MASTERING READING STRATEGIES
IN ENGLISH FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES:
SOME EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

di

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1. *Introduction*

It might be argued that all psychologists, regardless of their specialty, share the experience of exposure to a system of writing conventions that differs from other genres in many ways. In the light of this consideration, the aim of this paper is to provide a contribution to the teaching of English in Universities where English for Psychological Studies is taught, on the basis of my teaching experience within the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Catania. The aim is endowing students with a good communicative competence (both oral and written) in the English language and to meet the needs of future psychologists and future readers of scientific literature, through a *learner-centred approach* more than just teaching the language *per se*, which is a *language-centred approach*[1].

To give examples of good practice, among the many variations on methods, scattered across journals and books that are read by disparate groups of psychologists, I tried to lay out a variety of theme-dredging methods so that all researchers who deal with psychological texts can use them for their analyses. With my students I have outlined some helpful techniques for discovering themes in texts. These techniques are based on: (1) an analysis of words (word repetitions, key-indigenous terms, and key-words-in contexts); (2) a careful reading of larger blocks of texts (compare and contrast, social science queries, and searching for missing information); (3) an intentional analysis of linguistic features (metaphors, transitions, connectors); and (4) the physical manipulation of texts (unmarked texts, pawing, and cut and sort procedures).

My English for Psychology course has focused on three major aspects:

– The acquisition of study skills (i.e. note-taking, or using a monolingual dictionary).

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[1] See M. Ibba, *L'inglese della medicina*, Milano, Vita & pensiero, 2007, pp.19-30.

– The acquisition of reading skills (i.e. critical evaluation of specialised texts, or making comparisons).
– The acquisition of the ability to present and discuss the content of an article within a formal setting (class, seminar, conference).

The exercises I've provided have let the students learn gradually and effectively and given the possibility to revise, consolidate and normalize the starting levels for those who had already studied the language in different fields. To unlock students' self-expression I've used Neuro Linguistic Programming, whose first models come from psychotherapy. In other words, my approach was to teach the language of psychology from the psychological point of view. According to NLP the teacher is like a therapist, or anyone who is helping another person make changes in his/her life.

2. *Methods*

Exercises focused on four different levels and most operated on more than one simultaneously (whole group, between groups, interpersonal within groups, intrapersonal), as NLP teaching puts a lot of emphasis on creating a resourceful learning state. However good the exercise, students learn little if they are bored, tired or fed up. This is why, for example, in a lesson on body language the primary outcome was to increase awareness of the profound impact that simple matching or mismatching body language had on communication. Matching body language involved sitting in a similar posture, giving and receiving the same amount of eye contact and moving their body to the same extent. These added up to what we call "paying attention". The analysis of the students' communicative needs has given me the possibility not only to identify their linguistic needs, but also to identify the academic ones and their ability to study (such as note-taking, dictionary use, summing up, deducing meanings of new words, taking part in a conversation) which were necessary not only for a profitable attendance of the course, but also in everyday situations where the language is practiced.

According to J. O'Connor and J. Seymour[2], one of teachers' main tasks is to bring out the curiosity of their students and help them learn and enjoy learning. Goleman has coined the term «social intelligence»[3], whose scope spans over several competences, including empathy with others and good self-presentation. The latter involves high self-esteem, self-confidence and a certain *savoir*

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[2] See J. O'Connor, J. Seymour, *Introducing NLP*, London, HarperElement, 2002.
[3] See D. Goleman, *Social Intelligence. The New Science of Human Relationships*, London, Hutchinson, 2006.

