The Research-Practice Interface in English for Specific Purposes:

Past, Present and Future

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A Festschrift in Honour of Rita Salvi

Edited by
Ersilia Incelli, Renzo Mocini
and Judith Turnbull

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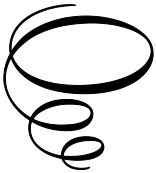

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FOREWORD

GIULIANA ELENA GARZONE

It is a pleasure for me to open this volume dedicated to the career of Professor Rita Salvi, a renowned scholar in English linguistics and didactics, but also a mentor for many of her collaborators and an instructor and reference point for a multitude of students over the years at the Faculty of Economics, Sapienza University of Rome, where she taught for over 30 years.

The broad range of Rita's tireless commitment to the teaching of ESP in higher education, her scholarly interests and her research work in English linguistics are reflected in the topics dealt with in the contributions collected in this book. The decision to maintain a focus on teaching is in keeping with the orientation of her research, which has mainly focused on topics in English linguistics, especially in the field of English for Specific Purposes, but always with the ultimate aim of putting research results to use by applying them to teaching at university level.

This sustained pedagogical interest, which translates into using her own research work to benefit others, reveals an important trait of Rita's personality that all those who have worked with her know very well: her great generosity, her empathy, her desire to put the results of her skills and talent to the service of the scientific community, her students and the university that had the good fortune to have her as part of its faculty for several decades.

I am fully aware of these special qualities of Rita because we have been colleagues and friends since the very beginning of our careers, when we met thanks to the encouragement of Professor Leo Schena, whom I still thank today for bringing us together at that time. For this reason, I can give a personal (and inevitably partial) historical glimpse of Rita's activity over time, as a researcher, a member of the (inter)national scientific community, and a language instructor.

To outline the earlier stages of Rita's career I can easily rewind to the 1990s, when English Linguistics had just been introduced as a self-standing subject in the list of disciplines taught and researched in Italian universities, thus becoming separate from English literature, with which it had been

grouped until then (as a minority subject, we believed at the time). She was certainly one of the researchers who contributed most to affirming the disciplinary identity of English Linguistics (L18c), first and foremost for research purposes, but also with a view to making sure that it was included in university curricula, especially in non-humanities degree programmes where we thought professional and specialised communication needed particular attention, dedicated teaching and high-level metalinguistic competences.

Another forward-looking aspect in her career was her commitment to promoting the use of technologies in language teaching, at a time when computer assisted language learning was still in its infancy and scholars who were involved in it for teaching and research activities had to struggle to have it accepted and see it become part of ordinary teaching routines.

These were the leitmotifs in Rita's early career and also the directions along which it developed, a path which led to her becoming a most distinguished scholar in *English language, linguistics and translation* (as our discipline is now denominated), a very active member of the Associazione Italiana di Anglistica, on whose Board she served for two mandates, and a highly respected member of the Faculty of Economics, where she worked until her retirement in late 2021.

In German the word *Festschrift* means "celebration-writing" and it can be stated with no fear of exaggeration that it is the purpose of this Festschrift to celebrate Rita's accomplishments, but also her unique humane personality, her generosity, and her passion for research and didactics.

INTRODUCTION

RENZO MOCINI

A COMMODIOUS VICUS OF RECIRCULATION

This book contains a selection of papers written by scholars who have had the good fortune not only to share academic interests with Professor Rita Salvi, but also to count among her friends. Of the several fields of research she has worked on we decided to focus on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as the intersection par excellence between the several domains of linguistics she pursued, and the many felicitous encounters she fostered with scholars. We can safely say that Rita has been and continues to be a genial, efficacious scholarly mediator capable of amalgamating different approaches with the maximum sensitivity towards individuality. The synergy she creates has frequently generated fruitful stimuli that have opened up new research pathways. We chose ESP because it represents the broad scope of the diverse areas of research she has engaged in – the theoretical, the methodological, and the analytical. It also reflects her multi-directional approach to teaching and theory: a pathway that moves in a spiralling motion, from theory to teaching and back again, attributing yet another meaning to James Joyce's famous pluri-semiotic "commodious vicus of recirculation" (1975: 3). Her face-to-face interaction with her students and colleagues reveals a persona with a passion for research, endowed with intellectual generosity and a tireless will, always ready to build bridges and launch projects.

