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# Can We Reconcile ERT (Emergency Remote Teaching) and Best Practices in Language Learning/Teaching?

## A Case Study on How to Stimulate Students' Proactiveness via CMC

### Abstract

*The adoption of technological tools as an alternative to or in support of more traditional methods became pressing and inevitable in 2020, because of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which marked the closure of on-site face-to-face classes all over the world. All of a sudden, what had so far been considered to be 'normal' was destabilized or disrupted by the pandemic. Technology solutions had to be adopted to save the whole education system, as teachers reinvented themselves in a period which catalysed a new era in virtual language learning and teacher professional development (Copeland 2021). In some cases it was possible to move classes effectively to online and distance education platforms because of pre-existing experience, but in others all the involved stakeholders had to strive to cope and manage the 'new normal' (Trust and Whalen 2021).*

*The present contribution explores the online practices adopted in a course attended by master students with a view to stimulating the attendees' proactiveness, and in particular their involvement in tasks which encouraged them to develop a capability for using linguistic resources strategically and knowingly, aware of "how meaning potential encoded in English can be realised as a communicative resource" (Widdowson 2003, 177).*

**Keywords:** *Emergency Remote Teaching, proactiveness, global communicative competencies, strategic awareness*

The term globalisation, which is now recurrent in contemporary rhetoric and a keyword in both academic and popular discourse, refers, in a general sense, to the "quantum-like pace of the international flow of communication, knowledge and money [...] being increasingly available in all parts of the world" (Hirst and Thompson 2011, 19). As the world becomes more and more globalized and connected, technological devices used to accomplish various tasks

(Nevado Peña et al. 2020) inevitably come to exert some kind of influence on various aspects of people's everyday life. One of the affected areas is certainly education, which has been "restructured" due to the increasing rate of computer and multimedia technologies use (Büyükbaykal 2015). Students are familiar with the facilities provided by internet for acquiring information or doing research for their assignments.

The adoption of technological tools as an alternative to or in support of more traditional methods became pressing and inevitable in 2020, because of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which marked the closure of on-site face-to-face classes all over the world. All of a sudden, what had so far been considered to be 'normal' was destabilized or disrupted by the pandemic. Technology solutions had to be adopted to save the whole education system, as teachers reinvented themselves in a period which catalysed a new era in virtual language learning and teacher professional development (Copeland 2021). In some cases it was possible to move classes effectively to online and distance education platforms because of pre-existing experience, but in others all the involved stakeholders had to strive to cope and manage the 'new normal' (Trust and Whalen 2021).

The present contribution explores the online practices adopted in a course attended by master students which had to be 'transferred' to the digital environment. As a consequence it was decided to enrich the objectives of the course, which aimed to stimulate the attendees' proactiveness, and in particular their involvement in tasks which encouraged them to develop a capability for using linguistic resources strategically and knowingly, in accordance with the ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) paradigm, with insights from digital contexts.

To shed light on this particular instance of remote teaching it was decided to adopt the qualitative case study as a research perspective, because case studies "ensure that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood" (Baxter and Jack 2008, 544).

## 1. Digital tools

By the end of the 1980s language classes started to include online communication or telecollaboration projects in their curriculum (Warschauer 2001). The potential of using digital tools for project-based learning was already envisaged from the start, as attested by the list of online activities from different higher education programmes compiled by Warschauer (2001). However, within first-generation digital tools, individuals were passive elements who did not take part in the communicative process, as they were only meant to receive input, without being able to express any type of feedback.

In fact, it is only with the advent of the new generation of digital tools (Web 2.0) that individuals have become ‘users’ who can actively modify the message and the way it is then perceived by other people involved in the communication process. In order to participate in this digitally mediated communication, it is no longer enough to have knowledge about different tools, but it is necessary to be fluent in using the tools to produce content. Digital fluency is defined by the National Research Council (1999, 3) as “understanding the underlying concepts of technology and applying problem-solving and critical thinking to using technology.” Virtual collaboration between students based on a project assignment is conducive to new learning models that not only include language learning, but also encompass the opportunities to work interdisciplinarily and to reach outside of the language classroom (O’Dowd 2018), thus making learners “active agents and users of the target language” (Thomas, Reinders and Warschauer 2013, 7).

