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Developing L2 Academic Listening: The Role of Digital Technologies

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Abstract: This work explores the linguistic and communicative competences required by international students to navigate academic study in a language other than their L1. Special attention is given to the development of L2 listening skills and the role of digital technologies in supporting this process, with practical examples provided. Academic discourse is frequently delivered in monologic formats, requiring learners to sustain prolonged active listening. In this context, listening must be approached as a strategic and goal-oriented activity that facilitates the comprehension and processing of disciplinary content. Digital tools can play a key role in designing pedagogical materials and activities that scaffold learners in developing effective academic listening skills.

Keywords: international students, academic discourse, listening skills, higher education

1. Introduction

The internationalisation of higher education is one of the key requirements for the development of a European Education Area. Although there is an extensive body of literature discussing the nature and evolution of internationalisation processes implemented by different countries and their respective institutions—which highlights how "internationalisation is not developing in similar ways in higher education throughout Europe and the world as a whole" and that any rigorous reflection on the topic must therefore acknowledge that "internationalisation strategies are filtered and contextualised by the specific internal context of the university, by the type of university, and how they are embedded nationally" (Hans De Wit, 2010)—internationalisation nonetheless continues to be considered an indicator of educational quality. We can identify two main forms through which this

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requirement is typically met: *internationalisation at home* and *internationalisation abroad*. The former—on which we will not focus in this paper—usually involves the implementation of cross-curricular programmes within institutions, with English commonly used as the medium of instruction.

This paper instead focuses on *internationalisation abroad*, a category that includes all forms of academic mobility involving a period of study at a university in a country different from the student's country of origin. Mobility opportunities are available to several categories within higher education institutions: students, researchers, teaching staff, and administrative staff. For each of these groups, mobility programmes exist that support training or study at foreign institutions. As stated, this work will focus exclusively on the category of international students. For them, mobility can take two primary forms: mobility for credits or for degree purposes (Samu and Scaglione, 2024). In the first case, students complete only a portion of their studies at a host university abroad, while in the second case, they pursue and obtain their academic degree in a country different from the one where they previously studied.

This contribution focuses on international students studying at Italian universities. In particular, we aim to examine the profile of these learners and their linguistic learning needs. We will then reflect specifically on the importance of listening skills and explore how technology can serve as a valuable resource to support and enhance these skills.

2. International students and educational needs

While internally heterogeneous, some common traits can be identified. As Fragai, Fratter, and Jafrancesco (2017) note, international students are part of the broader young adult learner category, marked by their need for active involvement in their learning decisions. They are generally highly educated, digitally literate, and they require specific linguistic and communicative competencies to navigate their academic challenges successfully.

This means that any language training programme designed to support their integration into the Italian university system must go beyond the development of general social language competencies relevant to daily life outside the university. It must also pay close attention to the specific skills needed for study and academic life. From this perspective, it is essential to focus both on social competencies closely tied to the university context—such as the ability to navigate academic life, manage typical university social interactions, and deal with the complex situations that arise in this environment—and on the linguistic competencies required to engage with academic discourse. These include, for example, knowledge of the conventions for producing and managing scientific texts such as oral exams, written reports, and short academic papers (Fragai, Fratter and Jafrancesco, 2010). In this sense, the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and more specifically English for Academic Purposes (EAP), offers a valuable reference point, having developed a substantial

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body of research and pedagogical applications. This is due in large part to the earlier emergence and flourishing of studies focused on the specific educational needs of international students in English-speaking contexts. However, the same cannot be said for other national languages, including Italian, where there is an urgent need to expand research both in terms of describing the registers and genres used in academic settings and in the field of language teaching, particularly in the context of teaching specific academic skills. Such research is essential not only for international students but also, more broadly, for all students beginning their university studies. As Biber (2006) notes, "students who are beginning university studies face a bewildering range of obstacles and adjustments, and many of these difficulties involve learning to use language in new ways."

In this regard, it is worth mentioning Cummins' (1979) classic distinction between BICS and CALP. The former refers to *Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills*, that is, the skills sufficient for handling communicative situations typical of everyday life and informal interaction. These are generally acquired by any native speaker in the absence of particular impairments. The latter, by contrast, are acquired only by part of the population. CALP refers to *Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency*, namely the abilities needed to manage disciplinary content and the types of texts typical of academic settings. In Cummins' own words, they represent "the extent to which an individual has access to and command of the oral and written academic registers of schooling" (2008). Acquiring the former does not automatically lead to acquiring the latter, which instead requires specific training. While this applies to native speakers as well, it is easy to understand how much more challenging it can be for second-language learners to master CALP.

