

THE LINGUISTICS STUDENT FACED WITH THE CHALLENGES OF SPECIALISED DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Purpose: The aim of this article is to identify the challenges faced by students of applied linguistics when analysing specialised discourse and developing the specialist competences necessary to function effectively in today's labour market.

Design/methodology/approach: The article is based on an analysis of the specific nature of specialised discourse (at the lexical, morphosyntactic, textual and phonetic levels, as well as in terms of specialised, sociolinguistic and intercultural competences) and on a qualitative analysis of specialised Italian language textbooks used by students of applied linguistics (content analysis).

Findings: The analysis of the characteristics of specialised discourse points to a long list of challenges for linguistics students in the areas studied, while the analysis of selected textbooks reveals their great potential in teaching specialised competences, as well as the uneven development of language competences, including the lack of a translation component. It has been confirmed that effective work with specialised discourse requires an integrated approach that takes into account both linguistic and subject-specific aspects.

Research limitations/implications: The study was conducted on a limited sample of specialist Italian language textbooks, which limits the possibility of generalising the results. It would be worthwhile to extend the study to include a comparative analysis of textbooks for other languages and at other levels of proficiency.

Practical implications: The findings may influence the modification specialised language curricula, particularly through greater use of authentic materials, pragmatic competence training and the development of discourse analysis tools in teaching practice.

Social implications: Improving the quality of specialist language teaching translates into better preparation of graduates for work in multilingual and multicultural environments, which can increase their professional mobility and effectiveness in intercultural communication.

Originality/value: This article attempts to systematically address the real challenges faced by students of applied linguistics when analysing specialised discourse. A novel feature is the combination of a didactic perspective with metalinguistic reflection, which may be useful for both academic teachers and authors of teaching materials.

Keywords: specialised discourse, applied linguistics, discourse analysis, specialised language; mobility; multiculturalism.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

In the face of dynamic changes in the contemporary labour market, applied linguistics is no longer perceived solely as the study of language – it is gaining a practical dimension, focused on preparing students for the realities of international and intercultural professional communication. Knowledge of a foreign language, although still important, is not sufficient in the context of contemporary requirements. Intercultural, pragmatic and interpersonal skills are also becoming crucial, as they enable effective functioning in diverse professional environments.

In the era of globalisation, effective communication is based on flexible movement between different linguistic and cultural codes and on understanding the specifics of specialist professional contexts. A particular challenge is the mastering of specialist discourse, which requires not only advanced knowledge of professional terminology, but also the ability to recognise complex syntactic structures, genre conventions and cultural conditions specific to a given professional field. Therefore, the education of future linguists should be interdisciplinary and based on working with authentic texts and real communication situations.

The aim of this article is to present the main challenges faced by students of applied linguistics in the context of specialised discourse analysis, as well as to identify the areas of competence that need to be developed in order to prepare them to function effectively in the realities of today's global labour market.

In order to better define the specific nature of these challenges, it is necessary to examine the issue of specialised discourse, its definitions and properties that determine how language functions in professional contexts. In the following section of this article, three popular textbooks on Italian specialised language will be analysed in order to assess the extent to which they take into account the development of the key elements of specialised discourse and the competences necessary for its correct use.

2. Literature analysis – the Specificity of Specialised Discourse

Discourse can be defined broadly as language in use or as a communicative act, text, or utterance enacted in a specific communicative context (Dijk, 2001). Contemporary research further emphasises discourse as a social practice that reflects and shapes power, identities, and professional norms within communities of practice (Fairclough, 2020).

Specialised discourse, on the other hand, is a specific way of using language within a particular professional or scientific community, serving the function of exchanging knowledge, coordinating activities among experts, and supporting professional practices

(Grucza, 2006). It is characterised not only by the precise use of terminology and adaptation to the context of professional communication, but also by its dynamism — it evolves with the development of the field and changing communication needs (Gotti, 2008).

Specialised discourse encompasses a variety of forms of communication, from written texts such as scientific articles or reports, through oral interactions such as conferences and meetings, to multimodal presentations using charts, diagrams, or other visual aids (Balboni, 2000). In addition to the transmission of information, it plays negotiating, persuasive, and regulative roles, influencing decisions, standard-setting, and shaping knowledge structures within specific domains (Porcelli, 1990; Fairclough, 2020). This multidimensionality means that specialised discourse requires its participants not only to be linguistically proficient, but also to have the social, cultural, and contextual competences that enable them to navigate through a specific professional environment effectively.

Having defined specialised discourse and discussed its general characteristics, it is worth taking a closer look at its features at various linguistic levels — from lexical, through morphosyntactic, to textual and phonetic. This analysis will provide a more detailed understanding of how specialist language functions in practice and what challenges its users face, especially students of applied linguistics.

