

Developing Lexical Awareness with ICT

An Experience in Fostering Learner Autonomy at University

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Abstract Expanding the L2 learners' mental lexicon is a core issue in much recent language teaching theory and practice, as well as developing the learners' ability to learn autonomously by applying vocabulary learning strategies. The introduction of ICT in language teaching opens up the opportunity of implementing efficacious learning paradigms such as constructionism, task-based learning and experiential learning to achieve these goals. This study illustrates how university students of English as a foreign language may be guided towards increasing lexical awareness by means of deep processing, as advocated by cognitive linguistic approaches, in the collaborative creation of a specialist glossary in a Moodle environment. After introducing the main pedagogical principles informing the methodology, namely the Lexical Approach, cognitive linguistic motivation, task-based learning and experiential learning, the paper presents the design features of a blended learning English Language course leading up to the creation of the glossary as a final task, with reference to objectives, learning context, tools and materials, and graded activities.

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1 Pedagogical Principles

After several years of language study, university students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) generally master the subtleties of grammar and syntax. However, their receptive and productive vocabulary competences are often still inadequate, as well as their understanding of the features of the English word system. Lewis' Lexical Approach (1993, 1997 and 2000) offers a framework to help students expand their mental lexicon, based on the view that «language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary but often of multi-word prefabricated chunks» (1997, p. 3). Implementing the Lexical Approach entails activities such as noticing chunks, identifying their typology (e.g. strong collocations, idioms), researching and grouping words according to various criteria (e.g. topic, situation, notion, metaphor, etc.), and keeping lexical notebooks to «maximise the chance of input becoming intake» (p. 85). The Lexical Approach also recognizes that «an important element in all courses involves teaching students how to use the dictionary to investigate word grammar, collocational range, separability of phrasal verbs, and many other features» (1993, p. 132).

Moving on to advanced and very advanced ESL levels for students means to widen their vocabulary very significantly, especially in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and in the field or fields they are going to specialize in. This involves learning thousands of vocabulary items, most of which do not belong to the most frequent lexicon. As Nation declares,

The low frequency words, of which there are thousands, do not deserve teaching time, but gradually need to be learned. The most effective way of dealing with them is for the learners to work on strategies for learning and coping with them [Nation 2005, p. 582].

The focus of the English Linguistics course is to lead students to learn vocabulary autonomously, encouraging them to develop a number of vocabulary learning strategies among which being able to use reference tools independently and efficiently. This last one is vital for students and this is the reason why it is at the core of the course, in terms of both theoretical knowledge and applied research.

The Lexical Approach is utterly in favour of the development of learner autonomy, in which the selection and use of materials and activities play an important role. Students should be encouraged to choose their own study materials; to do so, students need to know where to find them, and which selection criteria to adopt. The English Linguistics course offers instruction on the wealth of dictionaries, corpora and research tools for the English language, provides the links to those available online and suggests taxonomic norms to organize them into categories. Besides, students need to know how to use the materials autonomously by making the most of them (Bozzo 2013), and this is the purpose of the graded activities and tasks in the course. The governing pedagogical principles for the autonomy-fostering activities are:

1. learner involvement, learner reflection, and appropriate language use (Little 2007, p. 2);
2. the stimulation of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) like ‘analyze’, ‘evaluate’ and ‘create’, as they are defined in Bloom’s revised taxonomy (Anderson, Krathwohl 2001). Therefore the course includes activities and tasks where students are actively engaged in finding solutions to the questions and reflect on their elaboration and interaction processes, using English both as a language of communication and as a metalanguage.

Effective vocabulary learning is therefore favoured by deep processing, as advocated by cognitive linguistic approaches:

The deeper the level at which information is mentally processed (i.e. the more elaborate and effortful is the mental work that is done with the information), the more likely the information is to be committed to longterm memory [Boers, Lindstromberg 2008, p. 12].

Cognitive linguistic motivation is defined by Boers and Lindstromberg as the phenomenon whereby «linguistic form betrays an analogy to extralinguistic phenomenon». In their opinion, cognitive linguistic motivation may help learners on the assumption that «linguistic phenomena necessarily reflect general cognitive processes (such as figurative thought)» (2008, p. 17). Boers and Lindstromberg consider as types of cognitive linguistic motivation meaning-meaning connections, form-meaning / meaning-form connections, and form-form connections (p. 19), all of which may be accounted for in the writing of linguistic information in a glossary. In addition to that, Boers & Lindstromberg amply argue for etymological motivation on the grounds that it has «good pedagogical potential» (p. 27).