In the Italian context, this issue is particularly urgent due to the language level that international students typically possess at the time of university enrollment. In most cases, students arrive in Italy without the necessary competences to successfully carry out the core activities required by their academic programs, such as attending university lectures, writing papers, or taking oral exams (Diadori, Palermo, and Troncarelli, 2023). In terms of linguistic and communicative competence, most incoming students fall within the Basic (A) and Independent (B) levels of the Common European Framework of Reference, while only a small minority reach the Proficient (C) level (Fragai, Fratter and Jafrancesco, 2010). Since the ability to handle specialized texts, according to the CEFR, does not typically develop before reaching at least a B2 level, many incoming students struggle to meet the demands and tasks required by their study programs (Samu and Scaglione, 2024; Diadori, Palermo, and Troncarelli, 2023). As it is the responsibility of universities to welcome international students, and as language support must be considered a fundamental part of this process, offering language courses tailored as closely as possible to students' specific needs becomes an essential component of internationalization. Nevertheless, until recently, the teaching offer provided by Italian universities was mostly focused on the communicative needs related to students' daily life abroad, typically proposing only "standard language courses without any specialization" (Ballarin, 2018). It is only in

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recent years that training courses specifically aimed at teaching language for academic purposes have begun to emerge.

2.1 Academic language and socialization

The previous paragraph discussed the importance for European universities to respond to the requirement of internationalization and how language training for international students plays a priority role in this process. It emphasized how language teaching should focus on language for academic purposes and the various forms of academic communication, rather than simply teaching 'general' language. Therefore, it is crucial to first identify and interpret the actual needs of international students (Samu and Scaglione, 2024). By academic discourse, we generally mean any text produced within or for academic purposes, including both “the scientific and didactic production of faculty members, and thus scientific production in a broad sense, as well as the production of discourse by students during their educational journey” (Fiorentino, 2015). Within a training path specifically aimed at developing the competences necessary to handle the complexity of both oral and written texts, and both in productive and receptive forms, it is essential to have clear references to the variety of academic discourse realizations and the activities that students will need to undertake at university. Focusing on both these aspects is fundamental because they enable the process of socialization and acculturation within the academic context. Looking at the learning process in this way means not considering it solely as a cognitive process but, above all, as a social one. Similarly, the use of language is no longer seen only from a cognitive perspective but as productions and interpretations formulated within a specific discourse community (Swales, 1990). Likewise, language teaching and learning "are no longer conceptualized as simply a cognitive process, but also as a situated social practice during which novice members of communities develop new identities through 'legitimate peripheral participation'" (Flowerdew, 2015). Therefore, we can no longer view language learning merely as the acquisition of a linguistic code, but rather as the acquisition of a system of uses and norms that govern it. Precisely because we must consider it the acquisition of a new behavioral system, we can also assert that "academic discourse is therefore a site of internal and interpersonal struggle for many people, especially for newcomers or novices" (Patricia A. Duff, 2010).

Academic discourse is not, moreover, monolithic within itself, but each different discipline has developed over time, in addition to a series of reference terminologies for encoding specialized concepts, a set of language uses and textual conventions that adhere to norms shared within the specific academic community (Hyland and Bondi, 2006). Part of the student's educational journey involves learning these uses, but often this happens unconsciously through daily text practice. The ability to reflect on language and the factors that influence its use, on the other hand, is part of general metalinguistic competence, and creating activities to foster its development is crucial in any language training program. In this regard, Caffi (2017)

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speaks of metapragmatic awareness, referring to the speaker's ability to reflect on the uses that affect the use and appropriateness of their own and others' textual productions. In this sense, it is no longer just knowledge of the code that serves as an evaluation tool, but rather the principle of adequacy and appropriateness.

In addition to the specialized uses of language specific to different disciplines in various contexts and the norms that govern them, students must also learn a series of transversal skills useful in academic activities and "a set of cognitive and social abilities connected to the context and the academic disciplines in question" (Samu and Scaglione, 2024). In constructing a syllabus, understood as that part of the curricular activity related to the specification and sequencing of teaching content in terms of knowledge and/or skills (Ciliberti, 2022), both aspects are fundamental. Following Ciliberti (2022), we can think of needs analysis as a process that starts with the identification of the contexts and situations in which students need or will need L2, and the language activities that typically occur in these contexts. From the results of this first phase, we proceed to identify the most frequent and representative text types and genres for the identified communicative situations, and then move to a more specific level, represented by the linguistic apparatus, which includes the grammatical structures and vocabulary most commonly found in these texts. We can, therefore, identify a series of situations that students will have to face during their academic journey, such as: communicating with administrative offices; communicating with professors; communicating with classmates; attending a university lecture; studying university textbooks; taking a university exam; preparing a graduation thesis. Since the goal of this work is not to delve into all the various communicative contexts and the respective skills they require, we will not explore this topic in detail. However, it is important to note that each of these macro-situations involves a series of more specific activities. For example, following (Silva et al. 2024, Samu and Pakula, 2024) and the experience of the MOOC for learning academic Italian LMOOC4SLAV, we can propose the following summary table.

