencionamos más arriba, como uno de los factores decisivos para la evaluación positiva del servicio postventa. De ahí la importancia de cuidar la redacción para que el cliente se sienta valorado.

3.5.2. Reflexiona sobre las diferencias que existen entre las *linguaculturas* en cuanto a la formulación, a pesar de que la estructura genérica sea bastante parecida. En el citado estudio de Van Herck & Vangehuchten (2024) destaca en particular la diferencia entre el enfoque orientado hacia el cliente de los datos británicos y el enfoque orientado hacia los negocios de los datos españoles.

3.5.3. Este ejercicio sirve para iniciar una reflexión sobre la comunicación externa e interna de una empresa hacia los diferentes grupos de interés.

3.5.4. El objetivo de este último ejercicio es reflexionar acerca de otros géneros que forman parte del *webcare*, como las reacciones a las reseñas online. Se puede aprovechar para introducir conceptos relacionados importantes, como el *NeWom* (*Negative Electronic Word of Mouth*) y el *Prosumidor*, es decir, el consumidor que se transforma en productor de información en la red, y explicar su importancia para la reputación de una empresa (Aced, 2018).

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Innovation in course design to teach business discourse: students' feedback and insights¹

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ABSTRACT

EN This paper describes a course in English Language and Linguistics addressed to MA students majoring in English for International Communication at the University of Turin (Italy). The course was especially designed for this degree program and integrated the use of language corpora, principles of multimodality, visual and verbal communication in company websites, as well as the analysis of corporate crises. The study draws on feedback gathered from students through an end-of-course questionnaire during the academic year 2023-24. The findings reveal that students appreciated active participation through a hands-on approach and group work on selected case studies. Their responses indicate an openness to new learning methods, though they remain attached to traditional content-based approaches, particularly in assessment. As established models make students resistant to change, this study demonstrates that educational innovation requires student active involvement and an engaging approach.

Key words: BUSINESS DISCOURSE, ESP TEACHING, MULTIMODALITY, DIGITAL COMMUNICATION, CMC, STUDENTS' FEEDBACK

ES En este artículo se describe un curso de lengua y lingüística inglesas dirigido a estudiantes de máster de la especialidad de Inglés para la Comunicación Internacional de la Universidad de Turín (Italia). El curso se diseñó para esta titulación e integraba el uso de corpus lingüísticos, principios de multimodalidad, comunicación visual y verbal en sitios web de empresas, así como el análisis de crisis empresariales. El estudio se basa en las opiniones recogidas de los estudiantes a través de un cuestionario de final de curso durante el curso académico 2023-24. Los resultados revelan que los estudiantes apreciaron la participación activa a través de un enfoque práctico y el trabajo en grupo sobre casos prácticos seleccionados. Sus respuestas indican una apertura a nuevos métodos de aprendizaje, aunque siguen apegados a los enfoques tradicionales basados en los contenidos, especialmente en la evaluación. Dado que los modelos establecidos hacen que los estudiantes se resistan al cambio, este estudio demuestra que la innovación educativa requiere la participación activa de los estudiantes y un enfoque atractivo.

Palabras clave: DISCURSO EMPRESARIAL, ENSEÑANZA DE INGLÉS CON FINES ESPECÍFICOS, MULTIMODALIDAD, COMUNICACIÓN DIGITAL, COMUNICACIÓN PARA LA GESTIÓN DE CRISIS, COMENTARIOS DE LOS ESTUDIANTES

IT L'articolo descrive un corso di Lingua e Linguistica Inglese rivolto agli studenti della LM in Lingue straniere per la Comunicazione Internazionale dell'Università di Torino (Italia). Il corso è stato progettato per il corso di laurea e ha integrato l'uso di corpora, i principi della multimodalità, la comunicazione visiva e verbale nei siti web aziendali e l'analisi delle crisi aziendali. Lo studio si basa sul feedback degli studenti raccolto tramite un questionario di fine corso. I risultati rivelano l'apprezzamento per la partecipazione attiva attraverso un approccio pratico e il lavoro di gruppo su casi di studio selezionati. Le loro risposte indicano un'apertura verso nuovi metodi di apprendimento, anche se rimangono legati ad approcci tradizionali basati sui contenuti, in particolare nella valutazione. Poiché i modelli consolidati rendono gli studenti resistenti al cambiamento, questo studio mostra che l'innovazione didattica richiede il coinvolgimento attivo degli studenti e un approccio coinvolgente.

Parole chiave: DISCURSO AZIENDALE, INSEGNAMENTO DELL'INGLESE SPECIALISTICO, MULTIMODALITÀ, COMUNICAZIONE DIGITALE, COMUNICAZIONE PER LA GESTIONE DELLE CRISI, FEEDBACK DEGLI STUDENTI

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¹ Even if the paper is the product of continuous collaboration among the authors, Antonella Giacosa is responsible for Sections 2 and 4, Virginia Pulcini is responsible for Sections 1 and 3.

1. Teaching English for occupational and professional purposes in higher education

In the course of the new millennium, both secondary and higher education have been compelled to introduce major changes into their programs and syllabi to meet the many challenges of contemporary society, such as the digital revolution, the internationalization agenda and the demands of a highly diversified labor market (Mautner & Reiner, 2017). In addition, a working knowledge of English has become a prerequisite for most occupational and professional careers all over the world, which has led to an increase in the demand for the study of English as a foreign language (EFL) (Gnutzmann & Intemann, 2008), English-medium instruction (EMI) in higher education (Wilkinson & Gabriëls, 2021; Molino, Dimova & Kling, 2022) and a tremendous boost in teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP), especially in the area of business communication (Garzone & Giordano, 2020; Sing, 2017).

A notable shift has also occurred within the Italian university context and especially degree courses that traditionally provide tuition in Modern Languages. Up to a few decades ago their syllabi would mainly address the educational needs of prospective language teachers and focus almost exclusively on the study of literature and translation. Nowadays many students choose to major in Modern Languages to find a job in other occupational and professional settings. To meet students' interests and cater for the needs of the current job market, new degree courses specialize in Modern Languages in combination with a growing variety of occupational and professional sectors such as hospitality and tourism management, international communication and cooperation, television, cinema and new media, fashion and design, business and marketing.²

One of the first innovative degree courses, still not mainstream in Italian academia to this day, is the MA program in Foreign Languages for International Communication, which has been offered at the University of Turin since 2004. This program was designed to provide students with advanced, specialized competence in two foreign languages, the ability to communicate effectively in intercultural situations and interdisciplinary knowledge of the historical, social, cultural, and economic aspects of the geographical areas in which the foreign languages are spoken. In addition, the course offers background knowledge of social, economics and legal sciences, as well as advanced competences in digital skills.³

With these objectives in mind, and in line with the expected achievements set by the Dublin descriptors,⁴ the course in English Language and Linguistics was gradually redesigned to meet the learning needs of these students. Experimentation on the present-day syllabus started in A.Y. 2019-20 and continued throughout the following years. The modular structure here described reflects the program implemented in A.Y. 2023-24, which consists of three main topics:

- corpus linguistics (18 hours)
- web communication of multinational companies (18 hours)
- communication and miscommunication in times of crisis (18 hours).

In this paper we will report on this English Language and Linguistics course and on the feedback provided by the students who attended it in A.Y. 2023-2024 in greater detail. The goal is to assess how students were impacted by a syllabus combining linguistic and professional aspects, which is an innovative approach for students majoring in English. The research question leading up to this paper is the following:

RQ: In students' opinion, how did the integration of linguistic and work-related aspects in an MA course in English Language and Linguistics impact their learning experience?

To address this goal, this paper first delves deeper into the pedagogical principles that inspired its design and how the development of general and specialized competence in the use of English and specific topics relevant to ESP were combined (Section 2). Second, it presents and discusses the answers to an end-of-course questionnaire provided by the students who attended the course (Section 3). Finally, it draws data-driven

² universality.it

³ https://www.lingue.unito.it/do/home.pl/View?doc=Lauree_Magistrali/Lingue_straniere_comunicazione_internazionale.html

⁴ For the qualifications that signify the successful completion of the second cycle in higher education (MA level) see: https://ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/WG_Frameworks_qualification/71/0/050218_QF_EHEA_580710.pdf (accessed October 2024)

pedagogical conclusions that could contribute to the innovation and improvement of ESP courses at the level of higher education (Section 4).

2. A student-centred project-based approach: the case study

The primary learning goal of the students enrolled in the MA course in Foreign languages for International Communication is to strengthen their proficiency, not only in terms of general language skills but also in the area of professional communication, starting from an already advanced level tested through an admission test (C1 level of the Common European Framework for Languages). To develop their language competence, students majoring in English are offered a 50-hour course running through the academic year, which focuses on English for Academic Purposes (EAP), especially reading and writing, and leads to a final summary writing test. In combination with the practical language work, students are offered a 54-hour curricular course in one semester, focussed on content-based academic subjects in the area of English linguistics. The results of the two courses are combined to obtain the necessary credits. The curricular course, which is the object of the present paper, aims to expand students' competencies in English for Special Purposes (ESP) – particularly in Business English (BE) – and help them familiarize with some theoretical models and analytical tools that may allow students to observe and analyze the English language used in professional and digital communication. The following sections highlight the considerations that inspired the syllabus design.

2.1. Syllabus design: inspiring teaching principles and contextual considerations

Several aspects were considered while planning the syllabus for this course. BE is a complex strand of research in the dynamic field of professional communication. It is informed by management and organization studies and impacted by e-technologies, the increasing volume of international trade and global integration (Du-Babcock, 2006). Therefore, the study of BE requires an interdisciplinary approach encompassing language pedagogy – i.e. the communicative uses of the language – as well as the knowledge and the training of skills related to corporate globalization and digital competence. This is in line with the recommendations of previous research on higher education degree programmes for business, which advocates for integrating language teaching practices in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) with the development of soft applied skills regarding business communication and workplace knowledge (Ainsworth, 2012; Sing, 2017). The integration of professional and educational factors has been indicated as a necessary step to bridge the gap between the learning experience offered at the level of higher education and the skills required by the work environment, as highlighted in recent accounts of needs analysis (Lung, 2014; Tardy, 2012).

In today's globalized world, ESP students not only need to acquire language skills but also – and most importantly – comprehension strategies and techniques that go far beyond strictly linguistic competence (Gnutzmann, 2011; Held, McGrew & Goldblatt, 1999). They must be trained to join a professional community and effectively communicate with the public, external stakeholders and within the organization they will be a part of (Gerristen & Nickerson, 2009). Furthermore, they need to be flexibly competent to cope with a complex environment requiring a multifaceted communicative competence encompassing multicultural, specialized language and context-related aspects (Sing, 2017). This complex competence requires understanding as conceived by contemporary learning theories and promoted by the Dublin descriptors for higher education. According to Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory, we understand an idea when we can apply disciplinary knowledge, skills, methods, and ways of thinking to new situations in which we do not know the 'correct' answer yet (Gardner, 2006). The concept of understanding as the application of knowledge is in line with the educational goals inspiring contemporary university pedagogy. Higher education must help students develop an advanced skill set involving the ability to deeply understand and manage complexity, develop original ideas, apply problem-solving skills, and effectively communicate conclusions to various audiences (Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, 2005). This is crucial in every field but especially in foreign languages. Language education, including EFL education, must have a transformative goal, which can only be achieved through cultural reflection and understanding within a critically oriented pedagogy (Weniger & Kiss, 2013). The ultimate goal is to facilitate students' development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), which is the ability to relate to new people from other contexts for which they have not been directly prepared (Abid & Moalla, 2019). The emergence of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in business makes BE classes a fertile environment for teachers to integrate language skills with global cultural awareness and soft skills related to global business communication (Abid, 2021; Ainsworth, 2012). To meet the various needs of contemporary BE students, the syllabus was articulated into three different modules, as described in the following section.

2.2. A task-based approach to a three-module course

A task-based approach was chosen to encourage active student engagement with the course contents. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is based on communicative language teaching and focuses on using authentic language to complete meaningful tasks in the target language (Harmer, 2008). The teacher acts as a facilitator and chooses relevant tasks while encouraging the students to actively participate and contribute by integrating their personal experiences into their language learning environment (Long, 2015). This enhances the mainstream communicative teaching style for BE, which within the ESP field has traditionally focused on lexical items, grammatical structures and discourse functions, by organizing learning around tasks needed to become part of a professional community (Lambert, 2010). This contextualized teaching method favors active student engagement through hands-on activities that the students carry out under the teacher's supervision individually or in groups by exploring possible applications of knowledge referring to the business world.

Three main areas were chosen to help students gain a comprehensive understanding of the various aspects of business communication. First, to enhance student proficiency in ESP and enable them to familiarize with e-technologies, they were introduced to corpus linguistics (McEnery & Hardie, 2011). As pinpointed in Jaworska (2017), the use of corpora has provided relevant insights into frequent lexico-grammatical and pragmatic aspects of BE. Our students familiarized with the main concepts and the application of this methodology to the study of general and specialized vocabulary. Corpus-informed learning is considered an effective digital learner-centred approach to EFL and ESP, as students can examine language features – such as concordances, collocations and phraseologisms – that are useful to increase their proficiency in general and specialized discourse by means of digital tools. This was tested by integrating a more traditional, content-based form of assessment – a multiple-choice test – with an active exploration of lexical and morpho-syntactic patterns. For the latter, they were asked to draw a lexical profile of a phraseologism or a collocation by working on corpora available on Sketch Engine, a corpus query software (Kilgarriff, Rychly, Smrz & Tugwell, 2004) (see Appendix 1).

Second, students familiarized with the multimodal communication of companies and organizations for the construction of their own identity. After being introduced to the concepts and tools of multimodal analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Machin, 2016), they were tested through a traditional individual content-based quiz and a more creative activity, namely the collaborative analysis of the “About Us” sections of corporate websites (Handler, 2017). This task required them to analyze the multimodal orchestration of company web pages in groups while disentangling the combination of resources for meaning-making in digital texts and online interactions (such as speech, writing, still and moving images, music and sounds, layout etc.) put in place by companies to establish their corporate identity (see Appendix 2). In line with the Common Framework of Reference for Intercultural Digital Literacies (CFRIDiL)⁵, this activity had different goals. While analyzing the use of digital tools and the understanding of their affordances in business communication, they increased their digital fluency,⁶ i.e. the ability to discover, evaluate, and use information and technology effectively and ethically. Given the global reach of the companies analyzed, they increased their intercultural communication skills, namely the ability of making meaning in socio-culturally diverse contexts as well as community-specific practices. In addition to the aforementioned abilities, this activity aimed to help students develop the so-called “Transversal Skills” (i.e. use, management and awareness of “soft” skills, including personal and relational skills such as emotional intelligence, stress management and team building).

Third, the students explored crisis management communication (henceforth CMC), namely the strategic use of words to manage information and meaning during a crisis aiming at restricting reputational damage (Coombs, 2021). This transdisciplinary approach to communication covers a series of subtopics such as crisis management, the ongoing approach to communication, the qualities of the spokesperson, the role of social media in communication strategies, and the spread of misinformation and fake news. First, the students became familiar with the details of a crisis and analytical tools to analyze the crisis as such and how internal – within the company – and external communication – with the public – were managed. After the first

⁵ This framework integrates digital literacies and proficiency in English for international communication and can be used as a guidance and reference in the context of intercultural digital literacies. It draws on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR), which was integrated and expanded to cover digital aspects of communication in the 3-year project EU-MADE4LL, European Multimodal and Digital Education for Language Learning (Sindoni, Adami, Moschini & Karatza, 2019).

⁶ This term refers to the ability to discover, evaluate, and use information and technology effectively and ethically (Law, Woo, de la Torre & Wong, 2018)

introductory lesson on the basic concepts of CMC, they explored the field in groups under the teacher's supervision. They analyzed representative case studies and actively applied analytical tools that helped them reflect on business practices and communication choices. Finally, they were given a list of crises⁷ involving companies and were asked to choose one, analyze it and summarize their findings in a written report.

The various steps of this module rely on case studies, a teaching and learning method borrowed from business studies methodology (Ainsworth, 2012). This is a complex activity for students majoring in foreign languages for various reasons. On the one hand, it presents students with information and terminology that are typical of the business world they are still not familiar with. On the other hand, it requires them to critically analyze different speech acts from multiple sources to identify possibly biased and manipulative communicative strategies for a favourable narration of a crisis. This module encourages students to develop higher-order thinking skills and favours critical thinking (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Despite acknowledging the benefits of this method, research on the use of case studies in BE classes has recommended a gradual introduction in the syllabus (Esteban & Cañado, 2004). In line with these recommendations, students gradually assimilated the terminology and necessary information by analyzing case studies individually and in groups, discussing their findings in class and asking for further clarifications in Q&A sessions. Finally, they were asked to apply their knowledge to understand a complex situation and use the appropriate terminology to describe it.

In addition to encouraging students' active engagement, the tasks in the three modules required students to increase their motivation and enhance their learning. Since they replicate the job of professionals in a real workplace, these tasks qualify as examples of Authentic Assessment (AA), a contextualized approach to teaching and assessing involving higher-order thinking skills (Villarroel, Bloxham, Bruna D., Bruna C., & Herrera-Seda, 2017; Villarroel, Boud, Bloxham, Bruna D. & Bruna C., 2019). This approach to evaluation was deemed an effective way to assess real competences and 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, which are crucial for new generations of students (Atmojio, 2021; Giacosa, 2023). This approach is deeply rooted in a constructivist conception of knowledge and focuses on curriculum goals, the enhancement of individual competence, and the integration of instruction and assessment (Atmojio, 2021; Tessaro, 2014). The constructivist approach is recommended in language teaching because it is learner-centred and encourages learners to actively participate in their learning process, rather than passively receiving information. Learners are encouraged to experiment with the language, make mistakes, and learn from those mistakes. The following section on the students' feedback will show how this pedagogic proposal impacted their learning.

3. Monitoring students' feedback through end-of-course questionnaires

3.1. Methodology: The questionnaire

To monitor the outcomes of the experimentation, we created an end-of-course questionnaire to collect valid and reliable data on student satisfaction and suggestions for improvement. This is considered an effective tool to collect feedback from students and provide strategic-level information aiming at improving the quality of higher education courses (Watson, 2003; Richardson, 2005).⁸ The end-of-course questionnaire was created with a Google form and sent by email to the 76 students who attended the course in A.Y. 2023-24. We received 53 responses, corresponding to a 70% response rate. The majority of the respondents were females (88.7%) and a minority were males (11.5%), a proportion that generally reflects the composition of the student population enrolled in degree courses in Modern Languages. The questionnaire included 12 questions focused on the students' learning experience that aimed to measure the linguistic, digital and multimodal input students felt to have acquired through hands-on activities and group work on case studies. The answers will be presented below with some meaningful comments provided by the students.

⁷ Examples of articles introducing case studies to be analyzed: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jun/30/disney-female-employees-wage-disparity-lawsuit>
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/may/09/italian-oil-firm-eni-lawsuit-alleging-early-knowledge-climate-crisis>
https://www.theguardian.com/media/2023/feb/02/netflix-accidentally-posts-guidelines-for-cracking-down-on-password-sharing?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other

⁸ At the University of Turin, all students must fill out an evaluation form (called Edumeter) for all the courses they have attended before enrolling and sitting examinations. This is one of the tools available for monitoring the quality of teaching. By contrast, this end-of-course questionnaire was created for internal purposes only, to collect students' feedback on the specific contents of the English Language and Linguistics course.

3.2. Findings

The initial set of questions (n. 1-2) asked students which modules of the course had helped them the most to improve their English proficiency. The module on corpus linguistics was selected by the largest share of the respondents (47.2%), followed by CMC (37.7%) and multimodality (15%). The respondents considered the module on corpus linguistics a new, interesting way to expand their vocabulary (words, collocations, phraseologisms and morpho-syntactic patterns) through the use of digital tools. What emerged from the comments was that students felt they had acquired autonomy in the analysis of vocabulary and experienced the pleasure of “discovering” lexical patterns, thus empowering their agency as learners. Having access to authentic language was also positively considered because it is an opportunity to understand how language is used by native speakers, which is considered the most desirable model by most Italian EFL learners. Here are some examples of comments reported verbatim:

- 1) Analyzing the corpora, I discovered new terms, new syntactic structures and many idioms.
- 2) It allowed me to understand how words are naturally used by native speakers and with which words they most frequently collocate.
- 3) It provided me with new tools for the investigation of the English language.
- 4) It was interesting analyzing corpora using Sketchengine tool (I've never used it before) this improved also my digital skills learning how to surf through it

Those who selected CMC justified their choice by stating that this module helped them familiarize with the language used in real-life situations and taught them to appropriately communicate in specific professional settings. In other words, students experienced the pragmatic dimension of discourse and developed greater awareness of communication strategies that help speakers respond to a critical situation and repair their own reputation. Another positive aspect of this module in relation to the acquisition of language competence was the assignment of a written paper, which made students focus on their writing skills. Here are some relevant comments:

- 5) The module is more linked to real-life situations.
- 6) CMC helped me understand how to manage a hypothetical company crisis in real life through linguistic features and effective communication strategies.
- 7) While writing the final paper on CMC I learned new vocabulary and useful expressions used in academic language.
- 8) The choice of the multimodality module by a smaller number of students was explained by the useful exposure to new language during classroom interaction and in the reading assignments.
- 9) It was an interesting and interactive way to learn about English
- 10) Strong presence of new terms and expressions.
- 11) Because I have explored this topic with many readings that have allowed me to improve my English proficiency

The following set of questions (n. 3-4) asked students which module of the course had helped them the most in developing useful skills for their future professional life. A large majority of respondents answered these questions by indicating the module on CMC (67.9%), followed by multimodality (22.6%) and corpus linguistics (9.4%). Here the situation is reversed, as corpus linguistics was considered somewhat unrelated to their future job, whereas CMC was seen as closely connected to their specific field of specialization – business communication in international environments – and the world of work. Comments related to this question were particularly elaborate and truly enthusiastic, detailing the many advantages that this module had offered. In particular, students appreciated the interdisciplinary nature of this topic –encompassing communication science, business discourse, sociology and rhetoric – and its relevance to both the world of business and present-day events. Some students pointed out the importance of training future managers to handle complex situations ‘from within’, find solutions and adequate responses to crises arising in different professional settings, cope with stressful situations, and communicate effectively through different media. The wide range of stimulating case studies discussed in class and the one they chose for their final report offered students the opportunity to develop a critical perspective towards real-life events, also considering that facts may now be skewed by the deliberate spread of misinformation, disinformation and fake news.

- 12) With this module I learnt how to handle crisis situations, what kind of approach to take and what language to use. I think this module is perfect for the kind of work we should do once we have finished this university course.
- 13) I would like to work in a company, in the communication area, and this module has taught me how to communicate properly with stakeholders, in particular in times of crisis.
- 14) I was able to understand business mechanisms concerning company communication that I did not know before, in particular about the importance of speed of communication both internally within the company and externally (e.g. on social media or the website) in the event of a company crisis.
- 15) CMC module helped me improve my ability to manage stressful situations, work under pressure and adapt quickly to unpredictable events.

Students who opted for the lessons and activities focused on multimodality gave several reasons: they seemed to enjoy getting to know more about visual communication, company websites of known and new brands and navigating online. Students appreciated the proposed group activities, which stimulated group discussion and decision-making for the presentation of a company's "About Us" section.

- 16) Considering our nowadays work fields, most of them are based on the use of websites, hence knowing how to develop them in a multimodality sense was useful for me.
- 17) Multimodality module helped me the most to develop useful skills for my future professional life because working in a team I had the chance to learn and improve how to coordinate my work with that of my colleagues and how to manage group projects.

Figure 1 displays the data analyzed so far, showing that the modules on corpus linguistics and CMC were rated higher for the development of English competence and CMC and multimodality emerged as the modules that helped the most to develop professional skills.

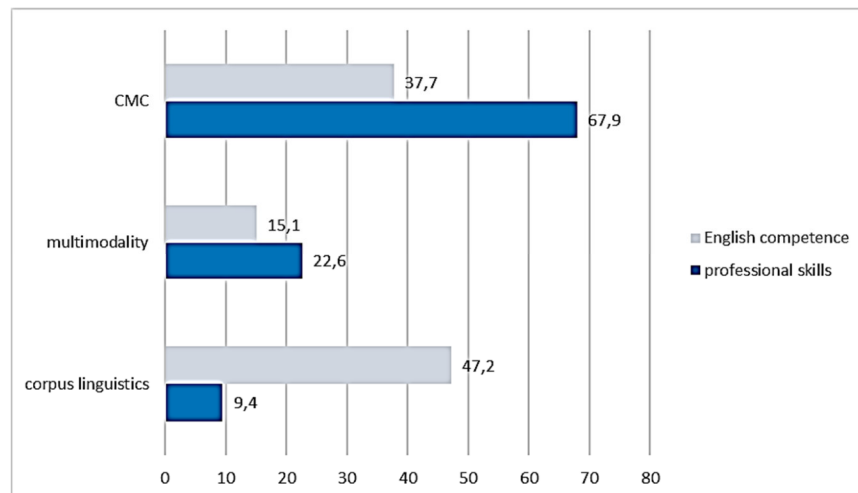


Figure 1. Skills developed in the three modules of the course

Question 5 aimed to find out how familiar students were with multimodality before attending the course. This information can be useful to redress the complexity of the reading material and the classroom activities. In fact, this is what emerged from the students' feedback. The answers were based on a scale from 1 to 5, ranging from minimum ('I did not know about it') to maximum familiarity ('I was already familiar with this approach'). As shown in Figure 2, 40.4% of respondents selected a mid-range value (3), 23.1% and 5.8% had a high degree of familiarity (4 and 5), and 9.6% and 20.2% opted for a low level of familiarity (1 and 2). Overall, a medium to high level of familiarity emerged from the data (69.3% summing up values 3, 4 and 5). This trend was to be expected, given that many students are familiar with digital technology and capable of navigating digital devices. Moreover, they had also attended a course in visual communication in their first year. This fact suggests that an update of the approach and the materials used in this module is necessary to stimulate students' interest and motivation.

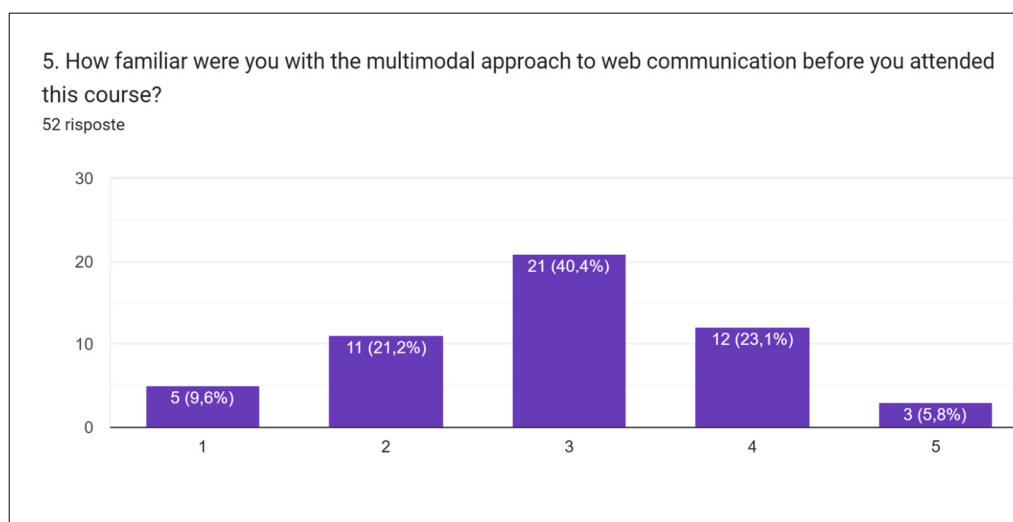


Figure 2. Students' familiarity with multimodality

Question 6 asked what students felt they had learned about multimodality that they did not know before the course. The answers to this question highlighted the fact that the course provided a theoretical framework (the field of semiotics and the notion of 'mode' as a semiotic resource to express meaning) to help them systematize the analysis of websites and made them more aware of the resources and strategies available to web-designers to enhance the efficacy of corporate communication. Here are some comments:

- 18) I didn't know that it was a specific strategy used by companies to convey or focus on specific meanings.
- 19) Before studying this module I never paid enough attention to how a company's website is structured and now I see things differently.

Question 7 focused on the contribution of the English Language and Linguistics course in further developing students' digital skills. In this case, the scale from minimum (only a little= 1) to maximum (very much= 5) weighed more on a positive input for strengthening students' digital skills: in fact 38.5% selected a mid-range score (3), 34.6% a high score (4), and 15.5% the highest (5), against 9.6% (2) and 1.9% (1) that selected lower scores. Overall, the sum of the mid and high scores (88.6%) indicates that the exposure to corpora, websites and materials (including the Moodle platform of the course) contributed to students' familiarity with technology, although it is important to stress that the curricular course was primarily about English language and linguistics.

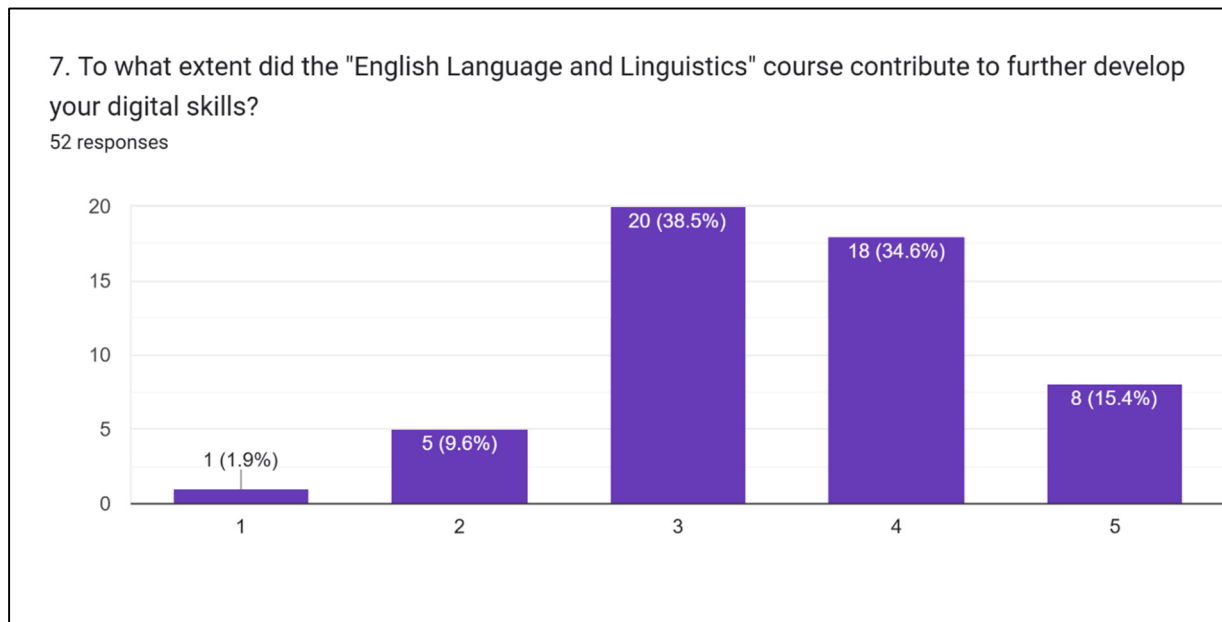


Figure 3. Development of digital skills

Question 8 was about their opinion on the digital component of the English Language and Linguistics course: this confirmed a positive perception about their improvement in digital skills: in fact, 64.2% selected the option 'I learned something new about digital technology' and 34% selected the option 'I learned many new things about digital technology'; only a small fraction (1.8%) opted for the option 'I did not really learn anything about digital technology'. These answers provide an even higher positive perception of the digital component of this course (98% by adding 'I learned something new' and 'I learned many new things').

As previously mentioned in relation to questions 3 and 4, a large majority of course attendees declared their preference for the module on CMC. Question 9 asked them to place the main positive characteristics of this module, offering a choice among 4 options, in order of importance. The positive characteristic that received the highest rating was 'its interdisciplinary nature' (43%), followed by 'its relevance to the world of business' (34%) and 'its connection to present-day events' (34%) and finally 'the importance for the training of future managers' (32%). These results suggest that, in this initial phase of university life, students' opinions are mostly influenced by the academic preferences that led them to choose this degree course, i.e., a variety of different disciplines that are not normally found in degree courses in Modern Languages. The connection to the world of business and present-day events are also considered strong motivating drivers, while they may not see themselves as future managers yet, although more than one third of the respondents recognize this as a positive characteristic of this course.

Questions 10 and 11 were focused on the activities that students considered particularly useful for enriching their academic competence. Again, these activities had to be placed in order of importance. In addition, respondents were asked to provide free comments. Surprisingly, the activities placed in first position by the highest number of students were the online tests. Comments underlined the importance of 'studying notions' and being formally tested. The two tests that students had to take were multiple-choice quizzes based on the reading assignments about corpus-linguistics and multimodality. This preference indicates that Italian students are accustomed to written and oral assessment tests and feel the need to be guided by the tutor.

- 20) Thanks to the intermediate tests, we had the opportunity to gradually study the notions, internalize them and apply them.
- 21) With online tests I have less anxiety, while presentations put more pressure on me

The Q&A activities in class were the next most appreciated tasks carried out during the course. These were guided by various types of prompts such as videos or short articles that students had to work on in groups, followed by peer-to-peer and class discussions.

- 22) Q&A activities in class: encouraged critical thinking and engagement. Asking questions and participating in discussions could have deepened your understanding of the subject.

The next activities that received appreciation from students were the preparation and delivery of two digital presentations supported by slides (see Appendix 1 and 2), which required the additional submission of written scripts. The first presentation consisted in the lexical profile of a phraseologism or collocation; the second was the analysis of the "About Us" webpage of a company. These presentations were delivered in groups either in class or recorded as an mp-4 file and uploaded on the Moodle platform of the course. Scripts were uploaded on the Moodle platform for evaluation. The writing of the scripts was placed in fourth position in terms of usefulness for enriching the students' academic competence.

- 23) I really enjoyed the presentations, I believe it's easier to understand and learn something when put into practice.
- 24) I think the two PowerPoint presentations were really useful for learning to speak in front of an English-speaking audience about a research work that I had done myself
- 25) Also the lessons delivered by the tutor on the theoretical content of the course were appreciated by students, although they rank only in fifth position.
- 26) The tutor's presentation of the theory was very useful to understand something new.
- 27) In my opinion it is essential to have the explanation of theory and new concepts, but to really learn them it is important to have something real to apply it to (ie. the cases).
- 28) The last activity in order of usefulness was corpus-based research on phraseology, for the reasons well described in the following comment.
- 29) Although it was instructive to learn notions about corpora, I put the corpus part at the end because I found it too "static and decontextualized."

Overall, the impression was that some students were not very keen on technology and found it difficult to access and use the corpus-query tools presented in class with sufficient ingenuity and independence.