Therefore, the three main tasks of the course's workshop have been designed in a way that they require deep processing of linguistic information at semantic and structural level. The final glossary-writing task also focuses on cognitive linguistic motivation, asking students to find multiple associations for each entry word.

Task-based learning is a specific language learning approach. Willis defines tasks as «activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome» (1996, p. 23). Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) theorize that task-induced involvement enhances vocabulary learning. The authors' motivational-cognitive construct of involvement consists of three basic components: need, search, and evaluation, whose combination with their degree of prominence constitutes involvement load. The Involvement Load Hypothesis proposes that «teacher/researcher designed tasks with a higher involvement load will be more effective for vocabulary retention than tasks with a lower involvement load» (p. 17). The task-based approach in the course workshop consists of assigning students work to do autonomously, individually or in groups, with the help of the guidelines provided in the materials and, optionally, with the assistance of tutor and lecturer. All tasks involve need, search and evaluation to a high degree of prominence. In order to obtain the maximum involvement and participation of the students, the course design and the teacher's approach have to be learner-centred, and activities alternate individual and group work (Chan 2000). Group work generates a learning environment which promotes interaction, negotiation of meaning, and cooperative learning; within this type of environment, students take on responsibilities as autonomous learners, expressly the choice of resources, the planning, monitoring

and assessment ('self-' and 'peer-evaluation') of the processes involved in the performance of the activities, in addition to benefiting from group dynamics on motivation and creativity.

A pedagogical approach which underlines the role of reflection in learners' active and responsible contribution to the learning process - previously endorsed as a basic principle in our course - is experiential learning (Kolb 1984; Kohonen 2007). Experiential learning is oriented towards integrating theory and practice in a holistic vision of the learner and emphasizes the value of direct experience for effective learning (Kohonen 2007). While academic teaching traditionally privileges passive observation and abstraction to the detriment of action and concrete experience (Kohonen 2007), in Kolb's theoretical model of experiential learning 'prehension' is composed of dialectically opposed abstraction and concrete experience, where deep and effective learning is the result of the resolution of the conflict between them (1984, p. 2, as quoted in Kohonen 2007).

Within this theoretical frame, one of the most promising applications of ICT in language teaching is data-driven learning (DDL), where learners explore language with a bottom-up approach by using or even creating corpora and which «can empower learners to find out things for themselves» (Römer 2008). The guided practice and the freer tasks in the course workshop are based on the students' active experimentation with reference and research tools, and are preceded and followed by reflective activities on the students' cognitive processes.

2 Course Design

As previously stated, one of the main aims of the course is to make students independent language learners (and future teachers and researchers) by focusing on the development of their English lexicon. The concept is supported and expanded by Pavičić Takač, who maintains that

the advocates of a strategic approach to vocabulary teaching [...] find explicit strategy instruction crucial in vocabulary learning. It is necessary, they assert, to introduce occasionally decontextualised activities as an addition to extensive exposure to language input, because large amounts of vocabulary cannot be acquired in a short time through language skills only. This observation is especially true for advanced learners. Long-term retention of vocabulary presupposes appropriate strategic support [Takač 2008, p. 76].

Compiling a glossary fosters awareness of the several linguistic phenomena surrounding a word/phrase, makes it easier to understand how to use the English lexicon communicatively and pragmatically, familiarizes

students with the types of information available (or not available) in a dictionary, motivates and encourages them to use dictionaries to extract information other than a word's meaning, helps prevent making mistakes in these areas, prepares them to critically select and use resource tools like dictionaries and corpora. The objective of the glossary-writing task is to «train students to notice lexical chunks during their exposure to language» (Lackman 2011, p. 8) but also to analyse the features of lexical items and their functions, to select and group them, to organize them in a document. To say it in Lackman's words:

The idea is not so much that students remember the structure of various lexical chunks, for there are far too many to remember, but that they become aware of the structural nature of the language beyond the traditional grammar structures [Lackman 2011, p. 5].

The study of vocabulary learning strategies has been tackled by a large number of researchers, among which Nation (2001, as quoted in Pavičič Takač, 2008, p. 52), who writes that vocabulary learning strategies are defined by the following important features:

1. they involve choice;
2. they are complex, i.e. consisting of several steps;
3. they require knowledge and benefit from training;
4. they increase the efficiency of vocabulary learning and use.