Communicate with administrative staff	Contact the offices through and know how to ask for information by email or telephone; contact the administrative staff in person at the counters
Communicate with professors	Contact a professor to ask for information by email; Attend to a professor’s office hours; Ask a professor to supervise the thesis
Peer communication	Organize and carry out group work for study courses; communicate within the university about academic topics, exchange opinions informally

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Understanding the information material	Browse and orient yourself on the University website, understand the descriptions and objectives of the different courses of study, the notices posted on the pages of the professors, etc
Educational activities	Follow university lectures and take notes; carry out the activities assigned to the lesson (written reports; term papers; oral presentations); prepare and be able to carry out the final exams required by the courses of study (oral or written exams); know how to write a final thesis and present it
Study activities	To be able to identify the salient parts of the texts to be studied for the exams; know how to integrate the notes taken in class; knowing how to read and understand an expository text; know how to summarize the relevant parts; to be able to perform oral and written productions on what has been learned

Table 1 Communicative situations and activities in an academic context

Table 1 includes both activities that involve written and oral texts. We will turn our attention now primarily to oral texts and the skills they entail.

3. Orality and academic context

Since the main aim of this contribution is to offer a reflection on receptive oral skills in the academic context, it is essential to identify the oral activities involved. The oral dimension of academic discourse has often been overlooked in favor of written communication, which has received more attention due to its diverse genres. This gap is hard to justify, given the central role of oral communication in teaching and learning within universities.

One crucial aspect to address is the lack of data on which to base research in this field. As Biber (2006) emphasizes regarding English language courses, "to provide the basis for ESP/EAP instruction, we need full linguistic descriptions of the registers that students encounter." Similarly, we believe that one of the main challenges lies in collecting data that can help define the fundamental characteristics of oral communication in the academic setting. This leads us to reflect on corpus linguistics and the construction of corpora that are varied and representative. In the absence of a representative corpus of oral varieties in academic contexts for Italian, this contribution will present examples from authentic productions, whose origin will be described each time. We have already seen that the oral dimension is realized in a

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variety of registers and genres, and that some situations are characterized by more explicitly dialogic forms of speech. In academic contexts, even the most dialogic situations are usually characterized by asymmetry in the roles of the participants. By asymmetry, we refer to the disparity of interactional power, which is a characteristic of exchanges in institutional environments, meaning that "there is no parity of communicative rights and duties between the interactants, but the participants differ in their access to the powers of interaction management" (Orletti 2014, 12, my translation). However, this asymmetry should be adjusted when we consider peer exchanges, which also occur in academic contexts, such as exchanges between students, between faculty members, or within administrative staff. In these cases, the asymmetry is reduced or eliminated, and the communicative register will be closer to an informal style.

Each of these different varieties will certainly require the use of specific linguistic knowledge and skills. However, we can recognize that dialogic speech, for example, is characterized by a continuous attempt by participants to predict the flow of the conversation. Participants, indeed, unconsciously make fairly precise assumptions regarding the transactional relevance points in order to provide appropriate feedback or take the turn to speak, as well as regarding the thematic progression of the conversation. Managing the dialogic complexity of a conversation becomes even more challenging in a second language, as many of the elements that are most relevant in the discursive and interactional dimension often go unnoticed by second language learners. Nevertheless, international students will have to face a variety of these situations. They will need to know how to interact with administrative staff, address a professor appropriately during office hours, and take an oral exam. The formulation of appropriate and correct statements during conversation depends primarily on an adequate understanding of the global and local context of the interaction. Thus, receptive skills play a fundamental role in these exchanges. Comprehension and production are, in fact, skills so closely intertwined that they can be considered complementary, and this is particularly evident in situations where an immediate response is required, without the opportunity to review and reprocess the input, as is possible in written communication. Not only can we consider comprehension and production complementary at a functional level, but also at a temporal one, as activities that occur simultaneously: “In order for turn-taking to proceed smoothly and naturally, speakers must act in advance, meaning that the activities of comprehension and production are, in fact, partially concurrent” (Voghera 2017, 45, my translation).