To conclude, the final question 12 asked students to suggest improvements for the English Language and Linguistics course the following year. The majority (54%) thought that the course was already well-balanced and had no suggestions. About a third (35%) recommended more practical activities to be done in class and 9% would encourage more discussion in class. This partly confirms the positive evaluation given to Q&A activities during classroom time: it seems that students liked working in groups and discussing issues among themselves (they often resorted to Italian, although they were encouraged to speak English during classes), whereas they were more reluctant to speak up and actively participate in open debates.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Recent research has highlighted the need for tertiary education to bridge the gap between the academic syllabi and the work environment to better prepare students for the challenges of an increasingly digital, complex, intercultural and changeable work environment (section 1). This paper has reported on a task-based educational experiment which consisted in three modules helping MA students majoring in English reach various goals (section 2). On the one hand, they were offered the possibility to increase their understanding and proficiency regarding lexical and pragmatic aspects of EAP and ESP. To this end, they were provided with the analytical framework and tools to examine visual and verbal texts belonging to different genres and having different scopes (company web pages, newspaper and magazine articles, press releases, etc.). On the other hand, they were actively engaged in autonomous, hands-on activities related to business communication to sharpen their occupational and digital skills.

While planning the course syllabus, we adopted a student-centred approach to encourage active student engagement and the development of critical-thinking and soft skills in addition to language proficiency. After introducing the guiding principles and outlining the course structure, we presented the student feedback obtained through an online questionnaire. Measuring the teaching efficacy of degree programmes, curricular courses and all types of educational activities at all levels of education has become a very common practice to provide quality assurance and academic recognition of institutions. Our end-of-course questionnaire was designed and implemented for internal purposes only, to collect students' feedback and insights on the choices made as far as contents, skills and assessment were concerned. This feedback allows us to evaluate how the students reacted to an innovative educational approach in higher education courses for English majors that

differed from traditional methods (section 3). In the following sections we will first discuss the findings against the background of our inspiring principles of the course in order to answer our research question: *In students' opinion, how did the integration of linguistic and work-related aspects in an MA course in English Language and Linguistics impact their learning experience?* Then, we will draw the main pedagogical implications while providing suggestions for future research.

4.1. Assessing course quality through students' feedback and insights

To assess the impact of the course on learning, we can analyze our students' perspectives with reference to three areas: language proficiency, work-related skills, and digital competence. Our students' feedback indicates that the three course components have been beneficial (albeit to varying degrees) in improving their linguistic skills. Our students appreciated being confronted with authentic language while working on corpora and real cases of crisis management communication. They increased their knowledge and comprehension of general and specialized vocabulary and became aware of pragmatic and strategic aspects of the language they had never reflected upon. They felt that the linguistic and multimodal analytical tools they used made them more autonomous in actively producing quality written texts where they could apply theoretical principles. Therefore, our task-based approach proved successful in helping students sharpen their reading and writing skills by encouraging them to actively apply the knowledge and approaches – especially corpus linguistics – presented in the course. This aligns with the so-called Dublin descriptors, which recommend teachers to help students apply theoretical knowledge and develop the ability to talk to various audiences. Indeed, in their open comments, students reported that the course increased their ability to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of ESP and more effective competence in producing clearer written and oral texts.

This increased contextual sensibility in the use of English is intertwined with work-related skills, the second area of competencies our course aimed to develop. Similarly, the three components were perceived as useful in helping students prepare for their future careers. Although the students' preferences in this area mainly referred to CMC, the comments show that the other two modules also contributed to developing occupational skills. So, the choice of combining them in one course proves effective as it allows students to acquire various skills they can apply once they enter the job market. The majority of students prefer CMC due to its practical applications in the field of business communication, which is a fascinating and complex area that many of our students are likely to pursue as a career. However, the module on multimodality was also appreciated because it allowed students to work on visual components – a relevant aspect of our contemporary society – in a brand-based context. It was appealing because they had the opportunity to investigate the multimodal semiotic contexts of the companies they deal with in their everyday lives as consumers and might work for in future. Those two components made them feel as if they were gaining an insider's view of their future work field that might help them in their professional life. In this respect, corpus linguistics seemed less effective, as it was chosen by few students. Given the educational value of a corpus-based approach in the literature on business communication teaching, we will try to highlight the benefits of this approach for increasing general and professional language proficiency in our future courses.

This seems relevant also regarding the third area of interest of our paper, namely students' digital skills. As illustrated in section 3, the majority of our students perceived the course as beneficial to increase their digital competence. Despite being familiar with the digital world, they experienced it for the first time from a professional perspective. While using corpus-based tools like Sketch Engine or more familiar resources like videos and software for visual presentations, they experimented with an active and digitally enhanced approach to language learning. In addition to achieving in-depth comprehension of lexical and pragmatic structures, they actively used them while creating oral and written digital presentations. This result is encouraging, as it shows that the course complied with recommendations from various stakeholders at the international level to increase students' digital literacy and fluency. However, also in this third area, the module of CMC gained more appreciation than corpus linguistics or multimodality. This is surprising, as the digital component also plays a relevant role in the other two areas. As highlighted in section 3, this may be explained by the job-oriented approach of MA students, which make them view the topics and activities they consider more connected to their future careers in a better light. In the future academic years, we will continue to implement the digital aspects of the course and help students master corpus-based tools and grasp the variety of their possible applications to language learning and for professional purposes.

4.2. Suggestions for improvement and pedagogical considerations

The findings have shown that students positively evaluated the interdisciplinary approach we adopted in the course. Their answers show that the organization in three different modules proved effective, which confirms the recommendations for the integration of not-strictly linguistic components in courses in business communication that has been suggested in previous studies. Students considered the course well-balanced and appreciated the collaborative activities. They were guided and supported by the teacher and their peers while using different analytical tools that helped them focus on different aspects of the language and increase various skills. This is relevant not only because it appealed to various types of students' intelligences and allowed them to express their different talents and abilities. It contributed to sharpening our students' comprehension of the semiotically complex contemporary world where intercultural, digital and linguistic aspects are intertwined. While pursuing their active approach, the course has provided students with tools they will use in their academic and future careers. When asked for suggestions for improvement, they did not question the type of modules or activities. On the contrary, they appreciated them and grasped the benefits of this well-rounded approach for the development of their language and professional skills. The only suggestion they provided refers to the implementations of class discussions. This confirms that students appreciate an active involvement in the course and the possibility to work in teams. This aligns with the recommendations for a shift in higher education from a lecturer-centred and theoretical approach to a student-centred approach that encourages students to actively engage with the contents and their peers.

However, students' answers show that there is room for improvement. Students' responses show a willingness to adapt, indicating their openness to new learning methods. At the same time, their strong attachment to traditional, content-based approaches – especially in assessments – suggests a reluctance to fully embrace change. On the one hand, we aimed to provide them with a comprehensive approach encompassing traditional content-based testing with tasks that would elicit an active, critical and creative behaviour (e.g. the case study). On the other hand, we found it surprising that some students considered the former as their preferred way of gaining knowledge. Although they were a minority, this shows that they experienced traditional approaches to teaching that favored the concept of effective learning as the acquisition of notions. In other words, this indicates that, at least at the university level, students are still taught traditionally, which makes them consider conventional forms of testing the most effective tool to assess their learning. This suggests that established models continue to play a significant role in the learning experience, making students resistant to change. Therefore, to contribute to innovation in higher education courses, it seems necessary to actively involve students and increase their awareness of the benefits of a more creative, student-centred and engaging approach. In our future courses, it may be useful to discuss learning strategies and goals in order to include students in the process of necessary change of tertiary education. Although this paper investigated a single course, we believe that the insights provided by our students can contribute to the ongoing discussion on ways to make learning at the university level a more updated and relevant experience.

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Appendix 1.

Extracts from students' presentations
(concordance of the idiom 'keep an eye on' and word sketch of the verb 'explore')

POS TAGS AND MEANING

keep an eye on somebody/something
 ★ to take care of somebody/something and make sure that they are not harmed, damaged, etc.

Source: Oxford Learner's Dictionary

Collocations

concrete vs abstract

intensifiers

cognitive activities

modifiers of "explore"	objects of "explore"	subjects of "explore"
systematically ... systematically explored	possibility ... explore the possibility	chapter ... This chapter explores
afield ... to explore further afield	island ... explore the island	tongue ... tongue shyly exploring
thoroughly ... been thoroughly explored	avenue ... explore these avenues	worth ... are numerous cloughs worth exploring in the Dark
extensively ... has been extensively explored by	potential ... to explore the potential	researcher ... researcher explores
fully ... fully explored	theme ... explores the theme	project ... project explores the
briefly ... briefly explored	relationship ... explore the relationships	research ... research explores the
elsewhere ... explored elsewhere in	issue ... explore the issues	finger ... fingers explored

Appendix 2.
Screenshots from students' presentations
(Diesel's About us page; l'Oréal's rhetorical strategies)

"About Us" page

logo and tagline

table of contents

simple visual

IDEAL part: image/identity of the company

- **Corporate** website
- Stakeholders: **customers**, companies, suppliers

RHETORICAL STRATEGIES & TEXTUAL ELEMENTS FUNCTIONS

Beauty is our DNA. From the very first hair dye L'Oréal produced in 1909 to our innovative Beauty Tech products and services today, our company has been a pure player and leader in the beauty sector worldwide for decades.

Using these linguistic items, the company aims at promoting itself as an experienced partner

➡ Trasporent communication

Who We Are

For more than 110 years, we have devoted our energy and our competencies solely to one business: beauty. We have chosen to offer our expertise in the service of women and men worldwide, meeting the infinite diversity of their beauty desires. We are committed to fulfilling this mission ethically and responsibly.

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Insights from combining COIL & short-term study abroad: Using blended mobility to enhance international business communication learning

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ABSTRACT

EN Rapid cultural and digital transformations are disrupting higher education. Focusing on unique areas referred to as “human intelligence” (HI) is critical to meet students’ changing needs. This paper explores the design, pedagogy, and outcomes of an international business communication course integrating a blended mobility model. This study investigates student outcomes in a blended mobility format combining a COIL course with a brief study abroad experience, culminating in a cross-cultural team presentation to a real business client. Content analysis of student reflections identifies core learning outcomes, comparing and expanding upon blended mobility “employability skills”. Five additional skills emerged, consistent with intercultural competency communication research as well as ten sub-themes related to belonging. Findings highlight the potential of blended mobility to foster “HI” professional skills as well as a sense of belonging among student participants.

Key words: INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION, BLENDED MOBILITY, LEARNING OUTCOMES, HUMAN INTELLIGENCE (HI), RELATIONAL/BELONGING, PEDAGOGY

ES Las rápidas transformaciones culturales y digitales están alterando radicalmente la educación universitaria. Es fundamental concentrarse en áreas específicas denominadas «inteligencia humana» (IH) para satisfacer las necesidades cambiantes de los estudiantes. Este artículo explora el diseño, la pedagogía y los resultados de un curso de comunicación empresarial internacional que integra un modelo de movilidad mixta. Este estudio investiga los resultados de los estudiantes en un formato de movilidad que combina un curso COIL con una breve experiencia de estudios en el extranjero, que culmina con una presentación grupal intercultural a un cliente real. El análisis de las reflexiones de los estudiantes identifica los principales resultados del aprendizaje, comparando y ampliando las “competencias de empleabilidad” de la movilidad combinada. Surgieron cinco habilidades adicionales, coherentes con la investigación sobre la comunicación de la competencia intercultural, así como diez subtemas relacionados con la pertenencia. Los resultados resaltan el potencial de la movilidad mixta para fomentar las competencias profesionales «HI», así como el sentimiento de pertenencia entre los estudiantes participantes.

Palabras clave: COMUNICACIÓN EMPRESARIAL INTERNACIONAL, MOVILIDAD MIXTA, RESULTADOS DEL APRENDIZAJE, INTELIGENCIA HUMANA (IH), RELACIONES/PERTENENCIA, PEDAGOGÍA

IT Rapidi cambiamenti culturali e digitali stanno rivoluzionando l'istruzione universitaria. Per soddisfare le esigenze in evoluzione degli studenti, è fondamentale concentrarsi su aspetti specifici, definiti come “intelligenza umana” (HI). Qui si esplora progettazione, didattica e risultati di un corso di comunicazione aziendale internazionale che integra un modello di mobilità mista. Questo studio analizza i risultati degli studenti in mobilità mista che combina un corso COIL con una esperienza di studio all'estero, culminata in una presentazione interculturale di gruppo a un cliente reale. L'analisi del contenuto delle riflessioni degli studenti rivela i principali risultati dell'apprendimento, confrontando e ampliando le “competenze di occupabilità” della mobilità mista. Dallo studio emergono cinque competenze aggiuntive, coerenti con la ricerca sulla comunicazione delle competenze interculturali e dieci sottotemi legati all'appartenenza. I risultati evidenziano il potenziale della mobilità mista nel promuovere le competenze professionali di HI e il senso di appartenenza degli studenti partecipanti.

Parole chiave: COMUNICAZIONE AZIENDALE INTERNAZIONALE, MOBILITÀ MISTA, RISULTATI DELL'APPRENDIMENTO, INTELIGENZA UMANA (HI), RELAZIONI/APPARTENENZA, PEDAGOGIA

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1. Introduction

Technology continues to transform higher education, including allowing increased global interconnectedness and the development of new instructional techniques. Interest and attention to the internationalism of higher education has seen dramatic increase and can be viewed as a contemporary trend driven by Western nations (Ainsworth, 2013; Tight, 2022). As institutions of higher education navigate a complex landscape reshaped by digital transformation, the need for innovative pedagogical approaches has become urgent and necessary.

For instance, research conducted by Gartner forecasts that generative AI will disrupt and transform education in ways yet to be fully understood (Sheehan et al., 2023). A recent Forbes article speculates that generative AI and other technology will progressively replace professor roles, along a continuum from assistance to full replacement, potentially as early as 2035 (Andriole, 2024). In response, new teaching modes and practices, including those in business discourse, must adapt by developing instructional approaches to contribute to this digital age. Thus, a pressing question arises: how should higher education and the professorate respond?

The answer may lie in embracing and helping to steer technological change. Emerging technologies present opportunities to attract students, enhance student (and staff) experiences, and improve educational outcomes (Fernandez et al., 2023). All organizations must come to grips with how AI will impact them, but certain invaluable abilities and traits that are wholly (or mostly) human skills and that will be in more demand than ever in the age of AI cannot be easily replicated (Forbes Technology Council, 2024).

Business schools, in particular, should lead the way in engaging students with technology and creating curricula that prioritize fostering the unique, what I call “*Human Intelligence*” (HI), skills—those nuanced, “human touch” capabilities not easily replaced by machines. Some “new” curriculum ideas, suggested on a recent Harvard Business Publishing webinar, highlighted “soft skills” such as creativity, critical thinking, prompt engineering, teamwork, empathy, and collective intelligence (Lefevre & Shrier, 2023), which would certainly fit the bill as areas of HI. Other areas, deeply rooted in the human experience and likely challenging for AI and machines to replicate fully, include but are not limited to: emotional intelligence, intuition, moral and ethical reasoning, adaptability, wisdom, interpersonal skills, and self-awareness. Pedagogy methods, such as problem-based and experiential learning, offer considerable promise for enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes. To this end, alongside technological adaptation, important HI skills fostering international awareness and cultural competence are crucial for preparing students for the global business environment that will be increasingly impacted by AI.

Cross-cultural communication strategies are essential for business professionals to navigate the increasingly interconnected world. Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) projects—a type of experiential learning model—leverage virtual conferencing to connect classrooms across countries and cultures, bridging gaps in knowledge, and fostering global understanding (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 2021). These virtual exchanges support active learning through positive interdependence and the development of rapport between individuals working towards shared goals (Johnson & Johnson, 2005; Compagnoni & Serragiotto, 2024). This approach aligns with calls for innovative technological and pedagogical offerings to create novel educational services—identified as an imperative for future research (Rahmadi, 2024) and represents a forward-thinking strategy preparing students for international collaboration.

This study represents a further investigation into the outcomes reported by students participating in a blended mobility program—a COIL course augmented by a brief study abroad experience—developed in partnership between universities in the United States and Hungary. This inquiry takes up calls for further investigation into the deployment of collaborative skills, transferable to digital and real-life settings of professional and social nature (Compagnoni & Serragiotto, 2024) and exploring qualitative outcomes of international teaching and learning practices to help better inform institutions of higher education (Eiras, 2024). Through qualitative analysis of student reflections, this research examines self-reported outcomes, uncovering thematic insights into how blended mobility programs might better prepare students for digital and real-world professional contexts.

2. Short-term study abroad, COIL, and blended mobility

2.1. The rise of COIL in Higher Education

With today’s demanding and rapidly changing environment in the professional world, cultivating international and cross-cultural teamwork and business communication skills is vital; however, these

important skills remain underdeveloped in many undergraduate curricula (Escudeiro & Escudeiro, 2018) despite the known promise of virtual education in business contexts (e.g., Taras et al., 2013). Facilitating transnational relationships—such as bilateral university partnerships—could offer an intriguing and beneficial path for skill enhancement. Scholarship exploring the rationale, implementation, and outcomes of such collaborations remains needed (Fehrenbach & Huisman, 2022). Short-term study abroad often offers students a more affordable option than longer duration study-abroad; short-term study abroad offers a number of increased intercultural communication skills (e.g., Drews & Myer, 1996; Campbell, 2016; Coker, Heiser, & Taylor, 2018) as well as broadening knowledge of global business practices (e.g., Marlowe et al., 1998; Henthorne et al., 2001). Likewise, initial studies show that COIL experiences have been met positively by students as a valuable format for building skills within undergraduate international business classes and can have a positive impact on their ability to work in global teams (Garcia et al., 2023).

Traditional COIL courses seek to enhance student learning by incorporating an international education component co-developed and co-taught by professors from different countries. This setup allows students to engage in online collaborative group projects that foster sustained interaction and communication in a guided, cross-cultural setting (Liu & Shirley, 2021). By integrating this type of virtual exchange, COIL courses allow faculty and students to collaborate with global peers in co-taught, culturally-focused online environments, promoting intercultural awareness, disciplinary content knowledge, as well as essential skills in communication and teamwork (Vahed & Rodriguez, 2021). Faculties collaborate to design diverse learning activities, such as shared assignments, co-teaching sessions, guest lectures, social engagements, group projects, and other undertakings, to offer students multiple points of interaction.

COIL has become increasingly popular as a tool for developing intercultural competence among students who might otherwise lack access to study or internship abroad programs. Since 2015, Italy's Università Cattolica Del Sacro Cuore has coordinated multiple COIL projects, with U.S. and European partners, covering a variety of management courses including business communication (Università Cattolica Del Sacro Cuore, 2021). Three key elements of COIL—pedagogy, technology, and cross-cultural learning—have been found to strengthen the integration of multicultural perspectives and can offer unique learning experiences for both students and faculty (Asojo et al., 2019). Research supports COIL's effectiveness in fostering intercultural competence in higher education students (e.g., Hackett et al., 2023) and suggests additional benefits for developing other key workplace skills (Mestre-Segarra & Ruiz-Garrido, 2022).

Importantly, a sense of belonging has been reported via technology-based and blended learning environments. A sense of belonging is created when students feel included and connected to a group, class, subject, and/or institution (Armelli et al., 2021; Mendoza & Venables, 2023; Metzger & Taggart, 2020; Peacock & Cowan, 2019). Technology-based learning, through COIL has been positively associated with an increased sense of connectedness and belonging among college students. For instance, a recent study on COIL outcomes found significant improvements in intercultural competence as well as an enhanced sense of global community and belonging among undergraduate students from partnered U.S. and U.K. institutions (Nowak et al., 2023). Similarly, U.S. and Dutch students reported perceptions of personal growth, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural competence, and professional development (Harris & Seo, 2024). Another study observed that students in a U.S. international business class valued COIL-based experiences for fostering empathy, understanding of global issues, connections with international peers, and perceived applicability of these skills in the workplace (Garcia et al., 2023).

Instructors looking to implement COIL should be mindful of potential challenges, including coordinating across time zones, motivating team members, managing group dynamics, addressing language and content requirements, and growing students' intercultural communication competences. Establishing a final task as a common goal, supporting baseline technological competency, and preparing for logistical difficulties require proactive planning and preparation (Mestre-Segarra & Ruiz-Garrido, 2022). Faculties also report difficulties in sourcing high-quality, relevant materials, often needing the creation of custom resources (Orzech, Zhang, & Greenfield, 2023). Supporting students' cognitive development, critical thinking, and self-confidence can enhance engagement and commitment but may require extra instructional effort (Vahed, 2022).

2.2. The rise of blended mobility courses in Higher Education

Blended mobility can be defined as virtual mobility (e.g., COIL) plus physical mobility (e.g., short-term study abroad). Blended mobility combines joint online teaching and learning phases with periods of short-term physical mobility to one (or both) partner universities. This approach allows for a deeper, more sustained cross-cultural engagement to enrich and reinforce global/intercultural learning outcomes. In the wake of the

global pandemic, which necessitated a shift to online education, some universities are now exploring blended mobility as a durable model for international learning (Giralt et al., 2022).

Contributing to the emergence of this new type of mobility are the new universities alliances throughout Europe. Recognizing its potential, the European Commission (2022) has promoted blended mobility as an integral component of future educational frameworks, particularly within the Erasmus+ program. The European Universities initiative aims at establishing cooperation between higher education institutions from across Europe, supported through Erasmus+ funding.

Despite this growing interest, blended mobility research is relatively sparse. Helm and O'Dowd's (2020) position paper about virtual exchange suggests that blended mobility supports a range of 21st century "employability skills" including media and digital literacy, communication, global awareness, empathy, critical and analytical thinking, foreign language proficiency, and intercultural competencies. Additionally, they note early returns on the Erasmus+ research adds the employability skills of teamwork and problem-solving. This range of skills aligns with areas of HI and requires added research support.

Implementing a blended mobility course offers potential high outcome rewards but often comes with challenges. In a study by Malichova, Marton, and Tokarcikova (2022), researchers reported on a blended mobility initiative aimed at enhancing teaching methods, business and social skills, and simulating real-world work environments that was developed by a consortium of twelve universities and one registered organization. Although challenges were noted, such as logistical and coordination issues, the program yielded encouraging outcomes for students. In another study, Perfolz and Lopez-Varela (2022) evaluated the outcomes of a blended mobility course by surveying students on whether the course facilitated international learning. Results showed that 75% of students felt the course fully met this goal and an additional 20% agreed it was effective to a considerable extent. However, the study also listed challenges, primarily in the planning stages, such as financial framework, availability timeframes, personnel capacity with division of labor, and technical aspects.

2.3. An overview of the blended mobility course for this study

At the University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler Business School, students can enroll in faculty-led courses that involve short-duration international travel. These courses, known as Global Immersion Electives (GIE), typically consist of a sequence of pre-departure curricula leading to an in-country experience. The in-country component usually includes company visits, sightseeing, and cultural immersion activities. Upon return, students participate in a debriefing session.

In 2017, partially in response to student surveys expressing interest in a more extended client engagement, the blended mobility course was developed in collaboration with two professors from the Corvinus University of Budapest's Business and Management program. The course was first offered during the Spring term of 2018. In addition to the standard GIE short-duration study abroad activities in Hungary, the course incorporates a COIL component. It consists of a project-based learning experience, via cross cultural teams, working together on an actual client engagement with the culminating task of a case competition while in-country. Pedagogically, the course has three phases: 1) pre-departure (including COIL experience); 2) in-country; and 3) debrief and reflection.

Early in the pre-departure phase, students are placed into "global" teams. A typical team consists of two students from Kenan-Flagler working with two students from Corvinus. A class normally consisted of 8-12 cross-cultural teams, and the professors make an effort to mix the teams based upon student experience, background, interest of study, etc.

Each institution conducts separate, face-to-face "local" sessions for its students as well as online, synchronous joint sessions at mutually agreed upon times as part of the COIL component. Early in the engagement, all students attend a virtual kickoff meeting with the client, where they receive an overview of the project, and have the opportunity to ask questions. Throughout the pre-departure phase, student teams are expected to independently meet at least once per week. The pre-departure work lasts from January to the arrival in Hungary in mid-March. Table 1 outlines the pre-departure activities associated with the course.

Table 1
Phase 1 pre-departure activities associated with the course

Grouping	Description	Activities & Deliverables
(US Institution) local class sessions	4 face-to-face classes at (institution)	Class 1: Course introduction, ice breakers, syllabus review, assignment briefings, journaling assignment kickoff Class 2: Hungarian culture exploration (GlobeSmart, team presentations), travel logistics and preparation checklist Class 3: Maximizing the experience (session with career services), in-class SMART goals exercise Class 4: Travel logistics and safety, project consultation
(US Institution) student homework activities	Students complete assignments, including some asynchronous work, to develop skills	Review GlobeSmart self-analysis and compare with Hungarian averages Complete async module on working in virtual teams Earn IBM design thinking badge Work on journaling/self-analysis Project research Readings on Hungarian culture, cross-cultural teaming, developing team norms, running meetings, consulting methodologies, design thinking, basics of using MURAL, etc.
Joint sessions	7 virtual meetings US Institution + HU Intuition	Class 1: Introductions, icebreakers, overview, testimonials from past participants Class 2: Client kickoff meeting (come with questions) Class 3: Working in intercultural teams and case solving tips Class 4: Data, financials, and consulting methodologies Class 5: Ideation (multistep exercises facilitated on the MURAL platform) Class 6: Client consultation (come with questions) Class 7: Client presentation best practices: structure, story, delivery, and slide design
Global team virtual working sessions	4 meetings (minimum)	Teams schedule regular meetings designed to generate team bonding, socializing, learn from each other, and work on the client project. Teams normally use other mediums to communicate as well including email, WhatsApp, social media, text messages, etc.
Global team project consultation	2 virtual meetings	US professor sources experienced consultants to provide two half-hour checkpoint consultation sessions with each student team.

The in-country student experience (phase 2) spans over seven days (excluding travel time). During this phase, student teams worked on their projects in designated morning time blocks, with additional opportunities to meet during scheduled free time. Toward the end of the week, students participate in a case competition, presenting their project solutions to a panel of judges composed of client representatives and professors. The competition is structured in two flights. The top team, from each flight, advances to a final presentation in front of all teams; afterward, a winner is selected.

While the case competition is the culminating task of the trip, sightseeing, cultural immersions, company visits, socials, and opportunities to explore Budapest are highly enriching aspects of the short-term study abroad program. Table 2 overviews the in-country experience.

Table 2
Phase 2 in-country key activities

Day	Key activities for the day
1	Afternoon arrival, orientation, walking tour, welcome dinner
2	Budapest sightseeing & cultural immersion (full-day)
3	<i>Morning:</i> working session with student groups <i>Afternoon:</i> cultural immersion/sightseeing <i>Evening:</i> social coordinated by HU students
4	<i>Morning:</i> working session with student groups <i>Afternoon:</i> cultural immersion & company visit <i>Evening:</i> social coordinated by HU students
5	<i>Morning:</i> working session with student groups <i>Afternoon:</i> company visit <i>Evening:</i> team prep/free time
6	<i>Morning:</i> case competition (2 flights of student presentations) <i>Lunch:</i> with client and HU institution administration <i>Afternoon:</i> finalist presentation round, winners announced, and team pictures <i>Evening:</i> farewell dinner, awards ceremony, and t-shirt swap with Hungarian students and faculty
7	Sightseeing/cultural immersion in small towns outside of Budapest

Phase 3 focuses on reflection and debrief. Approximately three weeks after the in-country experience, participating UNC Kenan-Flagler students have a final class session. For this meeting, students write a single-spaced, two-page minimum reflection capturing the course experiences that had the greatest impact on them. Students are given latitude on their reflection but encouraged to consult their journal and consider personal, intercultural, and professional growth. During the final class, students share their insights. Additionally, a representative from the career services team lead a series of exercises (such as review of SMART goals, providing sample resume language, and practice answering common interview questions) designed to help students maximize the career impact of their experience.

2.4. Purpose of the study and research questions

Overall, COIL courses are increasing in popularity, and research is burgeoning. Blended mobility courses are less common but offer an intriguing option in Higher Education, resulting in increased attention; blended mobility is getting more funding as part of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 Program (European Commission, 2022). However, research on blended mobility remains limited, highlighting a need for further investigation into its outcomes. This study aims to explore the specific areas in which students self-report benefits from participating in a blended mobility course, focusing on both professional skill development and relational aspects. Accordingly, this inquiry addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: Which of Helm and O’Dowd’s (2020) proposed blended mobility “employability” skill outcomes were supported by student experiences?

RQ2: What, if any, additional “employability” skills do students report being fostered by the blended mobility experience?

RQ3: What perceptions of relational connectedness or belonging do students report through participation in blended mobility (Nowak et al., 2023)?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design & Participants

This study employed thematic analysis and a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze open-ended, narrative self-reflection accounts from students at UNC Kenan-Flagler, who participated in the blended mobility course. The course is an elective, typically capped at 20 students per cohort, to ensure an immersive experience, personalized interaction, and manageable team numbers for the case competition.

The data for this study was collected over a three-year period from three iterations of the course, encompassing Spring 2022, 2023, and 2024. All self-reflections submitted by Kenan-Flagler students during these three cohorts were included, resulting in N = 58 undergraduate students. All participants were enrolled in the GIE to Hungary. Of these participants, n = 18 were women and N = 40 were men. Participants' ages ranged from 18-22 at the time of data collection. All participants took part in the COIL+ course for roughly nine consecutive weeks, leading to the short-term study abroad period.

The self-reflection assignment, completed by all N = 58 Kenan-Flagler Business School students, provides key insights into their experiences and evaluation of the blended mobility course, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of student-reported outcomes. These reflections are particularly valuable for understanding perceived impacts on personal, intercultural, and professional development. Students were instructed to write at least two single-spaced pages for their reflection. The average text length of completed assignments was 3 pages (range of 2-5 pages). The average word count was 1,415 with a range of 483-2,980 words per assignment.

The Hungarian students did not complete a similar self-reflection exercise, so their data were not captured as part of this study.

3.2. Data collection and procedures

As previously noted, Kenan-Flagler students were asked to reflect and capture some of the course experiences that made the greatest impact on them. The assignment was to create a written reflection document (two-page, single space minimum), and students submitted the assignment to the course Canvas site. The reflection assignment prompt is included in the Appendix. Data were collected to ensure participant anonymity. Participants' names and personal information were removed from the collected data and replaced with codes.

3.3. Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted by the researcher and a trained research assistant to analyze participants' self-reflection narratives and identify recurring themes, trends, and professional development. Thematic analysis provides a structured approach for identifying common themes and gaining insights into participants' experiences, beliefs, and/or attitudes. This study followed the six-step process developed and recommended by Braun and Clarke (2008): 1) familiarizing; 2) coding; 3) generating themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining; and 6) naming themes. This same approach was effectively applied, in a similar recent study, creating insights from student reflections in a traditional COIL context (Harris & Seo, 2024).

The researcher and an assistant began by thoroughly reading participants' assignments to become familiar with the data, making initial notes to capture preliminary impressions. Categories were established with the assistance of concepts reported in previous research; specific codes were generated to represent key concepts within the data. The codes were manually examined and organized into potential themes, which were subsequently reviewed to ensure they captured meaningful aspects of the participants' experiences. Re-readings were conducted to confirm that each theme was well-supported by the data. In the final step, the themes were refined and defined. Terms and concepts from existing COIL, blended mobility, and intercultural communication literature were considered to enhance the rigor and contextual relevance of the findings.

4. Findings

4.1. Results for RQ1

As previously noted, Helm and O'Dowd (2020) suggest that blended mobility can foster a variety of 21st century "employability skills," including media and digital literacy, communication skills, global awareness, empathy, critical and analytical thinking, foreign language skills, intercultural competencies, teaming, and problem-solving. Given the relative scarcity of research devoted to blended mobility, finding support for these skills advanced our understanding of student outcomes. The thematic analysis of student reflections in this

study supported these nine employability skills as outcomes of the blended mobility experience, with the need to contextualize two themes.

First, for digital media literacy, student experiences, as noted in the extracts in Table 3, do not represent a direct reference to how they learned, discovered, or improved their knowledge of technologies. Rather, students articulate how using a specific digital technology or platform helped them to learn, discover, and improve other sets of skills. However, as discussed by Dezuanni (2016), a key consideration for digital media literacy is tapping into these literacies for connecting student identities to broader educational purposes. Thus, the media literacy theme does not relate to the precursor student learning to use a digital platform; rather, participant extractions showcase how gaining/possession digital literacy was leveraged to an enhanced learning outcome. Thus, this term was reclassified as “digital technology enabled learning.”

Second, since all course activities and student interactions were conducted in English, the “foreign language skills” component was reflected less in terms of multilingual proficiency and more as a skill in sense-making and overcoming communicative barriers across cultural contexts. This nuanced interpretation still highlights reported communication growth. Further, even though the majority of participants’ L1 is English, they had to communicate with other students, academics, and professionals whose L1 is not English. This necessarily involves a new set of language adaptations, both at the oral and written modes, because the context of communication is no longer a natural L1 context but rather a context where English is used as a *lingua franca*; L1 speakers, thus, often acquire a new set of oral and written skills that enable them to communicate with non-natives (Triki, Giacosa, & Li, 2023).

Table 3 provides sample quotes, three per proposed employability skill, from student reflections for each of the seven employability skills, illustrating the breadth and depth of the students’ skill development through their blended mobility experience. Using themes from Helm & O’Dowd’s white paper, the nine emergent themes are:

- 1) **Digital technology enabled learning:** Media and digital media incorporates a broad set of skills related to effectively using digital technologies including the ability to find, evaluate, use, share, and create content using digital devices. Here, students discuss the outcomes of using digital platforms versus learning about the platforms in the first place.
- 2) **Communications skills:** The ability to effectively convey, receive, and interpret messages. Students discuss professional communication enhancements.
- 3) **Global awareness:** Key aspects include cultural sensitivity, global issues, economic realities, and global citizenship.
- 4) **Empathy:** The ability to understand and share feelings, thoughts, experiences, and experiences of others, as well as responding with compassion. Students expressed a greater ability to place themselves in someone else’s shoes to build deeper connections, improve communication, and collaborate more effectively.
- 5) **Critical and analytical thinking:** Closely related cognitive skills that involve evaluating information and making reasoned decisions to solve problems.
- 6) **Foreign language skills:** In this context, as previously stated, this skill was reflected less in terms of multilingual proficiency and more in sense-making and overcoming communicative barriers across cultural contexts.
- 7) **Intercultural competency:** The ability to effectively and appropriately interact with people from different cultural backgrounds.
- 8) **Teaming:** Students frequently discussed the importance of working cohesively within their cross-cultural teams. They emphasized how the experience taught them to navigate interpersonal dynamics, appreciate diverse perspectives, and contribute meaningfully toward objectives.
- 9) **Case/problem-solving:** The project-based nature of the course encouraged students to develop strong problem-solving skills. Working on a real client case pushed them to analyze situations, ask questions, seek information, and propose feasible solutions.

