**SEM48. Human connections in growing online communities: Redefining English teaching and learning in digital contexts**

**11 September h. 11:00-13:00, S7 Moro**

**Convenors**
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The use of new technologies, generative AI and digital approaches to online English teaching and learning is constantly evolving, with variable degrees of success and satisfaction for lecturers and students (e.g., Padley, 2020 and Luppi, 2022). Despite enduring stigma and skepticism (Formiconi, 2016), English has been taught and learned through online platforms for several years at Italy's digital universities, offering exclusively distance learning programmes in a variety of subjects to increasing numbers of students, along with recent recruitment of English teaching staff at unprecedented rates (Minerva et al., 2024).

The seminar intends to encourage an open and bias-free debate on the issues, opportunities and challenges involved in teaching and learning English online at Italy's universities, be they traditional or digital. We invite theoretical, methodological, pedagogical and applied contributions, case studies and position papers with a strong research component that examine fully digital, hybrid and blended courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level, including Masters' and doctoral programmes, and those delivered online in English (Campagna and Pulcini, 2014).

Topics of particular interest to be addressed in relation to teaching and learning English online in Italian academia include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Innovative curriculum and syllabus design
- Revisiting methodologies such as peer education, cooperative learning, group work, task-oriented learning, project- and portfolio-based activities, etc.
- Technologies, tools, apps, platforms, virtual environments, immersive and augmented reality
- Gamification approaches
- (Generative) AI, Large (and Small) Language Models, Chatbots
- Standard varieties, world Englishes and ELF/EFL/L2 varieties in relation to speaking (including pronunciation) and writing
- Digital genres, online language use and multimodality
- The role of (audiovisual and multimedia) translation from and/or into English
- Promoting inter- and cross-cultural competence
- Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL)
- Protocols and applications of ELFentextualization
- Optimizing the benefits of synchronous and asynchronous online lectures
- Accessibility and inclusion strategies for students with disabilities and special educational and learning needs
- Developing learners' autonomy, self-assessment skills and reflexivity
- Informal learning outside the (digital) classroom
- Rethinking University Language Centres for digital universities
- Formative and summative evaluation, assessment, testing and feedback
- Monitoring the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning

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**SEM48. Papers**

**11 September h. 11:00-13:00, S7 Moro**

- *The (un)reliability of AI in EFL: Examining ChatGPT's role in academic writing* (Vanessa Leonardi, Sapienza Università di Roma)
- *Integrating AI into EMP instruction: Enhancing academic writing and presentation skills* (Roxanne H. Padley, Pegaso Digital University)
- *Extended reality in ESP learning: Insights from the ESP-XR project* (Valeria Giofré, Università degli Studi di Bergamo)
- *Exploring the role of AI in ELFentextualisation to improve the linguistic accessibility of academic and specialised texts* (Liviana Galiano, Università San Raffaele Roma)
- *Promoting students' AI literacy alongside teaching English at University in Italy: A proposal for micro-credentials* (Federico Gaspari, Università Telematica San Raffaele Roma)

**SEM48. Abstracts**

**Exploring the role of AI in ELFentextualisation to improve the linguistic accessibility of academic and specialised texts**

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In an increasingly internationalised educational environment, in which universities – particularly in Italy – seek to build or expand their connections with higher education institutions abroad, English is the main language of international academic communication. However, university students often come against language barriers in their attempts to approach texts and audiovisual materials in English regarding the subjects of their studies. After all, the expected minimum level of English for university students in Italy is typically lower-intermediate (B1 of the CEFR) for undergraduate programmes and upper-intermediate (B2) for postgraduate studies.

The present work investigates the possible advantages of ELFentextualising (Iaia & Capone 2020; Iaia 2024) academic and specialised texts written in English to be used as study material within Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) projects. The ELFentextualisation model calls for a detailed analysis of a text (i.e., Antext) in order to produce a retextualisation in English (i.e., Retext) that preserves the core information i.e., gist (Seidlhofer 1995), and communicative purposes (Nord 1997) while making the structure and, where applicable, the lexis (Daelemans et al. 2004) more accessible to lower-proficiency students. As the application of the ELFentextualisation model to extensive texts, such as whole textbooks or scientific papers, is expected to be time-consuming, it is verified whether current AI tools can speed up the process while safeguarding human-like quality. The following research questions are investigated:

1) Does ELFentextualisation improve the linguistic accessibility of academic and specialised texts in English?
2) Can AI tools be successfully integrated into the ELFentextualisation process?