In addition to the dialogic situations previously mentioned, monologic situations are also common in academic speech, with some authors even identifying them as characteristic of academic discourse (Ciliberti and Anderson, 1999). While agreeing with this statement, we believe it is important to emphasize that no form of monologue is ever completely non-dialogic (Voghera, 2017), as the speaker is always addressing an audience, even if only an ideal one. In monologic speech, the speaker does not have the opportunity to directly engage with the listeners to ensure that the

BUPT

message has been understood correctly (Nunan, 2002), at least not in the ways and to the extent that is typical in conversational forms. Similarly, the listener cannot freely intervene to ask for clarification or confirmation. However, some form of interaction between the speaker and the listener is always present (both parties are reactive), and the listener continuously provides feedback to the speaker: “This also occurs in spontaneous monologic speech, where the speaker typically seeks reactions from the audience, even if non-verbal, such as through facial expressions” (Voghera 2017, 63, my translation). In the academic context relevant to this discussion, and considering the perspective of students, the greatest difficulty in monologic speech situations will be maintaining active listening throughout the entire duration of the intervention. Given the number of lessons and the amount of hours a student must attend, we can infer the mental load that this task requires. Similarly, the contexts in which students must produce monological speech are also relevant. Typically, we are dealing with controlled speech, where the speaker maintains a high level of attentiveness to the structure and content of their utterances. In the next section, we will explore some general characteristics of spoken language and the related listening skills.

3.1 Listening: An often-overlooked skill

As David Nunan (2002) states, listening is ‘the Cinderella skill in second language teaching.’ While it is rightly argued in many contributions that the teaching of second languages has succeeded in giving listening skills a prominent place in research, it must also be pointed out that, until the 1970s, listening was primarily seen as the reception of input for memorization through repetition. Following the rise of communicative approaches and later action-oriented approaches, listening activities have certainly become more complex, with a greater focus on simulating real-world contexts and on using language to act in reality. However, it must be recognized that the listening dimension remains the most complex to enhance through targeted activities. This is in contrast to the central role it plays in an individual's life. It is estimated that, on average, considering the four language skills as percentages, they are divided as follows: "about 45% listening, 30% speaking, 16% reading, and 9% writing" (Cignetti et al., 2022). Obviously, these percentages are indicative and may vary significantly depending on the type of activity, profession, and lifestyle of the individual. We can imagine that, in the life of a university student, the ability to listen becomes even more central, and especially, the quality of this skill will determine performance in evaluations.

Therefore, while it is undeniable that listening occupies a central position both in language learning and in social life, as well as in the learning of academic content, the issue remains of how to develop this skill. By its nature, listening has been defined as ‘a slippery and silent skill’ (Cignetti et al., 2022) since we can only assess it indirectly. It does not immediately emerge but can be inferred through attitudes (posture, attention, distractions...) and concrete performance, such as through questions, requests for reformulation, questionnaires to fill out, etc. (Cignetti et al.,

BUPT

2022, 90). Thus, it becomes a challenge to design activities that guide students toward active listening. Particularly for university students, where in many contexts, content learning begins precisely with listening activities, it is crucial that students have the resources to control this activity. Therefore, it is essential to structure pathways where students learn to manage their listening as a strategic activity (goal-oriented activity).
Despite its primary role in learning, there is still no shared definition of listening skill in the reference literature (Jasinka, 2020). It is a complex activity that also involves cognitive skills not strictly related to language, such as perceptual abilities, attention, interpretive skills, and memory. However, there is no definitive agreement on which skills are essential to define listening ability and whether it should be considered, for example, as a responsive-oriented activity or only as a representation of meaning (Jasinka, 2020). What we want to emphasize here, and on which many studies seem to agree, is that it is an activity that simultaneously integrates both bottom-up and top-down processes. Without going into detail, we can say that bottom-up processes proceed in a linear manner through the analysis of the minimal units present in the input. After the acoustic signal has been segmented into discrete units, the system proceeds to map and analyze the phonemes. So, the process goes from minimal units, the phones, to larger units, words, and then sentences: "in other words, the process is a linear one, in which meaning itself is derived as the last step in the process" (Nunan 2020, 15). According to some authors, this process should be integrated with top-down mechanisms, which always act in the comprehension of the input. In this sense, the knowledge and expectations we have about the conversational context, the topics, and our general knowledge about the world continuously provide information that guides the understanding of the input. Thus, it becomes a process of reconstructing meaning, where "the listener uses prior knowledge of the context and situation within which the listening takes place to make sense of what he or she hears" (Nunan 2020, 15).

