GATE: AN ITALIAN-ENGLISH GLOSSARY OF THE LANGUAGE OF ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATIONS

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Abstract

The European Union's policy of multilingualism and intra-EU mobility, which is also reflected at the academic level in such exchange programs as *Erasmus+* and *Horizon2020*, and excellence awards such as the *HR Excellence in Research Award*, has resulted in the need for a number of academic institutions to make their administrative documents accessible to international audiences. This has been accomplished mostly by translating all relevant texts, which include official charters, codes, regulations, calls, contracts, forms and web pages, to name but a few, into English, the *de facto* lingua franca of academia. However, since the documents produced by Italian academic administrations, not unlike those written by the public administration, are characterized by high levels of complexity, especially at the lexical level, translation into English may become a burdensome task. The present paper reports on the construction and describes the main features of an Italian-English glossary of the most salient technical terms and phrasal expressions typical of academic-administrative language (GATE, i.e. Glossary of Academic-administrative Terms and Expressions) which was developed at the University of Insubria with the aim of providing a partial solution to this problem. The glossary wordlist was compiled making use of corpus linguistic methods from a corpus of 63 documents (and their English translations) produced by the academic administration and covering a wide variety of academic-administrative genres. Although developed specifically for a particular academic institution, the glossary, which provides a translation for a total of 508 entries among single-word and multi-word items that are characteristic of supra-local academic-administrative language, may be a useful resource for all Italian research institutions aiming at internationalizing their documents and aligning their policies to EU standards.

1. Introduction

As reflected in its motto – United in diversity – linguistic diversity represents one of the hallmarks of the European Union, which continues to this day to promote the principle of multilingualism in its language policy (Wright 2009: 94; Seidlhofer 2010: 356; Ammon 2012: 571). Since language played a significant symbolic role in the formation of European nation-states, where it was used to unite territories and strengthen communities (Wright 2009: 98-99; Ammon 2012: 573), and still carries a heavy ideological

load, opting for a dominant language would mean making the nation that owns it dominant as well (Wright 2009: 100; Seidlhofer 2010: 356-357). Thus, as laid down in Regulation No 1, the EU has 24 official languages, any of which may be used by EU citizens to communicate with EU institutions (European Commission 2022a). Multilingualism is further promoted by the European Commission, through such objectives as having all citizens learn at least two foreign languages by developing and adopting modern and more efficient teaching methods and favouring mobility within the EU itself (European Commission 2022b).

However, in the words of Seidlhofer (2010: 356), "there is a marked discrepancy between the European Union's discourse about language and communication on the one hand, and the reality on the ground on the other". Indeed, while all member-states' languages are officially recognized as equal, only five languages (i.e. English, French, German, Italian and Spanish) are used in the different EU institutions as official "working languages" (Wright 2009: 94), with English gaining ground on all the others and becoming the *de facto* but unacknowledged lingua franca of Europe (Modiano 2006: 233; Wright 2009: 94; Seidlhofer 2010: 355; Ammon 2012: 582). Indeed, English has for some years now been established as a language of wider communication, not only in the professional domain, but also in such areas as the media, tourism, advertising, popular culture, entertainment and even education (Seidlhofer 2010: 357; Ferguson 2012; Gerritsen 2017: 339; Mauranen 2018: 7), being studied as a second language by 96.4% of pupils at upper-secondary level in 2019 (European Commission 2021b).

At the academic level, this policy was aimed at creating a common European Higher Education Area, thus promoting linguistic diversity and the mobility of both students and academic staff (European Commission 1999; Seidlhofer 2010: 358), as reflected in such exchange programs as *Erasmus+* and *Horizon2020* (Kelly 2014), and excellence awards like the *HR Excellence in Research Award* (www.Euraxess.ec.europa.eu). The application of these policies and programs, however, has mostly resulted in the adoption of English for academic publishing and scientific networking (Wright 2009: 95), in the implementation of a number of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) academic courses (Gotti 2016a, 2017, 2020) and, ultimately, in the need for academic institutions to make their administrative documents accessible to international audiences, a goal that has mostly been accomplished by translating all relevant texts, which include official charters, codes, regulations, calls, contracts, forms and web pages, to name but a few, into English (Nickerson 2013; Mauranen, Carey and Ranta 2015: 414; Gotti 2016a and 2020).