These new learning models based on decentralised, democratic and learner-centric environments (Reinders and Darasawang 2012) is a fertile ground for research-based projects, which will enable students to develop a wide range of skills such as collecting and analysing data, negotiating meaning, collaborating, solving problems or improving understanding of cross-cultural communication in a globalised world (Thomas and Reinders 2010; Shaffer 2008).

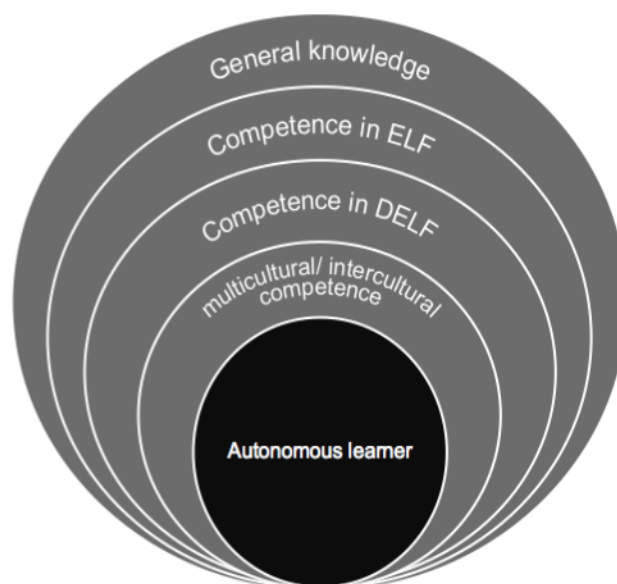
## **2. Global Communicative Competencies: Digital English as a Lingua Franca (DELFF)**

Nowadays, English is the Lingua Franca of the World Wide Web. Indeed, the status of the English language “cannot any more be perceived as ‘foreign’ in the same way as French, German, or Chinese, which are studied with the aim of being able to interact with the native speakers of those languages” (Lohuiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta 2011, 254). Since English is increasingly used as a means to communicate globally with fellow non-native speakers, in order to provide a characterization of ‘successful global communication’ Lohuiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) devised a conceptual framework, GCC (Global Communicative Competence), which is based on different layers of competence: multicultural competence, BELF competence, and business knowhow.

Moreover, with the widespread use of digital technology many new applications are readily available in our interconnected world which require learners to develop specific skills and competencies that are often referred to as global competencies or 21st century skills (Griffin and Care 2015). These global competencies include digital literacy as well as communication and collaboration strategies in using English, the Lingua Franca of the World Wide Web.

This is why Brautlacht et al. (2017) slightly modified Louhiala-Saminen and Kankaaranta’s

model of global communicative competence (2011), to make it suitable for today's digital, global communication scenarios. The adapted model includes an additional layer of digital competence in an ELF online environment. As seen in Figure 1 below, learners (shaded black) need four competence layers to be a successful global communicator. In the first place they need general knowledge in the business field; in addition, competence in ELF is required, but also specifically using ELF in a digital environment (DELFL). Digital literacy and the knowledge of new digital collaboration methods (e.g. mass communication; collaborative problem-solving) extend beyond traditional communication practices. The competence in multicultural/intercultural skills, shown in the last layer, is used to decode messages from other cultural backgrounds (Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta 2011, 258).



**Fig. 1:** Four layers of Global Communication Competencies (GCC). Adapted from Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta 2011, 258

### 3. The study

Remote learning, which is “a continuation of the more traditional concept of distance learning [...] denotes a situation where students do not attend the institution in situ at all and have no access to face-to-face, classroom-based teaching. They engage with their studies fully and completely at a distance, remotely” (Radić et al. 2021,7).