The study will compare human-created and AI-generated ELFentextualisations of academic and specialised English texts on human nutrition in order to highlight their differences and similarities, and gauge the overall success of applying AI tools to the task. Focusing on linguistically-relevant retextualised materials, form and content analyses will be employed to foreground the decision-making processes underlying changes in terminology and syntactic structures while allowing for the preservation of illocutionary forces. Preliminary results provide insights into recurrent issues related to the linguistic accessibility of academic and specialised texts as well as the strategies used to solve them, being them implemented by humans or AI software.

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**Promoting students' AI literacy alongside teaching English at University in Italy: A proposal for micro-credentials**
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Teaching English remotely at digital universities in Italy, including to non-specialist undergraduate and postgraduate students in a range of disciplines and programmes, presents a number of challenges and great opportunities, some of which are also common to traditional universities, while others are unique. Digital universities are very focused on innovation and flexibility in teaching and learning, which encourages the design of updated curricula and syllabi that incorporate strong technological components and student-centred resources for self-paced and personalized independent learning via dedicated academic platforms. As language-centric technologies with huge potential particularly for English, (Generative) Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Large Language Models (LLMs) are quickly becoming go-to resources for students that could in principle substantially benefit teaching and learning, particularly in higher education (Pym and Hao, 2025). However, in-depth pedagogical reflection and experimentation are still required to understand how AI-based tools can be best integrated into language education within academic programmes (Gašević et al., 2023).

The paper presents a preliminary proposal for the introduction of micro-credentials (European Commission, 2021) aimed at developing the students' AI literacy (Kit Ng et al., 2021; Cuomo et al., 2022; Lintner, 2024) that is currently being trialled at a digital university in Italy, emphasizing their effectiveness for lifelong learning and their value for the employability of graduates (Kato et al., 2023). The paper argues in favour of developing micro-credentials that supplement and support credit-bearing English language courses and that are aimed at fostering the students' overall AI literacy. The key motivations, main aims, overall design and core components of these micro-credentials are discussed, focusing on the flexibility of their implementation (Ahsan et al., 2023). In addition, their proposed contents are connected to the typical competences and skillsets of university students related to mainstream areas of EFL/ESL teaching and learning in both digital and traditional contexts.

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**Extended reality in ESP learning: Insights from the ESP-XR project**
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As technological innovations increasingly permeate both society and education, English Language Teaching (ELT) programs and curricula are being reshaped by these developments. Among these innovations, Extended Reality (XR) has emerged as a promising tool to enhance English teaching and learning practices. (Anesa, 2025; Fan et al., 2020; Hockly, 2019; Tegoan et al., 2021).

This study explores the application of XR in a relatively underexplored domain: English for Specific Purpose (ESP). Conducted within the framework of the University of Bergamo project *Enhancing competence in English for Specific Purposes via augmented reality: a prototype platform for educational and professional contexts*, the research led

to the development of an innovative application, called ESP-XR, which integrates XR technology, particularly Augmented Reality (AR), into ESP instruction. When integrated with AR—recognized as a versatile tool for both entertainment and mobile learning (Specht et al., 2011)—innovative ESP instruction reveals considerable potential and a wide range of possible applications. Drawing on principles from ESP course and material design and corpus-based language learning, three modules have been designed - i.e., medical, business, and legal English. Each module opens with an immersive scenario (i.e., a doctor's office, a business meeting room or a lawyer's office), triggered by a marker, overlaying digital elements onto the physical environment. In these environments, learners interact with 3D objects and engage in interactive dialogues that reflect naturally occurring language, thereby simulating real-life communication scenarios.
ESP-XR aims to support the development of domain-specific linguistic and communicative skills, while at the same time enhancing learner engagement through gamification and embodiment. This study presents a mixed-methods analysis of university students' experiences with ESP-XR at the B2 proficiency level, with a particular focus on their perceptions of using AR in educational settings.