Table 3

Sample student responses supporting Helm & O'Dowd's employability outcomes of blended mobility

Theme	Sample of student responses
Digital media enabled learning	<p>“Utilizing tools like GlobeSmart’s profile survey and cultural guides doing our joint virtual class sessions, my teammates and I were able to evaluate our respective strengths and weaknesses as well as address (and refine) some of the general preconceived notions we held.”</p> <p>“Working virtually with (HU students) before traveling to Hungary was truly a game-changer, meeting them online offered me a glimpse into the dynamics of real-world international business collaboration. It also served as a great icebreaker for our group, helping to break down any barriers, which built invaluable team rapport.”</p> <p>“I found the “Inclusive Virtual Meetings” module particularly helpful in learning how to effectively communicate across cultures...During this module, I found myself reflecting on past projects that I had completed on diverse teams and imagining how our outcomes would have changed if some of these cross-cultural communication strategies had been implemented. In most cases, our work produced would have been of higher caliber, due to a higher general understanding of the goals and needs of each member within the team. After completing the module, I internalized some of the most helpful tips I learned, such as sending meeting itineraries to team members prior to a meeting virtually as well as following up after meetings with the responsibilities/tasks of each member to be completed prior to the following meeting.”</p>
Communication skills	<p>“My group’s performance during presentation day gave me a boost of confidence as we effectively communicated out ideas and told the story of our recommendation convincingly. The experience proved to me that I can be an effective communicator in a professional setting.”</p> <p>“I believe this program significantly shaped my communication style and social behaviors for the better. Before this program...I was (or arguably still am a bit) naturally awkward and shy. In our in-class “Goal-Setting Assignment,” I challenged myself to improve my networking skills and intercultural awareness; through the experiences I will detail, I believe I’ve done both.”</p> <p>“The case competition was a completely new experience for me, as I have not done any prior work like this...Within all kinds of academic settings, I personally dread presenting in front of people. I always have this fear I am not good at it and have issues formulating my thoughts. However, this experience made me realize that I am not an entirely bad presenter although I do have lots of room for improvement. I am completely capable of presenting in front of different people...What I thought was going to be the worst presentation of my life turned into one of my best because I had become comfortable...”</p>
Global Awareness	<p>“Through conversation, I was able to learn more about the cultural significance of each Hungarian dish and the stories behind them. I also learned that for Hungarians it isn’t just about cooking it was also about preserving tradition, sharing stories, and building connection with others.”</p> <p>“...it was the warmth and hospitality of the Hungarian people that truly touched my heart. From the joyful vendors at the markets to the friendly locals I met at cafes, each encounter was a reminder of the power of human connection to transcend language and cultural barriers.”</p> <p>“Having gotten used to only seeing the wealthiest parts of Budapest, this moment placed me face-to-face with the fact that homelessness, poverty, pain and suffering exist all around the globe. This moment showed me that Hungary wasn’t all that different from the US. While the culture, time zone, food, and climate may have changed, financial inequality hadn’t.”</p>

Empathy	<p>“Throughout my time in Hungary, I had to reframe my perspective on the world and push myself to be more open to empathizing with experiences vastly different than the ones I already know. One of my most eye-opening experiences happened at Szechenyi, where a few of us met a young woman a little bit older than us who is currently fleeing Ukraine. She told us her story, explaining the details of suddenly having her life ripped out from under her and her family torn apart. I was struck by how sudden all of it was, and how similar she was to me.”</p> <p>“I learned to navigate through situations that were outside my previous realm of experiences (i.e., traveling out of my home country for the first time alone), honing critical life skills such as adaptability, problem-solving, and empathy.”</p> <p>“I feel more connected to other human beings than I ever have before, and feel empowered to think more empathetically every day, especially with the troubles of today’s world. As I graduate in May and enter a full-time position as a consultant this Fall, I feel prepared and confident in my own strengths and distinct perspective. These experiences and lessons give me new context for working in international teams and with international clients, I walk away from this experience knowing that there is much to learn from others...”</p>
Critical and analytical thinking	<p>“The project we undertook with (client) was a practical application of our COIL coursework. It demanded not just cultural awareness but strategic thought, leadership, and a global mindset. Exploiting the theories and frameworks we had all learned pre-arrival, my team and I developed strategic recommendations tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities (client) would face entering the US market. This project was a way for testing our accumulated knowledge and the consulting skills we had honed in preparation.”</p> <p>“We had to navigate new logistical complexities, coordinate in a foreign environment under tight deadlines, reconcile the theoretical specs of our analysis with the practical realities of (client) faced, and ensure our strategies were not only innovative but also actionable within the constraints of the U.S. market.”</p> <p>“Not only did the project help me learn to think outside the box through my own thinking and that of my peers, but it also reinforced my interest in analyzing the financial aspects of companies. This gives me even more confidence and eagerness to become a financial analyst and perform on the job in the years to come.”</p>
Foreign language skills	<p>“Going to Budapest was the first time I didn’t speak the language. I remember going to Mass at St. Stephen’s Basilica completely in Hungarian and feeling lost. And words on the street signs were so long and full of constants. I joked saying that I would have given up learning Hungarian as a kid if I had been born there as their language seemed so complex and difficult to learn. However, I was very glad to learn that most people in the city spoke English well.”</p> <p>“And amongst the laughter, there were moments of challenge and growth, like the time I attempted to correctly pronounce the longest Hungarian word which is “megszentségteleníthetetlenléteikéért” with my Hungarian friends. Despite the tongue-twisting struggle, it became a shared joke among us, a lighthearted reminder of the beauty and complexity of the Hungarian language.”</p> <p>“It seems silly to admit that one of the most formative experience I had during the in-country portion of our program was teaching my teammates American slang, but it’s the truth... Yet not slang we taught them had as significant an impact as “cooking” and “cooked”, two similar-yet-constraining terms... For reasons unbeknownst to me, these words unlocked something in our teammates; they absolutely loved them and started sing the describe everything we did... Through initiating simple and silly conversation, I believe I got to know our teammates on a deeper level, and this strengthened our working relationship and allowed us to collaborate more freely than we did virtually.”</p>

Intercultural competency	<p>“Getting to know the Hungarian students also forced me out of the comfort zone as I found it a bit challenging at first to break the ice...Being around them (Hungarian students) taught me how to break outside of my comfort zone, more easily start the conversation, and take an interest in others.”</p> <p>‘Getting to know them (Hungarians) not only deepened my appreciation for diversity but also taught me to approach differences with an open mind and genuine curiosity. Witnessing their willingness to share ideas, even when controversial, highlighted the importance of open dialogue and cultural exchange in fostering mutual understanding and collaboration.”</p> <p>“The intercultural aspect of the GIE was one of the most impactful, as it exposed me to the complexities and nuances of cross-cultural communication and collaboration...I learned to recognize and appreciate cultural differences while finding common ground to foster meaningful connections.”</p>
Teaming	<p>“We created a psychologically safe environment where no one was afraid to share ideas, this let our creativity shine.”</p> <p>“For me, this experience was a lesson in different working styles, managing expectations, and leveraging strengths. I also learned critical skills like navigating team meetings with time-zone differences, staying adaptable in constantly changing situations, and building meaningful cross-cultural relationships.”</p> <p>“We learned that effective collaboration under pressure was not just about dividing tasks, but also about converging different viewpoints into a unified, strategic direction, These experiences were instrumental in fostering a mindset that views obstacles not as setbacks but as opportunities for learning and growth.”</p>
Case/problem solving	<p>“(By) Working closely with my teammates and receiving guidance from our professors I was able to improve my design thinking, problem-solving, presentation, and teamwork skills.”</p> <p>“Conducting market research, analyzing data and developing recommendations for our client allowed me to hone my problem-solving skills and critical thinking abilities. Moreover, presenting our findings to the client and receiving feedback was a valuable learning experience that enhanced my communication and presentation skills.”</p> <p>“I have done a few case competitions before, but this was a real problem a company was facing which made the experience more authentic...The experience developed me heavily professionally.”</p>

4.2. Results for RQ2

4.2.2 Support for additional employability skills

In addition to the nine employability skills proposed by Helm and O’Dowd (2020), thematic analysis of student reflections revealed five additional skills reported developed through the blended mobility experience. While the following concepts are somewhat inherently interconnected to the previous skills, they are mutually exclusive as determined and coded by the research team. These emerging skills were highlighted by students as key takeaways from the program, enhancing their readiness for complex, real-world environments:

- 1) **Gaining “real world” experience:** Many students noted the value of applying classroom knowledge to the real problem set provided by the client. Working on an actual client project allowed them to experience the practical applications of their coursework.

- 2) **Self-awareness:** Reflections indicated that students gained a deeper understanding of their own strengths, weaknesses, and perspective. This self-awareness emerged as they navigated different roles and challenges, prompting them to consider their impact and growth areas.
- 3) **Adaptability:** Students highlighted adaptability as essential for describing situations requiring quick adjustments such as changing schedules, cultural norms, and project needs.
- 4) **Conflict resolution:** Students discussed the need to navigate disagreements and rejections productively.
- 5) **Increased confidence:** Many students reported increased confidence in their professional abilities and resilience. The immersive, hands-on nature of the course contributed to their sense of accomplishment and readiness for future challenges.

Table 4 provides sample quotes illustrating each of these five additional skills, three per additional employability outcome, from student reflections.

Table 4
Additional employability outcomes of blended mobility based on student responses

Theme	Sample of student responses
Gaining practical, “real world” experience	<p>“...I felt that I was able to improve my teamwork skills by working with foreign partners who had different mannerisms and coming up with creative solutions for problems we faced. These skills are very transferable to many fields and aspects of life, and I can see this benefitting me professionally in both the far and near future.”</p> <p>“Moreover, this journey has been instrumental in my professional growth, equipping me with essential skills such as consulting frameworks, teamwork, and communication (skills).”</p> <p>“The opportunity to work on a real business project for [client name] also helped me gain insights about international business and how it differs from the practices I previously took for granted in the US. For example, when creating a discounted cash flow model for our [client name] financial projections, we had to use a much higher weighted average cost of capital assumption to account for Hungary’s extremely high treasury bond yields. There were also other factors to consider, such as the fact that European cities are often more compact and more walkable.”</p>
Growing in self-awareness	<p>“After visiting Hungary, I experienced many things that challenged what I thought about myself and about the world in general. Interacting with the Hungarians showed me a whole new perspective. For example, I learned that in every trip I make, I come back home with not only new memories and new friends, but also with a deeper understanding of myself and fresh insights into the world.”</p> <p>“We had a conversation about what we appreciated about each other one night. I learned that I came off as a very genuine person who isn’t afraid to admit “embarrassing” things about myself. That completely threw off my self-impression. I’m very caught up in people-pleasing. To hear that I came off as vulnerable and authentic helped me realize how I compensate for my people-pleasing tendencies by being honest and transparent. I would never have known that about myself if I hadn’t had these conversations.”</p> <p>“My time in Hungary has significantly shifted my perspective on the world and my place within it. Living and studying in a foreign country compelled me to develop a greater self-awareness and self-sufficiency...This journey was as much about self-discovery as it was about exploration of the world, shaping a more nuanced understanding of my values and aspirations.</p>
Adaptability	<p>“These experiences have taught me the importance of adaptability, the value of diverse perspectives, and the strength found in community.”</p> <p>“To make progress in our meetings, my American colleague and I took on the challenge of starting our conversations. For me this was quite difficult at first since I am pretty reserved</p>

<p>myself, but I learned to overcome and adapt. If I did not come out of my shell, we were not going to make any progress. I found though that I was able to understand and adapt to their cultural differences quite effectively...:</p>	<p>“Quickly adapting to communication styles, time zone differences, language barriers, and cultural norms will make a huge impact on my work-life relationships and an understanding that knowing my team enables better teamwork will motivate me to get to know them on a deeper level.”</p>
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<p>Conflict resolution</p>	<p>“I also learned how to work with conflict. (Classmate) and I often bounced ideas off one another and frequently disagreed. I learned how to both take a rejection and respectfully give a rejection”.</p> <p>“The biggest learning moment for me was on Wednesday, the day before presenting. It was the last hour and that teammate was complaining about the executive summary. He didn’t like the way the three of us had done it. I was frustrated because we had all been working on it and if he contributed then we wouldn’t be wasting time on this conversation. I quickly realized this mindset would not be helpful and took a deep breath. Instead of being annoyed, I had him sit down and asked him questions about to figure out what he didn’t like about the executive summary and how we could go about making a new one together. It led to a good conversation where we shared our opinions and created an executive summary that in the end was better than the previous two versions. Both of us walked away happy because we both felt heard and validated.”</p> <p>“I will not go into detail, but in one case, I lost respect for someone due to their personal actions on the trip, yet I had to work and travel with this individual for a week. Fortunately, it was not someone I worked directly with. The question became: how do I separate personal and professional feelings on a trip of this nature to avoid any potential conflict? My solution, right or wrong, was to only attempt a professional relationship with the person and distance myself during any free-time. In consideration of this person’s feelings, I made no sign of being dismayed at their behavior and they would not have known my true thoughts about them. I mention this subject only because I believe it is important to recognize that in any professional setting, there will be people who you will need to work with effectively despite personal feelings.”</p>
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<p>Increased confidence</p>	<p>“When it came to my turn to speak during our presentation, I lost that sense of fear and didn’t stumble over any thoughts or words as I went slightly off-script. I felt confident and the anxiety turned into an exhilarating feeling as I realized I had somewhat gotten over a long-time hurdle in my public-speaking journey. Even during the challenging Q&A, I felt poised as I formulated thoughts right before I spoke them.”</p> <p>“I’ve noticed a newfound confidence in my ability to navigate complex cultural situations, a skill sharpened by the necessity to adapt quickly in a foreign context. Moreover, the team-building, leadership experiences, and consulting slide design frameworks have further informed my approach to group projects and class discussions, enriching my contributions and interactions with peers.”</p> <p>“The main lesson that I learned from this project experience is to trust myself and realize that I am valuable and here for a reason...I believe that it is a combination of self and collaborative reflection that leads to effective and successful growth in character and professional development.”</p>
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4.3. Results for RQ3

As noted, recent research highlights that COIL experiences offer relational benefits, such as fostering a sense of global community and belonging. For instance, a public health course between U.S. and U.K. higher

education institutions found a significant change in students’ knowledge of cultural worldview, as well as reported positive impacts on a sense of belonging (Nowak et al., 2023).

The current study found that blended mobility fosters relational benefits. In fact, every student (N = 58) reported at least one statement that could be categorized as experiencing a relational benefit from the course.

A thematic analysis of student reflections identified ten sub-themes that characterize the relational dimensions fostered by the blended mobility experience:

- 1) **Broad cultural connection:** Students reported a sense of connection to the broader cultural environment, finding value in a shared experience and/or feeling part of a global community.
- 2) **Bonding among U.S. institution students:** This category reflects stated accounts of enhanced camaraderie and/or support among classmates from their own institution, fostering closer-knit peer group—especially during the in-country travel phase.
- 3) **Bonding between students from the peer institution:** Students highlighted the relationships they built with their Hungarian peers as meaningful and projected to be long-lasting.
- 4) **Interpersonal insights/overcoming misconceptions:** Students noted personal growth from overcoming preconceived notions, gaining a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives, and dispelling stereotypes through direct interactions.
- 5) **U.S. faculty/staff closeness:** An expression of appreciation for connecting with faculty and staff.
- 6) **Peer institution faculty appreciation:** Students shared positive experiences working with the partner institution.
- 7) **Seeking to expand personal network:** Several students mentioned a desire to continue building their networks inspired by the connections formed during the course.
- 8) **Physical acts of promoting bonding:** Acts such as hiking, exploring, and even hugging were cited as catalysts for deepening student connections with peers.
- 9) **Improved intrapersonal self-talk:** Students reported enhanced self-concept.
- 10) **Spiritual connection or growth:** Multiple students described moments of spiritual awakening or growth, particularly during travel, which added a deeper layer of personal reflection and sense of connectedness.

Table 5 provides a representative quote for each of these sub-themes.

Table 5
Relational benefits & belonging outcomes of blended mobility based on student responses

Sub-theme	Sample of student responses
Broad cultural connection	“In that moment, surrounded by laughs and the smell of this delicious plate, I felt a huge sense of connection to the people and the culture of Hungary.”
Bonding among U.S. institution students	“I was impressed by how everyone from UNC Kenan-Flagle clicked together as a group and became friends...”
Bonding between students from peer institution	“This planted the most important takeaway from the entire trip: people are people, no matter where you go. My worries of not being able to culturally connect with the Hungarians faded away; because at the end of the day, we were all united by the same things: the feeling of being embarrassed, wanting to make friends, fears of loneliness, hopes of grandeur and happiness - we were all deeply human at the end of the day and that was universal. Overall, what started as deep fear over not getting to know the Hungarians well due to cultural barriers...faded over the week as I would come to make some of the closest bonds I've had thus far in college.”
Interpersonal insights / overcoming misconceptions	“I was also able to challenge my preconceptions about certain groups of people within the actual class as well; interacting with (and befriending) I most likely would have never spoken to on campus otherwise helped me realize that a lot of the things I held close to my heart were not necessarily true, but I operated as if they were cold, hard facts.”

Faculty / staff closeness	“(Faculty and staff) were all so understanding, funny, and nice. I do not think it would have been the same without you, and I thank you for who you all are. This course, this trip, and everything about this experience will go down as one of the best things I’ve done in my life.”
Peer institution faculty appreciation	“One of my favorite parts of this GIE has been the opportunity to engage with diverse cultures and perspectives. Interacting with the Hungarian students and faculty has broadened my worldview and made me reconsider my beliefs.”
Seeking to expand personal network	“I feel that my network of fellow students and friends that I can rely on has grown exponentially and has made me want to become more involved with campus life and to further build these meaningful networks.”
Physical acts promoting bonding	I am very used to simply hugging; I learned just how uncommon that is in Hungary, even between close friends. What became funny was that after we discussed this, to show respect, our Hungarian teammates would hug (us), as each other, every single time we saw each other.
Improved intrapersonal self-talk	“Any time I tried to engage with others, I convinced myself that I was encroaching on their pre-organized groups...all of my preconceived notions were in my head. In the end, I created new relationships with my peers, something my introverted self oftentimes struggles to accomplish.”
Spiritual connection or growth	“Being in such beautiful places of worship in Budapest took my breath away and I felt like I was reconnecting with God in my own way. I remember kneeling at one of the pews in the Basilica and saying a few prayers. Being in that moment almost brought me to tears because it was overwhelmingly fulfilling to feel so connected to God again.”

5. Discussion and implications

Blended mobility and intercultural communication are crucial components for modern business education, especially in the AI age. By 2027, an estimated 60% of higher education institutions will adopt a hybrid operating model that combines physical and digital capabilities to create a unified environment for learning, teaching, research, and operations (Sheehan, Riley, Farrell, et al., 2023). Blended mobility and intercultural business communication offer impactful components for modern business education. This shift aligns with the goals of AACSB-accredited business schools to make a positive impact on business, society, and the global community. As AI continues to transform industries globally, the ability to navigate diverse cultural contexts and adapt to various environments has become crucial. Business schools that prioritize these skills are not only preparing their students for current challenges but also equipping them with the tools to navigate future uncertainties. As AI and machine learning continue to evolve, the ability to work effectively in diverse environments and communicate across cultures will be invaluable to the human experience. Blended mobility can help equip students with these skills, ensuring they are prepared for the complexities of AI-driven workplaces.

Intercultural communication skills are essential for business students to thrive in a globalized world. Blended mobility, which combines physical and virtual mobility, allows students to gain international experience without the need for extensive travel. This approach not only broadens their cultural understanding but also enhances their ability to communicate effectively across diverse environments. The combination of blended mobility and intercultural communication could foster a more dynamic and resilient workforce.

The present inquiry aimed at exploring the self-reported student experiences with a blended mobility course found support for a range of HI learning outcomes. This research highlights the specific skills and themes that emerge from blended mobility experiences. Helm and O’Dowd’s (2020) position paper promoted the importance of blended mobility in cultivating student employability skills. Nine of the skills noted in their manuscript—digital technology enabled learning, communication skills, global awareness, empathy, critical and analytical thinking, foreign language skills, intercultural competency, teaming, and problem-solving—were supported with the current research. Five related, but differentiated, themes—gaining of practical, real-world experience, growth in self-awareness, adaptability, conflict resolution tools, and confidence—all emerged as well.

Previous research has shown that participation in technology-based and COIL learning is positively associated with a higher sense of belonging among college students (Long, 2016; Nowak, et al., 2023). This study indicates that a sense of belonging extends—and perhaps deepens—through blended mobility. Every student participant noted at least one positive relational, belonging outcome. Ten relational subthemes emerged from the student responses: cultural connection, bonding among U.S. institution students, bonding between students from the peer institution, interpersonal insights/overcoming misconceptions, U.S. faculty/staff closeness, peer institution faculty appreciation, seeking to expand personal network, physical acts of promoting bonding, improved intrapersonal self-talk, and spiritual connection or growth.

Many, if not all, of the major themes from this study's analysis have been covered in the literature on virtual intercultural exchange and/or short duration study abroad. However, the findings of this study underscore the potential of blended mobility to foster a wide-range of employability skills and relational benefits for students and seemingly exceeding the outcomes possible from a traditional COIL-only program or a short duration study abroad-only experience. Further, the belonging outcomes extended across all students and ten subthemes emerged. Thus, the blend of COIL and short-duration travel abroad seems to have a synergistic effect on outcomes—especially related to HI skills and belonging.

The support for a range of HI skills in this study offers a useful conversation into stimulating teaching practices and curricula design that can help meet the increased demands of an AI-equipped landscape. This study has identified reported student support for the varied rich outcomes of a combined COIL experience with cultural immersion. Further research into blended mobility courses is necessary to more fully understand their impact. Research involving participants from other universities might help complement or further inform this study. Seeking and comparing insights from the host institution would be potentially enlightening.

Blended mobility programs, such as the one explored in this study, illustrate a type of impactful educational approach that can provide students with meaningful, real-world experiences and expand their ability to operate in a globalized context. By embracing blended mobility and intercultural communication, higher education institutions can ensure their graduates are well-rounded, globally competent, and ready to make a positive impact in the business world. Despite the fact that implementing blended mobility well comes with a range of costs, these findings imply that blended mobility is a promising model for educators and program designers. Supporting faculty with training and resources tailored to blended mobility can help address challenges related to coordination, cultural integration, student engagement, and more.

6. Limitations and conclusions

Since this study used a thematic analysis, the findings cannot be generalized to all contexts. The results are based solely on self-reporting; the study's aim was to assess the students' reflections on personal growth as related to their participation and engagement within the course program.

Additionally, insights were collected from one of the two participating institutions. Collecting student's first language information, ethnic belonging, and other variables may have added deeper insights into student intercultural experiences.

In sum, this study highlights blended mobility as a powerful approach for preparing students to thrive in a globally interconnected world. The rise of digital advancements, particularly Generative AI, calls for higher education to embrace technological innovations while reinforcing HI aspects of education. This study suggests that blended mobility offers a valuable avenue for enhancing human-centered skills that technology alone cannot fully replicate. The strong student sentiment captured in reflection statements such as, "I would like to begin by saying that this was the best experience of my life" reflects the possibly profound impact blended mobility can have on providing students a rich, transformative learning experience.

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Appendix

The following prompt represents the student participant's final self-reflection assignment used for the blended mobility course each analyzed semester. This prompt generated the data coded for this study.

Final reflection assignment

Upon completion of this GIE, I want you to reflect and capture some of the experiences that have made the greatest impact on you. Please write a reflection document (minimum 2 pages, single spaced document using business writing best practices (including bold headings)). Be ready to discuss your reflections in our wrap-up class.

Content considerations: revisit the "Curiosity" Journal assignment; include a focus on personal, intercultural, and professional growth.

I'll consider content, structure, depth of learning self-reflection, overall work quality, and creativity!

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YouTube's automatic subtitles in the ESL/ESP classroom

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ABSTRACT

EN YouTube's technology allows users to automatically obtain intralingual subtitles for the videos that are uploaded on the platform. As YouTube is owned by Google, it uses the Google Automatic Speech Recognition system (Google Voice) to synchronize the subtitles with the speakers' utterances. In order to go one step further and produce automatic interlingual subtitles within a wide range of foreign languages, Google combines its ASR system with its Machine Translation system (Google Translate). However, despite ongoing improvements in technology, automatic captioning can fail to convey the message accurately. This can cause a series of cascading errors, leading the Machine Translation system to mistranslate or to hinder overall accuracy. This paper presents the results of a study conducted with a group of students at the University of Turin on the topic of marketing, to focus on the potential of using YouTube's automatic subtitles to enhance their listening skills and use of specialized vocabulary.

Key words: AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION, FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION, ESP, MARKETING, AUTOMATIC SUBTITLING

ES La tecnología de YouTube permite a los usuarios obtener automáticamente subtítulos intralingüísticos para los videos subidos a la plataforma. Como YouTube es propiedad de Google, utiliza el sistema de reconocimiento automático de voz de Google (Google Voice) para sincronizar los subtítulos con las intervenciones de los hablantes. Para ir un paso más allá y generar subtítulos automáticos interlingüísticos en una amplia gama de idiomas extranjeros, Google combina su sistema de reconocimiento de voz con su sistema de traducción automática (Google Translate). Sin embargo, a pesar de los avances tecnológicos, los subtítulos automáticos pueden no transmitir el mensaje con precisión. Esto puede provocar una serie de errores en cascada, lo que lleva al sistema de traducción automática a traducir incorrectamente o afectar la precisión general. Este trabajo presenta los resultados de un estudio realizado con un grupo de estudiantes de la Universidad de Turín sobre el tema del marketing, centrado en el potencial del uso de los subtítulos automáticos de YouTube para mejorar sus habilidades de escucha y el uso de vocabulario especializado.

Palabras clave: TRADUCCIÓN AUDIOVISUAL, ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS, ESP, MARKETING, SUBTITULACIÓN AUTOMÁTICA

IT La tecnologia di YouTube consente agli utenti di ottenere automaticamente sottotitoli intralinguistici per i video caricati sulla piattaforma. Poiché YouTube è di proprietà di Google, utilizza il sistema di riconoscimento vocale automatico di Google (Google Voice) per sincronizzare i sottotitoli con gli interventi dei parlanti. Per fare un ulteriore passo avanti e generare sottotitoli automatici interlinguistici in un'ampia gamma di lingue straniere, Google combina il suo sistema di riconoscimento vocale con il sistema di traduzione automatica (Google Translate). Tuttavia, nonostante i progressi tecnologici, i sottotitoli automatici non sono sempre in grado di trasmettere il messaggio con precisione. Questo può causare una serie di errori a cascata, portando il sistema di traduzione automatica a tradurre in modo errato o a compromettere l'accuratezza complessiva. Questo saggio presenta i risultati di uno studio condotto con un gruppo di studenti dell'Università di Torino sul tema del marketing, e si focalizza sul potenziale dell'uso dei sottotitoli automatici di YouTube per migliorare le competenze di ascolto e l'uso del vocabolario specialistico.

Parole chiave: TRADUZIONE AUDIOVISIVA, INSEGNAMENTO DELLA LINGUA STRANIERA, ESP, MARKETING, SOTTOTITOLAZIONE AUTOMATICA

1. Introduction

This paper intends to contribute to the field of foreign language teaching and learning through the use of Audiovisual Translation. More specifically, it focuses on the use of automatic subtitles in the ESL/ESP classroom in order to enhance students' listening skills and acquisition of specialized terminology. Indeed, in the course of the last few decades, Audiovisual translation (AVT) has emerged as one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding domains within the discipline of Translation Studies. This does not really come as a surprise if we consider how saturated our society is with moving images on the screen and how the latter influence our reception and consumption of information, working and social relationships, education, and entertainment. Due to the current proliferation of audiovisual texts and products, today's language learners are undoubtedly proficient with a wide range of digital media. This exposure, and the extremely important role that social media and digital interactions play in our lives, results in language learners' proficiency in the multimodal nature of audiovisual material, which employs various codes to construct meaning.

It has long been acknowledged that audiovisual works can have multiple educational benefits. As stressed by Díaz Cintas and Fernández Cruz (2008, 201–202), "Video permits students to see and appreciate how native speakers interact in everyday conversation, providing them with linguistic cues (regional accents, registers, and grammatical and syntactical structures), as well as paralinguistic cues (body language, gestures), allowing them to see language in use in a cultural context". Consequently, the integration of videos has become increasingly common in foreign language classrooms, especially with the advent of digitization and the development of technology.

The availability of audiovisual content has further increased due to the growth of online video-sharing and social media platforms, whether they are free, like YouTube or Vimeo, or on payment, like Prime, Disney+ or Netflix. These sites give users the option to watch their favourite films, TV shows, or documentaries in their original languages and in their translated versions, whether dubbed or subtitled. This offers both teachers and students the possibility to use this extensive collection of content for teaching and learning purposes (see Adams & Díaz Cintas, 2022, p. 10).

Despite its undeniable cross-cultural significance, the role of translation in foreign language classrooms has historically been ambiguous. This ambiguity can be largely attributed to the dominance of educational paradigms like the communicative approach, which emphasizes the exclusive use of the target language in the classroom. Consequently, translation was banned from many foreign language teaching and learning contexts for a long time (Adams & Díaz Cintas, 2022, p. 11). However, the value of translation in the foreign language curriculum has been increasingly recognized over the past few decades. Recent literature on language teaching indicates a resurgence in the use of translation activities in classrooms. This shift can be largely attributed to the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001), which not only emphasizes the acquisition of the four foundational language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—but also highlights the practical application of these skills in a multilingual world. The CEFR stresses the importance of learners' ability to mediate between speakers of different languages who cannot communicate directly, especially through activities of interpretation and translation.

This emphasis on mediation is further supported by a report from the European Commission (2013), which presupposes that if language learning enables learners to perform mediation activities, then explicit teaching of translation and interpretation could enhance these abilities alongside other areas of language use. The report suggests that translation activities can foster a deeper understanding of both source and target languages, as well as their cultural contexts (Adams & Díaz Cintas, 2022, p. 11).

The return to translation in language education has contributed to a wider recognition of its benefits. Undoubtedly, translation can foster a more comprehensive understanding of linguistic structures and cultural nuances, and consequently, improve learners' overall language competence (Cook, 2010). Moreover, it allows learners to draw connections between their native language and the foreign language, thus promoting bilingual and bicultural proficiency (Carreres, 2006). More recent studies also highlight the cognitive benefits of translation in language learning. In fact, it encourages analytical thinking and problem-solving, as learners must handle linguistic and cultural differences to convey meaning accurately (Laviosa, 2014). Furthermore, translation exercises can improve attention to detail and precision in language use as students engage with different aspects of grammar, vocabulary, and syntax.

Indeed, the evolving role of translation in foreign language education reflects a shift towards more integrated and practical approaches to language learning. By including translation in the curriculum, educators can provide learners with valuable skills that are increasingly relevant in today's interconnected world. This

approach not only enriches linguistic competence but also prepares learners to effectively communicate across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

Translation, including Audiovisual Translation (AVT), has become increasingly popular in second language acquisition since the turn of the century. The emergence of didactic AVT (DAT) as a distinct field, as noted by Talaván (2020), has demonstrated the benefits of subtitling and dubbing audiovisual texts in developing traditional language skills and promoting intercultural competence. These practices, in fact, conform to the updated versions of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2018, 2020), which emphasize intercultural competency. As a consequence, the use of AVT in foreign language education has become a significant area of research, marked by experimental studies which explore the impact of various AVT practices like subtitling, dubbing, and audio description in language classrooms. Such activities not only motivate students but also enhance their linguistic and intercultural competences. Indeed, students' exposure to digital technologies and various media formats during AVT activities contributes to the development of transferable skills and reinforces the educational value of incorporating AVT practices in language learning environments (Adam & Díaz Cintas 2022).

One of the main reasons to introduce audiovisual texts into educational settings is to provide learners with examples of oral communication in realistic contexts. This was traditionally achieved through passive observation, in contrast, recent research and practice (Sokoli & Zabalbeascoa Terrán, 2019) have shifted towards engaging learners actively through action-oriented tasks. Educators and researchers who implement active audiovisual translation tasks have observed that this not only promotes receptive and productive language skills but also improves critical thinking, pragmatic and intercultural awareness in both the first (L1) and second languages (L2). Furthermore, such tasks develop learners' ability to extract and infer information from multisemiotic texts combining multiple modes of communication, such as visual and auditory elements (Bolaños-García-Escribano & Navarrete 2022, p. 104).

The adoption of AVT tasks that involve active engagement, such as dubbing and subtitling video clips, has become rather popular in recent years. This approach has become particularly influential in foreign language education (FLE) scholarship over the past few decades (Incalcaterra McLoughlin, Lertola, & Talaván, 2018, 2020), with projects such as SubLanLearn (2009–2012), LeVis (2006–2008), ClipFlair (funded by the European Commission from 2011 to 2014), PluriTAV (2016–2019), Babelium (2013–2015), and, finally, the TRADILEX project (2019 - ongoing). All these projects have significantly contributed to various lines of enquiry and experimental research within the field and represent a remarkable step forward in the use of audiovisual translation as a didactic tool in foreign language education. By promoting action-oriented tasks and emphasizing mediation skills, they aim to enhance language competence and prepare students for effective communication in a globalized world (Lertola, 2019; Navarrete & Bolaños García-Escribano 2022; Talaván, 2020).

2. Subtitling in the foreign language classroom

In recent decades, the use of subtitles as a tool to improve foreign language learning (FLL) has received considerable attention from researchers all over the world. Europe, indeed, has emerged as a prominent centre for investigating the efficacy of subtitles in foreign language education, mostly due to the proactive initiatives led by the European Commission aimed at promoting multilingualism (Gambier, 2008, p. 12). Early research conducted by scholars such as Vanderplank (1988, 1990), Danan (1992), and d'Ydewalle and Van de Poel (1999) provided evidence that subtitled videos can significantly help language learning. These studies demonstrated that the integration of auditory and visual elements can effectively "facilitate formal and incidental language learning" (Danan, 2015, p. 41). Vanderplank (1988) had already stressed the advantages of using subtitles by showing how they help learners associate spoken language with its written form, thus improving both listening and reading skills. His subsequent research (1990) further emphasized the practical applications of subtitled texts in reinforcing language learning. Moreover, Danan (1992) investigated how subtitles improve vocabulary acquisition by providing contextual clues that help in understanding and learning new words. Similarly, d'Ydewalle and Van de Poel (1999) highlighted the role that subtitles play in conveying cultural differences and social contexts, which are crucial for developing pragmatic and intercultural competence.

The European Commission's efforts to promote multilingualism have significantly contributed to the widespread adoption of subtitles in language education. By supporting projects that integrate subtitles into FLL, the Commission has established new best practices and fostered innovative approaches within this field (Council of Europe, 2001). Research, indeed, shows that subtitles can substantially improve language learning

by providing learners with visual and auditory stimuli that reinforce vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and overall language proficiency (Vanderplank, 2016). Subtitles, in fact, offer contextualized language exposure, enabling learners to see and hear words as they are used in authentic settings, which is crucial for developing a deeper understanding of the target language.

Contemporary studies continue to explore and confirm the advantages of using subtitles in language learning. For example, Pujadas and Muñoz (2019) found that subtitled videos significantly improve listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition among language learners. Moreover, subtitles also serve as an effective bridge between spoken and written language, helping learners to develop the skills which are necessary to decode and understand linguistic structures (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007).

The European Commission's initiatives have also highlighted the role of subtitles in promoting cultural awareness and intercultural competence. By exposing learners to diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, subtitles help them develop a distinct understanding of different cultures and communication styles (Kruger, Szarkowska, & Krejtz, 2015). This cultural dimension is particularly important in a globalized world, where effective communication across languages and cultures is increasingly essential. In addition, the integration of subtitles into digital learning platforms and online resources has made language education more accessible and adaptable to different learning needs (Kruger, Hefer, & Matthew, 2013).

In general, it is possible to claim that the role of subtitles in foreign language learning has evolved from a niche interest to a widely recognized and researched pedagogical tool. As research and practice continue to evolve, the role of subtitles is likely to expand, offering innovative solutions for language educators and learners.