The concept of ERT (Emergency Remote Teaching) was at first described as a temporary response to the Covid-19 pandemic and was clearly distinguished (Hodges et al. 2020) from the kind of planned online activities which have long been in use as an alternative to or in support

of more traditional methods (Whittle et al. 2020). Despite this initial connotation of ‘tentativeness,’ ERT proved to be generally “flexible, free, and welcoming, non-prejudiced, non-restricted and unfettered” (Blessinger and Bliss 2016, 15), exactly like other forms of planned online teaching, and it made it possible for individuals to be involved in scenarios based on real-life tasks (Bond 2021)

The activities described here refer to the first semester of academic year 2020/2021, when a 60-contact-hour master’s degree course focusing on intercultural communication was entirely taught online, because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The class consisted of about 80 students<sup>1</sup> with a C1-like level of competence.<sup>2</sup>

The overall aim of the course was to help the students realize that rather than calling up elements of a foreign language and “pressing them into service as correctly as possible” (Seidlhofer 2009, 242), they should learn to exploit the full potential of the language, adapting to variability and different English lects.<sup>3</sup> After attending the course students were expected to be able to interact both remotely and face-to-face in international contexts, and by adapting their language production to their interlocutors, to deal with the cultural differences that may inevitably emerge in multicultural contexts, displaying at the same time awareness of the various genres called upon in their field of expertise.

### **3.1 Methodology**

In order to prompt participants to engage in critical examination of their assumptions and guide them to identify and acquire the necessary skills to perform in our globalized and interconnected world, it was decided to adopt the transformative approach originally devised by adult education theorist John Mezirow (1991). Accordingly, the course was structured into three main steps:

1. Awareness raising.
  - i. Discovering usages of English.
2. Knowledge development.
  - i. Coping with communication across linguistic barriers.

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of the students were Italian. Only a few of them came from other countries.

<sup>2</sup> The entry requirement for admission to the course is a Common European Framework of Reference C1-like level of competence in the English language.

<sup>3</sup> Mauranen explains that she uses the terms lects or similects for lack of a better word, to refer to the varieties which carry along some characteristics of their native language and take shape when different speakers’ communities use English as a lingua franca to talk to people outside their own language community (2015, 38).

3. Skills deployment.
  - i. Developing communicative skills for border-crossing communication.

It is widely acknowledged that in order for students to develop a more comprehensive view of the English language it may be useful to adopt an approach oriented towards the integration of theory and practice, which emphasises the value of direct experience for effective learning (cf. Matsuda and Friedrich 2012). Therefore, as the students' formative journey unfolded, they had first to realise that Native Speaker English correctness is not the only requirement to achieve intelligibility in international contexts (awareness raising), then they had to be gradually prompted to develop their understanding of computer mediated communication across linguistic barriers (knowledge development) and finally they had to put to the test the competences acquired during the course, by tackling a task they were likely to encounter in their future professional lives (skills deployment).

The emphasis was very much on the goal-oriented nature of communicative competence and on the elements that, according to the specific situation and domain of use, guarantee effectiveness through adaptive communication performances, bearing in mind that in computer-mediated intercultural communication the relevance of the context is especially significant (Chen and Starosta 2000), given the absence of face-to-face interaction and the inability to rely on gestures and proxemics.

### ***3.2 Awareness raising***

In the first place, students were sensitised towards different usages of English through exposure to instances of authentic and situated discourse. The materials were posted on the course Moodle platform and then students were directed to breakout rooms, where they were asked to brainstorm their thoughts. Notes were then collected and discussed in groups first and then shared with the entire class. In this first stage four texts as instances of different genres employed in a variety of international settings were made available.

- (1) Guests should announce the abandonment of their rooms before 12 o'clock, emptying the room at the latest until 14 o'clock, for the use of the room before 5 at the arrival or after the 16 o'clock at the departure, will be billed as one night more. (Bryson 1990, 173)
- (2) The integrity and thus the vitality of Urbino is no chance, but a conservation due the factors constituted in all probability by the approximate framework of the unity of the country, the difficulty of communications, the very concentric pattern of hill systems

or the remoteness from highly developed areas, the force of the original design proposed in construction, with the means at the disposal of the new science of the Renaissance, as an ideal city even. (Bryson 1990, 175)