2.1. Characteristics of Specialised Discourse at the Lexical Level

The key characteristics of specialised discourse at the lexical level include monoreferentiality, transparency, lack of emotional connotations, conciseness and conservatism. Monoreferentiality means that within a given field a term has one precisely defined meaning, while transparency refers to a direct relationship between form and meaning, with metaphors rarely used. Specialised language is also characterised by the lack of emotional connotations and a tendency towards conciseness, whereby concepts are expressed in the shortest possible form, often through acronyms, abbreviations or compound lexemes; additionally, it shows a degree of conservatism, reflected in the predominance of established terms whose meanings remain stable (Gotti, 2008). Developing specialised vocabulary presents particular challenges because learners must acquire not only precise lexical items but also the ability to use them in occupation-specific communicative activities (Dudzik, Dzięcioł-Pędich, 2022).

In addition to unambiguity and precision, an important feature of specialised vocabulary is a high frequency of borrowings and calques and term-formation creativity. New concepts, rooted in Latin and Greek, are created by adding various prefixes, suffixes or by combining existing words. The complexity and diversity of word-formation processes characteristic of specialist language make its mastery a time-consuming and labour-intensive process. Students must gradually learn the meanings of individual morphological elements, such as prefixes and suffixes, and understand the rules for combining them (cf. Balboni, 2000, pp. 51-58; Borczyk, 2023; Gotti, 2008; Porcelli, 1990, pp. 10-11).

From the learner's perspective, these characteristics make the acquisition of specialised vocabulary particularly demanding. Students must not only memorise precise terminology but also recognise word-formation patterns and interpret numerous borrowings, acronyms and compound forms. As a result, developing lexical competence in specialised discourse requires systematic practice and gradual familiarisation with the morphological structure of terms.

Specialised discourse differs from general language not only in its terminology. Many important challenges that linguistics students face can also be found at the morphosyntactic level.

2.2. Characteristics of Specialised Discourse at the Syntactic Level

A primary feature of specialised discourse at the syntactic level is its tendency towards conciseness. This often manifests in the omission of articles, prepositions, and other minor linguistic elements—a phenomenon known as elision. In Italian, for example, such omissions are common in scientific, technical, and IT texts, instructional manuals, and public notices. Elision is motivated by the need for brevity and the efficient transmission of information, where articles and prepositions are considered secondary to the clarity of the message. In business communication, a reduced linguistic form is also frequently used, with unnecessary adjectives omitted and punctuation simplified. In legal and administrative texts, however, elision often arises from stylistic conventionalism rather than a need for brevity. For learners of specialised language, mastering elision requires understanding both the contexts in which it occurs and its communicative function (cf. Balboni, 2000; Hyland, 2022).

Nominalisation is another significant syntactic feature, which transforms verbs or other grammatical categories into nouns. This process allows complex actions or processes to be expressed concisely and formally, contributing to the impersonal and objective tone typical of professional discourse. In legal, scientific, and administrative texts, nominalisation is used to condense information and formalise statements, but excessive nominalisation can reduce text accessibility, particularly for students unfamiliar with the field or topic (cf. Borczyk, 2024).

Depersonalisation, closely related to nominalisation, involves the frequent avoidance of personal forms in favour of impersonal constructions. This strategy emphasises the action or state itself rather than the agent performing it, enhancing objectivity and communicative distance. Traditional syntactic patterns, such as subject–predicate–complement, are often modified, which can introduce ambiguity or require careful interpretation. In formal documents like civil contracts or administrative texts, depersonalisation is reinforced by anonymising participants, e.g., referring to “buyer” and “seller” instead of specific individuals, highlighting the formal and impersonal character of the discourse (cf. Sinatra, 2008).

Another syntactic aspect worth noting in specialist discourse is passivisation, which is a special form of depersonalisation. As the name suggests, it involves the frequent use of the passive voice, which serves to shift the emphasis from the performer of the action to the process

itself and the result of the action. This phenomenon most often appears in administrative and legal texts, as well as in technical descriptions and operating procedures. The purpose of passivisation, like depersonalisation, is to increase the objectivity of the statement and focus the recipient's attention on the subject of the message rather than its sender. It is worth noting that for learners of specialist language, such formal simplifications do not always translate into ease of comprehension, as they require users to have much more developed language skills. Therefore, the teaching process should be appropriately adapted – both in terms of methodology and the selection of materials – in order to effectively support the acquisition of these complex structures.

At the morphosyntactic level, specialised discourse shows clear tendencies in verb tense and grammatical mood usage, which vary depending on the communicative purpose and the nature of the field. Present tense is common in factual descriptions, passive voice or past perfect in process and research descriptions, while instructional materials often employ infinitive or imperative forms. Future tense predominates in economic forecasting texts, whereas conditional and subjunctive moods appear in speculative, philosophical, or hypothetical contexts. Modal verbs are frequently used in scientific discourse to express assumptions or hypotheses (Hyland, 2022).

Sentence structure is another key syntactic element. The choice between simple and complex sentences is determined by style and field specificity. Scientific texts describing research processes favour complex subordinate sentences for clarity and precision. Legal and argumentative texts also rely heavily on subordinate constructions, while technical and technological texts often use coordinate compound sentences. Simple sentences are characteristic of manuals and instructional documents but are usually dense with terminology, abbreviations, and specialised vocabulary (cf. Balboni, 2000; Ballarin, 2009; Porcelli, 1990).