3. Technological advancements in subtitling

Subtitling has become increasingly popular in recent years, both as a professional practice and as an activity undertaken by amateurs. This growth in importance can be attributed to the rapid advancement of technology, which has helped the development of automatic subtitling solutions. These innovations, which will be examined in detail in this paper, aim to provide fully automated subtitles that enable quick understanding and an overall comprehension of audiovisual products.

Audiovisual Machine Translation projects have evolved in distinct phases that correspond to advancements in Machine Translation technology: rule-based, statistical, and neural methodologies (Karakanta 2022: 92). Each phase marks significant progress in the pursuit of effective Audiovisual Machine Translation solutions. The initial phase of Audiovisual Machine Translation projects focused on Rule-Based Machine Translation (RBMT). These early systems lacked the flexibility and sophistication necessary to handle the complexities of audiovisual content, such as contextual subtleties and accurate timing alignment. The advent of Statistical Machine Translation marked the next significant phase. The SUMAT project (2011-2014) exemplifies this stage, where Statistical Machine Translation systems were trained using human-transcribed, compressed, and time-coded subtitles for eleven different language pairs. While Statistical Machine Translation technology actually brought some productivity gains, it still lacked the precision required for professional subtitling (Karakanta, 2022, p. 94). The main limitation of Statistical Machine Translation was its inability to consistently produce translations that were both contextually accurate and synchronized with audiovisual content. Subsequent projects, including EU-Bridge (2012-2015) and ALST (2013-2015), moved beyond pure translation to integrate Speech Recognition and Automatic Speech Recognition with Machine Translation. These initiatives enhanced the subtitling process by combining the advantages of Automatic Speech Recognition technologies with advanced Machine Translation systems. The goal was to automate the transcription of spoken content and then translate it, streamlining the entire workflow from speech to subtitled text. This integration represents a more holistic approach to Audiovisual Machine Translation, addressing both the transcription and translation phases within a unified system. The most recent phase involves the adoption of Neural Machine Translation, which offers significant improvements over previous Machine Translation technologies. In fact, Neural Machine Translation systems use deep learning techniques to produce more accurate and contextually appropriate translations.

Juang and Rabiner (2005, p. 2) assert that the ambition to automate Speech Recognition has been a technological goal for a long time. In fact, Speech Recognition technology started to be popular in the mid-2000s, with a peak in popularity around 2006. During this period, the respeaking technique emerged as a prevalent method and effectively replaced manual stenotyping. Respeaking involves a trained professional, known as a "respeaker," who listens to the source audio and clearly repeats it into a Speech Recognition engine that utilizes acoustic and language models, and subsequently transcribes the repeated speech into text. Since

the respeaking process depends on a human mediator to convert speech into intralingual subtitles, it is classified as a “speaker-dependent” Speech Recognition technology. The initial transcription produced through this method captures the core content of the spoken language but requires additional processing to refine the text. This refinement is essential to transform the raw transcription into precise and well-formed subtitles suitable for viewers. Therefore, the role of a post-editor is crucial in this phase. The post-editor undertakes several detailed tasks to ensure the subtitles are accurate and synchronized with the audio. This includes segmentation (where the text is divided into manageable units), alignment (ensuring the text matches the spoken dialogue), and timecoding (to synchronize the subtitles with the audio and visual elements on the screen). These perfectionist processes are necessary to meet the visual constraints of the medium and to provide a smooth viewing experience.

Unlike respeaking, Automatic Speech Recognition technologies operate without the need for a human professional. These technologies use an acoustic model, a lexicon model, and a language model, which collectively process and analyze the audio input received via a microphone. Because of this independence from a human mediator, Automatic Speech Recognition is categorized as a “speaker-independent speech recognition technology.” Automatic Speech Recognition technologies, described by Ciobanu and Secară (2019, p. 92) as “language-specific computer programs that convert spoken input into written text in the language of the original speech,” have significantly transformed our interaction with digital content. They have become integral to numerous applications, enhancing accessibility and user experience across various domains. In fact, they are now commonly embedded in everyday tools such as virtual assistants (e.g., Siri, Alexa), transcription services, and language learning applications (Parini forthcoming). The development of these technologies was mainly steered by the desire to minimize human involvement in the transcription process. By automating the conversion of speech to text, they have streamlined many processes, making them a crucial component in modern digital applications.

As far as translation is concerned, efforts to integrate Automatic Speech Recognition into interlingual translation processes actually started when this technology was in its early developmental stages (Aliprandi et al. 2014, p. 2) and the advancement of technology has had its positive outcomes. Indeed, the “technological turn” described by Jiménez-Crespo (2019, p. 26) has had a deep impact on the field of Translation Studies, with a particularly significant effect on the Audiovisual Translation sector. As global media consumption habits continue to evolve and the demand for localized content increases, translation tools have had to undergo constant upgrading to keep pace (Burchardt, 2016, p. 206). As a consequence of this dynamic environment, Machine Translation has become an integral component of the subtitling process. Traditional MT systems are being replaced by avant-garde technologies such as Neural Machine Translation and Speech Translation. These innovations aim to simplify and accelerate the complex, traditionally human-driven workflows involved in subtitling, thus promoting the development of fully automatic subtitling solutions. In fact, the integration of Neural Machine Translation and Speech Translation technologies into subtitling not only increases efficiency but also ensures that high volumes of audiovisual content can be localized quickly to meet the increasing demand.

However, despite these advancements, the role of human subtitlers remains indispensable. Automatic subtitling solutions, although efficient, do not always grasp the nuances and subtleties of language, cultural references, or humour. Indeed, professional subtitlers bring a level of expertise and sensitivity to these aspects, ensuring that the subtitles not only convey the literal meaning but also the intended tone and context, which is something that often cannot be achieved through automatic subtitles. In fact, even if fully automatic subtitling systems offer promising capabilities in terms of speed and efficiency, the role of human supervision is essential to maintain the quality and cultural relevance of translations. This is why hybrid models that combine Neural Machine Translation and post-editing by human translators are being increasingly adopted. These models take advantage of machines’ rapid processing capabilities while ensuring that the final output is polished and culturally appropriate.

In brief, the “technological turn” has significantly transformed Translation Studies and the AVT sector, which was driven by evolving media consumption patterns and the increasing demand for localized content. The integration of advanced Machine Translation technologies into subtitling workflows marks a significant step forward in the field. However, as these technologies continue to develop, further academic research is essential to fully understand their impact and optimize their implementation in the translation industry (Jiménez-Crespo 2019, p. 26; Burchardt 2016; Karakanta 2020; Ferrara 2023, p. 32, Parini forthcoming). Research and development therefore aim at improving the accuracy and context-awareness of Machine Translation systems for subtitling. Innovations such as Neural Machine Translation and Speech Translation are

at the forefront of these efforts, with the purpose of enhancing the quality of automated subtitles (Karakanta 2020). Nevertheless, even if Neural Machine Translation has greatly improved the quality of translations, it is necessary to keep in mind that subtitling is a written form of spoken language and functions within the dynamic and diverse realm of entertainment, which includes, among others, various lexicons from fields like news, education, lifestyle, sports, law, and teenage slang (Bywood et al. 2017, p. 495). These distinguishing characteristics are responsible for the fact that technology is still not fully capable of handling the specific demands of subtitling and has to rely on extensive human intervention. Indeed, as will be seen in the following sections of this paper, automatic intralingual and interlingual subtitles are still flawed to various extents, and human intervention in a post-editing phase is still necessary if we want to obtain an accurate text.

4. Applications of automatic speech recognition technologies and machine translation: the case of YouTube

One notable application of Automatic Speech Recognition technologies is YouTube's auto-captioning system, introduced in 2009 and continuously refined since then. The evolution of YouTube as an open video platform reflects broader shifts in the media landscape and changes in content distribution methods. This transformation has significantly challenged traditional mass media, which relied on a linear, top-down model of content dissemination (Lee 2021, p. 2; Ferrara 2023, p. 54; Parini forthcoming). Historically, the global media market was divided into territories based on cultural and linguistic differences, where each country was associated with specific languages and media content.

However, digital and technological developments have radically changed the way audiences engage with media. These innovations have led to the rise of various online platforms that enable the immediate distribution of media content (Lee 2021, p. 1). This shift has moved away from the traditional top-down approach, allowing users to engage with and distribute content in a more interactive manner, and redefining the media landscape as a result.

YouTube's development occurred within a participatory culture, which emphasizes collective effort and voluntary user contributions (O'Hagan 2009, p. 97). This culture signifies a shift where consumers become active contributors and producers of content (Burgess & Green 2018, p. 12). These users, known as "prosumers," blur the distinction between content creators and audiences by engaging in both the production and consumption of audiovisual content.

The launch of YouTube in May 2005 marked a significant moment in digital media evolution. Founded by PayPal employees Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim, YouTube aimed to democratize video sharing by making it accessible to non-expert users (Burgess & Green 2018, p. 2). In fact, its user-friendly interface allowed anyone to upload and watch videos. The success of YouTube was accelerated when a Nike advertisement became the first video to reach one million views, highlighting the platform's potential for making content viral and fostering its appeal to advertisers (McFadden, 2023).

YouTube also introduced interactive and social features that facilitated user engagement and community building. This means that users could subscribe to channels and share videos via embedded links, thus promoting a networked environment of content creators and viewers (Burgess & Green, 2018, p. 2). The platform's early success exemplifies how technological innovation can transform media landscapes by enabling individuals to actively participate in digital culture. It has played a pioneering role in video-sharing platforms and it continues to influence global media consumption patterns.

Moreover, YouTube offers features that enhance user interaction. In fact, users can curate playlists, rate videos with a 5-star system, and view their personal watch history (McFadden, 2023). The platform also allows for direct interaction between viewers and creators through comments, which have been the primary mode of communication and engagement since its inception (Lee 2021, p. 4). These features foster a sense of community, allowing users to not only consume content but also engage in discussions, share feedback, and contribute to the evolving content landscape. The ability to rate videos and create playlists personalizes the viewing experience, while commenting simplifies the dialogue between creators and audiences, enriching the platform's social dimensions (Ferrara 2023, p. 55).

In October 2006, Google purchased YouTube, thus boosting its popularity. Since 2007, YouTube has launched several initiatives to enhance accessibility and support content creators. A significant development was the introduction of a captioning method to make web-based video content accessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing users (Smith, Crocker & Allman 2017, p. 115). During this period, YouTube also launched its partner programme, allowing content creators to monetize their videos through semi-transparent banner

advertisements. Through its collaboration with Google, YouTube raised its video quality standards and integrated licensed music features. These enhancements not only broadened YouTube's capabilities but also reinforced its position as a transformative force in the digital landscape by prioritizing accessibility, monetization opportunities, and content diversity (Ferrara 2023, p. 56).

YouTube has long been associated with globalization and "neo-Babelianism," highlighting the importance of mutual understanding among people of different languages (Cronin 2003, p.59; Ferrara 2023, p. 56). The platform's main aim has always been to ensure its content is comprehensible and accessible worldwide, an objective which was helped by the integration of automated technologies. This is why YouTube integrated Automatic Speech Recognition between 2008 and 2009 to provide automatic intralingual subtitles and improve accessibility.

Auto-captioning was initially limited to English-language videos (Tokusei, 2010). Later, Machine Translation was implemented on the platform, with the purpose of providing interlingual subtitles in various languages. Therefore, Google integrated its Automatic Speech Recognition system, Google Voice with its Machine Translation system, Google Translate, which was a Statistical Machine Translation system at the time (Turovsky, 2016). This integration marked a significant step as it allowed users to obtain automatic intralingual and interlingual subtitles, supporting YouTube's mission to improve global accessibility and inclusivity through technological innovation by overcoming language barriers.

By 2011, YouTube had enabled access to intralingual auto-captions for videos, providing nearly 40 million videos with captions that were automatically generated from their audio content (Ellis 2011). After the integration of automatic translation, it became able to produce subtitles in over 50 languages, which created videos that were comprehensible to audiences from different linguistic backgrounds (Ferrara, 2023, p. 57; Parini, forthcoming).

However, in spite of these technological advancements, it is not possible to claim that automatic subtitles, whether intralingual or interlingual, manage to convey the message accurately. In fact, even though Harrenstien (2010) reported that speech recognition algorithms had achieved a 20% reduction in error rates by 2010, and Varga (2021, p. 38) highlighted remarkable improvements in 2013, when YouTube's automatic subtitling integrated a speech recognition system based on deep neural networks, the quality of subtitles produced by YouTube is still far from being high. This fact has led to widespread dissatisfaction among users and content creators who recommended manual captioning, believing it would produce more accurate and reliable subtitles compared to those generated automatically.

Researchers and companies, including Google, have recognized the limitations of automatic captioning (Smith, Crocker & Allman, 2017, p. 117). Automatic Speech Recognition errors during auto-captioning often result in inaccuracies or misspellings, thus affecting the quality of both the captions and translated subtitles. Google Translate, which currently supports 133 languages (Caswell, 2022), relies heavily on accurate initial captions in order to produce reliable translations. Consequently, flaws in intralingual caption quality have a direct impact on the accuracy of translated content, which in turn affects comprehension across different linguistic audiences. In short, even if fully automatic subtitling solutions improve the global accessibility and dissemination of multimedia content, it often fails to provide viewers with accurate understanding.

Effective subtitle translation necessitates both linguistic accuracy and synchronization with the audiovisual context, ensuring that subtitles appear and disappear in harmony with the spoken dialogue. The absence of accurate time-coding can result in subtitles that are out of sync with the audio, which affects viewer comprehension. In fact, Google Translate faces difficulties in processing segmented strings of completed sentences, which is essential for generating accurate interlingual subtitles. Moreover, inadequate punctuation in intralingual subtitles often results in translated sentences that are syntactically inaccurate, leading to errors and compromising clarity. In order to maintain meaning and readability, it is necessary to ensure that Google Translate handle text segments that are structured and punctuated according to subtitle formatting.

Furthermore, Automatic Speech Recognition technologies face significant linguistic challenges, including disambiguating homophones, recognizing named entities (people, institutions, brands), and identifying technical or specialized language (Bolaños García-Escribano and Díaz-Cintas, 2023; Ciobanu and Secară, 2019, p. 98; Freitas and Liu, 2017; Karakanta, Negri & Turki, 2020, p. 63; Karakanta, 2022; O'Brien, 2022; Volk, 2008), as well as dealing with variations in accents, pronunciations, and common speech patterns like pauses, hesitations and repetitions, which are typical of spoken language. This can cause a series of cascading errors, leading the Machine Translation system to mistranslate or to affect overall accuracy.

The final part of this paper will present results from a study conducted with a group of students at the University of Turin, Italy, to illustrate how these new technologies in the field of Audiovisual Translation can be a useful instrument in teaching and learning marketing discourse for foreign language learners.

5. A practice-based study

This last part of the paper will present the results of a practice-based study involving 60 Italian students enrolled in the 2nd year of the MA degree programme in Foreign Languages for International Communication of the University of Turin, Italy. As reported on the webpage of the degree programme: “the degree course aims to build professional figures who interact with companies and international organizations in intercultural situations: linguistic and cultural mediators (communication area) in Italian and foreign companies, in public administration, in local authorities; management, responsibility or consultancy functions in international organizations, and in international cooperation projects¹.” The topic of marketing discourse, therefore, is undoubtedly of deep interest for the students. The study took place within the context of the course in English Language and Linguistics during Academic Year 2023-2024. The course is composed of two modules, taught by other professors. The former focuses on Corpus Linguistics, whereas the latter deals with Machine Translation. The last three lessons (2 hours each) of the second module – taught by the author – were dedicated to audiovisual translation and specifically automatic subtitling. It is important to stress that the three lessons took place on three subsequent days during the same week, so the students did not have much time to assimilate and process the information required for the study. These three lessons were aimed at showing the students the differences between translating and post-editing a written text with the aid of Machine Translation (which was the focus of the second module, which lasted 24 hours altogether) and post-editing and translating the subtitles of a spoken text while improving their listening skills and their competence in specialized terminology.

In fact, according to Karakanta (2020), the application of Machine Translation in subtitling closely mirrors its use in conventional text translation. Machine Translation systems can process subtitle content either as individual subtitle lines or as consolidated blocks of text that encompass several subtitle lines. The distinction lies in how the content is prepared and presented to the Machine Translation system. When Machine Translation is used with a time-coded transcription, it benefits from the preparatory work of professionals who have segmented the text into appropriate units and provided precise timing cues. This pre-segmentation is crucial, as it ensures that the Machine Translation system can accurately align the translated text with the corresponding audiovisual content. The timing cues help in maintaining synchronization between the subtitles and the video, which is a fundamental requirement for effective subtitling.

However, in the absence of such preparatory work, as in the case of YouTube's intralingual subtitles, Machine Translation systems process the text similarly to any other translation task. This means that the system does not inherently account for the specific requirements of subtitling, such as the necessity to match the duration and pace of the spoken dialogue with the on-screen text. Consequently, without professional input to segment and time-code the text, the Machine Translation output often does not meet the distinct demands of subtitling, leading to issues in readability and synchronization. Moreover, as will be seen in further detail, the fact that the Machine Translation system operates starting from a text which was originally spoken, gives rise to further difficulties.

5.1. Methodology

The students had no training in Audiovisual Translation and professional subtitling, so the first lesson was dedicated to the introduction of the main features and the main constraints which should ideally be kept in consideration when producing professional subtitles, such as the length of each subtitle, its duration on the screen, and other rules related to line breaks (making reference to the Netflix guidelines, which can be retrieved online)². They were then introduced to the main features of both intralingual and interlingual subtitles in the specific case of YouTube. Finally, we watched a video, which is a TED talk entitled “12 secrets of marketing and you won't believe what happens next”, which lasts 13.02 minutes and can be retrieved at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gEOP8Th478>. TED talks are delivered live to an audience during conferences organized by the TED organization. A diverse group of speakers presents their ideas and

¹ https://www.lingue.unito.it/do/home.pl/View?doc=/i_corsi/profili_professionali.html&tab=6 (translated from Italian)

² <https://partnerhelp.netflixstudios.com/hc/en-us/articles/215758617-Timed-Text-Style-Guide-General-Requirements> (accessed November 2024)

experiences on various topics to educate both the live audience and viewers at home. In fact, these talks are not confined to the event location, as they are also recorded and made available online. Specifically, they are published on the official website (www.TED.com) and platforms like Facebook and, most importantly for the study presented in this paper, YouTube. The Internet and the shift towards online videos have enabled widespread distribution, resulting in TED talks gaining increasing attention and interest from global viewers and listeners. Thus, TED fulfils its mission of sharing knowledge and connecting people through its mantra, namely, “ideas worth spreading.” The talk, released in 2015, is delivered by Naimul Huq, an alumnus of the Morehead-Cain Scholars Program at UNC, who is currently working as a Social Media Associate at WCG in Austin. In the video, he focuses on bettering the tools available to companies, specifically health-care companies, and making them more user-friendly in order to encourage customer interaction. The videoclip was divided into 4 segments (each one was about 3-minute long). The students were divided into groups of 4-5 people. Each group was instructed to work on a specific segment (more groups could work on the same segment).

During the second lesson, we first watched the video together in class with the intralingual subtitles activated (performed by Google Voice). Secondly, students were provided with a template on Google Drive with the transcription of the intralingual subtitles (which can be downloaded through various online websites). At this point they were supposed to 1) identify the various mistakes, 2) classify them, 3) edit and correct the subtitles and provide their version on the template. This phase of the study particularly aimed at honing the students’ listening skills, as quite a few of the mistakes were due to the Speech Recognition system’s misunderstanding of the spoken output of the TED presenter.

During the third lesson, the students were asked to activate the Italian interlingual subtitles, download them, and 1) identify the mistakes, 2) classify them, 3) edit and correct the subtitles and provide their version on the template on Google Drive. Finally, the students were tasked with examining the root causes of the errors found in the interlingual subtitles and discussing them in class. Their goal was to corroborate the hypothesis according to which these mistakes predominantly stemmed from word misrecognitions by the Automatic Speech Recognition system. These initial misrecognitions were believed to trigger a chain reaction of subsequent errors (the so-called “cascading errors”, Soffritti, 2018, p. 337).

Besides the more general purpose of identifying and classifying the inaccuracies of both interlingual and intralingual mistakes (which can be found in any video uploaded on YouTube), which presupposes a proficient level of the students’ mastery of the language, and in particular their listening skills, the study aimed at focusing on specific terminology related to marketing discourse. In fact, the goal was also to enhance students’ awareness in relation to the topics presented, and to improve their familiarity with them and the related lexis.

5.2. Analysis of intralingual subtitles

The students identified four main problems in the intralingual subtitles: lack of adherence to the norms related to the formal requirements of subtitles, misrecognition of common words, misrecognition of entity names, and misrecognition of specialized terminology.

- 1) Formal requirements (lack of punctuation; timing; line breaks)

The most immediate and evident problem was the absence of punctuation in the intralingual subtitles. This omission meant that the subtitles were not structured as complete sentences. Additionally, the subtitles failed to meet general standards regarding duration, which stipulate a minimum of 1 second and a maximum of 6-7 seconds per subtitle, as well as line treatment principles, which guide the proper way to break text into two lines³. Essentially, these intralingual subtitles were mere transcriptions of every spoken word by the speaker, which were roughly but often inaccurately synchronized with his speech. Moreover, the lack of punctuation not only disrupts sentence structure but also affects the readability and comprehension of the

³ For example, according to the guidelines provided by Netflix, the line should be broken after punctuation marks, before conjunctions, and before prepositions, whereas the line break should not separate a noun from an article, a noun from an adjective, a first name from a last name, a verb from a subject pronoun, a prepositional verb from its preposition, or a verb from an auxiliary, reflexive pronoun or negation.

subtitles. Without clear sentence demarcations, viewers struggle to follow the intended meaning, leading to confusion and a diminished viewing experience. In addition, failing to adhere to duration guidelines results in subtitles that are either too brief to be read comfortably or too lengthy to keep pace with the spoken content. This inconsistency in timing disrupts the natural flow of watching and understanding the video. The improper handling of line breaks can also lead to awkward splits in the text, making it harder for viewers to read and comprehend the subtitles smoothly (Parini forthcoming).

Therefore, when required to post-edit the intralingual subtitles, the first thing that the students had to do was to reconstruct the sentences by adding punctuation in order to make them meaningful. The table below shows an example from the very incipit of the talk:

Table 1.

Transcription of intralingual subtitles showing lack of formal requirements and post-edited version

Intralingual subtitles	Post-edited subtitles
I'm going to reveal to you the 12 steps to winning at marketing and what happens next is that well there are only four steps create share some kind of magical process and profit in order to succeed in marketing you have to create something representative of yourself and your audience and distribute it in the right way in reality there is some assembly required the one idea I want to express today is that marketing is complex because it strives to understand human beings and human beings are perplexing but you have the tools to understand them you just need to look for the right things and there are 12 steps we'll start with the Voice	I'm going to reveal to you the 12 steps to winning at marketing, and what happens next is that, well, there are only four steps: create, share, some kind of magical process, and profit. In order to succeed in marketing, you have to create something representative of yourself and your audience, and distribute it in the right way. In reality, there is some assembly required. The one idea I want to express today is that marketing is complex, because it strives to understand human beings, and human beings are perplexing. But you have the tools to understand them, you just need to look for the right things. And there are 12 steps. We'll start with the voice.

As can be observed, although the post-edited subtitles do not follow the guidelines that are usually required in professional subtitling, as far as time and space constraints are concerned (we should not forget that these students have no real training in subtitling, and that this is not the focus of the study), punctuation was added so the that sentences could provide a complete sense of what the presenter is actually saying, even in a written form.

2) Misrecognition of common words

The intralingual subtitles contain instances of misrecognition of words by Google Voice. Some examples are reported in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Transcription of intralingual subtitles containing examples of misrecognition of common words and post-edited version

Intralingual subtitles	Post-edited subtitles
Red Bull has a loud voice but it's not just loud it's one of the strongest brand voices on Earth not just among beverages or pickme UPS their promise is Wings an alternate reality where you can freef fall from the edge of space at the speed of sound or perfect that kickflip she actually drew it on a napkin in less	Red Bull has a loud voice, but it's not just loud, it's one of the strongest brand voices on Earth. Not just among beverages or pick-me-ups , their promise is "wings": an alternate reality where you can free fall from the edge of space at the speed of sound or perfect that kickflip. she actually drew it on a napkin in less than a minute

<p>than a minute and then she spent a whole year with Bor justifying her intuition they made a laptop for young people it's a tablet and a computer and one social conversation is volunteered on the other hand it's a public Declaration of our beliefs we check into our favorite haunts we spit vitrio about cable companies</p>	<p>and then she spent a whole year with boards justifying her intuition They made a laptop for young people: it's a tablet and a computer in one. Social conversation is volunteered. On the other hand, it's a public declaration of our beliefs. We check into our favorite haunts. We spit vitriol about cable companies.</p>
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Overall, Google Voice rather accurately transcribed the words uttered by the presenter. No real cases of misrecognition of homophones were found, although some words were misunderstood and mistranscribed, as will also be seen in the following sections.

3) Misrecognition of entity names

As previously mentioned, proper names, institutions, and brands can be difficult for Automatic Speech Recognition technologies to recognize and accurately transcribe. In the videoclip that the students analysed in class, this is probably the category which presented the highest number of errors, which are reported in Table 3.

Table 3
Transcription of intralingual subtitles containing examples of misrecognition of entity names and post-edited version

Intralingual subtitles	Post-edited subtitles
<p>the field of visual identity was pioneered by Gordon lipincott liping cot introduced Evolution Paul aare is one of the most prolific and active designers in the world when polisher was tasked with designing the logo of City Bank she actually drew it on a napkin in less than a minute many of you will recognize this building the Morhead planetarium houses the offices of the oldest merit scholarship in the country the Morhead Kane's audience is adaptive and The Branding needed to be adaptable it needed to be built on the latest Technologies the website needed to be current responsive and flexible marketing used to be driven by focus groups but like the elementary particles in Heisenberg's UNC C principal experiments when we're observed we change our behaviors fer got rid of the Viva Viagra ads when they realized that men were searching on Google about questions about Ed that were completely different from what they were saying on forums</p>	<p>the field of visual identity was pioneered by Gordon Lippincott Lippincott introduced evolution Paula Share is one of the most prolific and active designers in the world When Paula Share was tasked with designing the logo of Citi Bank she actually drew it on a napkin in less than a minute Many of you will recognize this building. The Morehead planetarium houses the offices of the oldest merit scholarship in the country the Morehead Cain's audience is adaptive and the branding needed to be adaptable, it needed to be built on the latest technologies, the website needed to be current responsive and flexible. marketing used to be driven by focus groups but like the elementary particles in Heisenberg's Uncertainty principle experiments when we're observed we change our behaviors. Pfizer got rid of the Viva Viagra ads when they realized that men were searching on Google about questions about ED that were completely different from what they were saying on forums.</p>

<p>they wanted to prove how powerful it was so they recruited Clams Casino to produce and Vic Mensa to MC this was the genius of the marketers over there they called it us today and they said how do you figure out what you're going to include in your wrapup</p> <p>Proctor and Gamble was going to scrap the yellow spice brand and my friend at widen Kennedy knew that the audience which was made up mostly of women who make the consumer decisions in the household needed to be talked to so they came up with this campaign and it had uh kind of Keo ree sort of character Surfer Dude speaking directly to the audience language itself is evolving the language the English that we use today is different from the English of baywolf</p>	<p>They wanted to prove how powerful it was So they recruited Clams Casino to produce and Vic Mensa to MC</p> <p>This was the genius of the marketers over there. They called USA Today and they said: "How do you figure out what you're going to include in your wrap-up?"</p> <p>Procter and Gamble was going to scrap the Old Spice Brand and my friend at Wieden-Kennedy knew that the audience, which was made up mostly of women, who make the consumer decisions in the household, needed to be talked to so they came up with this campaign and it had uh kind of Keanu Reeves sort of character Surfer Dude speaking directly to the audience Language itself is evolving. The English language that we use today is different from the English of Beowulf.</p>
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It is interesting to observe that the misrecognition of entity names includes proper names of people whose activities were/are connected to the marketing world (Gordon Lippicott, Paula Share), actors (Keanu Reeves), musicians/singers (Vic Mensa), brands (Procter and Gamble, Old Spice, Pfizer), institutions (Morehead Cain), advertising agencies (Wieden-Kennedy), newspapers (USA Today), theories in physics (Heisenberg's Uncertainty principle), as well as Old English epic poems (Beowulf).

It is also worth noting that in the video of the TED talk the camera focuses on the presenter most of the time, mainly with close-up shots, but from time to time it is possible to see that there is a big screen behind him which projects some slides related to what the presenter is talking about. This sometimes turned out to be helpful for the students, as they could see some of the names (specifically, Paula Share's and Morehead Cain's) on the screen, and were therefore facilitated in the task of post-editing.

4) Misrecognition of specialized terminology

As already pointed out, one of the main objectives of this study was to focus on the specialized terminology related to the field of marketing. In this case, the students managed to identify quite a few words or phrases which had not been accurately caught by Google Voice. In some cases, the students were not familiar with the terminology: therefore the proposed exercise turned out to be useful not only to enhance their listening skills but also to improve their lexical competence, as well as their knowledge of topics belonging to a specialized semantic field. The table below reports some examples:

Table 4.

Transcription of intralingual subtitles containing examples of misrecognition of specialized terminology and post-edited version

Intralingual subtitles	Post-edited subtitles
if we're in a focused group of moms we're unlikely to admit to sharing junk food with our kids	if we're in a focus group of moms we're unlikely to admit to sharing junk food with our kids
she actually drew it on a napkin in less than a minute and then she spent a whole year with Bor justifying her intuition declining sales and Sheriff voice meant that they were losing out if you haven't	she actually drew it on a napkin in less than a minute and then she spent a whole year with boards justifying her intuition declining sales and share of voice meant that they were losing out if you haven't
seen a peso model in your marketing classes yet you will it sensor paid earn shared and own and it stands for your advertising which is scalable your external endorsements which are credible your your shared media property like social which makes you authentic and your website which is where you define Who You Are	seen a PESO model in your marketing classes yet you will. It stands for PAID, EARN, SHARED and OWN , and it stands for your advertising, which is scalable, your external endorsements, which are credible, your shared media property, like social, which makes you authentic, and your website, which is where you define who you are.
we worked with 1 adla on a campaign called two days beat for HP	we worked with one ADLA on a campaign called #2DAYSBEAT for HP

A "focus group" is defined by the Online Cambridge Dictionary as "a group of people brought together to discuss what they think about a particular product, advertisement, or subject, as part of a company's market research"⁴ and it is labelled as belonging to the specialized terminology related to the marketing semantic field.

A "board" (a polysemic word) may refer to various referents. With reference to the semantic field of business, the Online Cambridge Dictionary defines it as "the group of people who are responsible for controlling and organizing a company or organization"⁵

The "share of voice" is defined by the Online Cambridge Dictionary as "the degree to which people see a company's advertisements, etc. in a particular market, compared to those of competitors"⁶. This phrase is also labelled by the dictionary as belonging to the specialized terminology related to the marketing semantic field. As far as the PESO model is concerned, Kernez (2022) claims:

The PESO model in marketing is important because it combines various marketing techniques and activities to create and build a strong presence. Marketing using the PESO model optimizes your content in every sphere, from sharing your content to engaging your customers. The PESO model consists of four arenas: paid media, earned media, shared media and owned media.

In this case, it is worth noting that the students did not manage to report the verbs that contribute to the creation of the acronym in their correct form. In fact, they put the verbs "earn" and "own" in their base or present form, whereas the verbs should all be in the past participle form (paid, earned, shared, owned). This is even more interesting if we consider the fact that in that specific moment of the video the camera focuses on the slide on the screen behind the presenter, where the following image is projected (and the four verbs are clearly visible):

⁴ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/focus-group>

⁵ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/board>

⁶ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/share-of-voice>

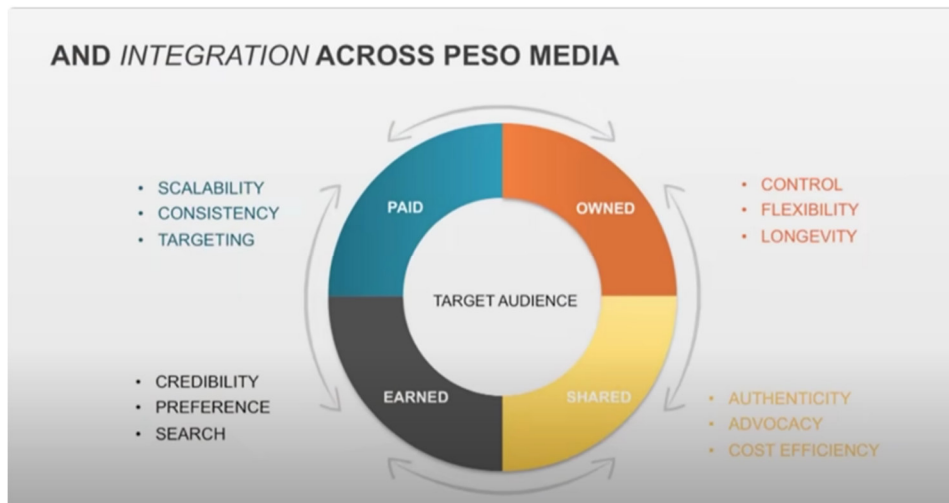


Figure 1. PESO model as represented on the screen behind the presenter.

Finally, the initialism ADLA (which pertains to the field of the specialized terminology used in marketing) stands for “Awareness, Demand, Lead, Acquisition.” This framework outlines the steps of a customer’s journey from first encountering a product or service to making a purchase. Below is an overview of each stage (Hussin & Hishan, 2022, p. 1538):

- 1) **Awareness:** The initial phase where potential customers become aware of the product or service. Marketing efforts focus on increasing visibility and recognition through advertising, social media, public relations, and content marketing.
- 2) **Demand:** Following awareness, the goal is to create interest and desire for the product or service. This involves educating potential customers about its benefits and value through targeted campaigns, informative content, and engaging promotions.
- 3) **Lead:** In this phase, interested potential customers (leads) are identified and captured, typically by collecting contact information via forms, sign-ups, or other lead generation tactics. The focus is on nurturing these leads to convert them into potential buyers.
- 4) **Acquisition:** The final stage is converting leads into paying customers. This involves closing the sale through effective sales strategies, personalized follow-ups, special offers, and ensuring a smooth purchasing process. The goal is to secure the customer’s commitment, leading to a completed transaction.

By using the ADLA framework, marketers can strategically guide potential customers through each stage of their journey, optimizing efforts to drive sales and business growth. Therefore, it is essential to stress how this exercise has managed to enhance the students’ knowledge of some topics related to their field of study.

5.3. Analysis of interlingual subtitles

As previously discussed, since interlingual subtitles are generated by Google Translate starting from the intralingual subtitles created by Google Voice, the inaccuracies noted earlier will inevitably affect the accuracy of the interlingual subtitles. This phenomenon is referred to as “cascading errors” (Soffritti, 2018, p. 337).

- 1) Formal requirements (lack of punctuation, timing, line breaks)

The intralingual subtitles of the video clip, as noted, lack punctuation, resulting in subtitles that are not formed as complete sentences. The intralingual subtitles are essentially just transcriptions of every word the speaker utters that are somewhat synchronized with his speech but not always accurate. This lack of structure in the intralingual subtitles impacts the interlingual subtitles significantly. The translation ends up being a

sequence of words rather than coherent sentences. Furthermore, the machine translation often struggles with grammatical and syntactic accuracy because it cannot determine the subject or object of the verbs. Consequently, the translated sentences frequently contain errors that render them incomprehensible. Here follows the automatic interlingual subtitles of the passage that was analysed (and post-edited) in the previous section:

Table 5.