faire that enable the individuals to master and control the expression of their emotions, and to get their messages across in a nuanced way. The skill and knowledge students gain depend on the state they are in when they are learning. This is obvious, yet so often forgotten or only paid lip service to. NLP puts this firmly centre stage. More than teaching our students something, our aim should be to create a context to draw out students' desire to learn. One of the most effective ways of doing this is by eliciting emotional states telling stories, going into the desired state ourselves, using our voice tone, doing something that will evoke the state naturally, asking directly and indirectly, creating an imaginary context, giving students a task, or describing a personal example. This way, learning happens naturally. It is also very important to use metaphors, meaning stories, analogies, parables, personal examples and jokes: all this brings a course alive. In addition, evaluation needs to be done at different stages:

– first there is *live evaluation*, where you are tracking what is happening minute by minute.
– Second, there is the *end of training* evaluation, where the students evaluate the course and the teacher. The teacher also evaluates the course and his/her performance.
– Third, there is *transfer evaluation*: however well the students performed in the course, it is no use if they leave their skills in the classroom when they leave. Have the skills transferred to where they are wanted? These results are used as feedback to refine the course.

3. *Results*

3.1. As far as the teaching of lexicon was concerned, the starting point my course was based on was that psychological discourse is qualified by two main features: high lexical density and mono-referential, denotative, synthetic technical terms, interlocked in special expressions and definitions. To paraphrase from Evangelisti[4], although technical terms are less frequent in Psychology than in the language of Physics or Biology, they are indeed present and build up a technical vocabulary which frequently has an existence and functionality only in this field, while also borrowing from medical Science, Mathematics and Statistics. Psychological language also features a high degree of abstractedness – necessary to explicate processes, events or properties –, the frequent use of *compound words*,

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[4] P. Evangelisti, *Strategie dell'informazione scientifica nel discorso psicologico italiano e inglese. La definizione nei testi introduttivi*, in *Studi sul trattamento linguistico dell'informazione scientifica*, cur. T. De Mauro, Roma, Bulzoni, 1994, pp. 195-227.

of Latin and Greek affixes, and of *passivisation*[5] *and*, finally, specific *rhetorical patterns* conditioned by the overall theoretical framework of the discipline[6].

Through the study of clinical and abnormal psychology, general psychology, developmental psychology, industrial/organizational psychology, physiological psychology, psychoanalysis and social psychology, my course syllabus was based on word-formation processes. Unfortunately, there is little agreement on the methodology for the study of word-formation, so I haven't provided a theory, but an introduction to some basic concepts such as: derivation and compounding[7]. It is important for students to understand what compound words are, as it helps them with reading. The objective was for students to be able to identify how two words make up a compound word. Students were also able to combine two nouns in order to create a new compound noun.

Some compound words will be listed, to show the framework that I gave my students:

Noun+noun: boy-friend, aversion therapy, battered baby syndrome, brain death.

Verb+particle: drop-out, breakdown, layoff, shutdown.

Phrase compounds: foot-in-the-door technique, doctor-assisted suicide, grant in aid, flesh and blood.

Particle+verb:, overeducate, overmark, underachieve, overdo.

Adjective+adjective: bitter-sweet, open-ended, dead-tired, present-absent.

A few examples of derivation will be shown as follows:

NOUN	ADJECTIVE	NOUN	ADVERB
clinician	clinical	clinic	
development	developmental		
physiology	physiological	physiologist	
psychoanalysis	psychoanalytic/psychoanalytical		psychoanalytically
society	social		socially
child		childhood	
	mad	madness	madly
	happy	happiness	happily

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[5] For further detail, see M. Pla, *L'anglais de la psychologie*, in «Etudes Anglaises», 90 (1984), pp. 643-659.

[6] Instances of different text types in psychological discourse are provided in G. Mandler, W. Kessen, *The Language of Psychology*, New York, John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1959.

[7] See L. Bauer, *English Word-Formation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Every topic I dealt with was related to a sector of the discipline and all scientific articles were preceded or followed by different types of activities, such as:

– fill in the blanks with an appropriate term

Ex: *Psychological Methods*[8]

different emotional experiments psychology

The science of _____ seeks to advance and test hypotheses about cognitive, motivational and _____ processes as these occur in social and non social situations. It does this by using controlled _____, to see how variables affect behaviour, and self-reports of what is perceived, thought, remembered and felt. These methods are supplemented by more informal observations, for example surveys of opinion and studies that look for correlations between mental attributes in _____ groups[9].