In summary, at the syntactic level, specialised discourse poses challenges for students in mastering complex grammatical and structural features such as elision, nominalisation, depersonalisation, and passivisation. These phenomena require not only knowledge of grammatical rules but also the ability to interpret texts where such forms enhance objectivity, conciseness, and formal tone. Additionally, the diversity of verb tenses, moods, and sentence structures across different professional fields demands sustained practice and careful guidance to ensure comprehension and correct usage.

2.3. Characteristics of Specialised Discourse at the Textual Level

At the textual level, specialised discourse is distinguished by its specific organisation of content, standardised structure and functionality subordinated to specific communication goals. Within micro-languages, various types of texts are characteristic, such as scientific articles, reports, research papers, technical documentation, user manuals, regulations, specifications, contracts, official letters, formal correspondence, as well as recruitment documents, including CVs, covering letters, and references (Hyland, 2022).

The structure of such texts is usually based on scientific conventions, which are highly formalised, predictable and often supported by editorial templates. In legal and administrative texts, standardisation manifests itself, among other things, in the logical arrangement of paragraphs, the presence of headings and subheadings, and the use of numerous footnotes and bibliographies. This facilitates navigation through the content and promotes unambiguous communication, which is particularly important in professional environments that require a high level of precision (cf. Gotti, 2008; Porcelli, 1990).

Visual elements such as graphs, tables, diagrams, infographics, and charts play an important role in organising information and enhancing clarity. In technical and promotional texts, these elements can dominate over verbal content, which is reduced to the essential minimum, reflecting the principles of economy of language and effective persuasion (cf. Balboni, 2000; Gotti, 2008; Porcelli, 1990).

In the area of electronic communication, including email correspondence, there is a departure from rigid standards – stylistic simplifications, the absence of classic forms of politeness, and inconsistent use of spelling rules are common. This is a manifestation of changes in the culture of written communication, resulting from the need for speed and effectiveness, as well as the influence of technology on language (Balboni, 2000; Hyland, 2022).

In promotional and advertising texts, such as brochures or industry leaflets, visual elements take on a dominant role. Verbal communication is reduced to the bare minimum, and images become the main vehicle for content (cf. Balboni, 2000, pp. 51-58; Gotti, 2008; Porcelli, 1990). This type of message is subject to the principles of economy of language and effective persuasion.

Understanding textual characteristics in specialised discourse requires students to master the organisation and conventions of various text types, interpret and reproduce standardised structures, and integrate visual and verbal elements effectively. They must also adapt to stylistic variations across media and professional contexts, recognising differences in formality, purpose, and audience expectations, which presents a significant challenge.

2.4. Characteristics of Specialised Discourse at the Phonetic Level

At the phonetic and phonological level, specialised discourse poses several challenges for learners, even though it is less frequently analysed in language education. Phonetic difficulties include the pronunciation of complex, multisyllabic terms of Latin, Greek, or other classical origin, such as *elettroencefalografia*, *interdisciplinarietà*, or *ipercolesterolemia* in Italian (Balboni, 2000; Gotti, 2008). Mastery of such terms requires precise control of stress, syllable division, and intonation patterns typical of the language.

Other challenges involve the use of intonation, rhythm, and speech rate. In formal specialist contexts—such as ed intonation predominates, and speech should be neither too fast nor irregular to avoid comprehension difficulties or phonetic distortions (Crystal, 2003).

These aspects mean that phonetic competence must be developed alongside lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic skills. Moreover, learners must cultivate broader communication abilities, including specialist, sociolinguistic, and intercultural competences. In professional contexts, the challenge lies not only in how one speaks, but also in what is communicated, to whom, and under what circumstances, highlighting the complexity of mastering specialised discourse in multilingual and multicultural environments (Levis, 2020).

2.5. Specialist Competence

Specialised discourse is deeply embedded in subject-specific knowledge, which creates a number of challenges for learners. Students must not only master the language but also acquire a thorough understanding of the subject matter in order to interpret texts accurately. Developing specialist competence involves learning to use terminology precisely, understanding processes and concepts specific to a professional domain, and recognising genre conventions typical of professional texts (Hyland, 2022).

The literature (Swales, 1990) highlights that genre awareness—the ability to identify the structure and function of texts according to their communicative purpose and audience—is critical. Students face the challenge of distinguishing between different text types, such as technical reports and legal contracts, which have diverse formal, stylistic, and pragmatic requirements. Without sufficient specialist knowledge, learners risk misinterpreting meaning, misusing terminology, or selecting inappropriate linguistic forms.

In educational practice, these challenges imply that teaching specialist language must go beyond vocabulary memorisation. Students need guidance to understand the discursive context of a field and to apply their knowledge effectively. Additionally, sociolinguistic competence presents another layer of difficulty: learners must adapt their language to varied professional relationships, levels of formality, and institutional norms, which requires both linguistic flexibility and cultural awareness (Hyland, 2022).