- (3) Mr. xxxxx, This is a very serious manner that has happened. Because your friend made a mistake in booking those two extra rooms for the evening of the 10th of June and you are just now contacting us, they were not cancelled and your friend has been charged as a no-show. We were completely booked on Friday night and so we were not able to sell you friends rooms because she did not contact us to cancel these rooms. I am sorry that she did not understand how to book a room correctly on our website, but she should have contacted us as soon as she saw there was a problem, not 3 or 4 days later. Would she like to keep her reservation for august? [...] I am sorry about this, but we will not be able to refund the money charged for the two mistake reservations, as we fill your friend did not do enough to mitigate the situation. [...] The problem with the bookings on June 10th is that even though they were for one room a piece, they were still for June 10th and they knew that and they didn't cancel the rooms. xxx Manager Ruby's Inn [author's personal data]
- (4) M Can I ask you a question?  
 EA Yes, of course.  
 M Do you know what time it is?  
 EA Yes, it's two o' clock.  
 M Might you have a little soup left in the pot?  
 EA What? I don't understand. (Lustig and Koestner 2006, 112-113)

In order to guide the students' analysis, the following questions were posted on the 'Collaborate' blackboard:

1. Can you make out what kind of information each text is meant to provide?
2. Which features, in your opinion, could aid/hinder comprehension?
3. Do you think text nr. 4 could be considered a successful instance of communication?  
 Yes/No? Why?
4. Do you think the texts involve native speakers (NSs) or non-native speakers (NNSs)?

From the students' remarks it emerged that:

- despite its non-standard quality, as highlighted by the presence of a few unusual forms (abandonment, at the latest until 14 o' clock, after the 16 o' clock) example (1) can be understood and considered functional to conveying its meaning;

- (2) contains a few misspellings (*od*, *siystems*). It is somewhat more difficult to understand it than example no. 1, because of its awkward structure;
- (3) contains a few misspellings (*manner* instead of *matter*; *your friends rooms*; but she sould have contacted; *august*, *fill* instead of *feel*; *they new* rather than *they knew*), some of which (see for instance (*manner* instead of *matter*; *fill* instead of *feel*; *they new* rather than *they knew*) could actually impede the correct understanding of the message;
- (4) is perfectly phrased as regards the lexico-grammatical features of the language. However, M does not succeed in making his colleague understand what his real intent is.

After listening to the students' opinions, the teacher explained that:

- (1) is a notice on a hotel door in Sarajevo;
- (2) is an excerpt from a brochure describing Urbino;
- (3) is an e-mail written by an American native speaker;
- (4) is a short conversation between a Malaysian and an American NS, who are both teaching at a community college in the United States.

By engaging in the above activities and tasks, the students were expected in the first place to acknowledge that different genres are inevitably conducive to different choices in terms of language and structure. Moreover, in international settings “those changes that do not impede intelligibility should be recognized as one of the natural consequences of the use of English as an international language” (McKay 2002, 127). In fact, since different people have different “softwares of the mind” (Hofstede 1985, 350), which make them phrase information in unpredictable ways, NS English correctness is not the only requirement, as even a grammatically correct message may not be intelligible.

### **3.3 Knowledge development**

Students were then shown some texts which were to become part of the website of the Agency for International Business Promotion of the Modena Chamber of Commerce. The analysis was meant to explore the way information was provided, with a view to ascertaining whether it would be suitable for an international audience.



## WHO WE ARE

We are an **empowering agency** that supports the enterprises of our region - Emilia-Romagna - in the **economical development and internationalization.**

We are committed to furthering the well-being and wealth of our district through the sale and promotion of our many top-quality products.

We work to help our entrepreneurs to expand their activities abroad and to attract new business in our territory.

**Fig.2:** Example no. 5 taken from the Modena Chamber of Commerce website-to-be

In addition to the presence of a wrong word choice (*economical* rather than *economic*) example (5) also displays a few more problems. In fact, students highlighted the presence of the word *region*, which is used to refer to a *regione*, an autonomous entity with powers defined in the Italian Constitution. This word is not used here with its most general meaning of: “an area, especially part of a country or the world having definable characteristics but not always fixed boundaries,”<sup>4</sup> but no further explanations are provided to inform the readers that the term refers to the first-level administrative division of the country.<sup>5</sup>

As to example (6), in the first place students reported on the presence of acronyms which, if not fully explained, might make comprehension difficult. In the example there were two types of acronyms, some which are internationally known like: CE marking;<sup>6</sup> ISO 9000;<sup>7</sup> CENELEC;<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/region>. Last visited 10/03/2023.

<sup>5</sup> In Italy there are 20 *regioni*, of which five are constitutionally given a broader amount of autonomy granted by special statutes.