This also applies to the Italian context, as evidenced by a survey conducted in 2015 (Broggini and Costa 2017). Whether intended to improve the national (3%) or international (70%) profile of the university, to attract foreign students (57%) and future members of the workforce (6%), to prepare students for the global market (39%), to promote interculturality (12%) or to improve proficiency in the English language (6%), 85% of the universities that responded to Broggini and Costa's 2015 survey reported that they offered EMI courses in such varied fields as economics, engineering, science, medicine and biotechnologies, IT, international studies, and law, especially at the master's or PhD levels (*ibid.*).

However, since the documents produced by Italian academic administrations, not unlike those written by the public administration, are characterized by high levels of

complexity, especially at the lexical level (Viale 2008; Cortelazzo 2021), translation into English may represent a burdensome task. Indeed, the language of the (Italian) public administration may be described as a language for special purposes (Madinier 2011), that is, a functional variety of the language, which is restricted to a specific field of knowledge and activity, and used by a limited group of speakers for the specific communicative goals of that specialized community (Viale 2008: 49). As it extends to political, legislative, administrative and judicial functions, the language of the public administration, besides sharing a number of technical terms with other specialized registers, is characterized by a high degree of formality and complexity, which is reflected at all levels: stylistic (e.g. synonymic repetition, deixis, explicitation), lexical (e.g. pseudo-technicisms, periphrases, abstract nouns), and morphosyntactic (e.g. impersonal forms, nominalizations, complex sentences: see Marazzini 2003; Viale 2008: 53; Cortelazzo 2021). However, although vocabulary is certainly not the sole factor responsible for the opacity and complexity of administrative language, it does represent the one aspect that has attracted most criticism, from the public and experts alike (Fioritto, Masini and Salvatore 1997; Madinier 2011: 69).

2. Aims, corpus and methods

The present paper reports on the construction and describes the main lexical features of an Italian-English glossary of the most salient technical terms and phrasal expressions typical of academic-administrative language (G.A.T.E., i.e. Glossary of Academic-administrative Terms and Expressions) which was developed at the University of Insubria (Varese and Como, Italy) with the aim of providing a partial solution to the problem posed by specialized vocabulary in the translation and redaction of academic-administrative documents.

The glossary wordlist was compiled from a corpus of 63 documents produced by the Research Office of the University of Insubria that were translated into English by experts within the university itself as part of the *Human Resources Strategy for Researchers* (HRS4R) project, which aims at implementing the *European Charter for Researchers* and the *Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* in the European Research Area, thus promoting an open, transparent and merit-based research framework (European Commission 2021a). As shown in Table 1, the documents in the corpus cover a wide variety of academic-administrative genres, including public selection calls to cover different positions, normative documents, notices and webpages on different procedures and topics, forms to be filled out in order to apply for various services, different types of contracts, meeting minutes, email communications, and some other organizational texts, for a total of 128,614 words.

A mixed-method approach was followed in the compilation of the glossary's wordlist, thus combining a quantitative, corpus-based, methodology (Culpeper and Demmen 2015; Paquot 2015) with a qualitative, manual, one (Martinez and Schmitt 2015). In order to include only those terms and expressions that are strictly connected to the specialized domain of academic-administrative matters, the initial wordlist was extracted by using the keywords function on *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff *et al.* 2004 and 2014, http://www.sketchengine.eu), which compares the corpus frequency list to that of a reference corpus of general Italian, in this case *itTenTen16*, a corpus of the *TenTen Corpus*

GENRES	NO. OF TEXTS	APPROX. NO. OF WORDS
Selection call	9	30,225
Regulations	6	11,832
Code	1	10,987
Notice	8	10,816
Guidelines	2	10,025
Webpage	4	7,102
Form	18	6,863
Rectoral decree	1	5,824
Contract	2	4,403
Plan	3	3,005
Minutes	3	1,979
Policy	1	1,198
Email	4	833
Ranking list	1	424