– use your dictionary to fill in the grid

Ex.

ABSTRACT NOUN	ADJECTIVE/ADVERB	VERB	MEANING
belief			
	wonderful		
faith			
	marvelous		
		be transported	
	imaginary		
		be captivated	

– match the words to their translations[10]

Ex: *Emotions*

Affect (v.)	ansia
Anger	sensibile
Anxiety	toccare, commuovere
Emotional	sollievo

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[8] See N. Whitteridge Zanforlin, *Did you understand? Developing Reading Skills in Psychology*, Padova, CEDAM, 1998, p. 5.

[9] See H. Bowles, *English for Psychology*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 2005, p. 164.

[10] See R. Facchinetti, *English in the Humanities: Psychology and Education*, Padova, CEDAM, p. 125.

Sensitive	paura
Pleasure	emozionale, affettivo, emotivo
Relief	piacere
fear	collera

– translation exercises

Ex. *The classification of psychologists*[11]

Psychologists can be categorized in many ways. One can divide them according to their level of training (doctoral or master's degree, where they work (university, college, high school, hospital, private practice, government agency), or in terms of demographic factors such as sex or ethnic status. Perhaps the most significant distinction is based on what psychologists do, the activities in which they are engaged.

This has provided a framework within which students could make their own discoveries about this «deepest, most secret part of language», as Bauer defined it[12].

Among the activities I have provided, I have asked my students, through the use of the online Oxford English Dictionary, to investigate on some lists of words and to build up a kind of individual thesaurus with every lexeme's definition, or definitions, derivatives, phrases and origin, so to raise their awareness even on the fact, for example, that nouns are mostly Anglo-Saxon, whereas adjectives are generally rooted in classical languages, which, according to Maurizio Gotti «may therefore provide interesting evidence for our understanding of conceptual evolution»[13], as in the example below:

brain

• noun 1 an organ of soft nervous tissue contained in the skull, functioning as the coordinating centre of sensation and intellectual and nervous activity. 2 intellectual capacity. 3 (the brains) *informal* the main organizer or planner within a group.
 • verb *informal* hit hard on the head with an object.
 – PHRASES have on the brain *informal* be obsessed with.
 – DERIVATIVES brained *adjective*.
 – ORIGIN Old English.

[11] See H. Bowles, *English for Psychology* cit., p. 166.
[12] L. Bauer, *English Word-Formation* cit., p. 296.
[13] M. Gotti, *Investigating Specialised Discourse*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2005, p. 56.

At the end of this activity, a table was built up, as follows:

NOUN	ADJECTIVE
heart	cardiac
brain	cerebral
hand	manual
liver	hepatic
skin	dermal
blood	haema - (B.E.)/hema-(A.E.)

3.2. Another aim of my English language course was to let students «exploit scientific metaphors, frequently aimed at higher clarity, precision, syntheticity and concreteness»[14]. It seemed to me a reasonable starting point to assume that we all use a great deal of figurative language, going beyond the literal meanings of the words involved, for humour, effect, politeness, to play, to be creative, and for a mixture of these and other reasons. In particular, within the specific context of psychotherapy, it represents a very important aspect of the process of patient insight so crucial to personal growth. As Gotti states[15]: «Another common device used in specialized discourse to create terms drawn from general language is metaphorisation. Metaphor creation is, indeed, a frequent feature not only of everyday language but also of specialist texts, especially for the purpose of catachresis».