<sup>6</sup> The CE mark, or formerly EC mark, is a mandatory conformity marking for certain products sold within the European Economic Area (EEA) since 1985.

<sup>7</sup> The ISO 9000 family of quality management systems standards is designed to help organizations ensure that they meet the needs of customers and other stakeholders, as well as statutory and regulatory requirements related to a product.

<sup>8</sup> European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization.

ETSI;<sup>9</sup> B2B<sup>10</sup>, and one acronym which only enjoys local currency, UNI.<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 3: Example no. 6 taken from the Modena Chamber of Commerce website-to-be

Unfortunately, since the Italian acronym is provided without any further explanation, it is not

<sup>9</sup> The European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) is an independent, not-for-profit, standardization organization in the telecommunications industry (equipment makers and network operators) in Europe, with worldwide projection.

<sup>10</sup> Business-to-business, commerce transactions between businesses, such as between a manufacturer and a wholesaler, or between a wholesaler and a retailer.

<sup>11</sup> UNI refers to *Ente Nazionale Italiano di Unificazione*, the Italian Organization for Standardization, which publishes standards for industrial, commercial and tertiary sectors, with the exception of electrical and electro-technical products. ISTAT is the National Institute for Statistics, a public research organisation which has been present in Italy since 1926, and is the main producer of official statistics in the service of citizens and policy-makers. It operates in complete independence and continuous interaction with the academic and scientific communities.

certain that foreign stakeholders will be able to understand what it refers to.

The same is true for the long list of typical products of the area around Modena, which is provided in Figure 4. On the one hand it may prove important to mention them, in order to underline the wide range of choices available. On the other hand, however, the lack of any kind of explanation or code-glosses runs the risk of turning them into a confusing and incomprehensible list.

In order to promote and protect the typical products of Modena's agro food system that are not yet covered by EU acknowledgements, the Chamber of Commerce has established a joint brand "*Tradizioni e sapori di Modena*" – Traditions and flavours of Modena ([www.traditionalfood.it](http://www.traditionalfood.it)) - which is granted to those manufacturers who undertake to observe the production regulations containing rules on the production area, organoleptic characteristics, farming, production or harvesting methods, storage, packaging and labelling. The initiative has been operative since 2003 and relates to a number of products including: *Patata di Montese, Tortellini di Modena, Crescentina (Tigella) di Modena, Nocino di Modena and Sassolino di Modena liqueurs, Amaretti di Modena, Mirtillo nero dell'Appennino modenese, Tartufo Valli Dolo e Dragone, Marrone di Zocca and Marrone del Frignano, Croccante artigianale del Frignano, Croccante friabile di Modena, Miele di castagno dell'Appennino modenese, Miele millefiori dell'Appennino modenese, Miele millefiori della pianura modenese and Salame di San Felice* (Modena Agro food industry).

Fig. 4: Example no. 7 taken from the Modena Chamber of Commerce website-to-be

The influence of the local culture is also to be seen in the following example (8) where the word *province* is mentioned. In Italy a *provincia* is an administrative division of intermediate level between a municipality (*comune*) and a *regione*. But the general meaning that can be retrieved from a dictionary reads as follows: "one of the principal administrative divisions of a country or empire."<sup>12</sup>

MODENA: AN EXCELLENT PLACE 

Modena is one of Italy's most highly developed provinces. The population's GDP pro capita is 31,999 Euros, one of the highest in the country, placing it well above the average for EU countries. The Modenese economy is characterised by a solid industry based on a district-type organisation and with diffuse relations with international markets.

-  8° exporting province of Italy
-  1 company every 10 inhabitants (67,876 totally)
-  Sales abroad represent 40% of the turnover of the entire manufacturing sector (approximately 9.3 billion Euros in 2010)
-  Emilia Romagna region system alone accounts for 7% of Italian imports and 12,5% of its exports.
-  Employment rate at 66,3% of the population between 15 and 64 years.

Fig. 5: Example no. 8 taken from the Modena Chamber of Commerce website-to-be

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/province>.