It is with these thoughts in mind that this book wishes to demonstrate how recent theoretical descriptions can potentially guide the teaching of the English language used in academic, professional, workplace, intercultural, and digital communicative contexts by investigating the complexity of human language and taking into account elements that go beyond the bounds of verbal language. Besides verbal fluency and accuracy, in fact, learners need to acquire a knowledge of the socio-cultural conventions of the peoples and places they are likely to encounter in the global village of the third millennium and be aware of the non-verbal communicative power of elements like mimicry, gesture, body

language and proxemics which can often prove to be more eloquent than words, at times even belie them. This means that it is no longer sufficient for teachers and course designers to focus on language in use alone, they also need to be aware, and make their students aware, of the reality of professional and cultural contexts and bring them into constant proactive contact with the treasure trove of information and material available on the web.

To date, much of applied linguistic scrutiny of discourse analysis or of specialist language corpora description fails to deal with the practical applicability of findings to pedagogy "in the flesh". Frequently, this vital nexus is either intentionally omitted from much of the current agenda of academic research, as it is deemed to lie beyond its scope, or taken for granted as an accessory. Conversely, many ESP classroom-based empirical studies and/or controlled experiments do not meet the criteria of replicability and generalisability required by scientific experimentation as they remain anecdotal, local and fragmented.

The papers published here represent a concerted effort to fill some of the gaps in the current literature, while also developing further some of the issues that have emerged over the considerably lengthy time span that ESP studies have now come to cover. At the same time, they aim to address some of the issues grounded in a holistic conception of and approach to ESP research and teaching while also indicating some of the avenues research might pursue.

Today, given the unprecedented access teachers and researchers have to authentic material there is no dearth of sources available to them for observation, analysis and use. Not only that but, by applying the modalities of action research to every point on the research-didactic spectrum, the teacher-researcher engages in continuous virtuous cycles of analyses and applications. A multi-perspective and multi-method framework can support well-grounded and thorough investigation into the set of discursive practices in professional settings, throwing light on why professionals use a specific variety of language to achieve their professional targets (Candlin 2002; Bhatia 2008; Koester 2010).

One of the essential pedagogic tasks in ESP is to intercept the effective communicative needs of real-life disciplines and professions and mould them into principled though flexible work-in-progress choices and practice. This will be useful to learners in the real world and can facilitate their entry into a certain community of practice (Wenger 1998).

This need inevitably involves rethinking the very concept of "text" which can no longer be constrained within the clear-cut boundaries of traditional formats, nor be packaged into a coursebook, however

exhaustive and updated it may claim to be. While a well-designed and well-chosen textbook may act as a valuable prompt, today it will need to be integrated and corroborated by a wealth of ever-changing ITC solutions and electronically mediated communication sources available "out there". These have had such an impact on the dynamics of professional discursive practices as to lead to continuous hybridisation and contamination affecting all professional ambits. This situation foregrounds the fluidity of the present-day intertextual and interdiscursive dimension of communication within all fields, including professional specialisation.

The choice of what to use in the classroom is vital for the success of any ESP course because it needs to be functional to the achievement of the two fundamental, interwoven purposes of this kind of teaching/learning: the students' reasons for wanting to learn and the concrete connection between the specific variety of English taught/learnt and the real-life professional world to which it refers. Teachers as pedagogues and critical observers of their own action need to avoid the temptation of "resting on their oars", the trap of believing they have found a "once-and-for-all" teaching method they can reiterate *ad infinitum*. What they need to do is embrace the engaging task of constant, critical observation, renewal and improvement of their classroom conduct. When teachers are also linguistic researchers, they are in a position to integrate their scholarly findings with hands-on practice, with a view to ensuring that their work be grounded in robust conceptual, descriptive and explanatory frameworks informed by linguistic theory. While, on the one hand, teachers may be capable of guiding learners towards the discursive practices that best represent a specific professional field and provide relevant analytical grids, on the other, they should never forget to involve the students themselves, for example when choosing teaching materials and electronic resources.