2.6. Sociolinguistic Competence

Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use language in a manner appropriate to the social and situational conditions in which communication takes place. In models of communicative competence (Canale, Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990), it is considered a key component alongside grammatical and pragmatic competence, as it involves understanding factors such as the status of interlocutors, the degree of formality, professional relationships, and institutional contexts. Recent research continues to emphasise that sociolinguistic competence enables language users to adapt linguistic choices to cultural expectations, social norms, and communicative situations, which is essential for effective interaction in educational and professional settings (Santipolo, 2020; Balboni, 2022). For students, developing this competence often presents a challenge, as it requires not only linguistic knowledge but also awareness of social conventions and professional norms.

In the context of specialised discourse, sociolinguistic competence involves the ability to adapt communication to different audiences—for example, a superior, business partner, client, or member of a project team. Learners must therefore learn to select an appropriate language register, use suitable polite forms, adjust the tone of communication, and structure arguments in a manner consistent with professional expectations. A particular difficulty arises from the need to recognise how the same communicative intention may require different linguistic forms depending on the context—for instance, when formulating a request in a formal email compared with informal workplace communication.

Insufficient sociolinguistic competence may lead to communicative problems such as excessive directness, unintended impoliteness, or stylistic awkwardness. These challenges highlight the importance of incorporating activities that develop stylistic and pragmatic awareness into specialist language education, including the analysis of authentic communication situations and practice in adapting language to diverse professional contexts.

2.7. Intercultural Competence

The modern professional environment increasingly operates in multicultural contexts, which creates a need for the development of intercultural competence. This concept refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with representatives of other cultures while maintaining openness and awareness of cultural differences (Byram, 1997). For students, developing such competence often poses a challenge, as it requires not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to recognise cultural assumptions, interpret messages in different cultural contexts, and adapt communication strategies accordingly (Deardorff, 2020; Jackson, 2020).

In the context of specialist discourse, intercultural competence involves adapting the tone and form of communication to the recipient's cultural and professional expectations. Students must learn to recognise differences in communication styles, such as varying degrees of directness in argumentation, the use of politeness strategies, or conventions of professional correspondence.

Earlier research by Hall (1976) and Hofstede (2001) highlights deeper cultural differences related to perceptions of time, hierarchy and patterns of communication. These factors may also influence the interpretation and production of specialist texts, including business correspondence or professional instructions, which can create additional difficulties for learners.

Developing intercultural competence in language education therefore requires not only providing knowledge about other cultures but also fostering students' ability to reflect on cultural differences and adjust their communication to diverse professional contexts (Deardorff, 2020).

In summary, the development of specialist, sociolinguistic and intercultural competences should be an integral part of language education focused on professional realities. Teaching materials, particularly specialist language textbooks, play an important role in this process, as they are intended not only to introduce terminology but also to prepare students to function effectively in multicultural professional environments.

3. Methods

The aim of this study is to analyse three popular textbooks on specialized Italian used in the education of applied linguistics students. The study aims to assess the extent to which these textbooks support the development of the above-mentioned competences and prepare students for effective communication in a professional environment, as well as to identify potential gaps or teaching difficulties. This analysis was conducted to collect the data necessary for answering the following research questions:

- **Lexical competences**
 1. What is the scope and degree of difficulty of specialist terminology in textbooks?
 2. What types of lexical exercises are used?
 3. Do textbooks present word formation processes and the use of loanwords, abbreviations, acronyms, neologisms and calques?
 4. Do they contain glossaries and definitions of terms to support the acquisition of specialised vocabulary?
- **Morphosyntactic competences**
 1. What is the level of syntactic complexity and grammatical difficulty of the texts?
 2. Do the textbooks analyse phenomena typical of specialised language, i.e. elision, nominalisation, depersonalisation, passivisation?
 3. Do the grammar exercises allow for the practical application of morphosyntactic structures?
- **Textual competences**
 1. Do the textbooks present a variety of text types characteristic of particular specialist fields?
 2. Do the materials contain exercises that support the recognition and reproduction of typical text structures?
 3. To what extent do they develop students' genre awareness?
- **Phonetic competences**
 1. What is the level of phonetic difficulty of the analysed texts?
 2. Do the textbooks contain phonetic transcriptions, listening tasks or audio/video recordings?

3. How do the exercises develop correct pronunciation, intonation and accent?
- **Specialised competence**
 1. To what extent do textbooks provide substantive contexts for specialised terminology?
 2. Do they introduce students to authentic professional situations?
 3. To what extent do they use authentic professional materials in teaching specialised language?
- **Sociolinguistic competence**
 1. How do textbooks support the adaptation of language to different social roles and communication contexts?
 2. Do the materials take into account formality, tone, polite forms and register differences?
 3. How do the exercises develop communication skills in different social situations?
- **Intercultural competence**
 1. How do textbooks treat issues of intercultural communication?
 2. To what extent do they take into account the role of cultural context in communication?
 3. Do textbooks address culturally sensitive topics and how are they presented?

The research questions outlined above constitute the analytical framework for the present study.

4. Results

The results of the analysis are presented separately for each textbook and organised according to the competence areas defined in the analytical framework.