Some difficulties in the process of understanding the input can be attributed to the nature of the input itself, particularly: a) the non-linearity of the signal, such as due to coarticulation; b) the absence of phonetic-acoustic invariance: the same phoneme never repeats identically in different contexts or in the speech of different speakers; c) difficulties in segmenting the acoustic signal.

Unlike written input, oral input exists only at the moment it is pronounced, and in order to be retained, it must be stored in memory or on some external medium. Moreover, spoken texts have linguistic and textual characteristics that distinguish them from written ones. These characteristics, often a consequence or compensation for the temporary nature of the input and the reduced possibility of planning oral productions, can both facilitate understanding and, at times, interfere with it. Among these properties of spoken texts are redundancy, false starts in utterances, consistent use of discourse markers, and the presence of fillers. According to Wendy Y. K. Lam (2002, 248), a program designed to help students strengthen their listening skills "should help learners recognize the unique characteristics of spoken language" and

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the differences between spoken texts and written ones, which often represent a large portion of the input provided by textbooks. In general, many authors emphasize the need to provide students with authentic material that is calibrated to the type of linguistic variety targeted for learning (Flowerdew and Miller, 2017; Nunan, 2002).
Despite the range of oral texts, from informal dialogues to more formal monologues, certain characteristics are inherent to spoken texts and should be considered functional correlates rather than sociolinguistic ones (Voghera, 2017).

4. Learning to listen

In this section, we aim to outline how technologies can be used to enhance listening skills. As previously mentioned, productive and receptive skills are closely intertwined, to the point of being described as a "symbiotic relationship" (Wendy Y. K. Lam, 2002); therefore, focusing on the latter inevitably brings benefits to the former as well. We have already highlighted the importance of exposing students to authentic input specifically designed to reflect the target linguistic variety. As discussed in paragraph 3.0, academic language encompasses a wide range of registers and genres; it is therefore the task of the language teacher to identify suitable examples for each of them. Technologies can serve primarily as a resource for teachers, allowing them to search for and collect materials to use with their students. Regarding academic varieties, while English now benefits from vast and readily accessible corpora, resources in other national languages are still under development or construction. In the absence of freely available corpora, teachers can independently gather relevant materials, for instance by recording segments of university lectures or seminars, or by asking students to record themselves. It is also worth mentioning that there are relatively effective transcription tools available, such as the built-in Microsoft Word feature that allows users to upload an MP3 file and generate a transcript. Additionally, free tools such as AntConc enable users to build small, personalized corpora and carry out basic corpus linguistic analyses, such as generating frequency lists or retrieving concordances.

These tools can be useful both for teachers, who may use them to develop linguistic activities based on selected texts, and for students, who can be guided to discover specific features of spoken academic discourse through inductive learning. Digital technologies also make it possible to integrate audio files into many online platforms, which can then be provided to students as the basis for targeted tasks and exercises. In the following section, we will present a few examples both in terms of materials and related activities that can be proposed. Naturally, these examples should be considered as part of a broader instructional framework specifically tailored to academic language learning. As embedding audio files is not feasible in this setting, we will include transcript excerpts to illustrate how these materials can be transformed into learning tasks.

BUPT

Below, we present a series of tasks based on student-generated recordings from different academic genres. In many academic settings, spoken language tends to be carefully monitored; this means speakers pay constant attention to what they say. Such demands can create a significant cognitive load, especially for novice members of the academic community and even more so when speaking in a second language. These conditions often lead to anxiety, which can impair performance. Among the anxiety-inducing factors identified by Rajitha and Alamelu (2020) and referenced, among others, in Martari (2025), we find issues related to language: lack of linguistic competence (language factor), metalinguistic awareness (grammar factor), and pronunciation difficulties. Providing students with materials and activities that target these specific challenges is therefore of central importance. We start with two brief texts related to the field of mathematics, specifically probability theory. As Lavinio (2022) notes, the genre of scientific definition is a subtype of expository texts. While it falls under this broader category, it exhibits specific textual and linguistic characteristics. It is essential for students to be able to identify and effectively utilize the linguistic genres commonly used to communicate disciplinary content within their field. Below is the transcript of a scientific definition given by a doctoral student on the concept of a random variable.