Transcription of intralingual subtitles showing lack of formal requirements, the corresponding interlingual (Italian) version and their post-edited version

Intralingual subtitles	Interlingual subtitles	Post-edited subtitles
I'm going to reveal to you the 12 steps to winning at marketing and what happens next is that well there are only four steps create share some kind of magical process and profit in order to succeed in marketing you have to create something representative of yourself and your audience and distribute it in the right way in reality there is some assembly required the one idea I want to express today is that marketing is complex because it strives to understand human beings and human beings are perplexing but you have the tools to understand them you just need to look for the right things and there are 12 steps we'll start with the Voice	Ti svelerò i 12 passaggi per vincere nel marketing e quello che succede dopo è che beh, ci sono solo quattro passaggi per creare una sorta di processo magico e condividere un profitto. Per avere successo nel marketing devi creare qualcosa rappresentativo di te stesso e del tuo pubblico e distribuirlo nel modo giusto in realtà è necessario un po' di assemblaggio l'idea che voglio esprimere oggi è che il marketing è complesso perché si sforza di comprendere gli esseri umani e gli esseri umani lasciano perplessi ma tu hai gli strumenti per capirli devi solo cercare le cose giuste e ci sono 12 passaggi inizieremo con la Voce	Vi svelerò i 12 passaggi per avere successo nel marketing. E quello che succede dopo è che beh, ci sono solo quattro passaggi: creare, condividere, una sorta di passaggio magico e profitto. Per avere successo nel marketing, bisogna creare qualcosa che rappresenti te stesso e il tuo pubblico e distribuirlo nel modo migliore. In realtà, è richiesto una sorta di assemblaggio. L'idea che voglio esprimere oggi, è che il marketing è complesso perché si sforza di comprendere gli esseri umani, e gli esseri umani lasciano perplessi. Ma voi avete gli strumenti per comprenderli, dovete solo osservare le cose giuste. Ci sono 12 passaggi. Iniziamo con la voce.

Indeed, apart from the presence of a comma in line 3 and a full stop in line 5, punctuation is completely missing. The passage, reflecting the original source text, sounds rather like a sort of “stream of consciousness”. However, there are other oddities that can be noticed from a syntactic point of view. First of all, the speaker is talking directly to his entire audience (who are actually present in the room) using the second personal pronoun, which can be interpreted as a singular or as a plural pronoun in English. In the interlingual subtitles, Google Translate always rendered it with the Italian singular pronoun (“ti svelerò...”, “devi creare...”, “di te stesso e del tuo pubblico...”, “tu hai gli strumenti per capirli...”, “devi solo cercare le cose giuste...”, etc.), which, in this context, does not sound accurate, as he is speaking to a large number of people. Moreover, at times the lack of punctuation is a source of syntactic ambiguity. For example, in the sentence “Per avere successo nel marketing devi creare qualcosa rappresentativo di te stesso e del tuo pubblico e distribuirlo nel modo giusto”, the verb “distribuirlo” is syntactically incorrect within the context that is provided (the correct form would be “distribuirlo”, as it depends on the Italian modal verb “devi” and should consequently be in the infinitive form).

If we observe the post-edited version of the subtitles of the passage performed by one group of students, first of all we can observe that the form of the verbs in the second pronoun has often been rendered as a plural pronoun (“Vi svelerò i 12 passaggi...”, “voi avete gli strumenti...”, “dovete solo osservare...”). However, surprisingly, it was sometimes rendered with the singular form (“bisogna creare qualcosa che rappresenti te stesso e il tuo pubblico”), which turns out to be rather inconsistent.

2) Misrecognition of common words

The intralingual subtitles contain few instances of misrecognition of words by Google Voice. Some examples are reported in Table 6:

Table 6

Transcription of intralingual subtitles containing examples of misrecognition of common words, the corresponding interlingual (Italian) version and their post-edited version

Intralingual subtitles	Interlingual subtitles	Post-edited subtitles
Red Bull has a loud voice but it's not just loud it's one of the strongest brand voices on Earth not just among beverages or pickme UPS their promise is Wings an alternate reality where you can freef fall from the edge of space at the speed of sound or perfect that kickflip	Red Bull ha una voce forte ma non è solo forte è una delle voci di marchio più forti sulla Terra non solo tra le bevande o i pickme UPS la loro promessa è Wings , una realtà alternativa in cui puoi cadere in libertà dal limite dello spazio alla velocità del suono o con il perfetto kickflip .	Red Bull lascia un segno, ma non è tutto, è uno dei marchi pionieri in ambito globale, non solo tra le bevande o energizzanti . La loro promessa è un " paio di ali ", una realtà alternativa in cui puoi cadere liberamente dai confini dello spazio alla velocità del suono o eseguire perfettamente un trick .
they made a laptop for young people it's a tablet and a computer and one social conversation is volunteered on the other hand it's a public Declaration of our beliefs we check into our favorite haunts we spit vitrio about cable companies	per cui hanno realizzato un laptop i giovani sono un tablet, un computer e uno la conversazione sociale è volontaria d'altro canto è una dichiarazione pubblica delle nostre convinzioni controlliamo nei nostri luoghi preferiti sputiamo al vetriolo sulle società via cavo	È stato realizzato un computer portatile per i giovani che è un tablet e un computer e uno . la conversazione sociale è volontaria. D'altro canto è una dichiarazione pubblica delle nostre convinzioni. Ci ritroviamo nei nostri luoghi preferiti. Sputiamo vetriolo sulle società via cavo.

In the first excerpt, we can note that Google Translate left the phrase “pickme UPS” unaltered, as the Machine Translation probably associated UPS with the shipping company, which, combined with “pick me” probably seemed plausible to the software. However, the students who post-edited this chunk of speech correctly translated it into “energizzanti”. A “pick-me-up”, indeed, is a noun compound which is defined by the Online Collins Dictionary as “something, often food or drink, that gives you more energy or makes you feel better”⁷, and since the speaker is talking about Red Bull, the students could easily detect the mistake. In the same passage, Google Translate left the noun “Wings” untranslated. This noun obviously refers to Red Bull’s famous claim “Red Bull gives you wings”, which, however, in Italian sounds like “Ti mette le ali”. Leaving the noun in English, therefore, does not achieve an effect of functional equivalence, as the Italian spectator is used to reading/hearing the word “ali” when talking about Red Bull, and not “wings”. This is a clear example of a cascading error, where the misrecognition of the word by Google Voice has an impact on its translation performed by Google Translate. The Italian students who worked on this passage managed to grasp this nuance and translated the word as “un paio d’ali” (literally, “a pair of wings”). Interestingly, the misspelling of the word “free” as “freef” in the intralingual subtitles did not have any repercussion on the interlingual subtitles (“free” was translated as “cadere”, which is the exact equivalent of “free”). However, “to free fall” is commonly translated as “lanciarsi in caduta libera” in Italian, whereas the interlingual subtitles rendered the phrase with the literal, but less fluent, phrase “cadere in libertà”, and the Italian students post-edited the subtitles with the likewise uncommon phrase “cadere liberamente”. Moreover, the students (mis)translated the word “kickflip” (which had been maintained in the interlingual subtitles, as it is an anglicism used in Italian in the field of skateboarding⁸) with the generic word “trick” (which is still an anglicism, but with a much more generic meaning).

⁷ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pick-me-up>

⁸ <https://www.fillow.it/blog/2021/10/dizionario-dello-skateboard/>

In the second passage, the interlingual subtitles present more than one inaccuracy. First of all, the preposition “for”, which is part of the benefactive complement phrase “for young people”, was completely ignored, so that the phrase was translated into “un laptop i giovani” (instead of “per i giovani”) in the Italian interlingual subtitles. Secondly, the lack of punctuation, already observed in the previous sections, produces a completely meaningless sentence (the subject of the verb “be” is not the laptop about which the speaker is talking, but the young people for whom the tablet has been made): “i giovani **sono** un tablet, un computer e uno”). Finally, the misrecognition of the word “in” as “one”, which had already been pointed out in the previous section, caused a cascading error in the interlingual subtitles, as it was translated literally as “uno”. Once again, the final outcome is a meaningless sentence. It is worth noting that the Italian students who worked on the post-edited version of this passage did not identify this error and translated “and one” literally as “e uno”.

In the third passage, we can see that the word “vitrìol”, which was mistranscribed in the intralingual subtitles as “vitrio”, was correctly translated as “vetriolo” in the interlingual subtitles. However, Google Translate performed a syntactic mistake by adding the preposition “al” (“sputare al vetriolo”), whereas, from a syntactic point of view, the correct phrase in Italian would be “sputare vetriolo”, as “vetriolo” becomes the direct object of the verb “sputare”. This is exactly how the group of Italian students who worked on this passage translated the phrase. However, it ought to be noted that the most common collocation in Italian is “sputare veleno”, whereas “vetriolo” usually collocates with “al” (e.g. “commenti al vetriolo”), though not with the verb “sputare”. This is probably why Google Translate added the preposition “al”⁹.

3) Misrecognition of entity names

As previously mentioned, proper names, institutions, and brands can be difficult for Automatic Speech Recognition technologies to recognize and accurately transcribe. In the videoclip the students analysed in class, this is probably the category that presented the highest number of errors, which are reported in Table 7.

Table 7.

Transcription of intralingual subtitles containing examples of misrecognition of entity names, the corresponding interlingual (Italian) version and their post-edited version

Intralingual subtitles	Interlingual subtitles	Post-edited subtitles
the field of visual identity was pioneered by Gordon lipincott	il campo dell'identità visiva è stato aperto da Gordon lipincott	Il campo della visual identity è stato lanciato da Gordon Lippincott .
liping cot introduced Evolution	<i>Interlingual subtitles missing</i>	Lippincott ha portato ad un'evoluzione
Paul aare is one of the most prolific and active designers in the world	Paul Aare è uno dei designer più prolifici e attivi al mondo	Paula Share è una delle designer più prolifiche e attive al mondo
when polisher was tasked with designing the logo of City Bank she actually drew it on a napkin in less than a minute	quando la lucidatrice è stata incaricata di disegnare il logo della City Bank lo ha effettivamente disegnato su un tovagliolo in meno di un minuto	Quando Paula Share è stata incaricata di disegnare il logo della Citi Bank lo ha disegnato su un tovagliolo in meno di un minuto
many of you will recognize this building the Morhead planetarium houses the offices of the oldest merit scholarship in the country the Morhead Kane 's audience is adaptive and The Branding needed to be adaptable it needed to be built on the latest Technologies the website needed	molti di riconoscerai questo edificio, il planetario Morhead ospita gli uffici della più antica borsa di studio al merito del paese il pubblico di Morhead Kane è adattivo e il marchio doveva essere adattabile doveva essere costruito sulle tecnologie più recenti il sito web doveva essere reattivo e flessibile	Molti di voi riconosceranno Il Morhead , un planetario Che ospita gli uffici della più antica Borsa di studio per merito del paese. Il pubblico di Morehead Cane è flessibile e il marchio doveva essere versatile. Doveva essere costruito sulle tecnologie più recenti.

⁹ The Corpus Italian Web 2020 on Sketch Engine reports only 5 instances of concordances of the verb “sputare” followed by the noun “vetriolo”, whereas it reports 1,641 instances of concordances of the verb “sputare” followed by the noun “veleno”.

<p>to be current responsive and flexible</p>	<p>il marketing era guidato da focus group ma, come le particelle elementari negli esperimenti principali UNC C di Heisenberg, quando siamo osservati, cambiamo i nostri comportamenti di cui sbarazzarsi gli annunci di Viva Viagra quando si sono resi conto che gli uomini cercavano su Google domande su Ed che erano completamente diverse da ciò che dicevano sui forum volevano dimostrare quanto fosse potente, quindi hanno reclutato Clams Casino come produttore e Vic Mena come MC questo è stato il genio degli esperti di marketing laggiù, ci hanno chiamato oggi e hanno detto come fai a capire cosa includere nel tuo riepilogo Proctor and Gamble stava per eliminare il marchio delle spezie gialle e il mio amico di Widen Kennedy sapeva che il pubblico, composto principalmente da donne che prendono le decisioni di consumo in casa, aveva bisogno con cui parlare, quindi hanno ideato questa campagna e aveva una specie di personaggio di Keo Ree, Surfer Dude, che parlava direttamente al pubblico la lingua stessa sta evolvendo la lingua, l'inglese che usiamo oggi è diverso dall'inglese di le organizzazioni baywolf</p>	<p>Il sito web doveva essere attuale, reattivo e flessibile. Il marketing un tempo era guidato da gruppi di discussione, ma, come le particelle elementari negli esperimenti di Heisenberg sul principio di indeterminazione quando veniamo osservati cambiamo i nostri comportamenti La Pfizer ha eliminato la pubblicità del Viva Viagra quando si è resa conto che gli uomini cercavano su Google domande sulla DE (disfunzione erettile) che erano completamente diverse da quello che dicevano sui forum. volevano dimostrare quanto fosse potente hanno reclutato Clams Casino per la produzione e Vic Mena per fare da MC. Questo è stato il colpo di genio degli esperti di marketing. Hanno chiamato Us Today e hanno chiesto: "Come fate a capire cosa includere nel vostro riepilogo?" Procter and Gamble stava per eliminare il marchio Old Spice e il mio amico alla Wieden+Kennedy sapeva che bisognava comunicare con il loro pubblico, composto principalmente da donne che prendono le decisioni di consumo in casa. Così hanno ideato questa campagna con un personaggio come Keanu Reeves, un surfista che parlava direttamente al pubblico la lingua stessa sta cambiando la lingua. L'inglese che usiamo oggi è diverso da quello di Beowulf.</p>
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It is worth noting that the misrecognition of entity names observed in the previous section led to a series of cascading errors in the Italian interlingual subtitles. In fact, most of the mistranscriptions of entity names were left unaltered in their translation. In one specific case (namely, the misrecognition of the name of the newspaper *USA Today* as "us today") led to a sentence whose meaning is totally different from what the presenter is actually saying (as it becomes "ci hanno chiamato oggi", meaning "they called us today", where "us" is an object pronoun and "today" is an adverb of time"). On the other hand, the post-edited version of the subtitles performed by the students presents an accurate rendering of the entity names (except just one case, namely Vic Mena, which was not corrected as Vic Mensa). Interestingly, the students added the meaning of the acronym DE (in the original "Ed"), by making use of a strategy of explicitation, presumably to clarify what it

refers to. Moreover, the students recognised the reference to the actor Keanu Reeves (which was not recognised by Google Voice and consequently by Google Translate), although the presenter clearly refers to the role he played in the film *Point Break* (“surfer dude”), which was released in 1991 before the students were born. Finally, as mentioned, the fact that the intralingual subtitles simply transcribe what the presenter says without punctuation and without intervening on certain features which are typical of spontaneous spoken language (such as hesitations and repetitions), gives rise to syntactic errors. This is especially clear in the last example, where, while correctly post-editing the name of the epic poem *Beowulf*, the students did not notice that the presenter was actually saying “Language itself is evolving. The language, the English that we use today, is different from the English of Beowulf”. Their first sentence, indeed, can be back translated as “Language itself is changing the language”, which is not correct.

4) Misrecognition of specialized terminology

As previously noted, a key goal of this study was to examine the specialized vocabulary used in the marketing field. The students were able to detect several instances where Google Voice had inaccurately transcribed words or phrases in the intralingual subtitles. In some situations, the students were unfamiliar with the terminology themselves, making the exercise beneficial not only for developing their listening abilities but also for expanding their vocabulary and deepening their understanding of concepts within this specialized area. The table below reports the interlingual subtitles of the passages that were analysed in the previous section, as well as the post-edited versions performed by the students:

Table 8.

Transcription of intralingual subtitles containing examples of misrecognition of specialized terminology, the corresponding interlingual (Italian) version and their post-edited version

Intralingual subtitles	Interlingual subtitles	Post-edited subtitles
if we're in a focused group of moms we're unlikely to admit to sharing junk food with our kids	se facciamo parte di un gruppo concentrato di mamme difficilmente ammetteremo di condividere cibo spazzatura con i nostri figli	se facciamo parte di un focus group di mamme difficilmente ammetteremo di condividere cibo spazzatura con i nostri figli
she actually drew it on a napkin in less than a minute and then she spent a whole year with Bor justifying her intuition	lo ha effettivamente disegnato su un tovagliolo in meno di un minuto e poi ha trascorso un anno intero con Bor giustificando la sua intuizione	In effetti lo ha disegnato su un tovagliolo in meno di un minuto e poi ha trascorso un anno intero con i consigli esecutivi per giustificare la sua intuizione
declining sales and Sheriff voice meant that they were losing out if you haven't seen a peso model in your marketing classes yet you will it sensor paid earn shared and own and it stands for your advertising which is scalable your external endorsements which are credible your your shared media property like social which makes you authentic and your website which is where you define Who You Are	il calo delle vendite e la voce dello sceriffo significavano che stavano perdendo terreno. se non hai ancora visto un modello in peso nelle tue lezioni di marketing, lo farai con il sensore pagato, guadagnerai condiviso e possiedi e rappresenta la tua pubblicità scalabile, le tue sponsorizzazioni esterne che sono credibili, la tua proprietà multimediale condivisa come i social che ti rende autentico e il tuo sito web, dove definisci Chi sei	il calo delle vendite e del peso pubblicitario significava che stavano perdendo successo. se non avete ancora visto un modello PESO nei vostri corsi di marketing, lo vedrete. Questo viene condiviso ed è di proprietà e sta per la vostra pubblicità che è scalabile e le sponsorizzazioni esterne che sono credibili. Le vostre proprietà mediatiche condivise come social, che vi rende autentici, e il vostro sito web che è il luogo in cui definite chi siete.

we worked with 1 adla on a campaign called two days beat for HP	abbiamo lavorato con 1 adla su una campagna chiamata Two Days Beat for HP	Abbiamo lavorato con un'adla su una campagna chiamata "Due giorni di vita" per HP.
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In this case as well, it is possible to note that some of the errors present in the intralingual subtitles led to cascading errors in the intralingual subtitles. First of all, in the first passage, the phrase “focused group” was translated literally as “gruppo concentrato”. The group of students who performed the post-editing version of the subtitles, however, identified the mistake and correctly translated it into “focus group”.

In the second passage, as seen in the section about intralingual subtitles, Google Voice misinterpreted the word “board” (meaning “committee”) and transcribed it as “Bor” (a non-existing word). Google Translate maintained the word in the interlingual subtitles (another case of cascading error). While the students who worked on this passage rendered it as “consigli esecutivi”, the correct terminology would actually be “consigli d’amministrazione”.

The third passage presents another case of a cascading error. Indeed, as Google Voice misinterpreted the phrase “share of voice” as “Sheriff voice”, Google Translate rendered it literally as “la voce dello sceriffo”, which makes the sentence completely meaningless. The students who performed the post-edited version of this passage translated the phrase as “calo del peso pubblicitario”, which is an acceptable translation, although Italian marketing discourse uses the English phrase¹⁰.

Moving on to the following passage, it is evident how the intralingual subtitles do not convey the exact meaning of what the speaker is referring to. First of all, “PESO model” is written in lower case letters (as in the intralingual subtitles), which makes it difficult to understand that he is referring to an acronym. Moreover, the Italian intralingual subtitles have inserted the preposition “in” (“un modello in peso”), which makes it even harder to realize that PESO is actually the name of this specific model, so it could be interpreted as the currency used in Southern American countries, such as Mexico and Argentina. Furthermore, the intralingual subtitles misrecognized the phrase “it stands for” (followed by the four words whose initials form the acronym: paid, earned, shared and owned) as “it sensor”, which causes a cascading error in the interlingual subtitles. Indeed, Google Translate renders the sentence as “con il sensore pagato, guadagnerai, condiviso e possiedi”, which makes no sense. Interestingly, whereas the group of students who had worked on the post-editing phase of the intralingual subtitles of this passage had managed to identify and render the meaning of the passage quite accurately (except for the tense of the verbs), the students who worked on the post-editing phase of the interlingual subtitles failed in this objective, so their Italian proposal of the passage presents many inaccuracies (“Questo viene condiviso ed è di proprietà” literally means “this is shared and it is owned”).

Finally, the last passage cannot be considered an efficient translation upon considering both the automatic interlingual translation and their post-edited version. Indeed, as observed in the previous section, ADLA is an initialism (where each letter is spelled out individually). By transcribing it with lower case letters the intralingual subtitles are not accurate, and such lack of accuracy was maintained both in the interlingual subtitles and their post-edited version.

6. Concluding remarks

The aim of this paper was to contribute to the field of foreign language teaching and learning by exploring the use of Audiovisual Translation (AVT). Specifically, it investigated how automatic subtitles can be employed in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms. The objective was twofold: it aimed at enhancing students’ listening skills by analysing automatic intralingual subtitles provided by Speech Recognition Systems and detecting potential errors in the transcription of the spoken output, and it sought to improve the acquisition of specialized terminology in the specific field of marketing discourse, as the video that was analyzed focused on this topic.

The study has confirmed the fact that, although incorporating Automatic Speech Recognition and Machine Translation into platforms like YouTube has significantly expanded public access to information and entertainment, and despite significant advancements in these technologies in recent years, achieving perfect accuracy remains a challenging goal. In fact, although YouTube aspires to create a fully automated interlingual subtitling system capable of generating subtitles in various languages without human involvement, this ambitious target is proving to be quite complex at present. It is true that the primary purpose of these subtitles

¹⁰ <https://ahrefs.com/blog/it/share-of-voice/>

is to provide users with a basic understanding of the content uploaded to the platform, and they generally fulfil this role effectively. Nonetheless, accuracy continues to be a considerable concern.

It has to be noted that the study was based only on one video clip, and that the students had a very limited amount of time to work on it and perform the tasks they were required to carry out. Three lessons (lasting two hours each) are not sufficient to provide them with the necessary skills. Therefore, it would be necessary to dedicate more time both to the students' training in this field and to the time allotted to study the content of the material more in depth and obtain more significant results.

In spite of these limitations, the study has provided interesting insights. First of all, the students learned that analyzing automatic intralingual subtitling and detecting the errors they contain can be a useful exercise to practice, and hopefully enhance, their listening skills (something they did not have the chance to do by working only on written texts). Secondly, they had the opportunity to improve the specialized terminology related to one of their fields of study. Last but not least, they practiced their skills in post-editing texts, which is a necessary ability if they are to become mediators.

7. References

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The development of a new multimodal genre for corporate communication: The case of video CEO statements

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ABSTRACT

EN The digitization of the world is continuously developing, with corporate genres migrating to the web. Annual Corporate Reports (ACR) now appear in digital formats ranging from static PDFs to interactive websites. This shift significantly impacts report narratives, which are often enhanced by corporate videos, as they represent a versatile communication tool. This is particularly relevant for students, who are naturally digitally literate and accustomed to visual and auditory content. Our study has two objectives. From a research perspective, we aim to identify key multimodal features of Video CEO Statements (VCS). From a pedagogical standpoint, we will demonstrate how these videos enhance students' multimodal literacy within corporate digital genres. This, in turn, could improve essential business communication skills, including leadership, audience engagement, and digital communication strategies, thus equipping students with competencies that are vital for today's corporate landscape.

Key words: ANNUAL REPORT, VIDEO CEO STATEMENTS (VCS), CORPORATE DISCOURSE, MULTIMODAL LITERACY, NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

ES La digitalización en el mundo actual está en evolución constante, con la migración de géneros corporativos a la web. Las memorias anuales aparecen ahora en formatos digitales, desde PDF estáticos hasta sitios web interactivos. Este cambio afecta significativamente a la narrativa de dichas memorias, a menudo enriquecida con vídeos corporativos, una herramienta de comunicación versátil. Esto es especialmente relevante para los estudiantes, que por naturaleza están alfabetizados digitalmente y acostumbrados a contenidos visuales y auditivos. Nuestro estudio tiene dos objetivos. Desde el punto de vista de la investigación, pretendemos identificar las características multimodales clave de los vídeos que complementan las declaraciones escritas de los directores generales. Desde el punto de vista pedagógico, demostraremos cómo estos vídeos mejoran la alfabetización multimodal de los estudiantes dentro de los géneros digitales corporativos. Esto, a su vez, podría mejorar las habilidades esenciales de comunicación empresarial, incluido el liderazgo, la participación y compromiso de la audiencia y las estrategias de comunicación digital, dotando a los estudiantes de competencias vitales para el panorama empresarial actual.

Palabras clave: MEMORIA ANUAL, VIDEO-DECLARACIONES DE LOS DIRECTORES GENERALES, DISCURSO CORPORATIVO, ALFABETIZACIÓN MULTIMODAL, COMUNICACIÓN NO-VERBAL

IT La digitalizzazione del mondo è in continuo sviluppo con la migrazione dei generi aziendali sul web. Le Relazioni Annuali delle aziende appaiono ora in formato digitale, passando da PDF statici a siti web interattivi. Questo cambiamento ha un impatto significativo sullo stile narrativo delle relazioni stesse, spesso arricchite da video, strumenti versatili di comunicazione. Questo è particolarmente importante per gli studenti, che sono naturalmente alfabetizzati al digitale e abituati a contenuti audio e video. Il nostro studio ha due obiettivi. Dal punto di vista della ricerca, ci proponiamo di identificare le principali caratteristiche multimodali dei comunicati video di amministratori delegati. Da un punto di vista pedagogico, dimostreremo come questi video migliorino l'alfabetizzazione multimodale degli studenti all'interno dei generi digitali aziendali. Questo, a sua volta, può migliorare le competenze di base della comunicazione aziendale, tra cui le capacità di leadership, il coinvolgimento del pubblico e le strategie di comunicazione digitale, dotando gli studenti di competenze vitali per il panorama aziendale odierno.

Parole chiave: RELAZIONE ANNUALE, VIDEO DICHIARAZIONI DI AD, DISCURSO AZIENDALE, ALFABETIZZAZIONE MULTIMODALE, COMUNICAZIONE NON VERBALE

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1. Introduction

The Annual Report (AR) is a genre which has been widely studied over the past few decades (El-Haj et al., 2020; Michelon et al., 2022; Sai et al., 2019), offering a detailed overview of a firm's financial performance, operations, and strategic initiatives over the course of a financial year (Lord, 2002). It is a means of communication between a company and its shareholders, stakeholders, investors, and the general public (Abdullah et al., 2017). It is written at the end of a financial year and then made available to the public, and comprises quantitative information, narratives, photographs, tables, and graphs, becoming a legitimate and trustworthy medium to communicate information about the firm's financial performance (Yuthas et al., 2002). An AR is "commonly divided into two sections, with the statutory required financial statements usually assigned either to a rear section, or to a separate volume" (Stanton et al., 2004, p. 57). This document, especially the executive statements or narrative sections of the AR (including the chairman's and the CEO statements), has two main purposes: to inform and to promote the company; the former is a legal (statutory) requirement for multinational companies in most countries (Rowbottom & Lymer, 2010), and the latter is the result of an intention to use the document to generally show the positive views of the company, sometimes understood as a marketing tool (Cadiz Dyball, 1998). However, this view can also be influenced by external factors (Palmer-Silveira & Ruiz-Garrido, 2014), although the company may try to minimize these issues and highlight the firm's achievements. Furthermore, previous research, such as Giordano et al. (2019), confirms the hybrid nature of the annual report genre, as it seeks to expand its target audience to both specialist and non-specialist readers. This genre and the documents it contains also go beyond mere economic results; for some time now, they have also been of great relevance when it comes to social issues, which can be of interest not only to regular stakeholders, but also to new ones, many of whom are non-specialist readers (Baier et al., 2020). Furthermore, this hybridity is also seen because the genre is the object of interest of many researchers from a wide variety of fields using different analytical approaches (exclusively linguistic or multimodal, among others) (Hynes, 2009).

Like other essential corporate documents, ARs have been subject to digitization. The digitization of the world is not only a fact but is also in continuous evolution, as many genres are migrating to the Web (Hafner, 2018). Indeed, the digital transformation of the world, which accelerated due to the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way many businesses work nowadays (Dal Mas et al., 2020; Vaska et al., 2020), with many becoming "smart factories" (Lasi et al., 2014). This is something that companies have also suffered: like a natural breaching experiment, digitization has disrupted organizational and societal processes (Faraj et al., 2021). Many firms, for example, have noticed that they need to change the way they have traditionally communicated with their potential stakeholders (Aula & Mantere, 2008), seeking ways to improve this communicative need. Some time ago, Garzone (2007) noted that corporate genres have been migrating to the Web, and this has progressed in different ways so that now they are accustomed to presenting a corporate image worldwide (Tang et al., 2015). In the case of Annual Corporate Reports (ACR), as Giglioni (2020) adds, these have usually been transferred to the digital environment in a static .pdf (downloadable) format, like the traditional hard copy, sometimes called an interactive report because they integrate hyperlinks to other sections or even sites outside the document itself. However, ACRs can also be found in a richer online format, similar to a website. These digital ACRs "may have an impact on the disclosure of corporate narratives. This is exemplified by the online, abridged version of the narrative sections, where companies purposely select what information to present to their readers" (Giglioni, 2020, pp. 31-32). We can therefore agree that the presentation and delivery of ACRs are shifting "towards a more visual-based communicative approach" (Giglioni, 2020, p. 32). Some companies are also adding a video to the message of the executives, reinforcing the idea of the hybridization of the genre as it becomes more digitized and multimodal in form. In Giglioni's work (2020), an exceptional presence of video narratives is mentioned, opening up the possibility of adding corporate videos to the narrative sections of ACRs, which to our knowledge has not been studied.

2. Video CEO statements (VCS)

As mentioned above, using the digital world to improve communication with stakeholders is a fact of life today (Bilinski, 2024). Well aware of the power of video as a communication tool, companies are using different platforms to disseminate contents (Sharma, 2022). According to Ditlevsen and Kastberg (2020, p. 195), corporate videos refer to "all audiovisual instantiations of corporate communication efforts". This broad definition can include different topics (e.g., video newsletters or CEO speeches), addressed to different target audiences (e.g., external stakeholders or employees) and different roles (e.g., human resources department to

provide orientation or training to employees). Thus, corporate videos have become “a potent, multifaceted and multipurpose corporate communication medium”, supporting “the discursive construction of corporate identity” (Ditlevsen & Kastberg, 2020, p. 196), and they are even used to repair the image of firms when necessary (Jaworska, 2023).

CEOs (Chief Executive Officers) have a leading position within multinational companies and can be considered the main asset of the company’s corporate identity; they make executive decisions for the organization, and their reputation has a clear influence on the market behavior of the company, and even on its share value (Gaines-Ross, 2000). They determine the corporate social responsibility of firms, and their rhetoric is fundamental not only for reporting facts, but also for influencing future corporate strategic choices (Beldad & von Rosenstiel, 2024; Hung, 2011; Marais, 2012). Drawing on previous literature (Aritz et al., 2017; Fairhurst, 2007; Nielsen, 2009), a discursive focus is needed to analyze how leadership is achieved interactionally in organizational settings. Discourse should be both a representation of reality and a way of engaging the audience to understand all the benefits that the firm can offer: corporate narrative researchers highlight the need to focus not on what is disclosed, but on how a particular issue is disclosed (Hossain, 2017). CEOs nowadays try to offer an aura of positivity turning to mass media to convey their messages, offering a clear image of control, which is especially important in harsh times. In their public disclosure of favorable (and unfavorable) data, CEOs consider many factors: corporate ethics, integrity and, more importantly, discursive models (Amernic & Craig, 2013; Ruiz-Garrido & Palmer-Silveira, 2023).

In this sense, corporate videos show the potential to promote and exploit multimodal and multimedia channels (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2022) and, as Valeiras-Jurado et al. (2018) have already said, the need to persuade stakeholders through diverse oral professional discourses is reinforced by different semiotic modes, including words, gestures, and intonation. Apart from informative messages (often linked to events) and promotional recordings, CEOs also use videos to accompany and complete traditional letters to shareholders, offering financial communication to viewers in a plain and engaging way, trying to enhance an attractive image among potential stakeholders. However, “when taking technology a step further, the use of video for oral financial communication is instead still rather underdeveloped” (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2022, p. 78). It is also understudied (Costa-Sánchez, 2017; Ditlevsen & Kastberg, 2020). CEOs are already aware of the importance of appropriate communication, and in response to the call of Helfat and Peteraf (2015), it has become a must to study verbal and non-verbal communication, as they are relevant components of managerial cognitive skills (Banker et al., 2024; Choudhury et al., 2019). To do so, a multimodal approach to the development of Video CEO Statements (VCSs) is necessary.

3. Multimodal communication in business discourse

Multimodal Discourse Analysis focuses on a set of modes that help speakers convey a message to their audience. These semiotic modes are used in a communicative act to enhance the communication process (Norris, 2004; O’Halloran, 2011). Firms aim at harnessing semiotic resources in innovative ways to produce discourses that serve their strategic goals (Machin, 2013; Jaworska, 2023). Following Valeiras-Jurado and Bernad-Mechó (2022), we identify three different types of modes: embodied, which are modes controlled by the speaker’s verbal and non-verbal language; disembodied, which are external elements that can affect the audience; and filmic, which define those semiotic resources that go through a production and editing process. While embodied and disembodied modes are present in all oral communication processes, the use of filmic modes can greatly enhance the ability to convey a message in a video recording as well as emphasize certain engagement resources, and this is something that VCS authors know well.

Those modes must be seen as a holistic communicative process with a single common goal: to convey a message. This is called a multimodal ensemble, implying the combination of different modes in only one communicative act (Bernad-Mechó, 2021; Valeiras-Jurado & Bernad-Mechó, 2022). Modal coherence plays an important role in the process, that is, the consistent use of modes without contradicting each other.

Particularly when it comes to embodied and disembodied modes, non-verbal communication plays a key role in business, complementing (and in many cases reinforcing) the ability to carry out commercial interactions. Non-verbal communication is just as important as verbal communication, as they both work together in the communication process; the former can even replace the latter in some specific cases, often being easier to interpret (Ibrahim et al., 2022). Although attention is often focused on what is said, the associated non-verbal signals can be crucial to the effectiveness of communication. As Blahova (2015, p. 14) points out “[m]ost of the time, this process is unconscious, so it requires a bit of effort to pay closer attention

to non-verbal cues we send or receive". Non-verbal communication, which includes examples of embodied modes, such as gestures, facial expressions, posture, tone of voice and eye contact, among others, but also disembodied modes, such as the speaker's outfit or the setting, reinforce the content of the spoken message (Ruiz-Garrido & Palmer-Silveira, 2023). In a business environment, this consistency between verbal and non-verbal communication can create trust and credibility (Ciuffani, 2017). For example, leaders who communicate a strategic vision using a firm tone of voice and open body language strengthen trust in their message.