Table 1. Distribution of academic-administrative genres in the corpus

Family [1] collected entirely from web documents and comprising a total of 5,864,495,700 words (https://www.sketchengine.eu/ittenten-italian-corpus/). Both single- and multi-word terms were taken into consideration for the construction of the glossary, so as to provide the best possible tool for the translation of specialized texts (Gray and Biber 2015; Martinez and Schmitt 2015; Xiao 2015). All keywords and expressions which appeared fewer than three times in the corpus were automatically ignored, in order to limit the dataset to more relevant material.

The keywords and expressions thus retrieved were then subjected to a manual analysis aimed at identifying the most relevant multi-word expressions among very similar alternatives. As the *Sketch Engine* keywords software identifies multi-word expressions composed of up to five single words, some lower-order n-grams are naturally also to be found as part of higher-order n-grams. Since including all lower-order n-grams which also figured in the keywords list as part of a higher-order n-gram would lengthen the glossary's wordlist to no avail, these were manually deleted. Thus, among *cooperazione interuniversitaria* (inter-university cooperation), *accordo di cooperazione* (cooperation agreement), *accordo di cooperazione interuniversitaria* (inter-university cooperation agreement), *cooperazione interuniversitaria internazionale* (international inter-university cooperation) and *accordo di cooperazione interuniversitaria internazionale* (international inter-university cooperation agreement), only the latter, which clearly represents the most complete expression, was included in the glossary's wordlist. Manual refinement also aimed at identifying small and negligible variations, including those

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[1] The *TenTen Corpus Family* is a family of over 40 corpora compiled from Web texts with the purpose of creating comparable corpora collecting more than 10 billion words per language (https://www.sketch-engine.eu/documentation/tenten-corpora/).

related to grammatical gender, number and prepositions, in semantically identical expressions. For this reason, among *entrato in vigore* (effective as of, masculine singular) and *entrate in vigore* (feminine plural), or among *direttore di dipartimento* (director of the department, simple preposition) and *direttore del dipartimento* (articulated preposition), only the former expressions, which, in Italian, represent the grammatically unmarked forms, were maintained. Finally, since the names of the individual departments, courses, and offices (e.g. *Como*, *Varese*, *Insubria*) that are specific to the institution which produced the documents themselves are particularly prominent in the corpus keywords list, precisely because of how the *Sketch Engine* software extracts keywords, the manual analysis also aimed at identifying and selecting only those terms and expressions which, because of their supra-local nature, may apply to all academic contexts.

The same procedure was applied to the corpus of translated texts (126,197 words), whose frequency list was compared to that of e*nTenTen20,* a reference corpus that belongs to the same *TenTen Corpus Family* and which collects English web documents for a total of 44,968,996,152 tokens (https://www.sketchengine.eu/ententen-english-corpus/). The terms thus extracted from the Italian and English corpora were then manually matched to compile the glossary. The wordlist was then organized in alphabetical order, so as to enhance its practical usefulness and applicability.

3. The Glossary of Academic-administrative Terms and Expressions (G.A.T.E.)

G.A.T.E, the Glossary of Academic-administrative Terms and Expressions thus compiled, collects 508 entries among single- and multi-word items that are typical of supra-local Italian academic-administrative language. While 30% of the glossary wordlist consists of single words (e.g. *commissione*, committee, *incompatibilità*, incompatibility, *macrosettore*, macroarea, *plagio*, plagiarism, *reclutamento*, recruitment, etc.), the majority of entry words are made up of multi-word expressions (e.g. *bando di selezione*, selection call, *Consiglio di Dipartimento,* Department's Board, *indirizzo email istituzionale*, institutional email address, *sede legale*, legal head office, etc.), some of which are characteristic of the formulaic language employed in the wider administrative domain (e.g. *e successive modificazioni e integrazioni,* following amendments and additions, *conforme a*, compliant to, *in osservanza di,* in compliance with, etc.).