> *La varianza di una variabile casuale quantitativa si ottiene facendo la media dei cosiddetti scarti quadratici. Gli scarti quadratici di una variabile casuale sono le singole realizzazioni della variabile a cui viene sottratta la media, elevati al quadrato. L'elevazione al quadrato serve per aumentare il peso delle osservazioni molto distanti dalla media e diminuire il peso di quelle molto vicine alla media. La varianza aiuta a specificare quanto la media è rappresentativa della popolazione. La media, infatti, non è un indice robusto. È sensibile, cioè a singole osservazioni che sono molto distanti dalle altre, i cosiddetti outliers.*

> *The variance of a quantitative random variable is obtained by averaging the so-called squared deviations. The squared deviations of a random variable are the individual realizations of the variable from which the mean is subtracted, squared. Squaring serves to increase the weight of observations that are far from the mean and decrease the weight of those that are close to the mean. Variance helps specify how representative the mean is of the population. The mean, in fact, is not a robust index. It is sensitive, meaning it is affected by individual observations that are far from the others, the so-called outliers*

Scientific definitions are primarily characterised by a precise textual organisation. Often, the arrangement of information within the text follows a pattern described by Gualdo and Telve (2021, 247): each sentence "opens with given information followed by new information, which in turn becomes the given element of the next sentence, allowing for the introduction of another new piece of information, and so on." This alternation between given and new information is clearly observable in the example

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presented, where informational units of interest have been highlighted. Each new concept introduced is expanded upon in the subsequent sentence. The sentences are typically simple, with few subordinate clauses. The progression is gradual—"from the delimitation of the concept to its definition, and finally to its terminological specification" (Gualdo and Telve 2021, 385). In this process, which reflects the epistemology and internal logic of scientific definitions, connectives play a fundamental textual role. In addition to the information structure just described, the cohesion and coherence of the text are supported by the use of these elements, which signal the relationship between statements and help to organise the information hierarchically. Below, we provide a transcription of the definition with the relevant connectives highlighted.

> *La varianza di una variabile casuale quantitativa si ottiene facendo la media dei cosiddetti scarti quadratici. Gli scarti quadratici di una variabile casuale sono le singole realizzazioni della variabile a cui viene sottratta la media, elevati al quadrato. L'elevazione al quadrato serve per aumentare il peso delle osservazioni molto distanti dalla media e diminuire il peso di quelle molto vicine alla media. La varianza aiuta a specificare quanto la media è rappresentativa della popolazione. La media,* ***infatti****, non è un indice robusto. È sensibile,* ***cioè*** *a singole osservazioni che sono molto distanti dalle altre, i cosiddetti outliers.*

As elements that operate at the textual rather than the sentence level, connectives fall predominantly within the domain of textual competence. Their correct use can pose challenges for second language learners. It is therefore essential to address them explicitly in the classroom, drawing learners' attention not only to their presence but also to their position within the sentence and, most importantly, to the specific function they fulfil in a given context. In the context of second language teaching, it is important to recall that "learners must somehow 'notice' things in the input for acquisition to happen" (VanPatten 2003, 20). Learners should therefore be encouraged to listen to the same audio recording multiple times, promoting a process-oriented approach. Additionally, it is useful to make the different communicative functions of each segment of the text explicit, thereby increasing learners' awareness of the text discovery process. As Field (2002, 247) points out, "learners listen in an unfocused way if questions are not set until after the passage has been heard". Consequently, teachers should design activities that promote strategic listening, or active listening: "By listening and relistening, they improve the accuracy with which they listen" (Field 2002, 247). The proposed activities should follow a sequential structure: they should begin with a global level focused on content, proceed to a level concerning textual organisation, and finally guide learners towards more specific levels, drawing attention to linguistic forms that contribute to textual structuring. In addition to being able to handle short expository texts—such as those typically encountered in oral exams—students must also learn to manage more substantial and

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structured content, as in the case of oral presentations. We will now examine a short excerpt from a simulated presentation of a Master's thesis. This is an authentic text: the student, in preparation for her thesis defence, recorded herself presenting the introduction to her work. Below, we reproduce the opening section, highlighting some of its notable features in Figure 1.

In Figure 1 we have highlighted certain elements that are particularly relevant and on which learners' attention should be focused. These belong to the category of discourse markers, which, in addition to indicating the organisation of the text and thus facilitating the listener's comprehension, can also serve interactional functions or express the speaker's stance towards the content being presented. In this example, we also observe a textual organisation that differs from that of scientific definitions. Since this is the presentation of a Master's thesis, the student begins by formally greeting her supervisor and the examination committee. These are important elements, as they reveal the institutional nature and social rituals typical of certain textual genres. Figure 1 highlights the main steps through which the student introduces her thesis: she first outlines the general topic and the broader disciplinary area, and only then moves on to specify the object of her investigation. A thesis presentation often implies a high level of student engagement, typically including personal motivations behind the choice of topic. In such academic speaking genres, it is desirable that the student personalises the exposition, showing awareness of the knowledge acquired during the research process. Due to space constraints, we cannot provide a detailed analysis of all the features of academic discourse as they appear in this presentation. However, we would like to reiterate the importance of encouraging students to reflect on the multiple dimensions of a text—from its content to its organisation and the linguistic forms through which it is realised. In Figure 2 and Figure 3, we include some examples of activities focused on textual organisation. These were created using Lumi, a free online software that enables the development of interactive activities with immediate feedback options.