Against this backdrop, ESP teaching needs to be ready to espouse semiotic and generic resources not necessarily ascribable to the domain of linguistic studies in the strictest sense, by opting for real-world tasks whose objectives are not primarily verbal. It often happens in teaching practice that it is precisely during the performance of real-world tasks not explicitly aimed at language learning that students are more inclined to absorb the specialised discourse that social actors use in the workplace. Here, where the emphasis is on "doing", the ESP used becomes "an accessory after the fact" because the students' attention is "distracted" from the language tout court to focus on the hands-on experience (Krashen 1988). Didactically speaking the teacher acts as an interface between theory and praxis, forging, as it were, a link between them while bridging

the gap between the classroom and the workplace to create a dynamic virtuous circle.

The multi-faceted abilities required to deal with complex and increasingly sophisticated communicative settings like those outlined briefly above may be corroborated thanks also to the suggestions arising from the papers in this volume. The broad spectrum of materials analysed from multiple theoretical perspectives, it is hoped, may be able to inspire and corroborate ESP teaching. Findings from pragma-linguistics are capable of making explicit the linguistic construal of argumentation and the conveyance of stance while hypothesising the cognitive strategies employed in the process. At the same time, some of the papers include suggestions for corpus-based genre analysis activities in instructional settings, providing means by which to describe the lexico-grammatical structuring and rhetorical patterning of ESP texts.

Collectively the studies presented here reflect the state-of-the-art in ESP-anchored research and related studies, drawing on top-down or bottom-up practice and methodological itineraries (see Bowker, this volume, for an account of this fundamental conceptual framework for ESP). They make use of new and the most up-to-date research pathways and tools. A frequent top-down methodology consists of the integration of quantitative corpus-based techniques followed by discourse analysis of contextual usage to interpret empirical results, employing a corpus-assisted approach, a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis (Baker 2006; Partington *et al*. 2013). Bottom-up analyses of what occurs in the classroom, on the other hand, are often informed by ELT (English Language Teaching) educational theories and related research as well as notions regarding language acquisition, motivation, learning styles and instructional contexts, to the benefit of the teaching/learning process and/or the provision of beneficial insights into the impartation/acquisition of ESP.

Both top-down and bottom-up approaches to the theory-practice dyad provide the opportunity of obtaining a closer view of the subject from both ends of the spectrum and prompt fresh initiatives by all those working within the domain of ESP. To this end, this book aspires to provide a cutting-edge account of some of the latest avenues in research and practice being pursued in the fast-evolving didactic field. This kind of knowledge is fundamental for both language educators and researchers of language, who often occupy both roles within academia. Unlike many other disciplines, teaching and learning play a focal theoretical role within the field of linguistic investigation. The participation of action-researchers is, therefore, essential if we wish to guarantee that ESP be endowed with a

dynamic research-applicative interface, pivotal to the optimisation of language education, to the efficacious management of programmes and progress capable of enhancing the usefulness and prestige of educational institutions.

The chapters in this book are grouped thematically into four interconnected sections covering a wide range of topics.

The first section deals with *Lexicography and semantic analysis in ESP* and opens with **Stefania Nuccorini**'s study entitled *The lexicographic treatment of representative samples of English and Italian collocations*. In view of the partial or null lexical and/or pragmatic equivalence between Italian and English collocations, she analyses different samples of word combinations, Italian *prendere*/*guadagnare tempo* and English *buy*/*gain time*, to illustrate how this divide may represent a problem for language learners who often turn to bilingual dictionaries. Drawing on corpus evidence, the author advocates the creation of a digital Italian-English dictionary of collocations featuring explanations, examples and equivalents which may help Italian learners of English to avoid making collocation errors.

In the second chapter *A corpus-based study of semantic prosody: a methodological proposal and a case study in ESP teaching,* **Ersilia Incelli** explores the concept of semantic prosody and its integration as a vocabulary activity in ESP teaching in a higher education context. The paper is concerned with two aspects of this field of research. Firstly, it considers how corpus-based analysis can identify and unveil semantic prosody, in this case study the collocational behaviour of the lemma *fuel**, and secondly, how research-informed studies arising from prior corpus analyses can inform ESP teaching practice and applications.