As shown in Figure 1, which displays the part of speech distribution of the glossary entry words, the glossary consists almost entirely of nouns (22%, e.g. *certificazione*, certificate, *immatricolazione,* enrolment, *Rettore,* Rector) and noun phrases (68%, e.g. *anno accademico,* academic year, *esame di laurea,* final examination, *Settore Scientifico Disciplinare*, Academic field). This is not particularly surprising, since, historically, domain-specific lexicographical works have always had a bias for those lexical items which refer to the specific objects, people and concepts that are relevant for the domain itself and may thus be described as dictionaries of things (McConchie 2019). The second most frequent part of speech is that of adjectives (e.g. *istituzionale*, institutional, *rettorale*, rectoral), which, however, make up only 6% of the glossary wordlist. The rest of the glossary consists of verbs (2%, e.g. *conseguire,* obtain, *reclutare*, recruit), adverbs (0.6%, e.g. *digitalmente*, digitally, *tempestivamente*, promptly) and prepositional phrases (1.6%, e.g. *ai sensi dell'art.*, pursuant to article, *in conformità con,* in compliance with).
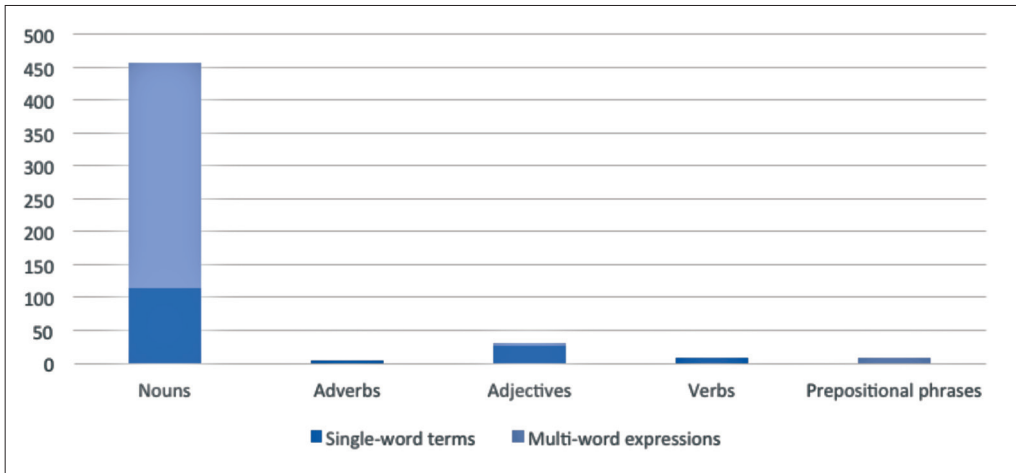
Figure 1. Part of speech distribution of the glossary entry words

Not unlike the language of the public administration, which shares many functions and, consequently, has many contact points with other specialized registers, most notably the legal one (Viale 2008: 53-54; Cortelazzo 2021: 14-15), the language of academic administrations appears to be similarly composed of a core of terms which may be properly defined as restricted to this specialized domain and a number of other words that strictly belong to different, though related, fields of knowledge, including, in particular, those of the public administration, law, research, publishing, business, and IT. While quite limited in number, as it roughly makes up 20% of the whole glossary, core vocabulary consists of those terms and expressions which are strictly connected to the academic world and that refer to the institutions themselves, their organizations, roles, activities and functions: *ateneo* (university), *Consiglio degli Studenti* (Students' Council), *Scuola di Dottorato* (Doctoral School)*, Commissione di Disciplina per gli Studenti* (Students' Disciplinary Committee), *professore ordinario* (full professor), *Cultore della Materia* (Honorary Fellow), *domanda di ammissione* (admission application), *diffusione della conoscenza* (knowledge dissemination), *tutorato* (tutoring), etc.