In this section, we have sought to provide examples of materials and possible activities aimed at helping students strengthen their active listening skills. We would further stress the importance of actively involving learners in their own learning process. This can be achieved by encouraging students to produce their own recordings, which can be shared with classmates in class or via the designated learning platform. In doing so, we not only promote collaborative learning but also align with the principle of making learning as learner-centred as possible: "by getting learners involved in the processes underlying their learning and in making active contributions to the learning" (Nunan 2002, 241).

BUPT

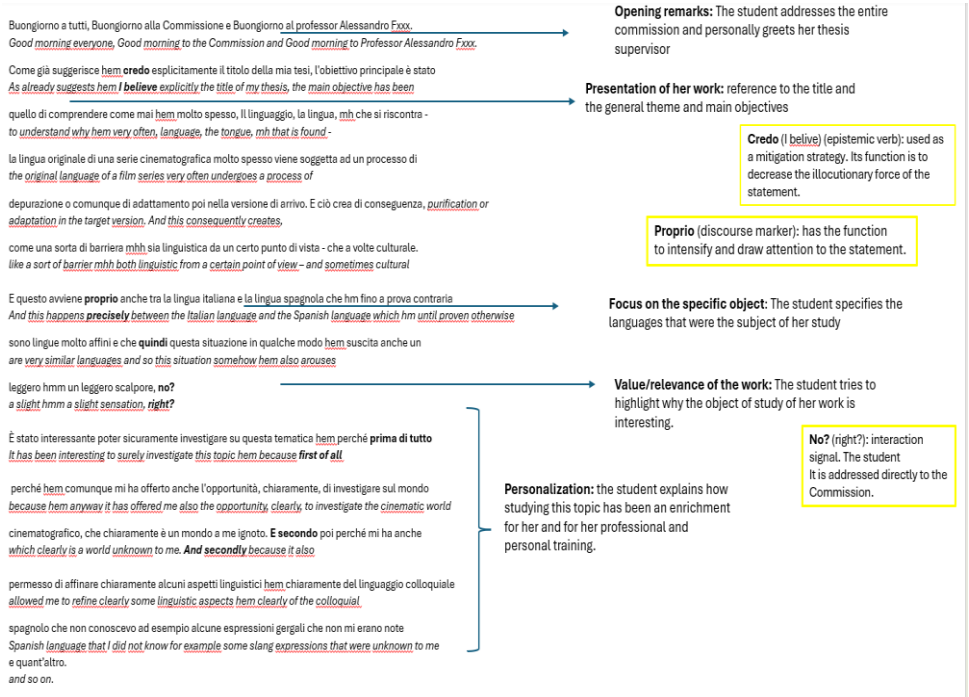


Figure 1 Transcript and analysis of the thesis introduction

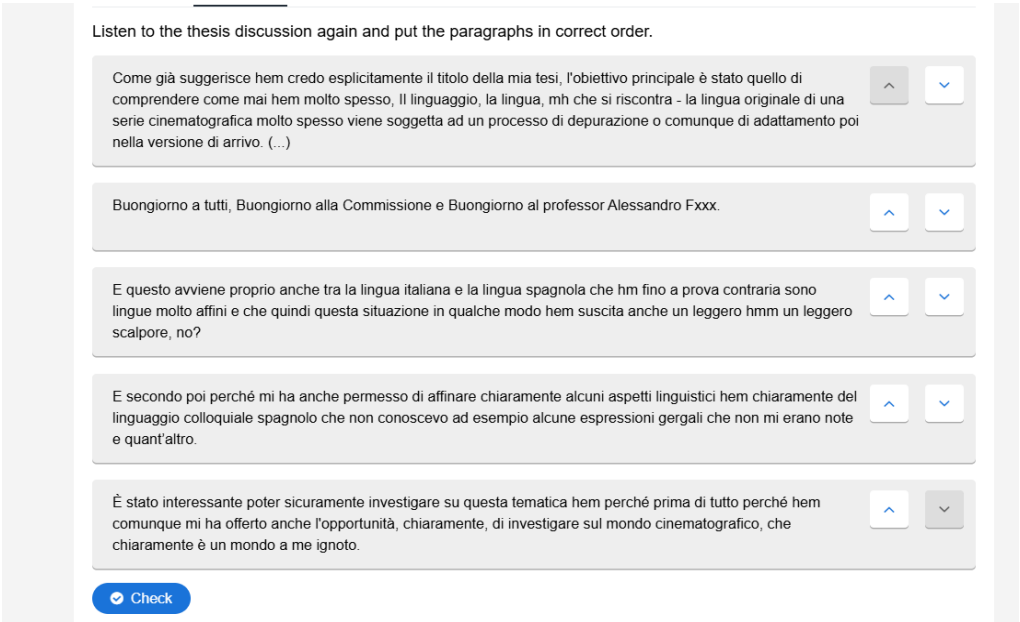


Figure 2 Text sequence reordering activity

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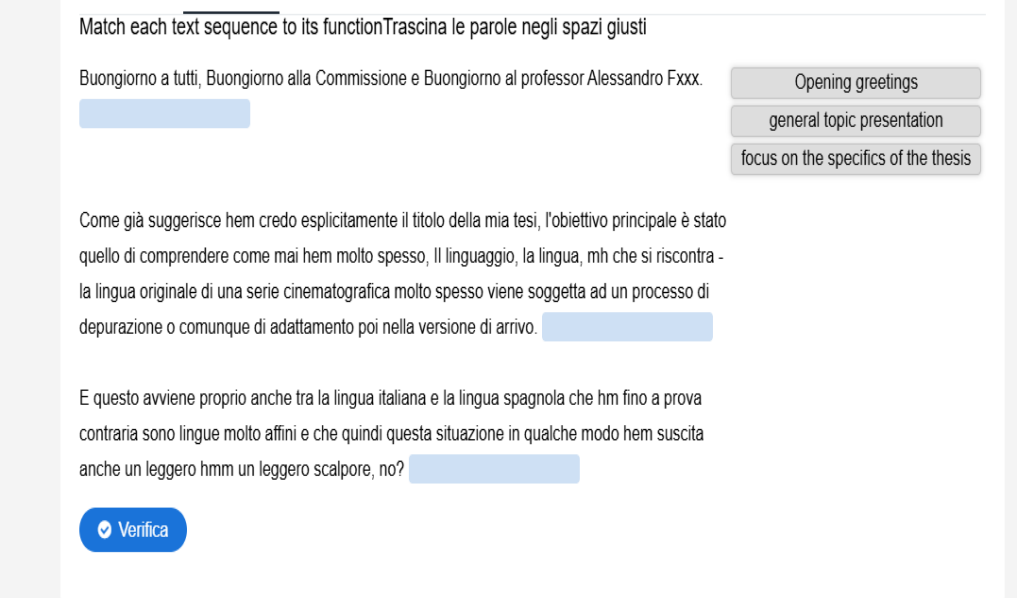


Figure 3 Text sequence function identification activity

5. Conclusions: Technologies and international students

We would like to conclude with a final reflection on the role of digital technologies in the teaching and learning of a second language for international students

The pervasiveness of digital technologies has deeply influenced the way individuals act, socialize, and learn. This is especially relevant for the target group we are referring to here — international students. While this group is internally diverse, it also presents some shared characteristics that make it relatively homogeneous: they are typically young adult learners, highly educated and digitally literate.