The third and last chapter in this section is by **Giuseppina Cortese,** C*ommunication strategies in city design: vision and verbal art in ESP*. The paper starts with a brief description of the posters placed along a stretch of a road to illustrate how street literacy and the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF), often involving sophisticated word play, have become part and parcel of the advertising genre. She provides examples from different contexts and domains to show how these street texts and other adverts may be used as ESP materials to make students aware of the challenges to 'the given' in sociocultural practices and the construction of alternative discourses. Learners can explore the hybridization of text types and the notion of action-in-discourse and produce instances of "socially sensitive" promotional material, using multimodal resources on a traditional platform.

The second section focuses on *Research in ESP as teaching resources*. The first chapter, *Risk and threat during the COVID-19 pandemic: a micro-diachronic perspective*, is by **Marina Bondi** and **Jessica Jane Nocella.** Adopting both a quantitative and qualitative approach, they explore the use and phraseological profile of *risk* and *threat* in the media representation of the COVID-19 pandemic over the years 2020 and 2021. The analysis was carried out on the Coronavirus Corpus which was created to keep record of the economic, social and political impact of the pandemic. The changes in the use of *risk* and *threat* in media discourse over the two years accompanied the evolution of the pandemic and reflect how the media had to handle different elements during the pandemic, from the development of the vaccination campaign to the need to deal with the new variants of the virus. The media were equally interested in using both *threat* and *risk* to represent not only the different phases of the pandemic, but also people's perceptions of it.

The chapter by **Franca Poppi** offers some interesting insights into corporate communication. It is based on a study carried out on two small-scale specialized corpora containing CEO's letters to shareholders of airlines and hotel companies written in 2019 and 2020. Using a concordancing software tool, the most frequently employed interactive and interactional markers are identified and classified according to the persuasive function they played. The author hypothesizes that the rhetorical and relational divergences between the letters in the two corpora are influenced by the effects of the COVID pandemic and the need to reassure stakeholders.

In his paper *Appraising the Brexit discourse in opinion-bearing blogs: An analysis of attitudinal stance meanings*, **Girolamo Tessuto** investigates how blog writers construe their evaluative stance on public-facing blog platforms and how stance meaning-making resources help writers present their identity, positions, values and ideologies in this generic form of public discourse. He focuses on the controversial question of Brexit analysing a corpus of commentary blog posts to illustrate the significance and role of attitude evaluative resources of the appraisal framework at the level of grammar and discourse. The author also points out how opinion-bearing blogs in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course may provide students with an interesting learning environment in which to promote their media literacy skills.

The third section is entitled *ESP spoken discourse: methodology and practice* and starts with the chapter *The Multimodal Expression of Humour in a Law Lecture: an exploratory case study* by **Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli.** She looks at the eclectic nature of the expression of humour

in a law lecture delivered at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The case study is based on a video recording and corresponding speech transcript. The methodological approach adopted is grounded in multimodal discourse analysis and supported by the use of multimodal annotation software to display and analyse co-occurring verbal and non-verbal resources. The examination of some instances of humour initiated by university teachers shows how humour during narratives can trigger the goodwill and empathy of students.

In the chapter *Ted talks in the learning/teaching of ESP and EAP*, **Giuliana Elena Garzone** discusses the increasing availability of multimodal didactic material and the limitless range of resources – mostly non-dedicated – available for exploitation in language teaching/learning. One of the resources is TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design), a series of talks on wide-ranging topics which provide ready-made solutions to a problem that traditionally bedevilled language teaching, that is, the exposition of students to real instances of native, or native-like, spoken language. They are characterised by a degree of simplification and reduced technicality and by the deployment of strategies that are typical of popularization. At the same time, they exhibit features pertaining to public speaking, and in particular the use of narratives – often *personal* narratives – and recourse to humour, which generally makes the talks pleasant to follow, indeed entertaining.

In the chapter *Citation practices in spoken academic English: the case of students' oral presentations*, **Giuliana Diani** focuses on a spoken academic genre, namely university students' oral presentations, using examples taken from the MICASE corpus. She investigates the citation practices that are most typically used by students in managing intertextuality and shows that there is a considerable use of *that*-complement clauses as reporting clauses in contexts where the student's position is at issue. This study may have implications for the teaching of referencing skills in EAP speaking courses and raise students' awareness about the importance of discussing sources properly by avoiding plagiarism and making their voice heard clearly throughout their oral presentations.