4.1. Textbook 1

Title: *Italiano Medico. Servizi sanitari. Terminologia medica. Casi clinici. Livello B1-B2*

Author: Daniela Forapiani

Publisher: Rome, Edilingua, 2012

Target group:

This textbook is intended for foreign students (including *Erasmus* programme participants) enrolled at Italian universities, as well as for non-native professionals working in Italian hospitals. It is designed for learners at B1-B2 levels and was developed in collaboration with the University of Parma. It can be used both for self-study and during university courses or specialized medical language training.

Structure of the textbook:

The textbook consists of ten thematic units. The first two chapters focus on topics and terminology related to the structure of the human body and professional medical equipment. The following three chapters deal with the Italian healthcare system, hospital organisation, and blood donation. The last five chapters are devoted to particular systems of the human body (digestive, cardiovascular, respiratory, urinary, and musculoskeletal).

Additional materials include audio recordings available on CD or via QR codes, an appendix with materials for copying and cutting out, an alphabetical glossary, a webography, transcripts of recordings, and an answer key.

4.1.1. Lexical Competence

With regard to RQ1 (scope and difficulty of specialist terminology), the textbook provides a broad range of medical vocabulary focusing on anatomy, medical equipment, healthcare systems, and the terminology of particular body systems. The terminology is introduced gradually and adapted to the B1-B2 level, although it includes numerous specialised medical terms.

Addressing RQ2 (types of lexical exercises), the textbook offers a wide variety of vocabulary activities. These include identifying terms in a visual dictionary, labelling illustrations and photographs, completing definitions with missing keywords, memory games for vocabulary retention, crossword puzzles reinforcing spelling, synonym matching, categorisation tasks, word games, and term definition exercises.

In relation to RQ3 (word formation processes and specialised lexical phenomena), the textbook presents selected word-formation processes by highlighting the meaning and function of common medical prefixes and suffixes. Learners are also encouraged to work with abbreviations and acronyms typical of medical discourse.

Regarding RQ4 (presence of glossaries and definitions), the textbook includes an alphabetical glossary at the end, which references the pages where each term appears in context. Space is also provided for students to write translations in their native language, which supports vocabulary acquisition.

4.1.2. Morphosyntactic Competence

With regard to RQ1 (level of syntactic complexity), the analysed texts demonstrate a relatively high degree of syntactic complexity typical of medical communication. The language reflects authentic medical discourse and includes complex sentence structures.

In relation to RQ2 (analysis of specialised morphosyntactic phenomena), the texts contain frequent examples of ellipsis, nominalisation, depersonalisation, passivisation, and implicit forms. However, these phenomena are generally not explicitly analysed or explained, which may limit learners' awareness of these features.

Addressing RQ3 (grammar exercises enabling practical application), the textbook includes grammar sections (*spunti grammaticali*) dealing with selected topics such as articles or irregular plural forms. These exercises are embedded within the units and are often combined with

communicative activities, language games, and role-plays, which facilitate the practical application of grammatical structures.

4.1.3. Textual Competence

In response to RQ1 (variety of text types), the textbook presents a range of materials including illustrations, photographs, dialogues, case studies, and models of doctor–patient interaction.

With regard to RQ2 (exercises supporting recognition and reproduction of text structures), the units are organised into clearly defined sections that include vocabulary introduction, main texts, exercises, and multimedia materials. Numerous tasks require students to analyse and reproduce specific communicative formats.

Addressing RQ3 (development of genre awareness), the textbook introduces learners to authentic types of medical texts such as laboratory test results, ECG printouts, and patient records, thereby supporting students' familiarity with professional documentation.

4.1.4. Phonetic Competence

With regard to RQ1 (phonetic difficulty of the texts), the phonetic difficulty may be considered relatively high due to the presence of numerous complex and multisyllabic medical terms.

Addressing RQ2 (phonetic support materials), the textbook includes audio and video recordings accompanied by transcripts, although phonetic transcriptions are not provided.

4.1.5. Development of Specialised Competence

Addressing RQ1 (substantive contexts for specialised terminology), each unit introduces vocabulary within realistic medical scenarios, such as the functioning of the healthcare system or hospital procedures.

With regard to RQ2 (introduction to professional situations), the textbook includes numerous case studies and role-play activities simulating doctor–patient interactions or other professional situations.

In response to RQ3 (use of authentic materials), the textbook incorporates authentic documents and materials reflecting the real context of the Italian healthcare system.

4.1.6. Development of Sociolinguistic Competence

Addressing RQ1 (adaptation of language to social roles), the exercises frequently require students to adopt different communicative roles, such as doctor, patient, receptionist, or helpline operator.

Regarding RQ2 (formality and register), the textbook introduces elements of formality and polite expressions primarily through dialogues presented in listening activities.

In relation to RQ3 (communication in social situations), role-plays and simulated interactions enable learners to practice communication strategies appropriate for different professional contexts.

4.1.7. Development of Intercultural Competence

With regard to RQ1 (intercultural communication), the textbook is strongly embedded in the Italian healthcare context and familiarises students with cultural norms related to medical communication in Italy.