It is therefore possible to conclude that the terms *region* and *province* have been employed with the meaning that is typically attributed to them in the Italian language. In these cases the people who prepared the texts privileged a literal translation over equivalence of meaning. In doing this, they inadvertently fell into the trap of using a term charged with the cultural meaning typical of a specific culture, which may not prove intelligible to external stakeholders. Another typical strategy adopted is the piling up of information. Indeed, the provision of detailed descriptions serves the purpose of avoiding possible misunderstanding. However, excessive informational density may prove confusing, especially when it comes to computer-mediated communication. In fact, it should not be forgotten that the abundance of information available on the Net could provoke disorientation or anxiety. As a consequence, particular care should be devoted to the consistent and neat organization of websites to make users ‘feel at home’ so that they “surely will pay with their attention and maybe even with their loyalty” (Loranger and Nielsen 2006, xxii).

### **3.4 Knowledge development**

After engaging in the tasks described in the previous sections, the students were expected to have become aware of the need to “adapt to variability, [and] live with a more varied selection of English lexis than has been customary for second-language users” (Mauranen 2012, 143). Therefore, they were ready to put their knowledge into practice.

The students were subsequently shown a short text taken from an Italian website:<sup>13</sup>

- (9) Welcome to Lombardia. The official Region site. A Region to act.  
In the files here attached you can find figures of our Region; economic and territorial data, history, political guidelines divided in themes, Presidentship’s activities, useful addresses, values and the mission of Regione Lombardia.

Once again, the students were asked to comment on the communicative effectiveness of the text. The analysis revealed:

- a deviant form (divided in) which does not, nonetheless, compromise the correct understanding of the information conveyed;

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<sup>13</sup> The text was actually included in an old version of the website of Regione Lombardia. Later on, however, the website underwent a restyling process which resulted in the disappearance of the example quoted here.



- phrases which are remindful of the typical structural patterns of the Italian language (e.g. “A Region to act,” which could derive from the Italian: Una regione per agire) and may not be totally comprehensible for international audiences;
- terms translated from the Italian language into English, without any explanation provided (*region*, *Presidentship*);
- expressions typically associated with letter or email writing rather than with documents posted on the web (“in the files here attached”);
- the lengthy articulation of the text, whose high informative density does not contribute to its clarity;
- the textual structure, featuring commas and even a semicolon, which is quite unusual for computer-mediated-communication (CMC), and very much in line with the idea of a written paper report (see for instance “In the files here attached you can find figures of our Region”, as well as the long list of items: “economic and territorial data, history, political guidelines divided in themes, Presidentship’s activities, useful addresses, values and the mission of Regione Lombardia”).

Later, the students themselves were asked to develop their own versions of the original text and some of them created a new website, in which they tried to exploit the affordances of the web, such as active links on which to click to obtain additional information, dropdown menus, etc.

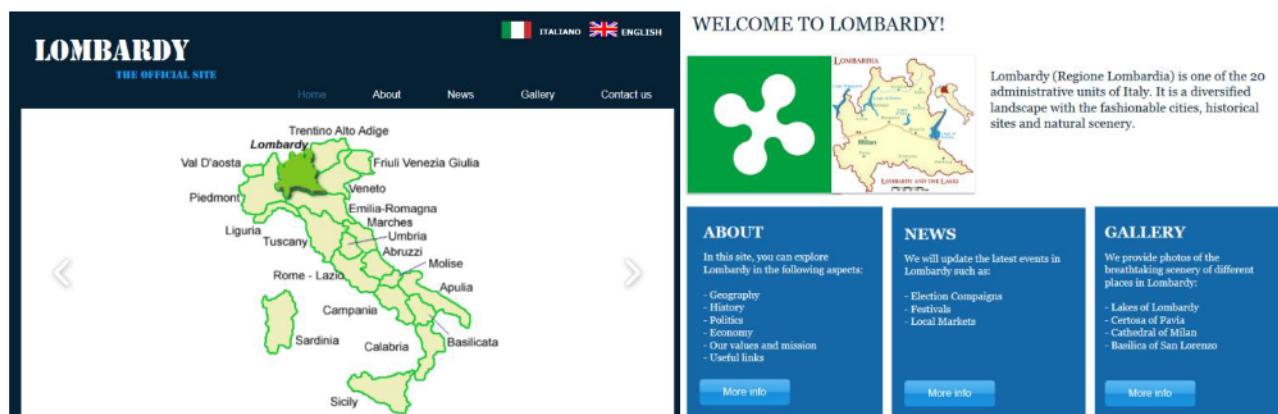


Fig. 6: Example of the opening page of the website devised by DC<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> One of the attendees of the course.