The section ends with *The research-practice interface in ESP and the challenges for linguists in the digital era: the case of the InterDiplo Corpus* by **Silvia Cavalieri**, **Sara Corrizzato**, **Roberta Facchinetti**. They propose the case study of the InterDiplo Corpus composed of journalistic interviews currently under development at the University of Verona. This spoken ESP corpus includes broadcast interviews and debates, where diplomats and international operators are interviewed in English by journalists who do not share the same linguistic and cultural background.

The authors discuss how linguistic data, especially the spoken word, can be annotated, mined and visualized using contemporary computing ware. They deal, in particular, with the differences between native and non-native oral production and the challenges encountered by researchers when annotating the traits and idiosyncrasies of different speakers.

The fourth section of the book is devoted to *Research applied to ESP teaching contexts.* In her chapter, *ESP education in Italian universities: a case study of the Faculty of Economics, Sapienza University of Rome*, **Janet Bowker** traces the influence of linguistic theory and research on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) over the last forty years and assesses its impact on teaching and learning practices. In particular, two ESP courses held at the Economics Faculty of the Sapienza University of Rome are described in detail. Their course planning, syllabus design, materials, methods and assessment mode are placed under the lens of their underlying rationale and pedagogic principles. The two courses illustrate the value of theory-informed descriptions of language in use, together with the varied interdisciplinary research and methodological foundations for ESP practice.

In the second chapter *Teaching CSR discourse: a critical approach to Business English*, **Paola Catenaccio** proposes an approach to the teaching of Business English that combines the development of linguistic competences with critical literacy. Using a CEO's message in the CSR report of a well-known company, she illustrates the benefits of in-depth analysis as a means by which to identify and critically assess textual composition from a genre-theory perspective and shows how the text can target multiple audiences with tailored arguments. She also describes how companies build their ethical reputation by presenting themselves as active agents pursuing CSR goals.

Renzo Mocini's chapter *Knowing that – knowing how. A love-driven, inquiry-based teaching pathway* focuses on a work-in-progress teaching/learning method he has tested during ESP university lessons aimed at enabling healthcare students to read and appraise medical literature in order to learn how to write scientific papers themselves. By leveraging motivation as the element par excellence for learning and drawing on the belief that mastering a foreign language for special purposes can efficaciously occur through "learning by doing", the method he proposes seems to succeed in combining, felicitously, the interpretation and creation of knowledge-enhancing data and skills, while promoting professional expertise.

The section closes with the chapter by **Laura Ferrarotti,** who gives an overview of the literature dealing with the use of the Linguistic Landscape

as a tool for teaching foreign languages, and in particular English. The Linguistic Landscape includes multilingual signages, ranging from shop signs and posters to street names and public signs on buildings, as well as the spoken languages that can be heard in urban areas. She concludes the paper by presenting an approach to the study of English through Linguistic Landscape, which she has adopted over the years for a Master's degree class for students in communication and marketing at the Sapienza University of Rome.

The variety of the discursive areas and methodological approaches dealt with in this volume reflects the wealth of Rita Salvi's activity as a researcher and teacher as well as the power of her intellectual influence over students and colleagues. It also bears witness to the strong bonds of friendship and esteem existing between her and the authors of the papers contained here. We are more than certain that she will not abandon the studies to which she has devoted her energies. As she enters a new period of her life free from formal schedules, ties and duties, we envisage for her an occasion to delve as deeply as ever, if not more than before, into the issues she is so passionate about.

So, rather than "goodbye", it is "so long, see you soon!".

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PART I

LEXICOGRAPHY AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS IN ESP

CHAPTER ONE

THE LEXICOGRAPHIC TREATMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLES OF ENGLISH AND ITALIAN COLLOCATIONS

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1. Introduction

Collocations and word combinations are probably the most problematic issues Italian learners of English must face even at an advanced level. Word-for-word translation is hardly ever correct, but especially in the field of collocation and phraseology it usually results in errors due to the unpredictability of the co-occurrence of constituents in foreign-language combinations. This is, indeed, the main feature of collocations in general, as Firth explained long ago: "You shall know a word by the company it keeps" (1957:11), and, one might add, by the company it does not keep.