Much early metaphor research was devoted to testing the claim that metaphors are deviant forms of language that require extra processing to be understood. In fact, as metaphors involve the juxtaposition of concepts from separate domains of experience, they ask us to think of something in terms of something else that is radically different. Probably, the publication which has done more than any other to popularize the Cognitive Linguistics movement was Lakoff and Johnson's *Methaphors We Live By*[16]. Their analysis of English

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[14] R. Facchinetti, *Teaching "Humanities English" in Italian Universities: the Role of Language Centres*, in *Le lingue nell'università del Duemila*, cur. A. Csillaghy, M. Gotti, Udine, Forum, 2000, p. 116. Another interesting investigation on metaphors can be seen in V. Bambini, *A Survey in Neurocognitive Pragmatics: with Insights for the Study of Lexical Combination*, in *Studies in the Semantics of Lexical Combinatory Patterns*, cur. M. Bertuccelli Papi, Pisa, PLUS, 2005.

[15] M. Gotti, *Investigating Specialized Discourse* cit., p. 56.

[16] G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, *Methaphors We Live By*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980.

shows that the systematic arrangement of different metaphors in specific semantic fields is a consequence of conceptual patterning within the language community. An example of this is their list of metaphors demonstrating how the notion of "*argument*" is normally interpreted as "*war*". Following this example, lists of methaphors were provided by my students, after reading articles, so to enrich their vocabulary and discuss on symbols in think-aloud protocols. After making comparisons or drawing resemblances, my students could recognize many types of metaphor, depending on the relation between the words actually used and the intended meaning.

For example, the process of metaphorical projection was illustrated by the metaphor model
   – "*success is a path*".

The concept of "path" was further differentiated, in terms of career steps, parallel paths, obstacles and detours. We have also matched some examples of metaphorical expressions such as
   – "*achieving distant goals*",
   – "*heading in the right direction*",
   – "*moving on*".

As the metaphor model 'success is a path' shows, using metaphorical expressions such as
   – '*career steps*',
   – '*trying to find the right path*', etc.,
not merely documents how someone understands his or her present situation, but also indicates a more general understanding of success, which favors certain problem-solving skills more than others.

Another example we commented on was the expression
   – '*it was completely off limits*',
which is not metaphorical if used in the context of a tennis game and the 'it' refers to the tennis ball being actually and physically off the limits of the tennis court. The same expression is metaphorical if it refers to an argument or behavior, which is described as 'off', e.g.
   – '*her argument was completely off limits*' or
   – '*his behaviour was completely off limits*'.

In both cases, inadequate behavior is described in terms of a sports vocabulary, the limits of the playground symbolizing what is still acceptable to the referee who is symbolically represented by the speaker in this example. Tennis play thus serves as an analogy to express the abstract and complex rules of adequate social behavior.

Metaphor analysis, thus was used to assess the structure and content of the implicit theories responsible for those automated and subconscious processes, but also to understand cultural models provided by language to express individuality, self-concept and the «inner world»[17].

4. *Discussion*

In my course, I also took into consideration the various characteristics of my students, thus practicing with varied and multisensory teaching ways. There were the *auditory ways*, such as discussing, lecturing and using registrations, *visual ways*, such as films, videos and demonstrations, and *physical ways*, such as role plays, experiential groups and exercises involving physical movement. In addition, the material needed by students to master psychological language could not be simply identified in texts. Of outstanding importance was the employment of authentic material, rather than texts especially devised or abridged for the purpose of language learning. Following Facchinetti's method[18], all «texts were analyzed either linearly or by means of the computerized tools which had been presented to the students in the introductory lessons. These tools highlighted cohesive and coherence devices, peculiar wording, recurrent syntactic structures, collocational patterns and other semantic features within one single sample or between two or more texts pertaining to a specialized language, particularly Psychology».

Bearing this in mind, a few sites were also shown to the students to provide linguistic data from different varieties most of which are accessible free of charge. The psychmovies.com website, for example, has grown to include hundreds of films which deal with the portrayal of mental illness and its treatment. Some contain characters with mental disorders, some include mental health professionals, and others reflect dysfunctional family relationships.