Non-verbal signals are important features when expressing attitudes and emotions that are not always explicit in verbal discourse (Liu et al, 2024; Wisankosol, 2018). In a business environment, this can affect the dynamics of working relationships, both between colleagues and between superiors and subordinates (Larson & Kleiner, 2004). A manager who communicates empathy and understanding through gestures, tone of voice or the right keywords can foster a more collaborative and motivating work environment (Jia et al., 2017). This indicates the importance of analyzing how interpersonal relationships play a role in organizational life and how, in turn, non-verbal communication contributes significantly to building these relationships. Eye contact, open posture and affirmative gestures, for example, often convey respect and attention (Sauter, 2017) facilitating the creation of trust between employees, customers and business partners. Similarly, non-verbal behavior that reflects disinterest or hostility can undermine these relationships creating friction. Assuming this, non-verbal communication can help to manage (and even resolve) conflicts and misunderstandings.

Some business activities can greatly benefit from the use of non-verbal communication. In business negotiations, non-verbal communication can provide insight into the other party's thoughts and intentions, and a close observation of some gestures and movements can help a businessperson to understand his/her likelihood of closing a deal, providing cues about the level of agreement or disagreement, sincerity, or interest (Pugu et al., 2024; Teodorescu, 2013). Similarly, controlling those gestures and body movements can help any CEO to express their message appropriately. This is particularly relevant in the context of pre-recorded and edited video messages (filmic modes), which are often created to share information with prospective stakeholders. In the present study, we focus on videos that accompany the CEO statements included in annual reports presented on the Internet. Despite their relatively recent appearance, the use of video CEO statements (VCSs) has increased in recent years, especially after the 2020 pandemic, and allows firms to share information with prospective shareholders. These documents, for research purposes, can be understood as a new genre or, at least, as a new genre variation, and have become the focus of our current research. We have observed these are used by CEOs in order to give information about the financial performance of the company (unsurprisingly the most prominent aim of most annual reports), but also to talk about the firm's strategy, to analyze the industry's trends, to thank the employees for their work and to introduce information about sustainability. Additionally, these corporate videos, when compared to traditional annual reports, help firms to reach a wider audience, enhancing company branding and gaining trust and credibility.

4. Aim of the study

Our study has two main objectives:

- Identifying the main features of video CEO statements accompanying the message in online annual reports.
- Showing ways to exploit video CEO statements to develop students' multimodal literacy to improve students' business communication skills.

5. Methodology

The first part of the next section will develop the analysis of a selected multi-sectorial dataset of 10 VCSs available on the Internet. All the selected companies are multinational corporations, offering a diverse range of products and services. We are interested in examining the structure of this type of video to identify common features may identify a general structure similar to that observed in written corporate statements (Palmer-Silveira & Ruiz-Garrido, 2014). We will then examine the content of these videos to ascertain whether they can be used to create a taxonomy based on their function. Then, from a multimodal standpoint, we will study how the use of this new digital genre can engage the audience (the shareholders) in a dynamic way (through the use of prosody, the type of images and shots selected, or the length of the sentences uttered). Finally, we will apply our findings to show the potential of this new digital genre and its features for the English for Business Communication classroom. The dataset selected for this study is the following:

Table 1
List and features of companies analyzed

Companies	Year	Sector	Country	Duration	On Website	Speaker
Securitas Group	2020	Security Service	Sweden	2:43	no	Male
Telenor Group	2018	Telecommunications	Norway	3:22	yes	Male
Boels Rental	2020	Equipment rental company	Netherlands	2:56	yes	Male
Barco	2020	Technology	Belgium	4:43	yes	Male
Fresenius Medical Care	2021	Health Care Services	Germany	5:49	yes	Male
Commonwealth Bank of Australia	2021	Finances	Australia	4:08	no	Female
VISA	2022	Finances	USA	6:53	yes	Male
Hugo Boss	2020	Fashion	Germany	2:20	yes	Male
Koppers	2020	Chemical	USA	5:30	yes	Male
Georg Fischer (GF)	2020	Manufacturing	Switzerland	3:48	no	Male

In this part of the study, we will pay attention to the following features which help to define this new approach to corporate communication:

- a. Taxonomy: differences between lecturing and interviewing styles
- b. Structure: different sections that tend to appear in these recordings
- c. Common topics analyzed
- d. Visual aids
- e. Engagement resources

The data was collected from different searches conducted on the Internet (Google and Youtube), through the combination of several words (i.e., *Annual reports, Video, CEO letter, CEO messages, CEO statements, CEO video, Chairman statement, Message to shareholders*), sometimes using snowball sampling. Although those digital videos seem to be an excellent pedagogical material (Girón-García & Fortanet-Gómez, 2023), they also seem to be "... an understudied corporate communication tool." (Costa-Sánchez, 2017, p. 139). In selecting the videos, we tried to prioritize their availability online (webpages and official media platforms), to choose items of a similar length and year of publication, representing a diverse selection of economic sectors, and VCSs which contained similar contents to the written statements of the companies examined. All in all, we came up with around 20 VCS from which we selected the ones shown in Table 1 to start our research. Those in the table are representative of the larger pool of videos gathered. All were viewed and comparisons were made between them. Afterwards, we also checked the content components of the recordings using Atlas.ti software (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2023), to confirm our observations. For the visual aids and engagement resources we complemented our watching with GRAPE-MARS software (Ruiz-Madrid et al., 2023).

6. Results and discussion

6.1. Taxonomy

Regarding the taxonomy of these video CEO statements, we can observe that in the selected dataset there is a predominance of a lecturing style, where we often see a talking head (the CEO) looking directly at the camera. The speaker tends to stand while speaking, and they tend to use only one shot, often edited in post-production from two different camera positions. Visually speaking, these tend to be simple videos, and the skill of the final editor makes all the difference.

A second option, also found in our dataset, is an interview style, based on a series of questions asked verbally or written on screen. It attempts to offer a more documentary approach to the genre. In one of the recordings the interviewer is asking a question, but more often, these videos are presented to suggest that someone behind the camera is interviewing the speaker, and the CEO is responding directly to that person, who is not seen in the final recording. In a way, this presents an active approach of the CEO when talking to the camera, although we can see exceptions to this rule.

6.2. Structure

As for the structure observed in these texts, it should be noted that there is not a clear-cut structure and that it is rather up to the people who create these videos to decide on the general structure of the final cut. In some cases, videos simply summarize the most interesting facts and figures from the printed CEO statements; in others, they choose to change the original order of the different pieces of information presented in the written version. In any case, our dataset has allowed us to see that there are some common general sections that are repeated from the written CEO statements that appear in these videos. To sum up, there are four (genre-based) moves that seem to be paramount regarding the general structure of these video statements.

First, all the videos in our dataset focus on the current situation of the company, analyzing the firm's performance over the past year in great detail. This is an aspect that is also a fundamental part of the structure of the written version, becoming in some ways the most important element of these texts. CEOs are clearly aware that it should appear in this visual approach to their customers/investors.

A second element that appears in all the recordings analyzed, and which forms an integral part of the overall structure of the video CEO statement, is a detailed analysis of the financial and economic issues that underpin the company's position in today's market. CEOs always address the relevance of various economic fluctuations in their company's overall performance and try to explain them in an optimistic manner for the listener.

While this positive approach to financial and economic issues can also be seen in the written version of these statements, in these video recordings there is usually a third element to consider, which is a forecast of future activities and efforts, underlining the perpetually dynamic character of the business. CEOs take great care to present an engaging attitude throughout their videos, but this is especially a must when presenting what the company intends to achieve. From a present-oriented perspective, these videos often highlight a bright future for the company, and this has become an integral part of the overall structure of the CEO video statements analyzed.

Finally, as a fourth key element, CEOs comment on various social issues to convey a positive image of the company. They pay attention to the welfare of the planet, the proper use of resources for charities, or the satisfaction of their employees and their families, among many other strategies that are used to better position the company in the eyes of the public and give it an edge over its competitors.

6.3. Common topics

In the context of the verbal mode, we also examined the type of topics addressed by the videos that make up our dataset. Considering that the video CEO statements were collected in recent years, the first common topic observed is ways for companies to overcome the problems faced since 2020 (mainly the COVID-19 crisis and the war in Ukraine), always indicating the difficulties suffered, and the solutions adopted by the companies. Another common theme is a summary of the reliability of the measures taken to overcome these external problems and their impact on the companies' balance sheets, always confirming positive results. In this attempt to present a positive image, another common topic is an explanation of the specific improvements made by the companies, mainly in terms of turnover, the launch of new products/services or the opening up of new markets.

Some other recurring topics were also noted, such as the presentation of new challenges and strategies for the future of the company, as well as some rules and recommendations to link the company's present with future decisions to be taken. In addition, and reinforcing aspects observed in the written version of the CEO statements, these videos emphasize the concept of corporate values and fundamental operational objectives. Other topics such as sustainability and the reinforcement of environmental issues, which are mandatory for companies in many countries, are also included in this video format. In addition, a relatively new concept also observed in our dataset is the introduction of information related to the process of digitization.

6.4. Visual aids

Different visual aids (disembodied or filmic modes) are used to convey information in these VCSs. There are two basic ways of doing this: using two cameras to record the same message from two positions in order to provide more editing options (Figure 1), or using only one camera to record the same message twice, at different distances from the speaker, in order to combine the shots later in the editing suite (Figure 2). In both cases, the editing table becomes a relevant addition to the topic, as these closer and different shots try to add rhythm to the recording and increase the engagement of the overall recording. In our view, this attempt to create a more flexible and engaging rhythm is basic to understand the firms' attempts to work with this new video format.

In some cases, the camera becomes the focus of attention, and we can see it functioning to highlight the company's interest in revealing the truth (Figure 3); the aim seems to make the audience aware of the importance of the medium used, trying to present a more active image/perspective than traditional CEO statements by clearly showing that the recording process requires a further effort, something that the editors of the video make clear through the use of these specific shots. This is probably done to add an image of interaction with the audience, possible stakeholders who can then feel closer to the message being shared by the firm's CEO. Similarly, transparency and trust-building are additional values that this kind of shots can convey.

As suggested by these recordings, a multifaceted approach involving varied modes is employed to offer a novel perspective on traditional CEO statements. The positioning of the speaker, the placement of the camera to emphasize specific traits (hands, eyes, full body), the selection of angles, and other visual choices are instrumental in enhancing the information value of the final video.

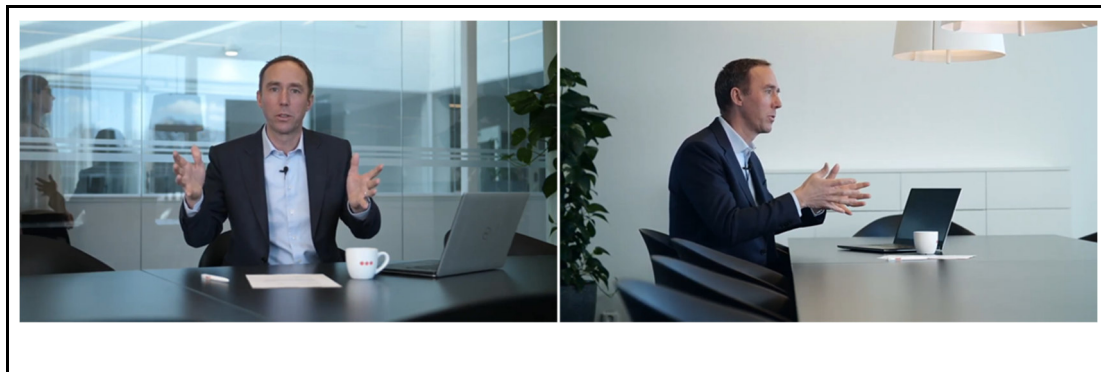


Figure 1. Two camera shots

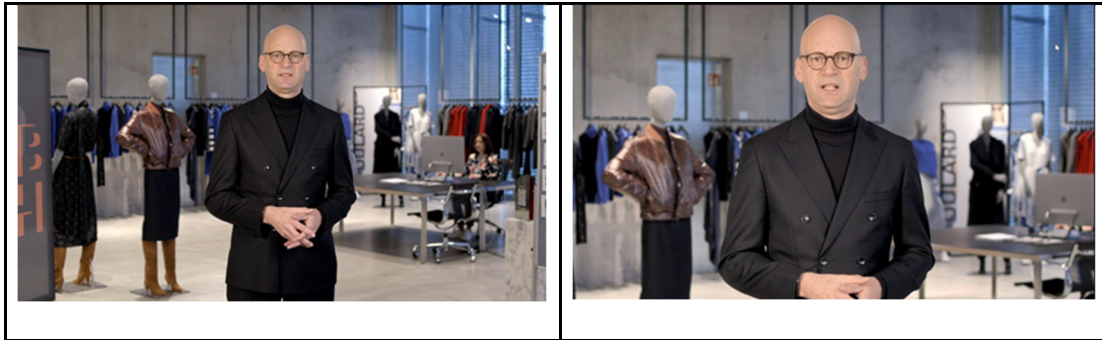


Figure 2. Two distances

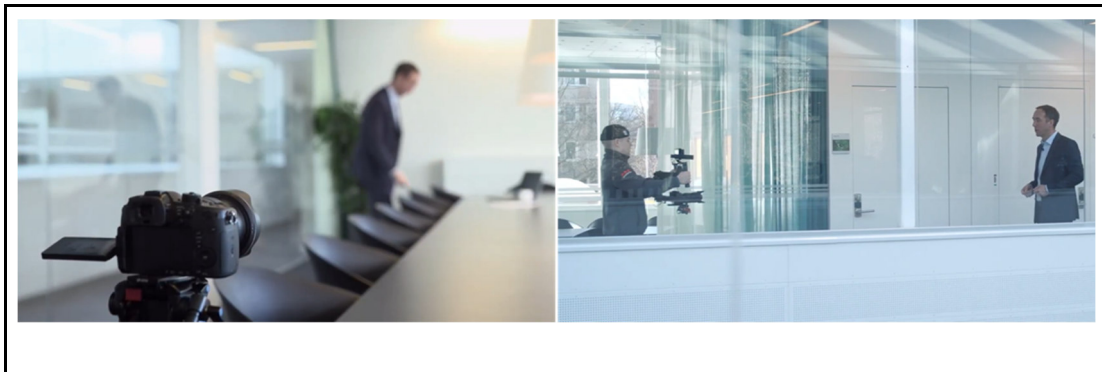


Figure 3. Camera as the object of attention

We have also seen the use of a chroma key background (Figure 4), the use of full-screen graphs in motion (Figure 5) and the use of full-screen moving image displays (Figure 6), different resources used to increase the communicative process of the videos and offer a more dynamic and attractive image of both the CEO and the company. All of these visual aids are deliberately used in the videos to improve the company's image and become a way of promoting the company to viewers. Once again, the significance of post-production editing serves to augment the engaging capabilities for Chief Executive Officers to communicate information, rendering it more enticing for prospective stakeholders to analyze the array of assets introduced to the audience through these videos.

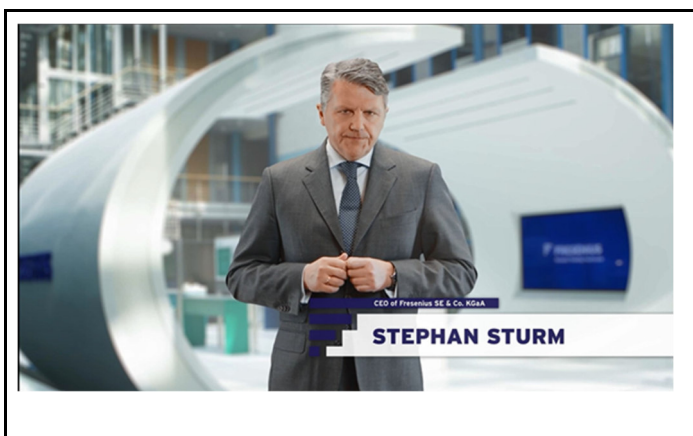


Figure 4. Chroma key background

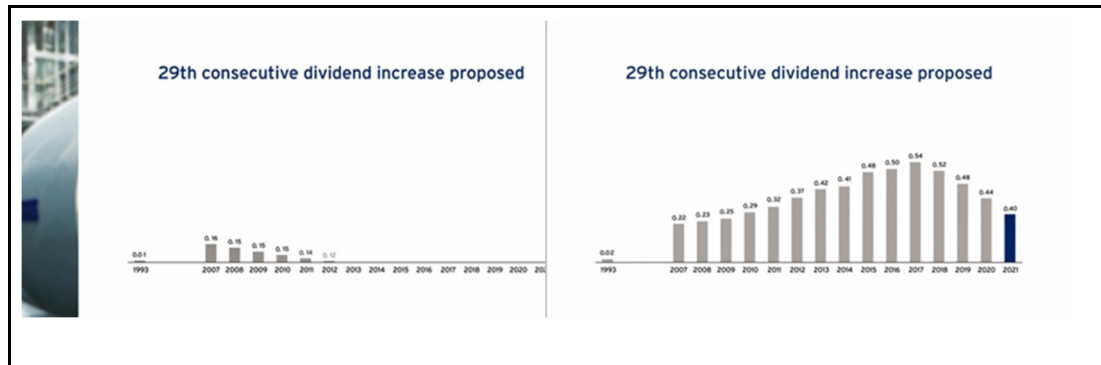


Figure 5. Graphs in motion - full screen

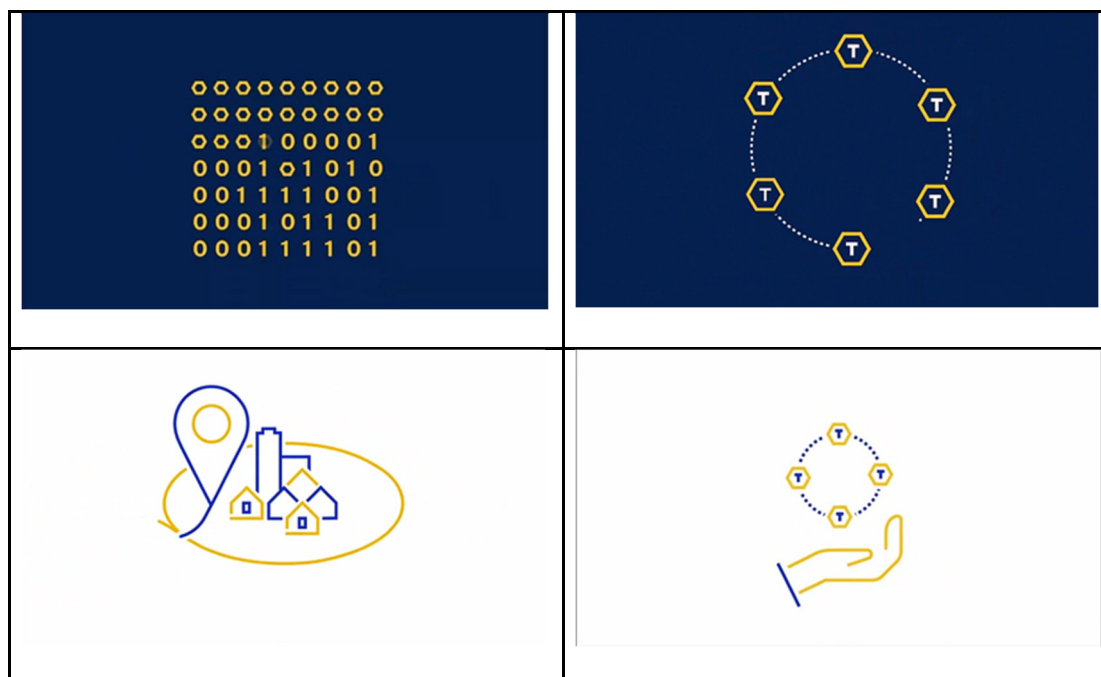


Figure 6. Full-screen moving image (imagine movement clockwise)

Our dataset has also helped us to identify two visual resources that have been implemented in the editing of the final version of the VCS. Firstly, the editors have the possibility to divide the screen into two halves, one with the speaker on the left and the other with a graph that subsequently appears on the right (Figure 7). Another possibility, also observed in the videos analyzed, is the use of a small image that appears in the top right-hand corner of the screen while the speaker introduces a concept (Figure 8), a system that is commonly depicted in newscasting. Additionally, in a third and much simpler possibility, we can see that video editors often interrupt the image of the speaker by introducing a regular slide on the screen for a few seconds (Figure 9).



Figure 7. Speaker and graph combination

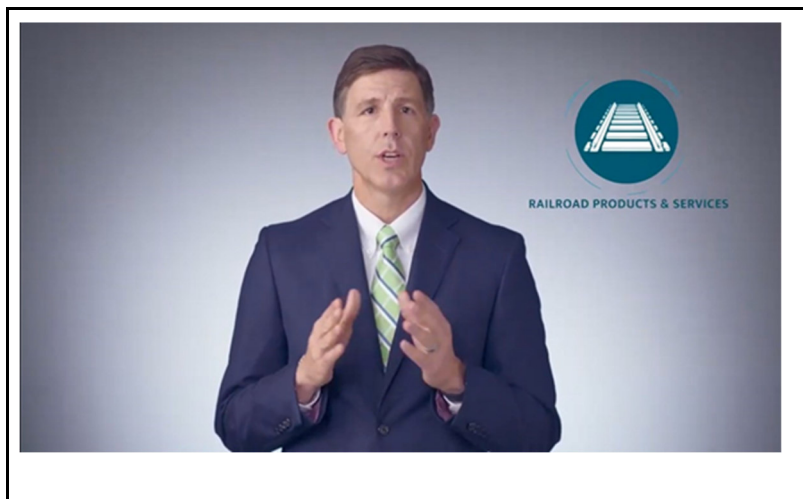


Figure 8. Top-right image and speaker combined

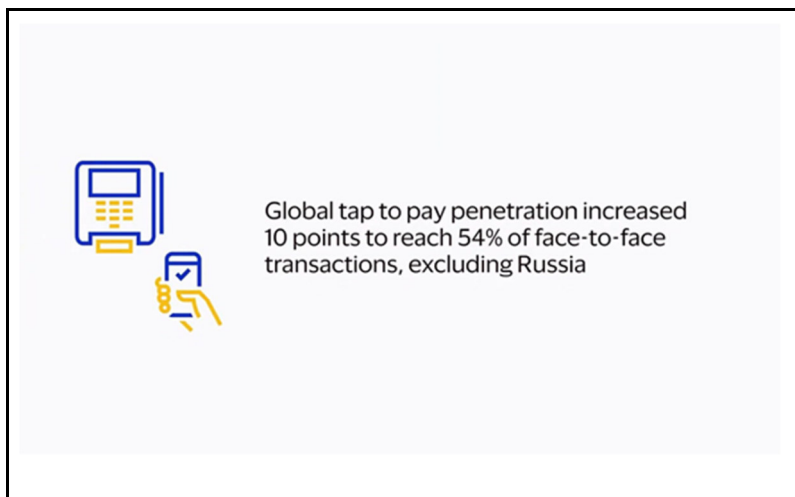


Figure 9. Regular slide

6.5. Engagement resources

It is imperative to emphasize that the videos discussed above are characterized by a multimodal structure and should be analyzed in their entirety as a cohesive unit. The objective of this study is to deconstruct these multimodal units to identify the modes and resources employed to enhance the effectiveness of the message conveyed. It is crucial to acknowledge that the primary objective of this study is to develop a comprehensive, overarching analysis of the videos, rather than undertaking a meticulous, detailed examination.

The fact that a video format is used to introduce the information of a typical CEO statement allows the speakers to use basic expressions to engage their potential audience (verbal mode). The use of greetings such as “Hello, shareholders” or “Hello, shareholders, customers, partners and employees around the world” implies an initial attempt to get closer to the audience and engage them in the message. The use of a final “thank you” in all videos is also important from an engagement perspective. In addition, the frequent use of the inclusive “we”, implying that the members of the company are a team, is another means of strengthening the connection between the speaker and the audience.

Some of the more commonly used strategies (embodied mode) to engage the viewer are constant eye contact with the audience (seen when greeting or thanking, above), and continuous hand movements to emphasize the different concepts explained on screen (see Figures 7 and 8, for an illustration of both features). Speakers often smile at the camera when talking to the audience or when talking to other people who appear in the video statement. Smiling implies positivity, and in some cases, the videos show moving images of people smiling or looking at landscapes where natural beauty is used to reinforce the positive image mentioned above as well as the ideas expressed at those moments.

The constant use of moving images also increases the attractiveness of the message, and video producers know this (as part of the filmic modes), as they focus on the different brands of the company in the moving images, on the different new products or technical innovations introduced by the company, or even on the active role of the company as such, through the use of some images of directors with shovels or of the company’s workers. These videos are therefore used to offer a more attractive and engaging image of the company, an active and committed institution which one should reward with trust and investments.

7. Concluding remarks

The study of these new video genres is emerging in the world of corporate communication, with a clear purpose: to reach a wide range of possible stakeholders. Companies are trying to get closer to their audience, which is often made up of people interested in their products/services and also willing to invest in economically sound companies. It is the CEO of the company who tries to project this positive image through these videos, with the aim of becoming more familiar to the (current and prospective) stakeholders, knowing that companies today need to gain trust and credibility in society. As explained, this is a crucial way to construct the corporate image of multinationals.

To do this, CEOs appear to choose between the two techniques mentioned above: they can use a lecturing style, giving the audience hints about the current (and future) situation of the company, or they can use an interviewing style, answering some questions that the audience might ask the speaker. In both cases, the objective is to present a positive image of the company through a well-designed piece of information, thus achieving the communicative purpose previously established by the CEO.

Additionally, our study has also found that the content is quite similar to the written version of the CEO statement. The topics are those that have been expected in CEO statements in annual reports in the past, although they are often presented in a different order, giving greater relevance to social issues.

From a multimodal point of view, we have seen that there is a multimodal ensemble, as verbal features are combined with non-verbal ones, including embodied, disembodied, and filmic modes. Visual aids, as an example of filmic modes in our dataset, are paramount as part of the promotional genre that the video CEO statement has become, as well as building trust by showing evidence of what is said. Additionally, their use, accompanied by the embodied modes speakers employ or the disembodied ones, also increases engagement, an aspect that companies are keen to work on. The humanized discourse fulfilled by the CEO’s emotions and attitudes is an asset of multimodal discourse that the written statement can hardly achieve. Thus, every single verbal and non-verbal feature in combination has become essential to engage the audience and gain its trust.

8. Pedagogical implications

The analysis of how CEOs deliver this type of discourse can be used in the business communication classroom to enhance students' ability to analyze corporate communication from a different perspective and delve into the specific features of what can be defined as leadership communication. By analyzing the diverse features used by CEOs in their video-recorded messages, students can enhance their public speaking skills, focusing on those engagement characteristics that can better involve their audience. Indeed, the objective of these messages is to reinforce the corporate identity of the firm and, subsequently, enhance the image of corporate identity among potential stakeholders, who constitute the target audience of these messages. We should bear in mind that companies tend to prioritize creating a positive corporate image, and the use of these new resources can help our students to better focus on the real needs of these firms, thus increasing their chances of working with reputable international corporations one day.

Multimodal literacy, understood as the ability to understand, orchestrate and use multiple modes effectively to construct meaningful works (Girón-García & Bernad-Mechó, 2024), is a key skill that students must master nowadays. It is becoming increasingly challenging to identify courses that are exclusively focused on a single genre. Lecturers often use digitized materials and platforms for various reasons, including practicality, proximity, and motivation (Nash et al., 2024). Students must familiarize themselves with multimodal discourse, as they are already aware that texts and genres are no longer limited to a single mode (Huang & Xia, 2024). Learning about each mode (embodied, disembodied and filmic) and how they should create a modal orchestration and use it coherently is a current need. It is not only that they need to be aware of the use and purposes of each, but they also should learn how to implement them in their future jobs.

To keep up with the evolving trends in business communication, it is important to incorporate digital genres into the business communication curriculum (Hartle et al., 2023; Lim and Tan, 2018; Nervino, 2023). These materials are authentic, readily available on platforms such as YouTube, LinkedIn, and Instagram, and free of charge. They facilitate the students' active participation in the learning process (Fortanet-Gómez & Edo-Marzá, 2022; Girón-García & Fortanet-Gómez, 2023). Furthermore, these videos have been created with the objective of engaging the audience, prospective stakeholders. Consequently, different engagement strategies are often employed, regardless of the mode, always bearing in mind that we are dealing with digitized genres (Bernad-Mechó & Valeiras-Jurado, 2023; Bondi et al., 2015; Xia & Hafner, 2021).

9. Further research

This initial experience has allowed us to understand that this is an area that can benefit from further research. We believe it is necessary to expand the dataset, including a thorough analysis between different sectors, speakers of different nationalities, or even whether there are differences in the gender of the presenters. Our aim will be to look for more similarities (or dissimilarities) among CEOs. Based on this preliminary study, we need to do more quantitative studies on the quantifiable aspects and put more emphasis on the effect of the combination of the different modes involved in the presentations. It is this orchestration of modes that enhances companies' ability to engage and persuade stakeholders to pay closer attention and therefore merits a more thorough analysis.

We also want to study how companies create and release these videos over time, trying to observe how they can improve the way they present information about their companies in a simple and engaging way. This study, over time, may give us clues about how CEOs really present their message and what information they consider most interesting for potential stakeholders.

Finally, we would also like to select and analyze specific sections of these recordings from a multimodal perspective, looking at different features that may be of great interest to the audience (i.e. how good/bad news is delivered, how the use of future targets may interfere with present information, or how social issues are presented to the general audience). Further studies are needed to share and learn from teaching experiences about how multimodal literacy and multimodality can be integrated into business communication classes. Learners, because of their generation, may already know a great deal about digitized genres and how they work, from a user's perspective. What teachers must do is help them learn about the best ways of orchestrating different modes and making them coherent to best serve the purposes they have in mind.

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Moving from theory to practice: Applying the four meta-literacy model to the business communication classroom

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ABSTRACT

EN The multiple mixed-method case studies approach responds to the need for multimodal literacy and multiliteracies assessment in higher education to address the current digital workplace communication gap. The 4ML theoretical model for digital multimodal communication provided the basis for a scoring rubric and an analytical framework for multimodal content analysis. The model was an effective tool for diagnosing multimodal composers' literacy levels in digital literacy, multimedia skill literacy, multimodal design literacy, and rhetorical literacy. Additionally, the visual analysis of undergraduate multimodal slide decks provided qualitative insight into multiliteracies' strengths and gaps. The findings support the use of the 4ML model in business and professional communication classrooms to enhance digital multimodal communication competencies.

Key words: MULTIMODAL COMMUNICATION, MULTILITERACIES, MULTIMODAL LITERACY, DIGITAL LITERACY

ES Este estudio de casos múltiples y de método mixto responde a la necesidad de evaluar la alfabetización multimodal y las multialfabetizaciones en la educación superior para abordar la brecha de comunicación digital en el contexto laboral. El modelo teórico 4ML para la comunicación multimodal digital sentó las bases para una rúbrica de puntuación y un marco analítico para el análisis de contenido multimodal. El modelo resultó ser una herramienta eficaz para diagnosticar los niveles de alfabetización de los compositores multimodales en alfabetización digital, habilidades multimedia, diseño multimodal y retórica. Además, el análisis visual de presentaciones multimodales de estudiantes universitarios proporcionó una perspectiva cualitativa sobre las fortalezas y las deficiencias de la multialfabetización. Los hallazgos respaldan el uso del modelo 4ML en las aulas de comunicación empresarial y profesional para mejorar las competencias de comunicación multimodal digital.

Palabras clave: COMUNICACIÓN MULTIMODAL, MULTIALFABETIZACIONES, ALFABETIZACIÓN MULTIMODAL, ALFABETIZACIÓN DIGITAL

IT Lo studio, di casi diversi e condotto con metodo misto, risponde alla necessità di valutare le alfabetizzazioni multimodali e multiple a livello d'istruzione superiore, per far fronte al divario di comunicazione digitale sul posto di lavoro. Il modello teorico 4ML per la comunicazione digitale multimodale ha posto le basi per una rubrica di valutazioni e un quadro analitico per l'indagine di contenuti multimodali. Il modello è risultato uno strumento utile a determinare i livelli di competenza multimodale degli autori, la competenza nella manualità multi-digitale, la competenza nella progettazione multimodale e la competenza retorica. In più, l'analisi visuale di slide multimodali di studenti ha fornito una prospettiva qualitativa sui punti di forza e di debolezza delle alfabetizzazioni multiple. I risultati supportano l'uso del modello 4ML nei corsi di comunicazione aziendale e professionale, per migliorare le competenze digitali multimodali.

Parole chiave: COMUNICAZIONE MULTIMODALE, ALFABETIZZAZIONI MULTIPLE, ALFABETIZZAZIONE MULTIMODALE, ALFABETIZZAZIONE DIGITALE

1. Introduction

A digitally literate workforce is essential in a business environment characterized by technological disruption (Weritz, 2022). As new communication technologies rapidly disrupt the digital workplace, organizations must hire competent employees and develop their current workforce. To meet these demands, corporations must identify skills gaps within their human capital to upskill or reskill employees. The business communication environment is both digital and multimodal (Dias et al., 1999), necessitating an understanding of digital multimodal communication and related literacies for those training the future workforce. Despite ongoing discussions in academic and professional literature about closing the skills gap (Brent, 2011; Coffelt, et al., 2019; Winiarski, 2023), gaps remain, particularly in visual communication. Employers often categorize visual communication as either nonverbal communication or data visualizations (Coffelt et al., 2019), highlighting the need for shared terminology in multiliteracies and multimodal communication when training professional communicators.

Professional communication has evolved, making monomodal communication rare. Common workplace artifacts now combine text with images, icons, charts, shapes, color, layout, audio, and hyperlinks to enhance meaning and support accessibility. Slide decks, created in software like PowerPoint, Keynote, and Google Slides, are ubiquitous in the workplace and are inherently multimodal (Serafini, 2014). Twenty-first-century business communication is characterized by multimodal ensembles such as slide decks, data visualizations, social media posts, and email marketing.

Although slide decks are widely used, their effectiveness has been questioned, with issues like "death by PowerPoint" (Tufte, 2003) and poor use of presentation software causing excessive cognitive load (Knafllic, 2015). Professional communicators need multiple literacies, including visual and multimodal communication, to navigate the digital multimodal landscape effectively. The new "visual economy" (Canva, 2024) dominated by digital multimodal ensembles has transformed workplace communication, with consumers expecting engaging and visually rich messaging.

To address the workplace gap, business communication programs in higher education must train students to be multimodally literate communicators in digital spaces. A common approach is to require students to create and present multimodal slide decks for summative projects. However, evaluating multimodal literacy and assessing multimodal communication ensembles remains challenging. Instructors need to understand what it means to be multimodally literate to train their students effectively.

The purpose of this research is to examine how the four meta-literacies (4ML) model can be used to evaluate students' digital multimodal communication literacy, addressing both the workplace communication gap and the multimodal communication assessment gap in the literature. This multiple case study used the 4ML model to evaluate student slides created at the beginning and end of the semester, following explicit instruction in digital multimodal communication.

2. Literature review

2.1. Digital multimodal communication

Dias et al. (1999) argued that modern business communication is characterized by multimodality. Daily workplace communication is digitally crafted using combinations of modes that together make new meaning. Ubiquitous communication artifacts like email and slide decks include multiple modes in one communication piece. Examples of common modes incorporated into decking and emails include color, layout, text, shapes, sound, icons, and images. Not only does digital multimodal communication provide deeper, richer meaning than monomodal communication, it can reach a more diverse audience because it does not rely exclusively on textual language to communicate.