Though Italian and English collocations often share the same syntactic structure[1] and their respective transparent, or partially figurative, meaning, these features are not enough to form the right word combinations in

[1] Independently of the differences between English and Italian word order, typical syntactic combinations in both languages are the following: verb+noun, noun+verb, adjective+noun, adverb+verb, adverb+adjective, noun1+of+noun2. The examples here show various types of lexical selection restrictions (also involving partial synonymy) and common learners' mistakes (often based on Italian combinations): telephone rings (not *sounds); tell a joke (not *say); heavy rain (not *strong); argue strongly (not *heavily); vastly superior (not *amply); a bunch of flowers and a pack of cards (not vice-versa). These combinations are included in the specialised English and Italian dictionaries analysed in the following paragraphs, together with other types of restricted combinations.

English (or vice-versa): it is the lexico-pragmatic dimension of "company" and use restrictions that very often escape learners' notice. In addition, there are cases in which the categorisation of word combinations (as differently defined collocations or phrases) is not linguistically clear and/or ascertained in both languages.[2]

The following quotation from the *Wordbanks* corpus[3] describes the risks of word for word translation; it perfectly applies to the case of Italian collocations when reproduced verbatim in English, or vice-versa, as will be seen:

> Literalism, a word for word translation, would do nothing more than transfer the corpse of the original into a new language, not the living thing. (Nicolson 2003)[4]

Collocations well represent a considerable part of the "living thing" of a language, that is, its use. Linguists and teachers have long been aware of the role collocations – however re-named, defined, and exemplified – play in language learning. Lexicographers too have paid much attention to their inclusion and treatment in different types of dictionaries, with special reference to Italian-English bilingual dictionaries, English Learner's Dictionaries, and monolingual English and Italian Collocations Dictionaries. On the lexicographical scene what is missing is a bilingual Italian-English dictionary of collocations. Berti and Pinnavaia (2012, 2014) have convincingly shown how useful an Italian-English dictionary of collocations would be and have exemplified a presentation mode which is well grounded in lexicographical theory and implemented in example entries. The present contribution is meant to highlight a few difficulties in identifying translational equivalents and in raising learners' language awareness in the field of collocations. It aims to provide some background by analysing the treatment of representative sample cases of 'presumed' collocations in a number of English and Italian general-purpose and specialised dictionaries as sources of detailed information and corpus-based examples. As far as the analysis of the samples suggests, results show how subtle and relevant connotative aspects of the "living thing" ultimately are so that they should be overtly included in a digital bilingual dictionary of collocations.

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[2] For example, a word combination that qualifies as a collocation in English is not necessarily a collocation in Italian, as will be seen.

[3] https://wordbanks.harpercollins.co.uk/new, last accessed October 1, 2021.

[4] Source data (author, title, publication year, publisher) is always shown in the *Wordbanks* corpus, but the page number of quotations is not.

Collocations are part and parcel of both English and Italian in all types of communication. Different bilingual collocations dictionaries could also be compiled for ESP learners on the basis of relevant corpora and of already existing lexicographical sources in many specialised fields, in analogy with the proposal presented in the following sections. Each specialised language and its terminology are strictly connected. According to L'Homme (2015), though terms belong to different parts of speech, most are nouns, and often noun phrases. Most of the latter can be labelled as collocations: for example, "the series of phenomena affecting climate in the world were originally labelled as *global warming*. More recently, experts tend to agree on a more general designation, i.e. *climate change*" (L'Homme 2015).[5] Independently of the technical characteristics of, and the differences between these terms, it is to the point to note that each is considered as a collocation in one of the collocations dictionaries analysed in the following sections: "climate" is included as a collocate of "change" in the *Macmillan Collocations Dictionary*, and "global" as the only collocate of "warming" in the *BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English*. This shows that "global warming" and "climate change" are used as terms in scientific language according to their technical definitions and monosemic reference to their underlying concepts, and that they are also used in everyday communication, with no clear reference to their specificities as terms. However, their syntagmatically fixed nature would identify them as collocations worth including in a language-specific collocations dictionary, together with appropriate examples of their use. In such a case the criterion of meaning transparency, which will be presented in Section 2 as a necessary component to qualify a word combination as a collocation, would be based on experts' definitions. ESP collocations dictionaries might complement the already existing terminology-based specialised dictionaries in different fields by presenting collocative uses as entries, as in the case of the hypothetical general-purpose collocations dictionary described in the following paragraphs.