The most commonly used Internet tools are listed below:

– www.askoxford.com/concise_oed
– www.cori.umd.edu/research-publications
– www.hltmag.co.uk

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[17] For further investigation, see K.S. Moser, *Knowledge Acquisition through Metaphors*, in *Arbeit und Bildung das Ende einer Differenz? Travail et formation - la fin d'une distinction? Learning and Work - the End of a Distinction?*, cur. H. Hansen, B. Sigrist, H. Goorhuis, H. Landolt, Aarau, Bildung Sauerländer, 1999, pp. 141-152.

[18] R. Facchinetti, *Teaching "Humanities English" in Italian Universities: the Role of Language Centres* cit., p. 120.

– www.isabelperez.com/psico.htm
– http://newhum.com/
– www.psychmovies.com
– www.psychologymatters.org/glossary.html
– www.super-memory.com/sml/colls/engpsychol.htm
– www.teachingenglish.org.uk

By the end of the course my students had the ability to critically evaluate the accuracy of portrayal of psychological topics. A large part of them had increased their communicative competence; they were able to detect cognitive approaches to metaphor and to establish correspondences or «mappings»[19] in metaphorical expressions, especially from a Neuro-linguistic point of view, thus concentrating on small units (phonemes, nouns, verbs) and reaching progressive intellectual autonomy. As far as production was concerned, they were able to analyze conversations between patients and experimenters considering[20]: «answer type (request, clarification request, thank, etc.); semantic content (topic-maintenance, topic-shift, etc.); cohesion (ellipsis, verbal tenses, referential forms, etc.); fluency; sociolinguistic sensitivity (politeness forms, self-corrections, sarcasm, control on indirect speech acts, etc.); and non verbal communication (gesture, proximity, etc.)».

Altogether this adds up to a stimulation of their critical thinking abilities and experiences which, to move on from Maley's observation[21], «overcomes resistance from teachers to stop teaching and allows learning to take place».

ABSTRACT

L'articolo mette in luce la natura della Programmazione Neuro-Linguistica attraverso test psicologici, e in particolare attraverso la liberazione da blocchi espressivi da parte degli studenti, poiché fornisce materiale utile da applicare all'insegnamento dell'Inglese a studenti di Psicologia. Gli obiettivi di un corso così strutturato sono: lavorare sul lessico scientifico, attraverso lo studio dei processi di formazione delle parole e l'interpretazione delle metafore scientifiche, che di solito hanno come scopo grande chiarezza, precisione e concretezza. Le risorse elettroniche (dizionari online, glossari, riviste scientifiche, e video, fra le altre cose) possono fornire materiali di riferimento

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[19] See V. Bambini, *A Survey in Neurocognitive Pragmatics: with Insights for the Study of Lexical Combination* cit.

[20] Ivi, p. 340.

[21] A. Maley, *Extensive Reading: Why It Is Good for Our Students… And for Us*, in www.teachingenglish.org.uk, "Think Articles", 8 December, 2009.

utili per la ricerca e uno speciale input visivo che aiuta a catturare l'attenzione degli studenti e che permette loro di partecipare più attivamente alle attività programmate e svolte in grandi classi. Lo scopo ultimo è quello di preparare gli studenti ad un apprendimento permanente dell'inglese, nonché far acquisire loro una competenza linguistica finalizzata alla futura professione.

The paper outlines the nature of Neuro-Linguistic Programming through psychological testing, and in particular through the unlocking of students' self-expression, with its fascinating material when teaching English to students of psychology. The aims of such a course are: to work on scientific lexicon, through the study of word-formation processes, and to exploit scientific metaphors, frequently aimed at high clarity, precision, and concreteness. Internet resources (online dictionaries, thesauri, journals, videos, among others) can provide reference materials useful for research and a special visual input that helps attract students' attention and lets them react more actively to the activities set up and carried out in large classes. Goals are set to prepare students for continuing studies in English, and for English language competency at work that is career-specific.