The glossary-construction activity here illustrated encourages the development of a high number of the vocabulary learning strategies, among which those listed in Schmitt's taxonomy (1997), which is considered to be the most complete (see Pavičič Takač, 2008, pp. 68-71):

1. **determination strategies:** discovering a new word's meaning without recourse to another person's expertise;
2. **social strategies:** interaction with other people to improve language learning;
3. **memory strategies:** relating new words to previously learned knowledge using some form of imagery or grouping;
4. **cognitive strategies:** manipulation or transformation of information about words to be learned;
5. **metacognitive strategies:** conscious overview of the learning process and making decisions about planning, monitoring, or evaluating the best way to study.

The case study here described deals with a blended course in English Linguistics for the MA Degrees in Foreign Languages, Tourism and Interna-

tional Communication at the University of Torino, Italy.¹ It is the first of its kind in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures and Modern Cultures. The three-month course is composed of face-to-face lectures and activities in a computer laboratory led by Coauthor, and an experimental online workshop² (Bozzo 2012a, 2012b, 2013) tutored by the author of this paper and managed on the Moodle (<http://Moodle.org/about/>) platform of the University. This course, whose title is «The language of business and tourism through dictionaries and corpora», gives an overview of English dictionaries and the inherent theoretical and pedagogical problems, deals with linguistic research in the areas of lexis and grammar, focusing especially on terminology, collocations, phraseology and syntactic patterns specific to business, tourism and international communication.

The online workshop provides students with the opportunity to explore the topics of the course through a constructionist approach, and to use and manipulate linguistic research tools with the aim of engaging in linguistic analysis and research. A high number of links to resources is provided on the platform itself. The added advantage of consulting online resources like dictionaries and corpora is free and rapid access to lexical information (Loucky 2006, p. 368), with the result that more time is devoted to deep processing and less to time-consuming research. Consequently, the students' work is expected to be more profitable, satisfactory and enjoyable. Students upload the results of their work on the online database available on the workshop Moodle platform. The main advantages of compiling a glossary online are the following:

1. the availability of the data online anytime and anywhere, provided an Internet connection is available;
2. the opportunity to work at the database collectively and simultaneously, providing opportunities for practice and refinement of the strategies of reassessment, review and recycling;
3. the chance to understand the basics of a database and familiarize with the advantages of recording and searching data by complex queries;
4. «to develop consistent computer-assisted habits of systematically organizing the processing of new language» (Loucky 2006, p. 368).

For a fuller description of the learning context, watch the video *Online Workshop on English Linguistics* (<http://youtu.be/1JaeJfIG1s>).

The learning management system Moodle is the environment where all these activities take place. The Moodle area is organized into themed

1 <http://www.dipartimentolingue.unito.it/Facolta/OS-ShowProgram.asp?FromPage=Contents/os-guida-programmi2014.asp&ProgSrchFld=pulcini&Editing=852>.

2 <http://elearning.unito.it/lingue/>.

modules containing documents, forums, activities, links, questionnaires, and glossaries. The acquisition of competencies is developed through the performance of constructionist activities, namely participation in forum discussions on the topics of the course, execution of tasks and writing reports illustrating the task procedures and results. The achievement of the final objectives is pursued through graded activities which deal with the course topics from an experiential perspective and allow students to verify their learning of contents and investigation techniques. The controlled practice activities are available online, like all the workshop materials, and provide students with the opportunity to test their learning and check it against others' solutions and the answer key. Tasks are formulated in a way to allow students a high degree of freedom in making their own decisions concerning research methodology and objectives. The online asynchronous forums enable students to share their findings and views, to read the others' opinions and comments and consequently widen their perspectives, support each other, and build new knowledge. The online personal blog allows students to record their findings and difficulties as well as their impressions and reactions, to compare them with the other students', and eventually to revise them alongside their subsequent progress. The workshop glossary introduces students to the collective compilation of a complex document and the multi-faceted issues of such a task. Equally, the wiki areas train students to create documents which are immediately available to an audience. The final ESP glossary is in database format, so that it can be searchable according to a multiplicity of criteria, and its data can be easily exported/imported to/from Excel documents and other common formats. Besides, publishing reports as text documents on the platform favours the circulation of procedural and stylistic ideas. Direct feedback on the course is elicited in an end-of-course questionnaire dealing with all the features of the workshop and a post-course questionnaire focusing on the long-term effects of the methodology (Bozzo 2013).