2. Collocations and collocational errors

Starting from a largely agreed-on definition, a word combination qualifies as a collocation if:

[5] Page numbers are not displayed in the online version of L'Homme's paper (2015).

- its meaning as a whole is transparent, though one of its components could be used figuratively;
- no substitution of either component is possible with a (near) synonym in the same context, with occasional exceptions concerning one of them;
- the repeated co-occurrence of the words it is composed of determines restrictions in its use.

These are the elements that characterise collocations as opposed to free combinations on the one hand, and idioms on the other. As Laufer clarified:

> Collocations are habitually occurring lexical combinations that are characterized by restricted co-occurrence of elements and relative transparency of meaning. The former characteristic distinguishes collocations from free combinations which are generated through grammatical rules while the latter discriminates between collocations and idioms whose meanings cannot be inferred from their individual components. (Laufer 2011: 30)

The adjective "relative" refers to the figurative use of one element: in Laufer's example, it refers to the use of "pay" in "to pay attention". The use of "buy" in "buy time" represents another instance of "relative transparency of meaning" as will be seen.

The great majority of students' errors occurs in productive activities from Italian into English. Examples of erroneous combinations taken from written/oral productive activities by B2 students who attended English classes at Roma Tre University in the past include "literalisms" such as *to prove emotions (to feel/experience emotions), Italian *provare emozioni*; *to make a photograph (to take a photograph), Italian *fare una fotografia*; *to sustain the hypothesis (to support the hypothesis), Italian *sostenere un'ipotesi*, and many others, which also concern other syntactic combinations. Surprisingly, in an English-into-Italian impromptu oral translation, a student produced the following inexistent Italian combination, again an example of literalism: **comprare tempo*, for "buy time". Usually, students offered correct Italian equivalents of English collocations: for example, *soddisfare i loro bisogni* for "meet their needs", or *trarre vantaggio* for "take advantage".

In general, most, if not all, English erroneous combinations produced by learners depend on three interrelated factors: students' lack of familiarity with the language-specific role of collocations; "literalism", i.e.

students' tendency to literally translate their thoughts or ideas into English (occasionally, vice-versa); and no, or not appropriate, use of dictionaries.[6]

The "literalism" of **comprare tempo*, probably due to the immediateness of the oral interaction during which it occurred, led to the idea of analysing the treatment of "buy time" in bilingual dictionaries and in monolingual English dictionaries. The Italian equivalents given in the selected bilingual dictionaries were then checked in Italian dictionaries. As will be seen, the usage of "buy time", on the one hand, and of its Italian equivalents *guadagnare/prendere tempo* on the other, reveals more challenging aspects than expected from the linguistic, lexicographical, and translational point of view. These aspects should be included in a future digital Italian-English dictionary of collocations.

3. Analysis of "buy time" and its Italian equivalents in selected dictionaries

The dictionaries that have been consulted for the analysis can be found in Table 1.1.[7] They have been selected because of their expected linguistically accurate description and exemplification of the sample entries. Bilingual dictionaries and English monolingual dictionaries on the one hand, and Italian-based dictionaries on the other, are supposed to provide ample coverage of the treatment of "to buy time" and of its Italian equivalents.

All the selected dictionaries define and include word combinations, though these are not always classified as collocations according to each dictionary-specific policy. Terminology and definitions vary, as do the criteria for the inclusion and presentation mode of (usually corpus-based) examples, and of quantitative and qualitative aspects. However, the comparison of the treatment of the same combinations in different dictionaries rests on the attention all pay to collocations, independently of their various denominations and definitions, with respect to each dictionary's purposes as a monolingual, bilingual, general-purpose, or specialised work.

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[6] Collocations can also be problematic because language learners often "cannot recall them as a single chunk", as highlighted on the home page of *ColloCaid* (https://www.collocaid.uk/). *ColloCaid* "is a text editor that provides real-time collocation suggestions to support academic English writers". It aims to help students and researchers "discover suitable collocations for themselves" (Frankenberg-Garcia *et al*. 2021: 207-208).

[7] See the list of references for full details.