Addressing RQ2 (role of cultural context), sections such as *Lo sapevi che...?* and prompts encouraging online exploration promote cultural reflection and contextual understanding. In relation to RQ3 (culturally sensitive topics), such topics are generally limited. One example is a dialogue involving an immigrant contacting a helpline to obtain information about procedures for acquiring a health insurance card.

4.2. Textbook 2

Italiano per giuristi – updated edition. Level B1-C2

Author: Daniela Forapiani

Publisher: Alma Edizioni, Florence, 2021

Target group:

The textbook is intended for students (including Erasmus programme participants), translators, researchers, and international professionals who require specialised knowledge of Italian for legal or academic purposes. It is designed for learners with B1-B2 level language proficiency and a general understanding of legal systems. The textbook may also be used for self-study.

Structure of the textbook:

The textbook consists of fifteen thematic units focusing on key areas of law, including the Italian legal system, hierarchy and interpretation of legal sources, constitutional law, civil law, commercial law, comparison between Roman-Germanic and Anglo-Saxon legal traditions, as well as civil and criminal procedure.

Additional materials include an alphabetical glossary with definitions and references to textbook units, an answer key, and an appendix containing a webography with links to legal websites.

4.2.1. Lexical Competence

With regard to RQ1 (scope and difficulty of specialist terminology), the textbook presents a very extensive range of legal terminology covering fields such as civil law, administrative law, criminal law, and European law. The degree of lexical difficulty is high, as many terms occur exclusively in legal discourse and have no direct equivalents in general language.

Addressing RQ2 (types of lexical exercises), the textbook offers numerous vocabulary tasks, including paraphrasing legal provisions, summarising content, matching definitions, identifying synonyms and antonyms, completing diagrams and mind maps, filling in keywords in legal texts, answering detailed comprehension questions, and solving crossword puzzles that reinforce spelling.

In relation to RQ3 (word formation processes and specialised lexical phenomena), the textbook highlights selected word formation mechanisms by presenting the function of common prefixes and suffixes and encouraging learners to create derivative forms and complete lexical families. Work with abbreviations and acronyms is also included, and certain loanwords used in legal discourse, such as *common law*, are discussed.

Regarding RQ4 (presence of glossaries and definitions), the textbook includes an alphabetical glossary with definitions and references to the units in which the terms appear. The glossary also provides space for learners to note translations in their native language.

4.2.2. Morphosyntactic Competence

With regard to RQ1 (level of syntactic complexity), the analysed texts demonstrate a very high level of syntactic complexity characteristic of legal discourse. Long sentences, elaborate subordinate structures, and complex complements frequently occur in the materials.

In response to RQ2 (analysis of specialised morphosyntactic phenomena), the textbook explicitly addresses linguistic features typical of specialised legal language, including ellipsis, nominalisation, depersonalisation, passivisation, and implicit forms. These phenomena are discussed and illustrated through examples taken from authentic legal texts.

Addressing RQ3 (grammar exercises enabling practical application), the textbook contains numerous grammar activities designed to practise complex sentence structures, such as inserting relative pronouns, analysing participial constructions, completing clauses with appropriate conjunctions, and studying the role of pronouns and particles in legal texts.

4.2.3. Textual Competence

Addressing RQ1 (variety of text types), the textbook presents a wide range of legal genres, including laws, codes, excerpts from judicial decisions, contracts, official documents, court summonses, and procedural documents.

With regard to RQ2 (recognition and reproduction of text structures), authentic formatting of legal documents is preserved, including articles, paragraphs, headings, and numbering. This allows learners to become familiar with the structural conventions of legal texts.

In relation to RQ3 (development of genre awareness), the textbook promotes students' understanding of the stylistic and functional characteristics of legal genres by providing models and templates of official documents.

4.2.4. Phonetic Competence

With regard to RQ1 (phonetic difficulty), the phonetic complexity of the texts is relatively high due to the presence of numerous complex and multisyllabic legal terms.

Addressing RQ2 (phonetic support materials), the textbook does not include audio recordings, listening exercises, or phonetic transcriptions.

In response to RQ3 (development of pronunciation and prosody), pronunciation and intonation are not explicitly addressed, as the textbook focuses primarily on written legal discourse.

4.2.5. Development of Specialised Competence

Addressing RQ1 (substantive contexts for specialised terminology), the textbook provides extensive explanations of legal institutions, legal systems, and basic legal procedures.

With regard to RQ2 (introduction to professional situations), the textbook includes tasks simulating professional activities such as drafting legal documents, analysing regulations, interpreting legal provisions, or reviewing contracts.

In response to RQ3 (use of authentic materials), the materials include excerpts from authentic legal documents, judicial decisions, and legal articles, which reflect the real language used in professional legal contexts.

4.2.6. Development of Sociolinguistic Competence

Addressing RQ1 (adaptation of language to social roles), the textbook indirectly introduces role-based communication through tasks involving formal legal correspondence or official documentation.

Regarding RQ2 (formality and register), the materials emphasise the use of highly formal and specialised legal register typical of professional legal communication.