Fig. 7: Example of the opening page of the website devised by GA<sup>15</sup>



Fig. 8: Example of a page of the website devised by GA

<sup>15</sup> One of the attendees of the course.



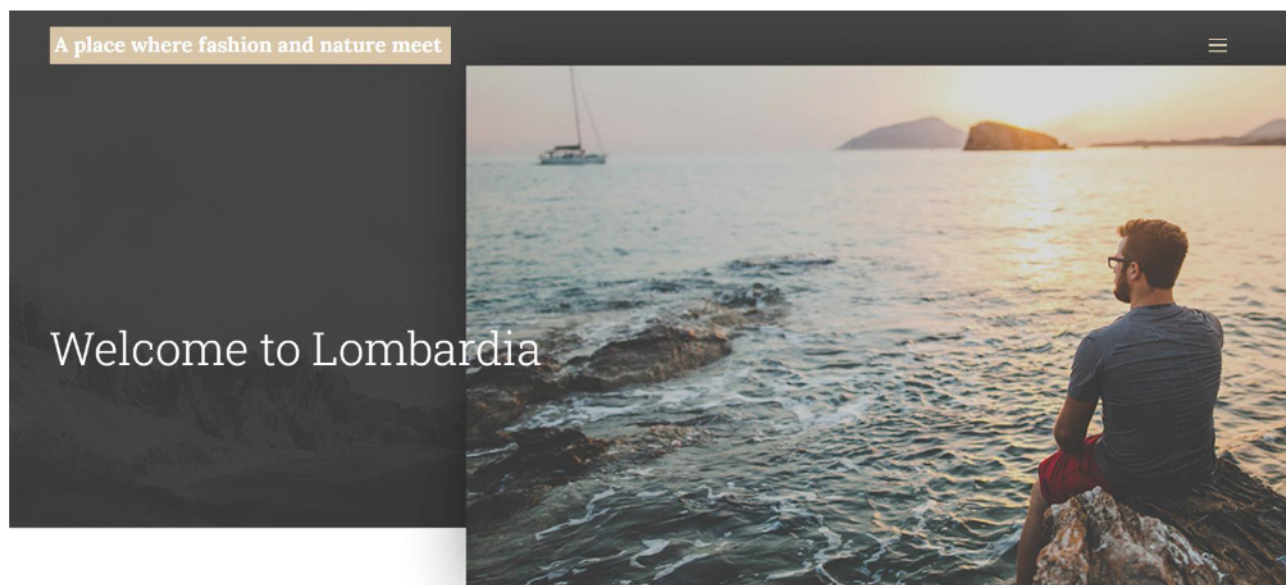


Fig. 9: Example of the opening page of the website devised by AH<sup>16</sup>

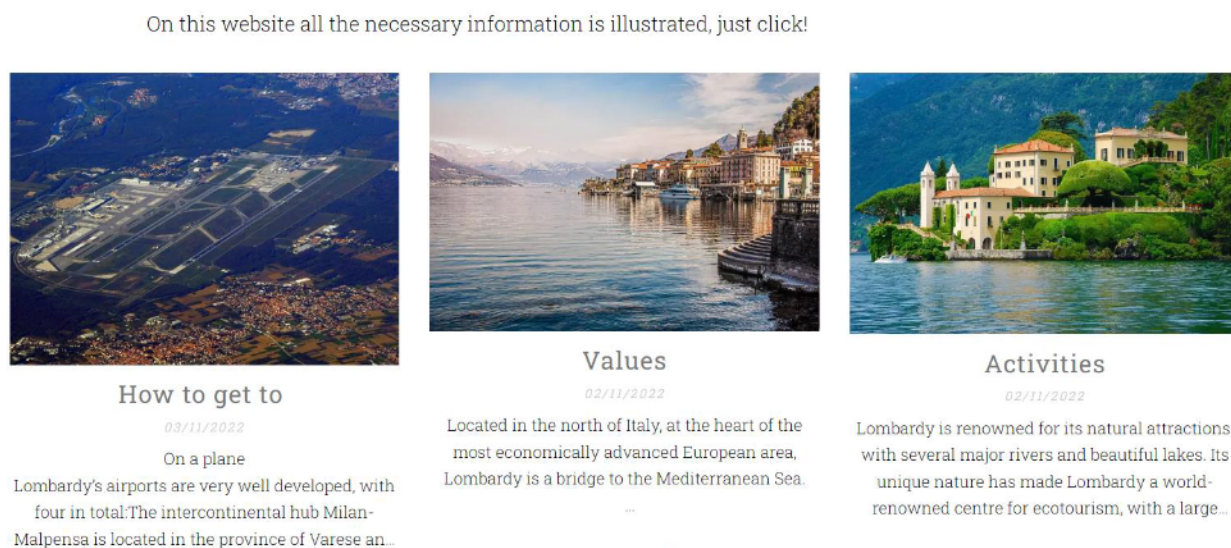


Fig. 10: Example of the opening page of the website devised by AH

After undertaking this final task, the students were also asked to collectively compile a list of the competences they had deployed and that might, in their opinion, be needed in order to be able to successfully interact in international contexts:

- rephrasing and explaining (never taking anything for granted, as there are differences amongst possible stakeholders, due to their culture, nationality, etc. which will

<sup>16</sup> One of the attendees of the course.

inevitably result in differences in background knowledge); (i.e. competence in ELF);

- adopting a wider cultural perspective, by using local terms or concepts, rather than looking for a generic translation in English, but providing an explanation of the meaning of the culturally-bound term (i.e. multicultural competence);
- structuring one's message in accordance with the potential audiences (i.e. competence in DELF).

#### 4. Conclusions

As a consequence of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, all of a sudden what used to be an opportunity was transformed into a pressing and inevitable necessity that led all the actors involved in the training and evaluation process to radically change their way of teaching and assessing. Within a matter of days, educators around the world scrambled to shift their practice from in-person to remote teaching. The need to maintain social distancing necessitated the transition to Emergency Remote teaching.

Even though globally the emergency posed by Covid-19 popularised Emergency Remote Teaching as a temporary intervention to complete a higher education academic year, ERT has undoubtedly proved to be a feasible alternative “amongst learning students unconventionally dispersed, either locally or abroad, when only limited contact to educational facilities and instructional materials for their learning needs is available” (Nokukhanya et al. 2021, 9). Indeed, remote teaching may tend to de-emphasise person-to-person contact, as the participants in the communicative