2.2. Multimodal literacy assessment

Multimodal literacy is rooted in the work of the New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996) who called for new pedagogies that incorporate multiliteracies to prepare learners for communication in a new digital landscape. Multimodality was coined by Kress (Kress, 2010; Lauer, 2009) to describe the communication phenomenon of multiple modes combining to create new meaning. Old mono-communication forms were being disrupted by innovative technologies which made it easier to combine textual and visual communication into a single message through digital technologies. With the advent of the World Wide Web, visual communication was no longer an afterthought or decorative add-on when constructing messages. Effective content creators

were those who could integrate visual information with textual information to craft rich multimodal messages that could be decoded with ease and added depth of meaning.

Professional and business communication scholarship has recognized the need to train communicators to be multimodally literate (Andrews, 2022; Bourelle et al., 2017; Brumberger, 2007; Coffelt et al., 2022; Lauer, 2009). As noted, closing the gap studies in workplace communication have shown multimodal literacy to be lacking. Coffelt et al. (2019) suggested the training “devoted to writing, speaking, and visualizing” should be “foregrounded in multimodal communication” (p. 434).

The terms *multimodality* and *multimodal literacy* have created challenges for scholars and instructors in higher education. Reid et al. (2016) encountered challenges in a cross-disciplinary study on faculty use of the term multimodality in their pedagogy. Although multimodality was the more correct term, they chose to use *multimedia* instead because it would be “most familiar and meaningful to those outside” composition and communication scholarship (p. 6). By not explicitly using multimodal terminology when describing the communication phenomena, a “shared vocabulary” will be difficult to achieve (p. 17). Bourelle et al. (2017) called for the infusion of multimodal pedagogies into online courses to train students in skills that will “serve students in the workplace long after the class has ended” (p. 82). The authors emphasize the explicit use of multimodal terminology, definitions, and practices to enable learners to be multiliterate communicators. For “without the explicit emphasis on multimodal literacy, students fail to see the connection between what they are being asked to do and what they are expected to learn” (p. 83).

As indicated, digital multimodal communication is a skill that needs to be taught and a concept that needs to be explicitly discussed in business communication classrooms. To reach that objective, alternative assessment approaches need to be implemented that are more suited to multiliteracies pedagogy and multimodal literacy. A theory-based multimodal design rubric was posited by Hung et al. (2013) for formative assessments of slide decks in a higher education setting. The five dimensions directly corresponded to the literacies put forth by the New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996). The rubric was created for “practical application” of multiliteracies and multimodal theory (p. 4). According to the authors, their rubric design allows users to adapt the rubric to their own purposes by adding to the criteria. In their action research study, Hung et al. used the rubric to assess slide deck presentations created by university students. Over the 18-week course, student slide deck presentations were assessed three times. Students were split into two groups for the study: a control and an exploratory group. The first assessment using the theory-based rubric was a formative assessment that served as a baseline for the study. Following the baseline assessment, the learners received instruction in multimodality and delivered a second presentation. All students met with their instructor to receive oral feedback on their oral performances, but only the exploratory group were introduced to the multimodal rubric and received explicit feedback based on it. The final presentation was scored again using the same rubric. The summative assessment was used by researchers to make comparisons across the three presentations. Compared to the control group, the exploratory group performed better across the five dimensions of the rubric following revisions of their slide decks. Both groups noted, in a learning perception survey, the effectiveness of the formative assessment to support their learning process in multimodal content creation.

2.3. Research gap

The present study addressed multimodal assessment gaps in the literature. Hung et al. (2013) expressed the “urgent need” for alternative assessment devices to support student digital multimodal literacy development and attainment (p. 409). The need for multimodal evaluation tools was also expressed by Tan et al. (2020) who argued for assessment tools to measure “students’ multimodal literacies” (p. 107). The next section will provide background for the 4ML model.

3. Theoretical background of the 4ML model

The 4ML model for digital multimodal communication (Strong, 2022) was constructed in response to the complex and swiftly evolving communication environment in modern workplaces (Ross et al., 2020; Sparks et al., 2016). Workplace communication demands have evolved and continue to evolve as new technologies disrupt traditional communication norms and practices. Digital transformation requires that employees possess the ability to multimodally express ideas across multiple channel choices (McGrail et al., 2021). To address this need, higher education courses must be equipped with digital multimodal pedagogies to train students to be effective communicators in the workplace. Multimodality and multiliteracies are difficult concepts that have been criticized by educators as being too theoretical to have any practical classroom use

(Cloonan, 2011). The 4ML model addresses the need for an approachable model in digital multimodal communication that has practical pedagogical value in business communication classrooms. It addresses terminology troubles that plague multimodality and multiliteracies (Tseronis & Forceville, 2017).

3.1. Foundations of the 4ML model

Multimodality asserts that all communication is constructed of multiple semiotic modes that harmoniously combine to create meaning (Kress, 2010). Additionally, others have concluded that all digital text is multimodal in nature (Tan et al., 2015). Rooted in the semiotic tradition and multimodality, the 4ML model is underpinned by the early work of Saussure and Peirce (Deely & Semetsky, 2017; Rose, 2007). Other theorists like Barthes (1967), Halliday (1978), and Kress (2010) contributed to the evolution of social semiotics and multimodal theory. In 1994, the New London Group met to discuss the need for new pedagogies to address the new digital landscape (Cazden et al., 1996). As witnesses to a remarkable period of digital disruption, the group of ten scholars envisioned a new worker who possessed multiple literacies to effectively communicate across digital multimodal spaces. To say their seminal work on multiliteracies and multimodality has been influential is an understatement. Scholars from a variety of traditions and disciplines have noted how important multiliteracy development is (Liang & Lim, 2021). Since the late 20th century, multiliteracies and multimodality have become intertwined and synonymous (Lauer, 2009). In the 4ML model, multiliteracies and multimodality are used interchangeably (Strong, 2022).

Strong (2022) previously discussed the digital workplace skills gap. Digital multimodal communication skills are essential in the workplace (Lodewick, 2022). According to experts, a digital workplace gap exists with nearly 75% of workers lacking the digital multimodal skills demanded (Conklin, 2022). Employees lack multimodal communication competencies in areas such as digital content creation, content design, and data visualization creation (Solis, 2022). Slide decks made in presentation software like PowerPoint and Google Slides are ubiquitous in the workplace (Knight, 2015). The digital communication technology requires composers to select and combine multiple semiotic modes for meaning making. Despite prioritizing slide decks as multimodal content creation projects to train professional communicators for digital workplaces (Brumberger, 2005), bad slide decks persist.

3.2. Development of the 4ML model

Strong (2022) used qualitative interpretive meta-synthesis (QIMS) to construct the 4ML model for digital multimodal communication. Originally developed for social work research, QIMS is a structured approach for handling a large body of diverse literature to achieve a synergistic understanding, or “web of knowledge,” of the phenomenon (Aguirre & Bolton, 2014, p. 283). The interpretive methodology results in a broader understanding of the topic and is used to “develop theory and to inform practice” (p. 279). Researchers employing this method are encouraged to “cast a broad net” when collecting the body of literature for the study (p. 284). The characteristic wide net includes books, grey literature, and studies from multiple disciplines. QIMS is an interpretive rather than an aggregate approach found in meta-analysis types of methods (Leary & Walker, 2018). The iterative rather than linear nature of QIMS allows the researcher to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the phenomenon while following cross disciplinary trails in the literature.

Using QIMS, a number of frameworks were examined using keyword searches and the New London Group’s (Cazden et al., 1996) article as foundation (Strong, 2022). Close readings and memo taking of frameworks and taxonomies allowed for comparisons and connections—both explicit and implicit. A chronology of nine frameworks were chosen for the data corpus and included in the analytical template (Cazden et al., 1996; Cook, 2002; Eshet-Alkalai, 2004; Feerrar, 2019; Gallagher, 2020; McGrail et al., 2021; Ng, 2012; Selber, 2004; Sindoni et al., 2022). Themes were extracted from each framework which were used for category construction in a process which was both inductive and deductive. The categories subsequently became the meta-literacies dimensions—digital literacy, multimedia skill literacy, multimodal design literacy, and rhetorical literacy. Concurrently, definitional literature was collected in a separate QIMS analysis involving keyword searches (*digital literacy, multimedia literacy, multiliteracies, multimodal literacy, multimodality, rhetorical literacy*) and following the threads to find the original definitions for the four meta-literacies. The broad net unearthed related literacies such as *computer literacy, data literacy, information literacy, media literacy, rhetorical literacy, silicon literacy, and visual literacy*. An analytical table was used to extract the themes and construct the definitions for the four meta-literacies.

3.3. Construction of the 4ML model

The former comprehensive study of multiliteracies and multimodality resulted in the 4ML model for digital multimodal communication (Strong, 2022). In multimodality and multiliteracies, shared terminology and definitions are key to having a shared understanding. Lauer (2009) makes a strong case for the importance of naming and having a shared language in multimodality and multiliteracies. The term *meta-literacy* was coined to describe the four dimensions or “definitional buckets” in digital multimodal communication (Strong, 2022, p. 57). The term is closely related to *metaliteracy*--a term used in library science (Mackey & Jacobson, 2011). Metaliteracy, in information science, carries the idea that the learner has a growing awareness of their own multiple literacies and how each literacy functions (Senapatiratne, 2021). This meta-awareness helps them in their development of needed skills and competencies. The use of meta-literacies in the 4ML model is informed by these ideals.

The four dimensions for the 4ML model for digital multimodal communication are digital literacy, multimedia literacy, multimodal design literacy, and rhetorical literacy (Strong, 2022). The sections that follow will provide definitions and key information about each meta-literacy.

3.3.1. Digital literacy

Digital literacy is defined in the 4ML model as the “ability to locate and critically evaluate information in multiple modalities found on a variety of digital spaces, and to demonstrate respectful and responsible use of information and intellectual property in digital multimodal communication” (Strong, 2022, p. 170). Simply put, digital communication is the respectful and responsible use of information and intellectual property (e.g. information, images, brand logos, charts, data). This complements one of the early definitions of digital literacy from Paul Gilster who wrote the 1997 book *Digital Literacy*. He wrote that digital literacy is “the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers” (p. 1).

Gilster’s (1997) definition has been widely circulated since that time and informed both Feerrar (2019) and Eshet-Alkakai’s (2004) digital literacy frameworks. Interestingly, Eshet-Alkakai’s digital literacy framework is a “top 10” digital literacy framework with over 655 citations for the work (Pangrazio et al., 2020, p. 447). Although the term has been muddied (see Lauer, 2009; Secker, 2018; Tseronis & Forceville, 2017), the central concept of respectful and responsible use of information has been included in digital and multimodal frameworks since the 1990s. Categories extracted from a chronology of meta-literacies and multiliteracies frameworks to construct the 4ML model (Strong, 2022) that encapsulate digital literacy concepts are ethical literacy (Cook, 2002; Feerrar, 2019; Gallagher, 2020), information literacy (Eshet-Alkakai, 2004; Ng, 2012), functional literacy (Selber, 2004), online etiquette literacy (Ng, 2012), and originality (McGrail et al., 2021; Sindoni et al., 2022).

3.3.2. Multimedia skill literacy

In the 4ML model, Strong (2022) defined multimedia skill literacy as the “technical skills and competencies needed to create, curate, and distribute using digital multimodal communication technologies” (p. 170). Multimedia was a term that Kress (2010) took exception to. He argued that its use created confusion between “past practices” and “present givens” (p. 30). Kress did offer an important distinction between multimedia and multimodality. Kress perceived multimedia as “cultural technologies of dissemination” and multimodality as “cultural technologies of representation” (pp. 30-31). Lauer (2009) created clear boundaries between multimedia and multimodality describing multimedia as the production process (skill) and multimodality as the design process (design). Competency has early connections to literacy in digital spaces. In the late twentieth century, digital literacy was described as “core competencies” needed to survive the internet age (Gilster, 1997, pg. 28). The connection between competencies, or skills, and multiliteracies is a theme throughout the literature as theorists struggled with the balance between theory and technological skill. Literacies from other frameworks that informed digital literacy as a dimension of the 4ML model (Strong, 2022) are technical literacy (Cook, 2002; Ng, 2012), technological literacy (Gallagher, 2020), digital technologies (Sindoni et al., 2022), reproduction literacy (Eshet-Alkakai, 2004), and functional literacy (Selber, 2004).

3.3.3. Multimodal design literacy

Multimodal design literacy is described as the “ability to effectively communicate meaning through multiple modalities such as language, text, audio, visual, gestures, facial expression, design choices, color, animation, and other semiotic resources in digital multimodal communication environments” (Strong, 2022).

Multimedia and multimodality are often used as synonyms for each other to avoid confusion when addressing audiences outside academia. As multimedia is widely understood, some scholars have intentionally used the term over the more accurate term multimodality. Adding to the confusion, multimedia and multimodality are terms used interchangeably in multiliteracies and multimodal communication literature. For Ball (2012), the usage depends upon the audience. Students are more familiar with multimedia than they are with multimodality. Despite terminology debates in multimodality and multiliteracies, Reid et al. (2016) chose to use multimedia over multimodal for the survey instrument in their multimodal communication study because of audience familiarity with multimedia. In the multimodal and multiliteracies scholarship, mode has been commonly associated with design (Bourelle et al., 2017). Multimodal design literacy was constructed using QIMS methodology and is informed by the following literacy categories: photo-visual literacy (Eshet-Alkakai, 2004), multimodality (Ng, 2012), multimodal literacy (Gallagher, 2020), mode and meaning (McGrail et al., 2021), and multimodal orchestration (Sindoni et al., 2022).

3.3.4. Rhetorical literacy

In the 4ML model, Strong (2022) defined rhetorical literacy as possessing the “social, cultural, and emotional acumen needed to make appropriate rhetorical choices about communication including audience evaluation, purpose, and persuasive devices (ethos, pathos, logos) for digital multimodal communication” (p. 170). Simply put, it shows evidence of purposeful and audience-centric communication. As Kress (2010) explained, social semiotic multimodality “demands a rhetorical approach to communication” (p. 26). Rhetorical literacy is a common theme throughout multiliteracies literature. One of the earliest multiliteracies frameworks was constructed by Cook (2002). Cook postulated six literacies to inform 21st century technical writing because the historical frames that guided business communicators were no longer adequate. The existing frameworks did not “fully articulate the multiple literacies necessary” for workplace success (p. 8). Another early conceptual framework for multiliteracies was proposed by Selber (2004) in his book, *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*. Selber’s model, “The Conceptual Landscape of Computer Multiliteracies Program,” included the following three categories: functional literacy, critical literacy, and rhetorical literacy. Bourelle et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of considering the audience and purpose in “any given rhetorical situation” including multimodal compositions in business and technical communication (p. 224). Rhetorical literacy is informed by other framework categories including rhetorical literacy (Cook, 2002; Gallagher, 2020; Selber 2004), social literacy (Cook, 2002), social-emotional literacy (Eshet-Alkakai, 2004), critical literacy (Selber, 2004), social-emotional dimension (Ng, 2012), socio-cultural literacy (Gallagher, 2020), audience (McGrail et al., 2021), and transversal skills (Sindoni et al., 2022).

3.4. Simplified Terminology

Strong (2022) recognized the need for simplified terminology to apply the four dimensions of the 4ML model to business communication. To provide practical application, the 4ML theoretical model postulated one-word descriptors for each dimension. For digital literacy, the prevailing theme was *responsibility* for information being used and communicated. For multimedia literacy, the theme was *skill* in creating and distributing digital multimodal communication. For multimodal communication, the theme was *design* knowledge for incorporating semiotic modes and design theories. For rhetorical literacy, the theme was *audience* indicating the need for audience and situational analysis. Although the one-word descriptors may be too narrow in scope, there remains a need for simplified language to bridge the theoretical to the practical. More work needs to be done to make the 4ML framework more approachable for business communication practitioners and trainers.

4. Methodology

This multiple case investigation tests the 4ML theoretical model as an assessment tool in a higher education classroom. The intent of the study is to respond to the following research questions using a mixed method approach: How can the four meta-literacies model be used to evaluate multimodal artifacts in a business communication classroom? How does a visual analysis of slide decks inform the four meta-literacies model?

4.1. Study design

As part of the mixed method study, a scoring rubric was used to evaluate student created slide decks from two semesters of a single undergraduate business communication course. A multimodal content analysis (Ledín & Machin, 2020; Serafini, 2022; Serafini & Reid, 2023) of the slide decks was conducted in order to construct themes. The multiple case study involved two stages of analysis: within-case and cross-case (Merriam, 1998). Case one, which examined multimodal slide deck ensembles from spring semester 2022, was completed first. Case two followed with an examination of slide decks from fall semester 2022. Once each case was completed, cross-case analysis was performed to examine patterns across the two cases (Yin, 2018).

In this inquiry, the two cases were separate semesters of the same business communication course (BCOM 308: Technology for Business Communication). The undergraduate class was an elective course offering for the business communication certificate at a midwestern university in the United States. While the certificate was housed in the Business Communication department within the College of Business, non-business students could add the certificate to their degree. Even so, most students in the class were business majors. Students were either juniors or seniors due to course prerequisites. Enrollment demographics varied by semester. In spring 2022, the course had 12 female-identifying and 8 male-identifying students. In fall 2022, enrollment included 9 female-identifying and 14 male-identifying students.

This study drew from existing data found in the Canvas learning management system archives. In both spring 2022 and fall 2022, undergraduate business students completed a personal audit slide deck presentation of their use of communication technologies. Following the initial project, students received explicit instruction in the 4ML model for digital multimodal communication. Their final course project was a personal pitch deck, much like a visual resume, to highlight their achievements, strengths, and skills. The course outline, learning objectives, syllabus, and major assignments remained consistent from spring semester 2022 to fall semester 2022. The same instructor and lecture slide decks were used for both semesters, ensuring consistency in instruction and content delivery. The course workflow can be seen in Figure 1.

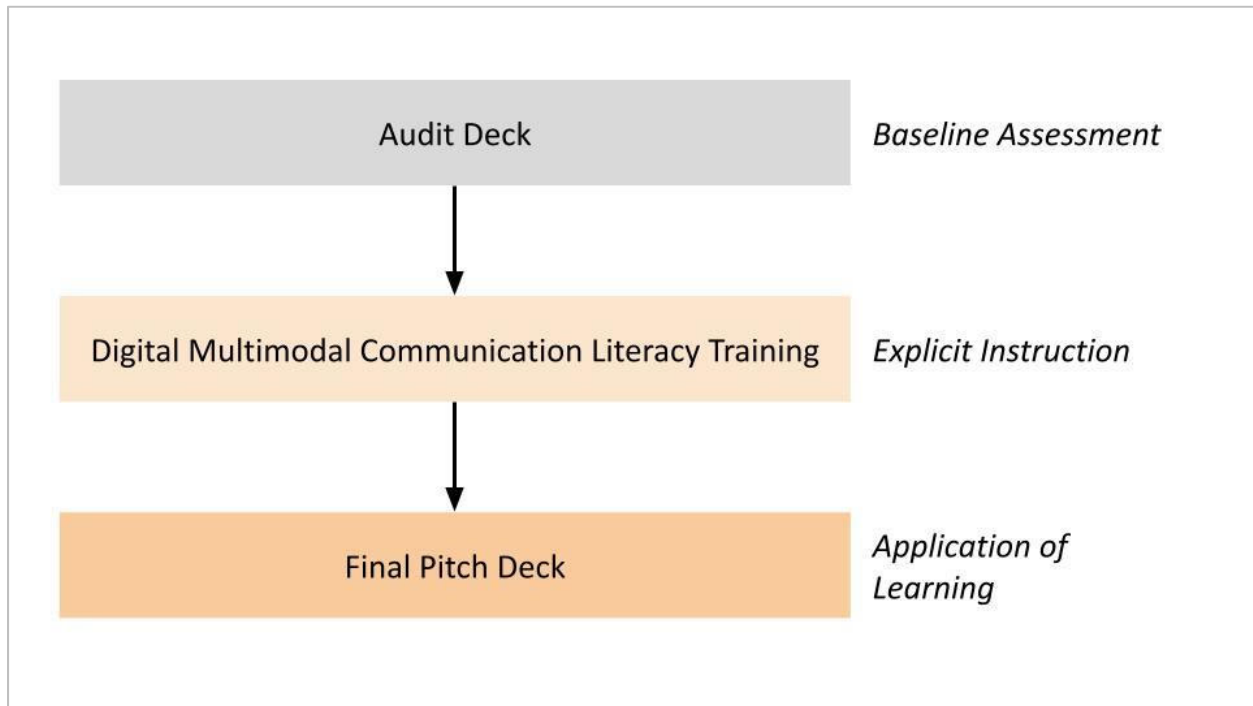


Figure 1. BCOM 308 course workflow

4.2. Data collection

Following approval by the university's Review Board, existent data was collected from two semesters of the BCOM 308: Technology for Business Communication course. Artifacts collected for the study included self-audit slide deck presentations and personal pitch deck presentations. All decks were completed in PowerPoint software. In spring 2022, all enrolled students created screencasts of their audit presentations and

shared the presentations via a discussion board on the Canvas learning management system. Because they used a variety of software to create the screencasts, only 17 out of the original 20 self-audit presentations were still available because the links had expired. All 20 pitch decks were still available for collection and analysis. For the fall 2022 semester, there were 23 students enrolled. One student did not complete the self-audit assignment, so only 22 slide decks were collected. Similarly, for the pitch deck, 22 slide decks were submitted.

4.3. Data analysis

Initial audit slide decks and end-of-the-semester pitch decks were evaluated for this study. The decks were rubric scored and comparisons were made in-case and cross-case. Multimodal content analysis was conducted on the slide decks to construct overall themes that inform the 4ML model.

4.3.1. Rubric scoring using 4ML

Rubrics are useful for evaluating literacy in higher education (Knight, 2006; Oakleaf, 2009;). The scoring framework offers an objective diagnostic tool to examine areas of strengths and areas for improvement guiding both instructors and students (Makani-Lim et al., 2014). Rubric design includes categories, indicators, and scoring strategy (Reddy & Andrade, 2010). The categories for the scoring rubric used in this study were the four meta-literacies taken from the 4ML model for digital multimodal communication—digital literacy, multimedia skill literacy, multimodal design literacy, and rhetorical literacy. Similar to Oakleaf (2009), the analytical rubric provided a score for each separate category. The scoring strategy incorporated a scale of 1-5 (Figure 2). The strategy was informed by Hung et al. (2013) who used a 5-point analytical rubric to assess multimodal composition in slide decks with (1) representing poor cohesion and (5) representing excellent cohesion to the design criteria. The scoring rubric was tested and refined before applying to the entire data corpus. Because slide decks are digital multimodal ensembles, each slide deck was evaluated as one unit.

4ML Scoring Rubric for Digital Multimodal Communication Ensembles						
	Definition	Mastery 5 points	Proficient 4 points	Developing 3 points	Emerging 2 points	Beginning 1 point
Digital Literacy	Demonstrates ethical and respectful use of content, Provides proper attribution, Avoids privacy issues, Shows respectful reuse content (e.g., follows brand style guides for aspect ratio and color)	Demonstrates complete mastery of the skills and competencies	Demonstrates considerable mastery of the skills and competencies	Demonstrates partial mastery of the skills and competencies. Most criteria are met.	Demonstrates limited mastery of the skills and competencies. Many criteria are not met.	Demonstrates no mastery of the skills and competencies.
Multimedia Skill	Avoids use of presets and defaults (templates, color schemes, fonts, layouts), Demonstrates advanced skills (transitions, animation), Shows ability to produce related artifacts (e.g., PDF, JPEG, PNG, screencast, notes), Knowledge regarding pixel size, checkered	Demonstrates complete mastery of the skills and competencies	Demonstrates considerable mastery of the skills and competencies	Demonstrates partial mastery of the skills and competencies. Most criteria are met.	Demonstrates limited mastery of the skills and competencies. Many criteria are not met.	Demonstrates no mastery of the skills and competencies.

	backgrounds show lack of knowledge re: file types					
Multimodal Design	Demonstrates consistent and intentional use of multiple modes (color, images, fonts, shapes, layout composition, movement to support message, Use of salience to focus message, Shows congruency between design and message, Demonstrates knowledge of gestalt principles, Shows creativity in design	Demonstrates complete mastery of the skills and competencies	Demonstrates considerable mastery of the skills and competencies	Demonstrates partial mastery of the skills and competencies. Most criteria are met.	Demonstrates limited mastery of the skills and competencies. Many criteria are not met.	Demonstrates no mastery of the skills and competencies.
Rhetorical Literacy	Appropriate for audience (i.e., accessibility, cognitive load), Creates for audience appeal not self-appeal, Purpose is evident, Shows logical flow of information and organization, Demonstrates credibility through professionalism (including grammar), Constructs a persuasive communication	Demonstrates complete mastery of the skills and competencies	Demonstrates considerable mastery of the skills and competencies	Demonstrates partial mastery of the skills and competencies. Most criteria are met.	Demonstrates limited mastery of the skills and competencies. Many criteria are not met.	Demonstrates no mastery of the skills and competencies.

Figure 2. Criteria for scoring

4.3.2. Multimodal content analysis

Multimodal content analysis (MMCA) is a systematic, interpretivist visual methodology underpinned by multimodality theories and qualitative content analysis (Serafini, 2022). Unlike quantitative content analysis approaches characterized by large data sets, MMCA studies tend to focus on “manageable data sets” that fall somewhere between 20 and 100 units of evaluation (Serafini, 2022, p. 79). Social semiotic multimodal researchers recognize that multimodal texts have multiple meaning-making potential as modes combine to create new meaning shaped by sociocultural influences. Slide decks, also referred to as presentation slides, are a widely used form of multimodal texts that require creators to “think visually and often multimodally” (Hung et al., 2013, p. 401). They are an example of “digital ensembles that utilize more than one mode to represent meaning potentials” (Serafini, 2022, p. 78). MMCA applies both inductive and deductive reasoning into its multiple-step process. The construction and utilization of an analytical framework is central to the

methodology. The analytical framework categories are developed inductively from the data corpus itself following close readings and theoretical memo taking, or deductively from categories developed in previous studies (Serafini, 2022). The analytical template will often go through multiple iterations as it is tested and refined and retested using samples from the data corpus.

Case:	Participant ID:	Assignment:						Notes
	Definition	5	4	3	2	1	0	
Digital Literacy	Demonstrates ethical and respectful use of content, Provides proper attribution, Avoids privacy issues, Shows respectful reuse content (e.g., follows brand style guides for aspect ratio and color)							
Multimedia Skill	Avoids use of presets and defaults (templates, color schemes, fonts, layouts), Demonstrates advanced skills (transitions, animation), Shows ability to produce related artifacts (e.g., PDF, JPEG, PNG, screencast, notes), Knowledge regarding pixel size, checkered backgrounds show lack of knowledge re: file types							
Multimodal Design	Demonstrates consistent and intentional use of multiple modes (color, images, fonts, shapes, layout composition, movement to support message, Use of salience to focus message, Shows congruency between design and message, Demonstrates knowledge of gestalt principles, Shows creativity in design							
Rhetorical Literacy	Appropriate for audience (i.e., accessibility, cognitive load), Creates for audience appeal not self-appeal, Purpose is evident, Shows logical flow of information and organization, Demonstrates credibility through professionalism (including grammar), Constructs a persuasive communication							
Additional notes:								

Figure 3. The Analytical Template

The visual analysis was conducted concurrently with the rubric scoring using the same analytical template (Figure 3). Memo taking and close reading, characteristics of multimodal content analysis (Serafini, 2022), were incorporated into the analysis phase. The rubric scoring form and the qualitative analytical template were combined into one analytical template due to the overlapping categories—digital literacy, multimedia skill literacy, multimodal design literacy, and rhetorical literacy. The analytical template with the scoring rubric was tested on five slide deck ensembles and improvements were made prior to applying it to the entire data corpus. Figure 4 illustrates the data analysis process.

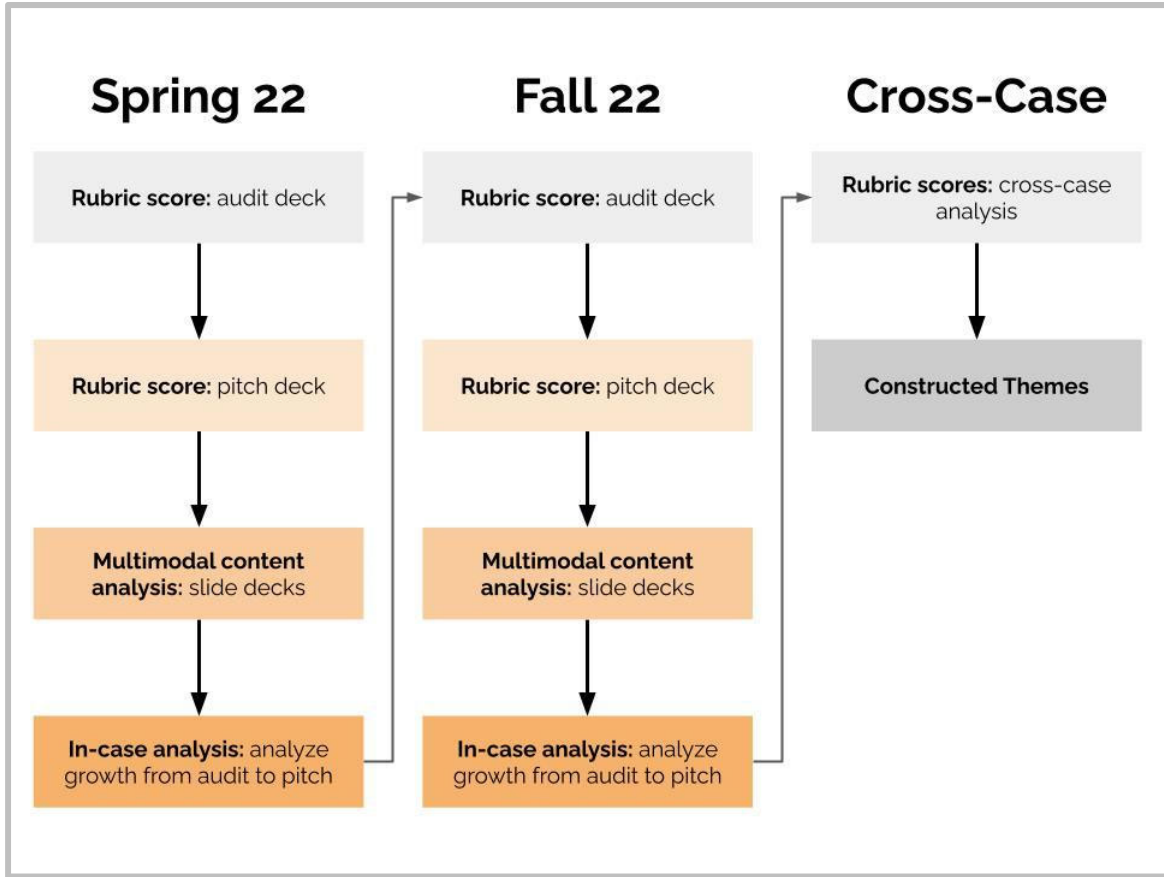


Figure 4. Data Analysis Process

5. Results

The mixed method inquiry allowed for the examination of the 4ML theoretical model as both a quantitative and qualitative analytical tool to gauge digital multimodal communication literacies levels in a business communication course. By examining slide deck ensembles from two separate cases, the goal was to test the tool and address the multimodal literacy assessment gap in the literature.

5.1. Rubric scoring results

The analytical rubric scoring results of the multiple case study are divided into three sections (1) Case one: spring 2022, (2) Case two: fall 2022, and (3) Cross-case results. The numerical results section addresses the research question: how can the 4ML model be used to evaluate multimodal artifacts in a business communication classroom?

Table 1
Average scores per meta-literacy

Dimension	Spring 22 audit	Spring 22 pitch	Fall 22 audit	Fall 22 pitch
Digital Literacy	1.35	2.75	1.41	2.95
Multimedia Skill	2.06	3.05	1.68	3.14
Multimodal Design	1.91	3.25	1.50	3.14
Rhetorical Literacy	2.12	3.43	1.91	3.50

5.1.1. Case one: Spring 2022

Slide decks were evaluated using the 4ML model as an analytical scoring rubric based on a five-point scale. Each of the meta-literacies—digital literacy, multimedia skill literacy, multimodal design literacy, and rhetorical literacy—was given a score. For analysis, each slide deck was considered a unit of analysis, and all the scores were averaged to create a composite score. For Spring 2022, the total number of slide deck ensembles that were evaluated was 37 including 17 audit decks and 20 personal pitch decks. Average scores are listed in Table 1.

For audit decks, the overall average scores ranked from lowest to highest is as follows: digital literacy (1.35), multimodal design literacy (1.91), multimedia skill literacy (2.06), and rhetorical literacy (2.12). Digital literacy scores indicate a need for targeted instruction in digital literacy in higher education. The higher average scores for rhetorical literacy suggest effective instruction in previous courses in the curriculum. Multimodal design literacy was lower than multimedia skill suggesting composers had more skill than design acumen.

Created following explicit instruction in the 4ML dimensions, the personal pitch decks ranked from lowest to highest as follows: digital literacy (2.75), multimedia skills literacy (3.05), multimodal design literacy (3.25), and rhetorical literacy (3.43). The ranking is similar to the initial audit decks with digital literacy having the lowest scores and rhetorical literacy the highest. Multimodal design literacy is higher in ranking for the pitch deck, which may suggest more targeted instruction in that area.

When comparing scores from the initial audit slide deck and the final pitch deck, the digital literacy dimension saw the most significant average growth at 104%. Multimodal design literacy had the next highest growth rate at 70%. Rhetorical literacy rates grew at 62%, and multimedia skill showed a 48% growth rate. Although slide deck scores show students began the semester with a low baseline rate of digital literacy, targeted instruction led to improvement in this area. Improvement in rhetorical literacy supports the conjecture that the curriculum provides a strong foundation as students effectively applied audience, purpose, and rhetorical appeals in different assignments and contexts. The overall growth supports the 4ML model as an effective tool for enabling multiliteracies growth.

5.1.2. Case two: Fall 2022

The sample size for fall 2022 was 22 audit slide decks and 22 personal pitch decks, totaling 44 decks. Using the analytical rubric based on the 4ML model, each deck was analyzed similarly to case one. The overall scores were averaged to evaluate both within the case and across cases.

For the initial audit deck, the average scores ranked from lowest to highest are digital literacy (1.41), multimodal design literacy (1.50), multimedia skill literacy (1.68), and rhetorical literacy (1.91). Digital literacy was the lowest, indicating a need for focused instruction in that dimension. Rhetorical literacy was the highest baseline literacy, suggesting students are receiving a solid foundation in other business communication courses.

For the final personal pitch decks, the average score ranking from lowest to highest are digital literacy (2.95), multimedia skill literacy and multimodal design literacy (3.14), and rhetorical literacy (3.50). Multimedia skill literacy and multimodal design literacy are consistently ranked in the middle, suggesting literacy layering (Cook, 2002) and interconnectedness (McGrail et al., 2021).

When analyzing the growth between the audit decks and the pitch decks, both digital literacy and multimodal design literacy had the highest percentage of growth at 109%. This was followed by multimedia skill literacy at 87% growth and rhetorical literacy at 83% growth. Substantial growth percentages suggest the efficacy of the 4ML model not only as a scoring device, but also as a framework for targeted instruction in digital multimodal communication dimensions.

5.1.3. Cross-case analysis results

To examine overall patterns and increase generalizability, a cross-case analysis was conducted (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2018). The total number of slide deck ensembles that were scored with the analytical rubric was 81.