3 Activities

The preparation leading up to the creation of the final product, the ESP glossary, is complex and involves a large number of competencies and skills, therefore needs to be accurate and carefully paced. Pavičić Takač (2008, p. 78) makes a number of recommendations about vocabulary strategic teaching, which may be adapted to a blended learning environment such as that of the online workshop as follows:

1. the use of the strategy is illustrated in step-by-step instructions and demonstrated in clear examples;

2. steps involved in the strategy are separately practised in controlled practice exercises available on the platform; extra support is provided by answer keys;
3. learners use the strategy in the activities available on the platform, and share the results of their work online supporting each other through the forum discussions;
4. learners reflect and report on their strategy use, including difficulties and success, in the forums, in the learning log and in the questionnaires;
5. lecturer and tutor systematically check the use of strategy through the platform tools (including individual and class statistics and reports) and provide feedback in the forums and, if necessary, via private e-mail;
6. if needed, learners consult teachers on their strategy use.

To sum up, in each module of the online workshop students are guided through a number of activities: set readings, controlled practice exercises, tasks, forum discussions. Additionally, throughout the course students are required to keep a lexical notebook in form of a blog.

The main task of each module has been designed bearing in mind «the six major criteria to consider in determining whether a CALL task is appropriate for a given language learning situation», noted by «Chapelle [...], who outlined the foundations for electronically enhanced teaching, testing, and research» (Loucky 2006, p. 366):

1. **Language learning potential:** the objectives of the tasks are to stimulate the acquisition of vocabulary learning strategies, to develop the students' ability to use vocabulary learning tools autonomously, and to consolidate data-driven learning techniques.
2. **Learner fit:** the level of the tasks is calibrated on the students' language and linguistics study curriculum; students take this English Language course as their last of their MA studies. Therefore many of the contents of the course constitute expansions of topics already tackled previously rather than being totally new to students, and the elaboration required in the tasks is performed on the basis of previously acquired knowledge.
3. **Meaning focus:** the study of the lexicon and the multi-layered facets of meaning are at the core of each task. Students are asked to explore the features of one or more lexical items of their choice, focusing on its/their collocational environment and contextual use.
4. **Authenticity:** the tasks reflect authentic real-life situations, where people are called to use and compare tools, to select information, and to create a glossary for their own or others' needs.
5. **Impact:** the online availability of the final products of each task makes them concrete objects which are shared with the course's learning

Table 1. The Online Workshop workplan

Module	Forum discussion	Controlled practice	Task
Welcome	Introduce yourself, briefly summarize your studies, and explain your expectations about this course. Feel free to respond to other students' postings.	Skills self-awareness questionnaire.	Write a list of the online resources (newspapers & magazines, broadcasting websites etc.) you use and find useful to improve your English, and briefly comment on their qualities and usefulness.
1. 'Dictionaries'	Watch the video of Erin McKean's talk at TED, take notes about the main points she tackles, then choose one of the points she makes and express your opinion.	Guided activities to explore a number of features in different dictionaries.	Choose three dictionaries of different types (e.g. monolingual, bilingual, specialist for the language of tourism / business / international communication); analyse, compare and contrast their entries for one chosen lexical item; refer to the dictionaries' macro- and micro-structure.
2. 'Corpora'	Web quest «The Linguist's Workbench». Which general-purpose tools would you include in a linguist's workbench? Which specialist tools for business / tourism / international communication?	Guided activities to use concordancers, create corpora, and find specific information from corpora.	Create a small corpus of your own, choose a lexical phrase (also called 'chunk') from the language of tourism / business / international communication and analyse its morphological, grammatical, syntactic, collocational, stylistic, semantic etc. features on the basis of evidence from your corpus.

Table 1. The Online Workshop workplan

3. «The language of business, tourism and international communication»	Which are, in your opinion, the ideal features of a specialist dictionary for business / tourism / international communication? How could it help non-native speakers of English overcome the most common difficulties? Provide examples.	Guided activities on the retrieval and identification of language features of ESP.	Choose a tourism / business / international communication ESP text of 1-4 pages (e.g. an article, a brochure, a contract, a book chapter, etc.), select 5 terms or phrases (including two compounds or phrases minimum) and compile the corresponding entries in the ESP glossary.
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community and shareable with the Internet community; this feature makes the students' work more meaningful and motivating.

6. **Practicality:** all the main tools for the performance and publication of the students' work are made available online, and the required quantity and quality of the output are commensurate to the time at their disposal. As a result, the tasks are challengingly demanding but within the student's capacity.