acts mainly interact via a screen, and sometimes without full access to video facilities. It is therefore essential to pay particular attention to the way teachers and educators promote interactive activities at the most efficient and realisable rate, with a view to stimulating the attendees' proactiveness, and in particular their involvement in tasks which encourage them to develop a capability for using linguistic resources strategically and knowingly. The present study reported on the online activities implemented in academic year 2020/21 in a course addressed to master students. Over the years, the objective of the course has always been that of providing the attendees with the necessary competences that might help them to become global, competent communicators. However, as a consequence of the particular situation at hand, it turned out that the objective had to be changed into digital, global, competent communicators, able to master DELF.

Hofstede (2015, 12) states that:

In today's globalized world, successful, nonviolent communication is essential. Learning these takes three steps: 1. Awareness of the existence of cultural differences; 2. Knowledge



about the cultures involved including one's own; 3. Skills in communicating with people holding different values, through developing shared practice.

Accordingly, the teaching goal of the online course described here was that of developing in the learners a special kind of awareness which allows them to accept as a natural consequence of the use of English in international contexts, those changes which do not impede intelligibility (awareness raising). A second teaching aim was that of ensuring intelligibility among English speakers, as correctness and mere compliance with NS norms may not be enough (knowledge development). Thirdly, a final goal was that of making learners try out the communicative skills needed to be intelligible when addressing international audiences (knowledge deployment). Indeed, only time will tell whether or not the students who attended the course will actually be able to successfully interact in international settings. However, in accordance with the old saying "forewarned is forearmed," it is to be hoped that the activities proposed may have at least contributed to sensitising them towards the possible problems and 'dangers' of international communication.

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