Any educational offering that makes use of digital technologies should therefore take into account the learners' profiles, particularly their level of digital literacy (Fragai, Fratter and Jafrancesco, 2017). Since this group is accustomed to using technology in many areas of their daily lives, educators should focus on promoting a smart, informed, and learning-oriented use of digital tools, in line with the goals of lifelong learning. Among the eight key competences for lifelong learning identified by the Council of Europe, we find digital competence, which is defined as: "the confident, critical and responsible use of, and engagement with, digital technologies for learning, at work, and for participation in society."

Digital platforms make it possible to share online resources that students can access at any time, and to design more interactive activities that provide immediate feedback. These features are particularly significant for the target group discussed here, as they support flexible learning and give learners the opportunity to manage

BUPT

their study time autonomously. Finally, we would like to stress the importance of teacher training in digital technologies. According to the DigCompEdu (2017) framework — a European reference for the digital competence of educators — teachers are expected to develop their skills in three main areas: for their own professional development; in integrating digital tools into their teaching practice; in helping their learners to use technologies effectively.
It is therefore crucial that educators know how to use technologies for their own continuous learning, for communication with students, colleagues, families, and other stakeholders, and for finding, creating, and adapting resources and activities that are accessible and personalized. They must also know how to design meaningful assessment processes. Importantly, they should guide students in becoming aware and ethical users of technology.

Ultimately, the role of the teacher is no longer merely to transmit knowledge, but to create learning environments where students can actively develop and enhance their knowledge, competences, skills, and attitudes.

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