Since Italian universities represent a branch of the wider public administration (Masucci 2019: 119) and its employees are for all intents and purposes considered to be civil servants, a number of words (15%) from the glossary entry list are actually in common with the language of the general public administration: *aspettativa per maternità* (maternity leave), *congedo obbligatorio* (mandatory leave), *marca da bollo* (revenue stamp), *trattamento economico* (economic treatment), etc. However, as the language of the public administration is closely related to and shares many functions and domains with legal language (Viale 2008: 51-53), the academic-administrative register is also characterized by a large number of words (35%) which originated in the legal context, including, for example, *autenticare* (authenticate), *comma* (paragraph), *Decreto Ministeriale* (Ministerial Decree), *norma di legge* (legal provision), *procedura amministrativa* (administrative procedure), *regolamento* (regulations), *verbale della riunione* (meeting minutes), etc.

While universities can certainly be said to belong to the public administration, recent reforms have led to what is generally referred to as the corporatization of the academic sector (*aziendalizzazione* in Italian), by which managerial and entrepreneurial rationales have been introduced to transform a previously bureaucratic, centralized and inefficient system into a dynamic, decentralized, efficient and customer satisfaction-oriented one (Cosenz 2011: 3-6). As a consequence of this corporatization and marketization of higher education, which favours performance and competitiveness for the allocation of funding and investments, academic institutions now also fall and have to act within the business world. For this reason, some of the glossary entry words (2.4%) belong to the specialized vocabulary typical of this domain: *bilancio generale* (general budget), *Direttore Generale* (Director General), *proprietà industriale* (industrial property), etc.

Although the majority of the glossary entry words are concerned with administrative aspects, the glossary also contains a number of words (11%) which refer to the other domain that universities naturally deal with: research, as evidenced by such words as *assegno di ricerca* (research grant), *grandi strumentazioni scientifiche* (heavy scientific equipment), *produzione scientifica* (scientific production), *terza missione* (third mission), etc. Connected to research, a number of the glossary entry words (3%) have to do with the works produced by the members of the academic community, which are derived from the domain of publishing: *bozza* (draft), *opera collettanea* (edited work), *revisione tra pari* (peer review), etc.

Finally, given the recent progress towards informatization and digitalization within the wider public administration (Dipartimento della Funzione Pubblica 2022; Camera dei Deputati 2018a and 2018b; Martines 2018; Masucci 2019), one last distinct category of words (2%), unsurprisingly, belongs to the semantic field of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), as testified by such words as *dati di navigazione* (navigation data), *PEC* (Certified Email Address), *software di firma digitale* (digital signature software), etc.

As mentioned in Section 2, the glossary entry list was organized alphabetically, rather than thematically, for ease of consultation and terminology retrieval. While each section contains an average of 24 entry words, no section actually collects that precise amount. As shown in Figure 2, which displays the alphabetical distribution of the glossary entry list, the longest section is represented by letter C, with 101 words (20%), followed by letters P and D, with 58 and 56 entry words each (corresponding to 11.4% and 11%, respectively). The high frequency of words in these sections is linked specifically to the presence of many multi-word
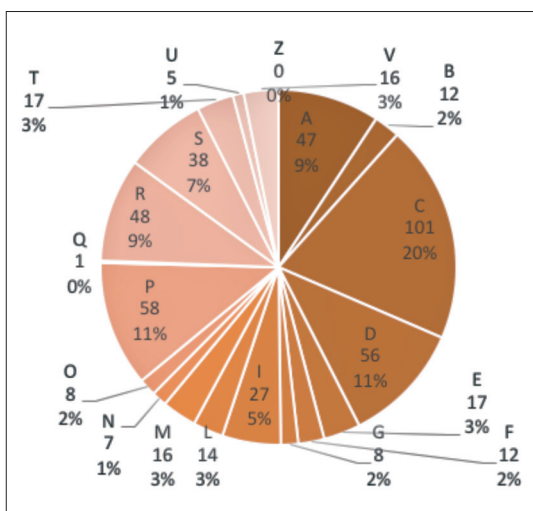
Figure 2. Alphabetical distribution of the glossary entry words

