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English for Linguistics and multimodal peer-assessment at university postgraduate level

Is English for Linguistics (EL) a domain of interest for EAP? Is the metalanguage for linguistics (e.g. lexical precision, semantic and pragmatic appropriateness) sufficiently taught at university level? Which strategies are most appropriate when developing presentation skills with regard to language competence in the field of linguistics?

This paper sets out to address these questions, adopting the viewpoint that competence in EL is probably taken for granted at university level and less researched than it should be. Strategies to encourage the development of this particular metalanguage, with reference to specific lexical items and semantic areas, are investigated in peer-assessment procedures, which would seem to be particularly effective at postgraduate level when integrating syllabus content and language skills to negotiate and reflect critically on this aspect of EAP.

Despite general agreement over the usefulness and impact of peer-assisted educational strategies (Topping 1988; Falchikov 2001), there is a striking lack of experimentation on peer assessment, especially when it comes to formal recognition and inclusion in university syllabuses within EAP practice. The rationale of this paper builds on a pilot project carried out at the University of Messina (Italy) in 2010, in a course of English Linguistics for postgraduate students in Foreign Languages and Literatures in which systemic-functional and cross-cultural socio-semiotic approaches to multimodal studies (Baldry & Thibault 2006; Kress & van Leeuwen 2006) were the major focus of analysis. Part of the course consisted in the development of individual projects, assessed both by the teacher and their peers with the ultimate goal of developing reflective, linguistic, metalinguistic and presentation skills.

Related issues are discussed, such as students' development of assessment grids, the integration of contents and metalanguage, and the consistency between peer and teacher evaluations. This approach helps expand students' language autonomy in articulating evaluative decisions and priorities regarding their own and their peers' learning outcomes. The mastery of a specialized language is targeted both as regards discussing syllabus contents and as regards expanding expertise in the field of linguistics.