In relation to RQ3 (communication in social situations), exercises occasionally involve stylistic transformations and the use of formal expressions; however, explicit comparisons between legal language and other language varieties are limited.

4.2.7. Development of Intercultural Competence

With regard to RQ1 (intercultural communication), references to intercultural aspects appear occasionally, mainly in the context of comparisons between the Italian legal system and other European legal traditions.

Addressing RQ2 (role of cultural context), the textbook assumes a certain level of familiarity with Italian institutions and therefore offers limited explicit discussion of cultural context.

In relation to RQ3 (culturally sensitive topics), intercultural reflection remains marginal and cultural pragmatics of legal communication are not explicitly addressed.

4.3. Textbook 3

Italiano in azienda

Authors: Giovanna Pelizza, Marco Mezzadri

Publisher: Guerra Edizioni, Perugia, 2012

Target group:

The textbook is intended for foreign students and professionals who use Italian in the workplace, particularly in business and commercial contexts. It is designed for learners with at least an intermediate level of language proficiency (A2-B2).

Structure of the textbook:

The textbook consists of twelve thematic units covering key areas of commercial communication, including job search, employment, business travel, advertising, trade fairs, transport, commercial correspondence, and financial transactions.

Additional materials include an audio CD, an appendix with visual materials supporting interactive tasks, transcripts of recordings, an alphabetical glossary with references to textbook units, and an answer key.

4.3.1. Lexical Competence

With regard to RQ1 (scope and difficulty of specialist terminology), the textbook offers a broad range of business-related vocabulary associated with employment, marketing, trade fairs, transport, commercial correspondence, and financial transactions.

Addressing RQ2 (types of lexical exercises), the materials include numerous vocabulary activities such as labelling illustrations, completing definitions and texts with missing terms, creating acronyms, matching synonyms and antonyms, categorising vocabulary, constructing mind maps, and participating in role-play activities simulating telephone conversations.

In relation to RQ3 (word formation processes and specialised lexical phenomena), the textbook does not explicitly analyse word formation mechanisms such as prefixes, suffixes, or compound formation. However, it introduces learners to abbreviations and loanwords frequently used in international business communication.

Regarding RQ4 (presence of glossaries and definitions), an alphabetical glossary is provided at the end of the textbook, with references to the pages where the terms occur in context and space for writing translations.

4.3.2. Morphosyntactic Competence

With regard to RQ1 (level of syntactic complexity), the materials reflect realistic communication in business contexts and include texts of varying complexity, such as business correspondence, contracts, and procedural descriptions.

In response to RQ2 (analysis of specialised morphosyntactic phenomena), examples of ellipsis, nominalisation, depersonalisation, passivisation, and implicit forms appear in authentic documents; however, these phenomena are not explicitly analysed.

Addressing RQ3 (grammar exercises enabling practical application), each unit contains grammar activities focusing on structures such as verb forms, participles, pronouns, adjective gradation, and the imperative mood. These structures are subsequently practised in communicative contexts.

4.3.3. Textual Competence

Addressing RQ1 (variety of text types), the textbook includes a wide range of materials such as dialogues, case studies, product presentations, reports, brochures, and authentic documents.

With regard to RQ2 (recognition and reproduction of text structures), the units contain numerous exercises requiring learners to analyse and reproduce the structure and layout of business texts and documents.

In response to RQ3 (development of genre awareness), the textbook introduces authentic communicative formats such as job advertisements, CVs, cover letters, brochures, business letters, bookings, and complaints.

4.3.4. Phonetic Competence

With regard to RQ1 (phonetic difficulty), the phonetic complexity of the texts can be considered moderate, although certain multisyllabic terms may pose pronunciation challenges.

Addressing RQ2 (phonetic support materials), the textbook includes audio recordings accompanied by transcripts, which support listening comprehension and dialogue practice.

In relation to RQ3 (development of pronunciation and prosody), various activities encourage the development of appropriate pronunciation, tone, and register, particularly through role-plays and simulated telephone conversations.

4.3.5. Development of Specialised Competence

Addressing RQ1 (substantive contexts), the units focus on realistic business situations such as job applications, commercial negotiations, business travel, and product presentations.

With regard to RQ2 (professional situations), role-play activities simulate typical workplace interactions.

In response to RQ3 (use of authentic materials), learners are exposed to numerous authentic documents and communicative situations reflecting real business practice.

4.3.6. Development of Sociolinguistic Competence

Addressing RQ1 (adaptation of language to social roles), the textbook includes numerous tasks requiring learners to adjust their language depending on the communicative role, such as employer, employee, client, or sales representative.

Regarding RQ2 (formality and register), exercises emphasise appropriate tone, polite expressions, and register differences in both spoken and written communication.

In relation to RQ3 (communication in social situations), simulated dialogues and telephone interactions provide opportunities to practise professional communication strategies.

4.3.7. Development of Intercultural Competence

With regard to RQ1 (intercultural communication), the textbook is strongly embedded in the Italian business environment.

Addressing RQ2 (role of cultural context), the section *La cultura degli affari* introduces elements of business culture and non-verbal communication.