The tasks are performed online, and the task reports are to be uploaded in an area called «Dropbox». Each task is presented through detailed instructions and samples, and is accompanied by a task planning checklist and a self-assessment grid. Tasks are differentiated on the basis of the students' field of interest, i.e. English for Business, for Tourism and for International Communication.

As shown in Table 1, the workshop is organized into a welcome module and three main modules, each providing controlled practice exercises, pre- and post-task discussion forums, and a task.

Module One focuses on dictionaries, their typologies and classifications, organization, making and use, with special emphasis on learners' and specialist dictionaries. The resources used for this module are the most reliable and popular online dictionaries and dictionary repositories. The exercises deal with the following activities: retrieval of information other than word meaning (prepositional colligation, verb-noun collocation, British or American equivalents, idioms, polysemous phrasal verbs) in monolingual learner's dictionaries; advanced search of prefixes, suffixes and word

roots in general purpose monolingual dictionaries; choice of appropriate collocations of synonymous terms; information on idioms in etymological dictionaries; the retrieval of information in dictionaries of collocations and in thesauri.

Module Two focuses on corpora, the fundamental principles of corpus linguistics, the electronic resources for creating and searching corpora, the applications of corpus research and results with special reference to lexicography. The tools and resources for this module are the corpora, concordances, databases and repositories available online. The exercises involve doing a simple corpus search to differentiate partial synonyms (e.g. propose/suggest; refuse/decline/reject/turn down); comparing information on collocations in dictionaries and from online corpora; finding and classifying ESP collocations using online corpora; doing advanced search activities on online corpora by using wildcards; doing advanced searches of word families in online corpora finding key words from their concordance; creating a small corpus using freeware concordancers.

The background readings for Module Three are based a set of articles on lexicological research in ESP. The resources consist of a number of links to the webpages of specialist newspapers, magazines and journals. The exercises include: differentiating and using words belonging to the same semantic fields; identifying morphological information; chunk-spotting in an ESP text; assigning usage labels; comparing and selecting collocational, grammatical and semantic information from different sources including concordancers and online semantic databases; creating mindmaps of lexical sets; finding items of a word family including affixed words and creating a mindmap for it; recognising and using ESP idioms; doing compositional analysis and drawing scales of degrees for sets of verbs or adjectives used in ESP; identifying script (Schank, Abelson 1977) in ESP; comparing and selecting collocational, grammatical and semantic information from different sources including concordancers and online semantic databases; identifying potential difficulties for learners in learning a specific ESP lexical item.

The creation of the ESP glossary is the final task of the workshop, which constitutes the climax and convergence point of the course where all the contents, resources and research methods are called into action. The format of the glossary is that of a database on the workshop platform where all the students' entries are collected. The database (see Table 3) is organized into a high number of fields, to maximize the types of lexical information on each entry. Students are required to complete the fields with an asterisk since they represent the types of information they are expected to know and to be able to retrieve, and may choose to fill in the others if they consider the information relevant in some way. The database format allows for flexibility of layout (by modifying the glossary form) and multiple and complex searches; this is meant to approximate the mental lexicon, which, in Aitchison's (2012) words, «is characterised by fluidity and flexibility».

Table 2. Task instructions and planning guidelines

Task Instructions	Choose a tourism / business / international communication ESP text of 1-4 pages (e.g. an article, a brochure, a contract, a book chapter, etc.), select 5 terms or phrases (including two compounds or phrases minimum) and compile the corresponding entries in the ESP glossary. Before doing the task, answer the questions in the task planning guidelines, then follow the indications about the required information in the sample grid, where two real examples from a students' glossary have been added together with the tutor's comments. The information with an asterisk is mandatory. Before submitting your work, check it against the self-assessment rubric.
Task planning guidelines	<p>This task is complex and requires you to make a number of decisions before you do it. The following questions might help you focus on the stages and organization of your work, and help you reflect on its aims and learning efficacy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which text are you going to choose? Why? Do you think your choice will allow you to point out interesting ESP lexical items and language features? • What lexical items are you going to choose? Why? • Which materials and tools will you need? • Where are you going to find the materials and tools you need? • Whose help might you need? • Are there any points in the task instructions or in the procedure which are not clear? How are you going to clarify them? • How much time do you foresee the work will take you? • Do you think this task is meaningful? Useful?

and offers multiple access to information. Table 2 contains the task instructions and the task planning guidelines as they are presented to the students, Table 3 contains the ESP glossary sample grid with detailed compilation instructions and guidelines. For editorial needs, Table 3 has been abridged – the omitted fields include: componential analysis, picture(s), links, Italian translation equivalents, translation equivalents in other languages, source context, examples, colligations, collocations, idioms, proverbs, hypernyms, hyponyms, synonyms, antonyms, derivatives, compounds, word family, schema(ta), script(s), spidergram or mindmap, info box, common errors, cultural notes and references.