Bilingual Dictionaries	**Monolingual English Dictionaries English Learner's Dictionaries English Collocations Dictionaries**	**Monolingual Italian Dictionaries Italian Combinatory Dictionaries**
Il Ragazzini Dizionario Inglese-Italiano, Italiano-Inglese (Ragazzini)	*Oxford English Dictionary* (OED)	*Grande Dizionario Italiano dell'Uso* (GRADIT)
The Bilingual English Dictionary (BED)	*Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (CALD)	*Dizionario Treccani* (Treccani)
	Collins Birmingham University International Language Database (COBUILD)	*Dizionario delle Combinazioni Lessicali* (DCL)
	Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE)	*Dizionario Combinatorio Italiano* (DCI)
	Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (MEDAL)	*Dizionario delle Collocazioni* (DC).
	Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD)	
	Longman Collocations Dictionary (LCD)	
	Macmillan Collocations Dictionary (MCD)	
	Oxford Collocations Dictionary (OCD)	
	The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English (BBI)	

Table 1.1 Selected bilingual and monolingual dictionaries.

3.1 Bilingual Dictionaries

Italian learners of English usually turn for help to bilingual dictionaries as their first choice.[8] In the case of "buy time" the two bilingual dictionaries, Ragazzini substantially monodirectional and BED clearly bidirectional, provide an insightful look at its categorisation and use.

In Ragazzini "buy time" is included in the bulleted phraseology section of the entry for the verb which means that, in the Ragazzini metalanguage and presentation mode that identify collocations, "buy" is not a "parola amica" of "time" (i.e., not a collocate, since collocates are always underlined), nor is it a "parola amica" of "buy" either. In other words, "buy time" is not considered as a collocation, presumably because of the

[8] The great majority of the students who attended the above-mentioned course stated that they favour online bilingual dictionaries, because they provide "immediate" information.

figurative use of the verb, but it pertains to the wider category of phraseology. The expression is translated into "guadagnare tempo", which is also not considered as a collocation in the Italian-English part. In the entry for "guadagnare" two almost opposite, apparently partial synonyms clearly show the different senses of "guadagnare tempo": "temporeggiare" and "risparmiare (tempo)". "Temporeggiare" is a single word and therefore not a collocation, unlike its English equivalents "gain time (or buy time)". Literally it means to postpone something.

Conversely, "risparmiare tempo", whose English appropriate translation is "to save time", means to do something in less time than expected. In addition, a third possibility, "to stall", is given for "cercare di guadagnare tempo". The entry for "to gain" further confirms the two opposite senses above. "To gain time" is an example (again not a collocation) in the entry for "gain", but it is also included in the phraseological section in the entry for "time", where a distinction is made between a person as its grammatical subject as opposed to a thing, namely a watch. Strangely, neither the entry for "to save", nor that for "time" include "to save time". As for "to stall for time", included in the phraseology section of the verb entry, the Italian equivalents exactly mirror those already given in the Italian-English part, "cercare di guadagnare tempo" and "temporeggiare". "Stall", as a noun, is translated into "espediente; pretesto; sotterfugio; stratagemma; trucco": all these nouns are generally negatively connoted.

Further research carried out on the cross-references from "guadagnare" to other Italian entries, such as "espediente" ("ploy)" or "trucco" ("trick"),[9] has yielded relevant results. In this net of cross-references, the following examples are even more interesting: "un espediente per guadagnare tempo", which is translated into "a ploy to buy time", and the definition itself of "ploy" as "trick".[10] Both point to the negative connotation of "buy time" when used as equivalent to Italian "guadagnare tempo" in the sense "temporeggiare", as reported in Ragazzini.

In BED "to buy time" is not presented as a collocation either: collocates are shown between square brackets and in special italics, while the expression is included in the following example: "we managed to buy

[9] Cross-references to other English and Italian entries are displayed in a column on the left-hand side of the screen of the online dictionary.

[10] The example "è giusto un trucco per guadagnare tempo", which is translated into "it's just a trick to gain time", shows that also "gain time" is negatively connoted, as are the following Italian translational equivalents of "ploy", which are listed in Ragazzini: "artificio", "arzigogolo", "astuzia", "escamotage", "espediente", "malizia", "manovra", "ritrovato", "sotterfugio", "stratagemma".