In relation to RQ3 (culturally sensitive topics), intercultural comparisons appear occasionally, particularly when discussing greetings or polite expressions, and learners are encouraged to compare Italian communication norms with those of their own cultures.

The results of the above analysis form the basis for the conclusions and didactic implications presented in the following section.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the extent to which selected Italian specialist language textbooks support the development of linguistic and communicative competences necessary in professional contexts. The analysis focused on seven competence areas: lexical, morphosyntactic, textual, phonetic, specialist, sociolinguistic, and intercultural. The study

included textbooks from the fields of medicine, law, and business, allowing for consideration of diverse specialist discourses and identification of both their pedagogical potential and limitations.

The analysis revealed that all three textbooks provide a rich repository of specialist vocabulary introduced in communicative contexts and supported by exercises such as paraphrasing, synonym matching, summarizing, and contextual tasks. This result is consistent with research emphasizing the central role of terminology in specialist language teaching and the importance of contextualized vocabulary learning for developing professional communicative competence (Hyland, 2022). *Italiano Medico* and *Italiano in azienda* introduce terminology gradually, facilitating vocabulary acquisition at an intermediate level, whereas *Italiano per giuristi* presents a higher level of lexical difficulty, reflecting the complexity of legal discourse. Similar observations regarding the high lexical density and conceptual complexity of legal discourse have been made in studies on legal language and professional communication (Gotti, 2019). Word formation and grammatical processes are analyzed only partially, which poses challenges for applied linguistics students who must integrate vocabulary knowledge with the ability to use it in professional contexts (Hyland, 2022).

At the morphosyntactic level, the materials reflect structural features of specialist discourse, including nominalization, depersonalization, passive voice, and ellipsis. Only the law textbook explicitly addresses these phenomena and provides exercises for analyzing complex structures, which is particularly important for students preparing for careers as translators or interpreters. These findings correspond with studies showing that specialist discourse often relies on dense nominal structures and impersonal grammatical forms that contribute to objectivity and precision in professional communication (Gotti, 2019; Hyland, 2022). In the other textbooks, these features remain largely implicit, requiring students to independently identify and interpret grammatical rules in different professional contexts.

Regarding textual competence, all textbooks present diverse authentic or quasi-authentic genres, such as medical documentation, legal acts, court decisions, business correspondence, or technical reports. Exercises focusing on recognizing and reproducing text structures promote genre awareness, which is essential for functioning within professional discourse communities. For applied linguistics students, this means mastering both the structure of texts and their pragmatic and cultural functions.

Phonetic competence is developed primarily in the medical and business textbooks through audio materials and listening exercises, whereas the law textbook focuses on written texts. The lack of phonetic exercises in the legal context presents a significant challenge for students, who must develop both oral and written competences in the specialist language.

The development of specialist competence is supported through case studies, role simulations, and authentic documents that enable students to integrate linguistic knowledge with domain-specific expertise. Sociolinguistic competence is fostered mainly through simulations of professional interactions, role-play, and dialogic exercises, which are

particularly important for students learning to adapt language to different audiences and situations. Intercultural competence is developed unevenly and requires the inclusion of cross-cultural comparisons to prepare students for work in multicultural professional environments.

The analysis demonstrates that learning specialist discourse presents applied linguistics students with complex challenges. They must master terminology, syntactic structures, genre conventions, phonetic rules, and sociolinguistic and cultural norms, all within various professional domains. This process requires an interdisciplinary approach and engagement with authentic materials that reflect real communicative practices in specific fields. Similar conclusions have been drawn in contemporary research on language for specific purposes, which emphasizes that effective professional communication requires the integration of linguistic competence, disciplinary knowledge, and discourse awareness (Hyland, 2022).

6. Summary

The conclusions drawn lead to several practical recommendations for specialist language teachers:

- Supplementing textbook materials with phonetic exercises, prosodic tasks, and analyses of morphosyntactic structures, especially when working with legal and business texts.
- Introducing elements of intercultural reflection – through comparisons of systems (e.g. legal, health, business) and communication norms – to support adaptive and pragmatic competences, which are essential in preparing students for real-world professional interactions.
- Integration of materials from different textbooks and fields – combining different styles, registers, and text structures allows for the development of linguistic *metacompetence* and teaches students how to work with heterogeneous material.
- Enriching classes with a translation component – although the texts require students to understand, interpret, and transfer meaning between languages, the textbooks do not offer translation tasks or strategies. Therefore, written and oral translation, terminology transfer exercises, translation strategies, and analysis of translation errors should be an integral part of the course.
- Using active learning methods – such as debates, case studies, interpreting and translation, professional simulations, and role-playing. These types of activities not only support knowledge acquisition but also promote the development of communication skills in professional environments.

In summary, effective teaching of specialist language requires going beyond the textbook and adopting a flexible, reflective teaching approach. The role of the teacher should not be limited to presenting content – they should act as a mediator and guide, focusing on supporting students in developing their translation, pragmatic, and intercultural competences, which are essential in dynamic and multilingual professional environments.

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