4 Conclusions

Actively exploring the workings of the lexicon enhances the students' awareness of the chunkiness of language, favours the transformation of

Table 3. The ESP glossary model grid

Label	Required Information	Example 1	Example 2	Tutor's comments on Examples 1 & 2
Headword*	Specialist word or phrase as headword.	Eurozone.	Niche market.	
Spelling variant(s)	Add any spelling variants such as AE or hyphenated/non-hyphenated compounds, etc.			
Syllabification*	Division of the word/phrase into syllables.	Eu-ro-zo-ne.	Ni-che mar-ket.	
Pronunciation*	Transcribe the pronunciation of the word/phrase (and its variables, if any) including stress(es). You may use the Phonetic Typewriter Tool (see Tools in the Module Three section).	BrE: 'jʊərəʊzəʊn. AmE: 'jʊroʊzəʊn.	BrE: ni:fmɑ:kɪt - nɪtʃmɑ:kɪt. NAme: ni:fmɑ:kɪt - nɪtʃmɑ:kɪt.	Not all the IPA characters are readable.
Morphology*	Add any useful morphological information (e.g. irregular plural; missing plural form; missing singular form; double plural with different meaning; irregular verb paradigm; spelling peculiarities when inflected; etc.).	No inflections.	Regular plural: niche mar-kets.	

Table 3. The ESP glossary model grid

Word class*	POS - part of speech (verb, noun, adjective, etc.).	Noun.	Compound noun.	It might be interesting to investigate in the corpus whether these two expressions are used as attributive adjectives too.
Syntactic features*	Add any relevant syntactic information (e.g. countable, uncountable, countable & uncountable noun; intransitive, transitive, ditransitive verb; etc.). Learner's dictionaries & corpora provide good & detailed information of this kind.	Only singular.	Countable.	
Field*	Specify the specialist field the word/phrase belongs to.	Economics.	Economics.	'Economics' is a rather broad field – might there be more specific ones which are more appropriate and informative?
[...]	[...]	[...]	[...]	[...]

linguistic input into intake (Lackman 2011), helps understand the communicative and pragmatic functions of lexical units; selecting, arranging and presenting data in a glossary facilitates the understanding of dictionary information and may motivate and encourage dictionary use, thus preventing lexical errors due to dictionary underuse or misuse; reflecting on and sharing the learning experience makes it more significant, motivating and memorable. The preparation leading up to the complex task of creat-

ing the glossary as a final product is carefully paced through a number of intermediate activities which support the acquisition of the necessary knowledge, competencies and skills; these include background readings, compiling lexical notebooks and logs, controlled practice exercises on dictionaries and corpora use, discussion forums, group tasks, and reflection (Bozzo 2013). The Moodle (<http://Moodle.org/about/>) learning management system is the environment where all these activities take place, thus enormously facilitating the communication, social construction and sharing processes, in addition to allowing comprehensive data-gathering for further action research.

However, the focus on specific items of the lexicon might have a number of drawbacks, as aptly summarised by Flowerdew when discussing the pedagogical applications of linguistic corpora (2009). Flowerdew warns against the shortcomings and drawbacks of focusing on lexical information and using corpora in language learning, such as excessive emphasis on bottom-up processing of text, decontextualization of the study of language, inappropriateness of the inductive approach and of the corpus as a resource. These argumentations are doubtlessly valuable, and it is for this reason that the approach of the online workshop is applied within a wider context of language teaching, including a parallel face-to-face language course based on the communicative approach in its broader sense.

The realization of the online part of a blended course on a platform allows for comprehensive data-gathering for action research on the learning impact of the workshop. The further developments of the data collection are to investigate if and how the materials and tools effectively promote vocabulary learning and learner autonomy, indirectly by analysing both the students' reactions and opinions and the lecturer's and tutor's insights, and directly by examining and comparing the students' performance before, during and after the course. The expected outcome is students' heightened lexical awareness and ability to expand their vocabulary autonomously, satisfaction with the workshop and desire to experience more construction-based courses both as students and as teachers-to-be.

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