When comparing the average audit decks scores, digital literacy was the only literacy lower in spring 22 (1.35) than fall 22 (1.41). Otherwise, the other three literacies were higher in spring 22 than fall 22. Although the audit deck assignment had the same criteria, the delivery modality differed. With some COVID restrictions still in place, the spring 22 audit decks were presented as screencasts. Analysis of the slide decks was conducted using the screencasts available. In contrast, the fall 22 audit decks were presented face-to-face.

A cross-case comparison of pitch decks also shows overall literacy levels as lower in spring 22 than in fall 22 except for multimodal design literacy which was slightly higher in the spring (3.25) than in the fall (3.14). Although the multimodal design literacy level was lower in fall 22, the growth rate was 109% compared to a 70% growth rate in spring 22. The increased growth rate may indicate more focused instruction in that dimension for fall 22.

Overall, a clear ranking pattern emerged in cross-case results, with digital literacy ranking lowest and rhetorical literacy the highest on audit and pitch decks for both cases. The pattern suggests that multimodal composers may struggle with their digital literacy while performing better in rhetorical literacy. Despite having the lowest ranking, digital literacy had the highest cross-case growth rate (106.5%) followed by multimodal design literacy (89.5%). Although rhetorical literacy rates are ranked highest, slide deck average scores showed that this dimension had a 72.5% overall growth rate, suggesting students were building on prior knowledge. Although there is a clear pattern of ranking in the 4MLs, the relatively small sample size should be noted. It would be interesting to see if, in future studies, the ranking remains consistent.

5.2. Multimodal content analysis

The entire data corpus consisting of 81 slide deck ensembles was analyzed using multimodal content analysis (Serafini, 2022). The purpose of the qualitative inquiry was to satisfy the research question: How does a visual analysis of slide decks inform the four meta-literacies model? In multimodal content analysis, themes are constructed through a multiple coding process similar to grounded theory (Serafini & Reid, 2023; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The six themes constructed from a visual analysis of multimodal slide deck ensembles follow.

5.2.1. The invisibility of digital literacy

A number of slide decks in the case study were curiously devoid of any secondary source material, a measure of digital literacy and responsibility. The multimodal composers chose not to include any photographs, stock images, brand icons, quotes, or other outside sources in their slide deck content and design. The resulting decks had a sterile and generic feel to the overall aesthetic, which consequently showed an overall lack of effort. At first glance, it did seem as though the scoring rubric category for digital literacy could account for this anomaly. The indicators for the digital literacy category examined use of citations, adherence to fair use and copyright guidelines, inclusion of a source slide, use of footnotes and/or in-text citation, respectful use of brand icons, data literacy, etc. The challenge with a five-point rubric was how to score the slide deck within the category when students showed no evidence. Lack of supporting evidence could be due to lack of effort, but it could also reveal a lack of knowledge and ability to respectfully use other's content. By not including outside source material to support their ideas and message, they actually revealed some of the lowest levels of digital literacy.

An example from fall 22 shows an audit deck with only four slides; a green monochromatic template is applied to it (see Figure 5). The template decoration is the same on every slide with thicker lines and more visual weight on the right side. Within the gradation of greens is a white open space reserved for the content creator to add their touch. The student creator added minimum text to the first slide. The agenda was added to the topic where the template layout would have it and four bullet points with no more than four words per bullet point. Overall, the agenda slide had 13 words and provided little information and even less visual interest. The next two slides with the same green decorating template included a screenshot image from the student's spreadsheet showing their audit data. The screenshots overlapped the template design background, and a few bullet points of information were included below the screenshot. The fourth and final slide included the conclusion title and one bullet point with a full sentence written in first person. The slide deck looked as if it had been created in less than ten minutes and lacked any outside information.

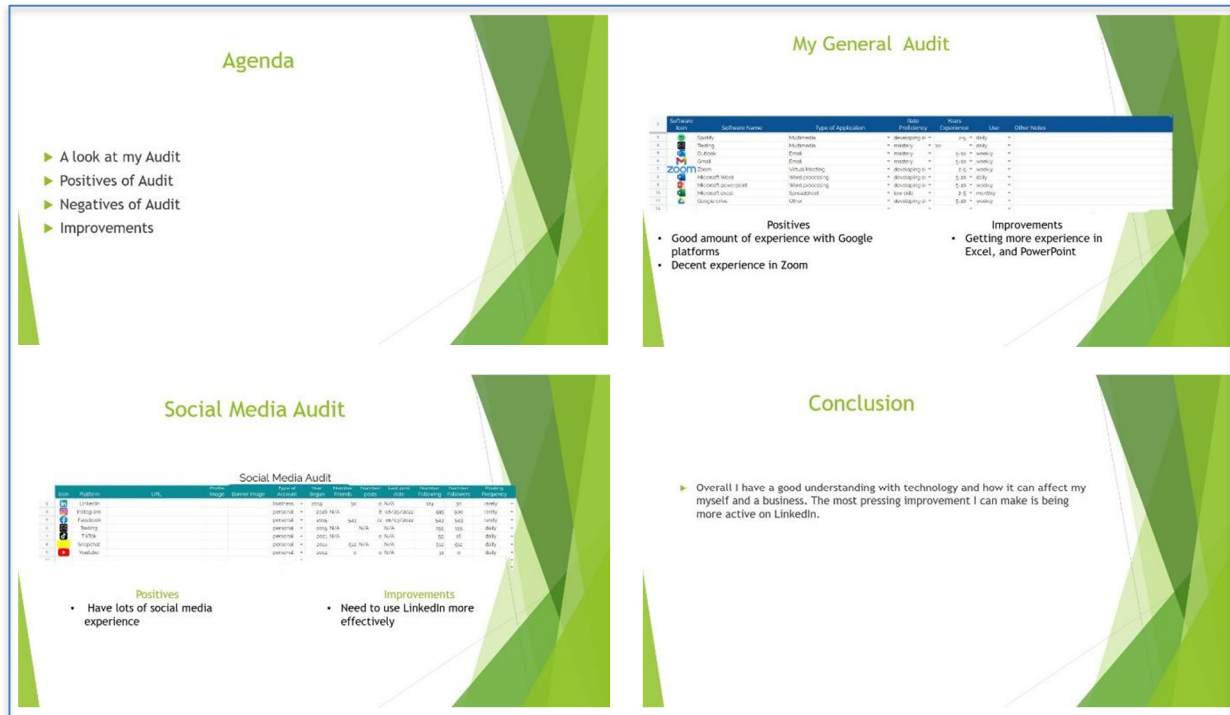


Figure 5. Green Template Slide Deck Screenshot

5.2.2. From decor to design: Moving creators to higher literacy levels

The old design adage, form follows function, is as relevant to the digital age as it was before. Digital multimodal communicators with lower levels of literacies miss the important distinction between designing and decorating. Composers choose to decorate their slides to make them appealing to their audience—or more often, to themselves—rather than using design elements to support the message. When presenters choose to decorate rather than design, the decorative elements add no communicative value or at times may detract from the message. With too much visual information, audiences may experience cognitive overload (Mayer & Moreno, 2003) which causes them to disengage from the presentation. One way multimodal composers decorate their presentations rather than design their presentation is by selecting a slide pre-set theme. Instead of making multimodal design decisions that add to meaning making, slide deck creators defer those key visual communication choices to a designer who created a good-looking deck for that generic purpose alone. As slide deck creators move away from template use, they avoid hidden biases that audiences may bring from another presentation that uses the same slide deck template.

Another example is seen in Figure 6 which was taken from fall 22 data. The audit deck is created from a popular template found on Slides Carnival, a website that provides free templates for Google Sheets, PowerPoint, and Canva (Slides Carnival, 2024). The undergraduate student applied the *Creative Pitch Deck* template from this site to their entire deck. Some of the keywords attributed to this particular template are creative, informational, multipurpose, project presentation, and SWOT analysis. The template incorporates light colored, sketchy drawings of objects from a bird's eye view of one's desk. On the bottom of the slide is a laptop with ear buds, to the left is a cup for coffee or tea, and on the top right is a tablet. Other smaller items like pens, a calculator, headphones, and a notebook are all radiating out from the center. The background is a mid-tone grey and the title text color is a tomato red. The body text is black and the bullet points are also tomato red. The text is layered over the sketchy decorative drawings on the background of the slide. The overlap creates unnecessary visual noise and makes decoding of the text a bit more challenging.

BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY EXPERIENCE

Presentation

- Prezi
- Google Slides
- Microsoft Powerpoint

Graphic Design

- Photoshop
- Google Drawings

CONTINUED

Spreadsheets

- Microsoft Excel
 - 5 years experience
- Google Sheets
 - 10+ years experience

Email

- Microsoft Outlook
Mitchenm5393@uwc.edu
- Gmail
mitchellnick4444@gmail.com

Meetings

- Microsoft Teams
- Zoom
- Discord
- 5 years experience

CONTINUED

Video Editing

- Sony Vegas
- Final Cut Pro

Word Processing

- Google Docs
- Microsoft Word

Management

- Google Drive

SOCIAL MEDIA

How active and large is my social media usage?

SOCIAL ACCOUNTS

<p>FaceBook</p> <p>I have had a FaceBook Account for about 5 years.</p> <p>I do not have access to it and it is not publicly available.</p> <p>Need to regain access to account.</p>	<p>SnapChat</p> <p>Snapchat user for upwards of 8 years.</p> <p>Active semi frequently, more active when being contacted.</p>	<p>LinkedIn</p> <p>Account activated in 2015.</p> <p>Very inactive on it, very small presence.</p> <p>Need to be more active.</p>
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Figure 6. Popular Template from Slide Carnival

5.2.3. Contrasting competencies: The duality of multimodal communication choices

The use of templates by multimodal creators often signals lower levels of multimedia skills literacy. Rather than learning the tools to create effective multimodal ensembles, some students will use templates. The use of a template does not hide skill deficit well but can easily expose low literacy levels. Once creators who lack software knowledge apply their chosen template to the slide deck, they find themselves constrained by it because they don't have the skill to make the changes. Orphaned text boxes—text boxes that have been created but have no textual information inside—are one indicator that the multimodal composer lacks understanding of layout features and slide construction.

The interesting phenomenon that came from this multimodal content analysis was that a choice that reveals a lack of literacy in one meta-literacy might raise the literacy level in another. The template is a good example of this. Although template use exposes lack of multimedia competency, it raises multimodal design ratings because the template layout is designed with clear hierarchy.

An audit slide deck example from fall 22 shows a common slide deck template with a navy background and teal colored overlapping triangle with a slight shadow (see Figure 7). The bottom right hand triangles are larger to provide visual weight to the bottom of the slide deck, while smaller triangles are on the top opposite corner. The layered triangles give the impression of layers of paper that are strewn across a workspace when one is busily working on a project. The undergraduate student has added text and two brand icon images to the slide. The brand icon images include a white background indicative of a jpeg image file rather than a png file, which is characterized by a transparent background. Although the white background adds visual noise, the icons are viewable, whereas if they had a transparent background they would get lost in hue. The white text on the dark blue background provides high contrast, so the information is readable to the audience. Although the template is a poor multimodal design choice because the triangles create visual noise and distract, rather than support, the overall message, the template layout does provide clear hierarchy with the title font size being the salient information on the slide.



Figure 7. Navy Template with Triangles

5.2.4. *The interplay of literacies: The influence of multimodal decisions across the framework*

As noted by Strong (2022) and others (Cook, 2002; Feerrar, 2019; Gallagher, 2020; McGrail et al., 2021), multimodal literacies are interconnected. Also described as synergistic layering, the concept of overlapping of literacies originated with Cook (2002). In multimodal communication, a slide deck composer might decide to use a childish, cartoon character on one of their slides for a formal, business professional presentation. The design choice is a poor one when other slides in the slide deck include high quality photographs. The incongruent slide deck design scheme indicates lower multimodal design literacy. This carries over to rhetorical literacy as audiences might perceive the creator as having lower credibility because of their poor design choice.

An example of the interplay of multimodal choices is provided from a spring 22 audit deck screencast (see Figure 8). The multimodal composer chose a black and white color scheme to show professionalism and formality much like wearing a black and white tuxedo ensemble semiotically communicates a formal occasion. The slide backgrounds were white and had a high contrast with the black banners and white text. For the slide deck, the undergraduate business student included images that were predominantly grey-scale with cool colors to support the overall feeling of formality. The slide composition was formal in arrangement with images and shapes in symmetrical balance. The uniform design and effective use of multimodal elements shows a higher level of multimodal design literacy. A screenshot taken of the screencast recording shows the slide deck prominently behind a small thumbnail image of the presenter in the lower right-hand corner. The presenter is casually attired wearing a Carhartt stocking hat in stark contrast to the formal and professional slide deck they are presenting.



Figure 8. Formal Slide with Informal Delivery

5.2.5. *Lost in hue and other poor saliency issues*

In multimodal design, saliency plays an important role. By employing color and contrast techniques along with design principles, the multimodal composer is able to focus their audience's attention and to communicate hierarchy (Serafini, 2014). Saliency is a way to visually express significance to audiences (Kress, 2010). It reduces eye movement and improves decoding of information. When a multimodal slide deck lacks saliency because of poor design choices, viewers may become confused and disengaged.

Two examples from the case study show how poor saliency in digital multimodal communication reveals students' levels of multimodal design literacy. Example one is taken from spring 22 (See Figure 9). The personal pitch deck slide has a saturated teal background. Featured prominently on the slide is a horizontal bar chart with spearmint green bars which are barely discernable against the teal. The textual elements on the slide are white which creates a high contrast with the saturated background hue. The analogous color scheme was ineffective because the salient information from the graph was lost to the viewer.



Figure 9. Bar Chart Elements are Difficult to See

Example two is a fall 22 audit deck with a different type of salience issue (see Figure 10). The slide is cluttered with visual information and the viewer is uncertain where to focus. On this slide, the background is also a saturated hue with a contrasting white title. The high contrast between the white text and the blueberry background uses saliency to create hierarchy, but the overall message is lost in the messiness of the slide. Against the blue background, there are 18 different brand logos related to communication technology that, at first glance, seem to be scattered around the slide in a haphazard manner. After viewing the slide for a moment, it is possible to discern two possible categories of logos, as some white space roughly separates the groupings. The most salient logos are the Snapchat social media logo and the Google Slides logo. Both logos are yellow hues which are complementary to the background. In visual weight, the TikTok logo fights for attention because of its black background. The red and pink logos like Instagram, Canvas, and PowerPoint scattered about the screen cause more eye movement.

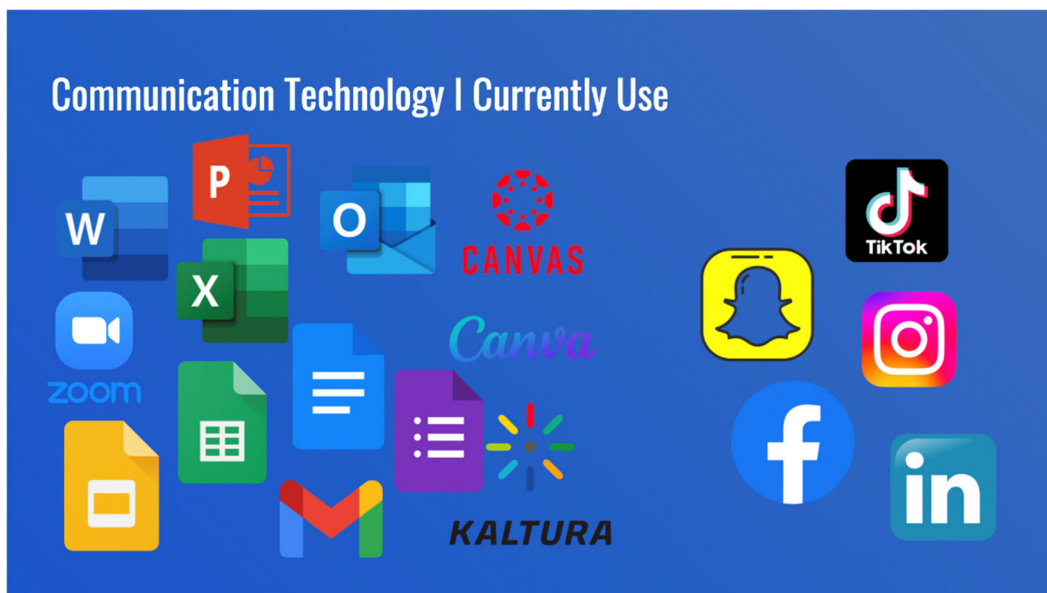


Figure 10. Multiple Icons on Bright Blue Slide Background

5.2.6. Errors and ethos: The impact of basic literacy on rhetorical intentions

In the 4ML model (Strong, 2022), basic literacy was posited to be foundational to the theoretical model rather than a sub-category. Through a multimodal content analysis of student slide decks, it became apparent that student work riddled with spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization errors have a direct impact on the perceived credibility of the multimodal composer.

An example of this can be taken from the pitch deck assignment, where undergraduate business majors were asked to compose a multimodal slide deck as a visual resume. In persuading a potential employer, the slide deck creator chose to highlight some of their high school and college achievements. On the high school accomplishment slide, there are four bullet points (see Figure 11). The first bullet point includes the high school name with obvious capitalization errors. The next bullet point proudly proclaims the mascot for the school. The third bullet point signals completion of advanced placement courses that have the potential of college credit if students score high enough. The final bullet point cites receipt of high academic honors with the adjective written out of sequence. Excluding bullet point two, which has no rhetorical value, the juxtaposition of claims to high academic achievement against obvious basic grammar mistakes leads one to question the student's credibility. The purpose of the next slide in the same deck is to highlight academic achievements at the university level (see Figure 12). The visual support on the slide is an image of the university seal that includes the word *Excellence* prominently displayed. The idea of excellence sharply contrasts with the textual information that includes an apostrophe error.



Figure 11. High School Accomplishments for Visual Resume



Figure 12. University Accomplishment Slide

6. Discussion

6.1. Interpretation of results

When considering the results of the current mixed-methods study, it is important to recall the central purpose, which was to test the 4ML model in digital multimodal communication as an assessment tool. The theoretical model was the foundation for the analytical scoring rubric and the analytical template for multimodal content analysis. From this lens, key findings will be discussed.

The key finding is that overall the 4ML was an effective tool for evaluating digital multimodal communication artifacts to determine the literacy levels of composers across four dimensions. The case study examined the intervention of explicit instruction in the 4ML model and measured growth from the audit deck baseline to the personal pitch deck final project. By consistently applying a standardized rubric, the result was measured growth in all four meta-literacies. The intervention of explicit instruction in digital literacy, multimedia skill literacy, multimodal design literacy, and rhetorical literacy was intended to “develop learners’ meta-semiotic awareness and metalanguage of multimodal texts” (Tan et al., 2020, p. 110).

In terms of overall growth, undergraduate multimodal composers had the most significant growth in their digital literacy, most notably in fall 22. This supports the argument for explicit instruction in digital literacy skills, which includes information literacy in the 4ML model (Strong, 2022) for business students (Makani-Lim et al, 2014). Multimodal design literacy was another dimension where growth was measured.

Multimodal composers scored highest in rhetorical literacy in both slide deck projects for both semesters. A rhetorical approach to business communication is emphasized across the program, so undergraduate students at this particular university would bring in that prior knowledge. As it relates to the 4ML model, Strong (2022) postulated the synergistic nature of the meta-literacies dimensions which support earlier research noting that literacies are layered (Cook, 2002), interconnected (Feerrar, 2019; Lauer, 2009; McGrail et al., 2021), and overlapping (Ng, 2012). Although meta-literacies overlap, clear multiliteracies boundaries must be created for there to be an effective evaluation of multimodal communication.

A surprising finding was the consistency of ranking for the literacies across the multimodal slide deck projects and cross case. Rubric scores showed digital literacy as the lowest, while rhetorical literacy was the highest. The initial decks for both spring 22 and fall 22 ranked multimodal design as the second - lowest dimension. Spring 22 pitch decks showed multimedia skill as the second lowest, while the fall 22 pitch decks had both multimodal design and multimedia skill ranked equally the second lowest. The ranking supports calls for more multimodality in the professional communication curriculum (Coffelt et al., 2022) and for multimodal communication evaluation tools (Hung et al., 2013). It also supports the argument that students should be explicitly taught multimodal terminology (Tan et al., 2020) in order to have a shared understanding (Lauer, 2009).

6.2. Implications

The theoretical implications of the present study support the use of the 4ML model in digital multimodal communication as both a quantitative and qualitative assessment tool. The efficacy of the model as a rubric scoring tool to diagnose multimodal creators' literacy in a business communication course has been shown. Each of the four meta-literacies were also used as categories in an analytical framework for multimodal content analysis. The multimodal analysis resulted in themes that provided qualitative information about how slide deck multimodal construction and decision-making reveals literacy strengths and gaps.

Practical and pedagogical implications from the mixed-methods inquiry indicate that educators who wish to understand their students' digital multimodal communication literacies can use the 4ML model in formative evaluations for diagnostic purposes. The information could be used for targeted instruction to improve learning outcomes.

The 4ML model could also be used at the curricular level to plan curriculum and instruction that supports digital multimodal communication literacy development. Additionally, it can be used as a guide for examining existing curriculum for multiliteracies gaps. Business colleges should consider leveraging other resources like the university library services to help create digital and information literacy instruction (Makani-Lim et al, 2014).

6.3. Limitations

As with all studies, there are limitations. The study was limited by the sample size, which was within bounds for the qualitative multimodal analysis, but low for quantitative inquiry. The study looked at only multimodal slide deck compositions from the beginning of the semester and from the end of the semester, but did not examine other multimodal artifacts created in the course, so it may not fully represent student work. Not all student slide decks were available because this was a past course and links had expired. Although assignments were the same in both cases, consistency in explicit instruction may have varied semester over semester.

Another limitation was that the study was conducted by a single researcher. The study design included a standardized analytical tool for consistency in analysis, multiple cases to allow for cross-case examination, and a mixed-method approach for triangulation. Despite these efforts, researcher bias should always be factored.

6.4. Future research

Future research is needed to explore the 4ML model as a multimodal assessment tool in other contexts and with larger sample sizes. The current study was narrowly focused on slide decks as a multimodal communication ensemble. Other multimodal artifacts should be explored including data visualizations, social media posts, multimodal presentations, and other digital content.

An intriguing direction is to explore different generative AI tools as a multimodal composer to determine meta-literacies strengths and gaps. This could provide valuable information about how multimodal content creators approach their use of the tool and what interventions should be made when using generative AI to support multimodal communication construction.

7. Conclusion

The mixed method study began with an overview of the digital workplace gap highlighting the need for more multimodality in business and professional communication courses (Coffelt et al., 2022). With the need for more multimodal content in higher education classrooms comes the need for effective evaluation tools to evaluate students' multiliteracies and support their development of multimodal competencies (Hung et al., 2013; Tan et al., 2019). The 4ML theoretical model in digital multimodal communication provided the foundations for the quantitative and qualitative examinations of undergraduate students' multimodal communication ensembles. The scoring rubric for the 4ML model indicated a consistent ranking pattern in multimodal communication literacies. By employing a visual analysis of the decking, constructed themes provide more information about digital multimodal communication literacies in professional communication. Overall, the study demonstrated that the 4ML model is an effective evaluation, intervention, and visual analysis tool.

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Appendix A

Table S1
Rubric scoring for spring 22 audit decks

	Digital literacy	Multimedia skill	Multimodal design	Rhetorical literacy
1	4.0	4.0	3.0	2.0
2	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.0
3	3.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
4	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
5	1.0	1.0	2.0	2.0
6				
7	1.0	2.0	2.0	1.0
8				
9	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
10	2.0	4.0	2.0	2.0
11	1.0	2.0	3.0	3.0
12	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
13	1.0	2.0	2.0	3.0
14	1.0	2.0	2.5	3.0
15	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
16				
17	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.0
18	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
19	1.0	2.0	2.0	3.0
20	1.0	3.0	3.0	4.0

Appendix B

Table S2
Rubric scoring for spring 22 pitch decks

	Digital literacy	Multimedia skill	Multimodal design	Rhetorical literacy
1	3.0	3.0	4.0	3.0
2	3.0	3.0	4.0	3.0
3	2.0	3.0	2.0	3.0
4	3.0	2.0	4.0	4.0
5	2.0	3.0	2.0	4.0
6	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0
7	2.0	2.0	3.0	2.0
8	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
9	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
10	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.5
11	3.0	4.0	5.0	5.0
12	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
13	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0
14	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
15	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.0
16	2.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
17	3.0	3.0	2.0	3.0
18	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.0
19	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
20	4.0	5.0	5.0	5.0

Appendix C

Table S3
Rubric scoring for fall 22 audit decks

	Digital literacy	Multimedia skill	Multimodal design	Rhetorical literacy
1	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.0
2	1.0	1.0	2.0	2.0
3				
4	2.0	2.0	4.0	5.0
5	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
6	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
7	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.0
8	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
9	1.0	2.0	1.0	1.0
10	3.0	4.0	1.0	3.0
11	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.0
12	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.0
13	4.0	2.0	2.0	3.0
14	1.0	2.0	1.0	1.0
15	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
16	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
17	1.0	1.0	1.0	2.0
18	1.0	2.0	2.0	1.0
19	2.0	2.0	1.0	3.0
20	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
21	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
22	1.0	2.0	3.0	1.0
23	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.0

Appendix D

Table S4
Rubric scoring for fall 22 pitch decks

	Digital literacy	Multimedia skill	Multimodal design	Rhetorical literacy
1				
2	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0
3	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0
4	4.0	4.0	5.0	5.0
5	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
6	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
7	3.0	3.0	2.0	3.0
8	3.0	3.0	5.0	5.0
9	2.0	3.0	2.0	3.0
10	4.0	4.0	4.0	5.0
11	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
12	3.0	3.0	2.0	3.0
13	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
14	2.0	4.0	2.0	3.0
15	4.0	5.0	5.0	4.0
16	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0
17	3.0	3.0	2.0	3.0
18	2.0	2.0	4.0	4.0
19	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
20	2.0	3.0	2.0	3.0
21	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
22	3.0	3.0	4.0	4.0
23	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0

Book Review: Fei Victor Lim and Mercedes Querol-Julián (Eds.) (2024), *Designing learning with digital technologies*. Routledge.

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ABSTRACT

EN *Designing Learning with Digital Technologies*, edited by Fei Victor Lim and Mercedes Querol-Julián (2024), is an insightful contribution to the ever-evolving conversation about how digital tools shape and influence teaching and learning practices. Grounded in multimodal and socio-semiotic theory, the volume centers the role of educators and teachers as empowered designers of learning. With a specific focus on post-pandemic teaching realities, yet not limited by them, it offers empirical studies, theoretical insights, and practical tools to support innovative, inclusive, and sustainable digital pedagogy across a range of educational and cultural contexts.

Key words: DIGITAL PEDAGOGY, MULTIMODALITY, BLENDED LEARNING, LEARNING DESIGN

ES *Diseñando el Aprendizaje con Tecnologías Digitales*, editado por Fei Victor Lim y Mercedes Querol-Julián (2024), es una contribución perspicaz al debate en constante evolución sobre cómo las herramientas digitales moldean e influyen en las prácticas de enseñanza y aprendizaje. Basado en la teoría multimodal y socio-semiótica, el volumen se centra en el papel de educadores y docentes como diseñadores empoderados del aprendizaje. A partir de un enfoque específico en las realidades docentes pospandémicas, pero sin limitarse a ellas, ofrece estudios empíricos, perspectivas teóricas y herramientas prácticas para apoyar una pedagogía digital innovadora, inclusiva y sostenible en diversos contextos educativos y culturales.

Palabras clave: PEDAGOGÍA DIGITAL, MULTIMODALIDAD, APRENDIZAJE COMBINADO, DISEÑO DE APRENDIZAJE

IT *Progettare l'Apprendimento con Tecnologie Digitali*, a cura di Fei Victor Lim e Mercedes Querol-Julián (2024), è un contributo approfondito al discorso, in continua evoluzione, su come gli strumenti digitali possano plasmare e influenzare le pratiche di insegnamento e apprendimento. Basato sulla teoria multimodale e socio-semiotica, il volume pone al centro il ruolo degli educatori e degli insegnanti come coloro incaricati della progettazione dell'apprendimento. Con un accento posto sulle realtà di insegnamento post-pandemiche, anche se non limitato a questo, il volume offre studi empirici, panoramiche teoriche e strumenti pratici al fine di supportare una pedagogia digitale che possa essere innovativa, inclusiva e sostenibile, orizzontale ad una serie di contesti educativi e culturali.

Parole chiave: PEDAGOGIA DIGITALE, MULTIMODALITÀ, APPRENDIMENTO MISTO, PROGETTAZIONE DELL'APPRENDIMENTO

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Designing Learning with Digital Technologies explores how educators can create meaningful, effective, and relevant learning experiences using a wide range of digital tools and resources in a post-pandemic world. It offers a multimodal perspective on how digital technologies are reshaping teaching and learning practices, particularly in response to the now-structural need for blended learning (Peters et al., 2020; Lim & Toh, 2020). Central to this approach is the repositioning of teachers as designers of learning (Kress & Selander, 2012; Selander, 2008;), moving beyond traditional views of educators as mere transmitters of knowledge.

Edited by Fei Victor Lim and Mercedes Querol-Julián, the volume brings together a diverse group of scholars working in multimodality, digital literacies, and across different teaching levels. Their contributions span current research areas such as genre analysis, embodied teaching, and multiliteracies, offering insights into how digital technologies influence the production and transmission of knowledge in educational contexts.

By highlighting the educational potential of digital media, the volume draws on the multiliteracies framework and contributes to the growing field of multimodal studies in education. Therefore, it will be of interest to researchers and educators focusing on digital learning and multimodal literacies. Similarly, readers will find both theoretical insights and practical applications across varied educational and cultural contexts.

The book is structured into five main parts, each exploring key areas in the design of learning with digital technologies. Part I, *Designing learning*, introduces the book's theoretical foundations and presents the teachers' role as a central designer of learning. Parts II to V develop this perspective through specific thematic focuses: *Digital learning designs*, *Digital learning with embodied teaching*, *Digital learning interactions*, and *Digital multimodal literacies*. More specifically, the volume opens with a chapter by Lim and Querol-Julián that maps the central themes and contributions, making the case for rethinking the teacher's role as a designer of learning.

Subsequently, Chapter 2 by Selander explores the theoretical foundations of the designs for learning perspective, addressing questions of knowledge, recognition, and identity in digitised education. He argues that, as media shape meaning-making, learning design choices are essential for fostering inclusive and future-oriented teaching practices. In Chapter 3, Lumsden, Djonov, and Slatyer introduce the Multimodal Community of Inquiry, a framework combining a multimodal social semiotic approach with the Community of Inquiry model, and applied to TESOL teacher education courses to illustrate how platform affordances and instructors' pedagogical values influence the design of online learning environments. Chapter 4, by Rennie and Smyth, examines the design of heutagogical learning experiences in online higher education. Drawing on case studies from their own teaching, the authors propose strategies to support learner autonomy, self-determination, and capability development through flexible digital design. Their approach mainly emphasises student-led exploration and the effective use of digital resources to foster self-directed learning. Concluding the second part of the volume, Chapter 5 authored by Komninou introduces a set of tools for monitoring the metasemiotic awareness of learners towards multimodal texts, to be used to assess the development of multiliteracies and, ultimately, to inform pedagogical design and support improvements in teaching practices.

The third part begins with Chapter 6, where Sindoni explores the teacher's gaze as a semiotic resource in video-mediated educational settings. In particular, through an analysis of user-generated content on different social media platforms, Sindoni investigates its implications for teacher training in digital contexts. Chapter 7, by Bao and Feng, examine the multimodal design of award-winning English language teaching micro-lectures where they identified patterns in teachers' use of camera angles, background music, and visual settings. In Chapter 8, Crawford Camiciottoli analyses OpenCourseWare videos to explore the role of gesture and prosody in teaching phrasal verbs through the use of corpus and multimodal annotation tools to illustrate how embodied communication can enhance language comprehension with significant practical implications for language teaching.

The fourth section opens with Chapter 9, where Santamaría-Urbieta examines the use of asynchronous video tools in foreign language learning, focusing on the platform Flip to show how digital interactions can foster student engagement and promote informal learning communities. In Chapter 10, Carciu and Muresan present a cross-national multimodal learning exchange aimed at developing communication competencies in English. The aim is to integrate digital collaboration into language education. Chapter 11, co-authored by Koh, Lim, and Jonathan, focuses on WiREAD+, a platform for supporting collaborative critical reading. As the authors explain, the platform's theoretical foundation and its analytics features can support the tracking of student interaction and foster their deeper engagement with texts.

The final portion of the volume, beginning at Chapter 12 by Beltrán-Palanques, explores online video game reviews as a pedagogical tool for ESP by analyzing their multimodal features and evaluating their role in developing students' critical thinking and multimodal literacy. Chapter 13, by Karatza and Lim, discusses the

creation of a pedagogic metalanguage for primary students engaging with websites. The chapter outlines turning research findings into practical classroom applications from research to practice and highlights teachers' roles in adapting metalanguage resources to specific classroom contexts. Gilje, closes the volume with Chapter 14, by examining students' digital multimodal compositions in Norwegian secondary schools. Using video data and student outputs, he analyses how learners negotiate meaning through semiotic choices, while emphasizing the importance of teacher guidance in fostering multimodal literacy.

The volume builds on the tradition of multimodal and socio-semiotic research in education (O'Halloran et al., 2017; Hafner & Pun, 2020), while advancing the urgent conversation prompted by Kalantzis and Cope (2020) on how the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed fundamental limitations in traditional models of education and accelerated the need for pedagogical change. In particular, the book responds to their call for pedagogies grounded in multimodal design, by contributing to a broader scholarly effort to rethink education in light of the growing importance of digital media in teaching and learning. It also addresses recent calls for the systematic integration of digital multimodal texts in educational practice, building on prior work that has analysed the structures and communicative functions of such texts (e.g., Adami & Jewitt, 2016; Bezemer & Kress, 2017; Zappavigna, 2020). In doing so, the contributors offer empirical evidence in how educators may effectively leverage these digital resources.

Moreover, the volume maintains a clear and consistent empirical orientation, with chapters grounded in diverse and often international contexts and educational settings. This not only grants it a broad scope but also ensures that its insights remain applicable across a wider range of teaching and learning environments. In this regard, the volume's current geographical and institutional representation, while diverse, could serve as a starting point for future expansions that further reflect the truly global impact of the pandemic. In this sense, there is the potential for continued dialogue and broader inclusion in subsequent work.

Ultimately, two aspects stand out. First is the consistently teacher-centric approach. During the pandemic, teachers and educators bore the full responsibility of managing both technology and pedagogy, being expected to adapt rapidly and perform efficiently with minimal preparation. The volume, instead repositions educators as empowered designers of learning, reflecting a clear willingness to move beyond tokenistic or deterministic uses of technology in favour of pedagogy and agency. Second, the volume's engagement with post-pandemic realities is both current and relevant, responding to current teaching demands while offering critical reflections on how digital learning has evolved. Now, a few years on, what was once described as the post-pandemic period increasingly appears not as a temporary phase but as a structural feature of contemporary education. For this reason, *Designing Learning with Digital Technologies* offers timely insights and frameworks that hopefully align with and help shape this ongoing transformation, in support of educators and researchers.

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