expressions which share the first term: *corso di aggiornamento* (refresher course), *Corso di Dottorato di Ricerca* (Doctoral Program), *Corso di Laurea a Ciclo Unico* (Five-year Degree Course), *Corso di Laurea Magistrale* (Master's Degree Course), *Corso di Laurea Triennale* (Bachelor's Degree Course), *Corso di Laurea Vecchio Ordinamento* (Four-year Degree Course), *Corso di specializzazione* (specialization course), or *professore associato* (associate professor), *professore di prima fascia* (full professor), *professore di ruolo* (tenured professor), *professore di seconda fascia* (associate professor), *professore ordinario* (full professor), *professore universitario* (university professor). Letters H and Z predictably have no entry words, while letter Q only has one (i.e. *questionario*, survey). Letters U, N, O and G are also sparsely covered by the glossary, with 5, 7, 8 and 8 entry words each (corresponding to 0.9%, 1.4%, 1.6% and 1.6%, respectively).

The translational equivalents list, which, as discussed in Section 2, was extracted from the keywords of the English translations corpus and whose terms were manually matched to their Italian counterparts, consists of 478 unique terms. While at first quite surprising, this discrepancy between the number of entry words and their equivalents is actually due to the presence of a number of synonymic expressions in the Italian source documents which in the corpus only have one English equivalent, including, for example, Italian *aspettativa per malattia* and *congedo per malattia*, which are both rendered in English as 'sick leave', or Italian *risoluzione anticipata*, *conclusione anticipata* and *cessazione anticipata*, which are all translated in English as 'early termination'.

4. Final remarks

While generally described as only the tip of the iceberg behind the complexity related to academic-administrative language, specialized vocabulary, which assumes a particularly important role given that some of the documents produced in this context also perform regulatory functions, does seem to represent the greatest obstacle to smooth communication in this specialized domain (Ciliberti 1997; Piemontese 2000; Viale 2008; Cortelazzo 2021). Not only has such terminological and stylistic complexity been perceived by ordinary citizens interacting with public offices as a deliberate attempt to exert social control by excessively complicating administrative matters and procedures (Viale 2008: 47-59; Cortelazzo 2021: 31-46), it has also become the focus of a number of governmental initiatives, most notably the 1993 reform of the public administration, whose focus on the simplification of administrative language expressed in the "direttiva sulla semplificazione del linguaggio amministrativo" (directive on the simplification of administrative language, Dipartimento della Funzione Pubblica 2002) resulted in the publication of the *Codice di Stile* (Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri 1993) and of the *Manuale di Stile* (Fioritto 1997), which aimed at eliminating unnecessary obscurity and rendering administrative documents more linguistically accessible (Fioritto, Masini and Salvatore 1997).

Such terminological complexity is reflected and also amplified in translation. In a specialized field such as that of the public administration, which shares many functions with the legal domain, terminological precision is of the utmost importance. However, since, in the words of Gotti (2016b: 13), "similar terms do not always refer to the same principles or standards in different jurisdictions", the closest and most literal translation is not always the most appropriate. Particular care must, therefore, be placed on

these aspects, especially in a context such as that of the European Higher Education Area, where, for the purposes of international mobility and cooperation, the institutions, customs and procedures of the individual member states have to be rendered comparable and accessible to each other (European Commission 1999; Seidlhofer 2010). All of this makes bilingual glossaries and other English-based lexicographical resources particularly useful. Indeed, while the EU policy was originally intended to preserve linguistic and cultural diversity by officially promoting multilingualism, in practice, it has mostly had the opposite effect of encouraging the use of English as a lingua franca and, ultimately, of increasing the Anglicization of higher education (Wright 2009; Seidlhofer 2010; Gotti 2017, 2020).

G.A.T.E., the Italian-English Glossary of Academic-administrative Terms and Expressions described in the present work, which provides a direct English equivalent for over 500 single- and multi-word terms that are characteristic of the Italian academic-administrative language, may thus represent a useful resource for all Italian and Italian-language research institutions aiming at internationalizing their documents and aligning their policies to EU standards. Indeed, although developed specifically for a particular academic institution, and starting from a number of documents produced by the university itself, therefore, ultimately depending on the quality of such documents, the glossary wordlist was compiled with the explicit objective of including supra-local academic-administrative language only, thus making it relevant for and applicable to a much wider context.

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