The outcomes of this research may offer insights into the potential of XR-enhanced tools to support ESP instruction and contribute to the ongoing development of XR-based language learning solutions, helping to advance new and effective approaches to digital instruction.

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**The (un)reliability of AI in EFL: Examining ChatGPT's role in academic writing**

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The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into university-level academic writing has prompted both enthusiasm and scepticism regarding its reliability and scholarly value (Tlili et al., 2023). This study examines ChatGPT's performance across a range of academic writing tasks within the context of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). ChatGPT was integrated into the teaching and learning process through a series of classroom-based activities aimed at supporting the development of academic writing skills. These included guided writing tasks, collaborative editing exercises and evaluations of AI-generated content. This research adopts a qualitative, practitioner-focused approach, drawing on classroom practice, learner engagement and analysis of texts either generated by or assisted with ChatGPT. It explores how AI tools can support both the teaching of academic writing and the development of learners' critical awareness of academic conventions, linguistic accuracy and disciplinary discourse. Findings indicate that while ChatGPT performs well in structural and editorial tasks, such as grammar correction and support with paper structure and organisation, it frequently produces imprecise phrasing, an overly informal tone and logical inconsistencies (Kim, 2023). Recurring issues include factual inaccuracies, unverifiable or fabricated sources, verbosity, repetition and a lack of original insight (Salvagno et al., 2023). In other words, ChatGPT can support formative feedback and early-stage ideation, but it cannot replace human creativity, critical thinking, subject-specific expertise or the careful application of academic conventions (Bhatia and Kulkarni, 2023). Authentic examples of ChatGPT-generated content, collected over three consecutive academic years (2021–2024) during EAP instruction at the Faculty of Economics, demonstrate the model's practical application, strengths and limitations across various academic scenarios.

This study is grounded in the assumption that students learning to write in academic English should engage directly with AI-generated content to critically assess its (un)reliability. First-hand experience with ChatGPT's output enables EFL

learners to develop analytical skills, refine academic judgement and deepen their understanding of disciplinary and linguistic conventions. This research underscores the importance of integrating AI tools with critical human oversight to uphold academic integrity, ensure factual accuracy and foster essential research competencies. While ChatGPT can serve as a valuable supplementary aid, its limitations necessitate clear usage guidelines and a cautious, informed approach within higher education (Kohnke et al., 2023). This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the (un)reliability of AI in academic contexts and aims to inform best practices for its responsible implementation in the teaching and learning of academic English within EFL settings.

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**Integrating AI into EMP instruction: Enhancing academic writing and presentation skills**


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Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly reshaping the landscape of language education, particularly in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Medical Purposes (EMP). Despite the widespread integration of AI in general English instruction, its targeted use in discipline-specific contexts such as medicine remains limited (Woo & Choi, 2021; Godwin-Jones, 2024). This study examines how AI-assisted tools can support qualified Italian-speaking doctors pursuing PhDs in developing academic writing and presentation skills essential for scholarly communication.

AI platforms, including chatbots and automated feedback systems, were used to deliver real-time, personalised feedback on learners' spoken and written outputs (Ji et al., 2024). These tools provided corrections, enhanced discourse structuring, and supported the development of logical signposting (Li et al., 2022). A corpus of AI-generated corrections and transcribed student presentations was analysed to identify recurring linguistic issues and assess improvements over time. These results were benchmarked against feedback from experienced educators to compare the effectiveness and accuracy of AI-generated suggestions (Alqudaihi et al., 2023).

The study also involved a questionnaire capturing learners' perceptions of AI's role in their language development. Most respondents valued the immediacy and consistency of AI feedback, highlighting its contribution to autonomy, motivation, and vocabulary acquisition (Li et al., 2022; Chapelle, 2018). Nevertheless, they acknowledged limitations in AI's ability to address nuanced, context-dependent aspects of medical discourse, confirming the ongoing need for expert human guidance (Godwin-Jones, 2024).

Findings suggest that AI can be a highly effective supplementary tool in EMP instruction, particularly in enhancing learners' ability to organise arguments and apply discipline-specific terminology. However, optimal outcomes are achieved when AI is integrated into a blended learning environment with meaningful human feedback. This research adds to the growing body of evidence supporting the use of AI in higher education and specialised language instruction.

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