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Teaching Business English in nineteenth-century Italy

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses an important gap in existing scholarship on the history of teaching English as a foreign language (EFLT) in Italy. Increasing popularity of English in nineteenth-century Italy stimulated the production of a vast range of didactic materials, addressed specifically to Italian learners. In addition to new grammars, dictionaries and reading books, in the same period also letter-writing guides for learners of English started to circulate widely. Two such guides, Millhouse – Anderson (1873 [1856]) and Cann (1878) will be examined in this study. Fifty-five commercial model letters from each guide will be analysed, in order to investigate practices of teaching business English to nineteenth-century Italian learners. The study shows that translation, in the form of explanatory notes or glosses provided in Italian, was employed as the main teaching method in both guides, while comparison of the choices the two authors made as to what they decided to translate and how they translated these items indicates that they had divergent views on what specific linguistic features characterised the nineteenth-century commercial style of writing in English.

Keywords: EFL, ELT, letter-writing guides, nineteenth-century business English.

1. Introduction

This article examines two nineteenth-century letter-writing manuals (Millhouse – Anderson 1873 and Cann 1878) which aimed to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) to Italian learners. In recent years there has been a significant increase in studies exploring the historical dimension of teaching modern foreign languages in Europe. While Kelly (1969), Stern (1983) and,

for the English language, Howatt (1984; 2nd ed. Howatt – Widdowdson 2004, also Howatt – Smith 2014) remain among foundational texts, McLelland – Smith (2014a), Linn (2016), McLelland (2017) and McLelland – Smith (2018) have been able to build upon this tradition by bringing together cutting-edge research on different language traditions in the European context¹. In Italy, important historical scholarship on modern foreign language teaching has been conducted within the framework of *CIRSIL*, an Inter-university Research Centre for the History of Language Teaching². This network, involving several Italian universities, has focused, for example, on different types of historical didactic materials (primarily grammars and dictionaries) used to teach modern foreign language in Italy (see Minerva 2005, 2007, Pellandra 2007). Vicentini's extensive research (2005, 2012a, 2012b) represents a welcome addition in that she deals specifically with the Italian tradition of English-language teaching (ELT). Her examination of eighteenth-century grammars of English shows that the manuals published in the course of that century (Barker 1766, Dalmazzoni 1788, Baselli 1795) are texts specialised in the teaching of English. This represents a rupture with the earlier tradition of multilingual grammars, bearing witness to an increasing popularity of ELT in Italy (Vicentini 2012b: 97).

What kind of impact this increasing popularity had on the production of ELT materials, as well as on teaching practices, in nineteenth-century Italy is a question that has so far almost entirely escaped scholarly attention. Only two publications (Del Lungo Camiciotti 2005a, 2007), to my knowledge, have dealt with this topic. These two publications are concerned with the use of specialised business letter-writing guides in the teaching of nineteenth-century commercial English to Italians³. Del Lungo Camiciotti (2005a) offers an overview of a small specialised corpus of letter-writing guides used for didactic purposes (Millhouse – Anderson 1873, Manetta 1874, Cann 1883, Lowe 1894, and Candelari 1899). The same corpus is analysed in a more systematic way in Del Lungo Camiciotti (2007), with the aim of investigating strategies employed in different manuals to teach specialised lexis and commercial phraseology to Italian learners of business English. This second

¹ See McLelland – Smith's (2014b) for the presentation of the HoLLT (*History of language learning and teaching*) network, <http://www.hollt.net/>.

² *Centro Interuniversitario di Ricerca sulla Storia degli Insegnamenti Linguistici*, <https://cirsil.it/>.

³ While Del Lungo Camiciotti (2005a and 2007) are the only two studies that focus specifically on the didactic aspect of these guides from the point of view of Italian learners of English, the scholar's ground-breaking work on nineteenth-century specialised business letter-writing guides was further pursued in Del Lungo Camiciotti (2005b, 2006a, 2006b and 2008).

study has shown that translation, in the form either of synonymic notes or explanatory notes, represents the main method for foreign language teaching (Del Lungo Camiciotti 2007: 49). As such, Del Lungo Camiciotti's studies (2005a, 2007) have made a significant contribution to our understanding of nineteenth-century teaching practices of domain-specific English.

The goal of the present study is to take Del Lungo Camiciotti's groundbreaking work one step further by examining the ways in which different authors conceptualise English commercial style and attempt to transmit its technicalities to Italian novices. In order to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the strategies of teaching business English, I will focus on Millhouse – Anderson (1873) and Cann (1878), the two most popular manuals of the five already discussed by Del Lungo Camiciotti (2005a, 2007). Cann's 1878 *Comprehensive Letter-Writer: A complete guide to English correspondence, etc.* (henceforth Cann) is the first edition of Cann (1883, 2nd edition) examined by Del Lungo Camiciotti, while *Practical Mercantile Correspondence, collection of modern letters of business, etc.* (henceforth Millhouse – Anderson) is the manual indicated as Anderson (1873) in Del Lungo Camiciotti. In this article this manual will be referred to as Millhouse – Anderson (1873) to acknowledge the contribution of John Millhouse. Millhouse was the editor of the bilingual English-Italian version, who supplied the explanatory notes for the Italian edition of William Anderson's popular letter-writing guide, first published in London in 1836⁴. In the next section I will scrutinise the publishing activities of the two Englishmen, John Millhouse and Theophilus C. Cann, both of whom, in addition to Millhouse – Anderson (1873) and Cann (1878) respectively, authored an impressive range of other didactic materials for the teaching of English in nineteenth-century Italy. I will show, first of all, that the Italian market of ELT materials was highly varied and dynamic in that period. Secondly, I will argue that, at a time when the Grammar-Translation method was the dominant paradigm in the teaching of foreign languages (Kelly 1969, Stern 1983), these two English teachers, Millhouse and Cann, approached translation as a teaching strategy in divergent ways. As the analysis of the explanatory notes in Millhouse – Anderson (1873) and Cann (1878) will show, the differences in using translation to teach business English concern both the selection of lexical items that were translated (i.e., what was translated) and the actual realisation of the translations (i.e., how the source text was translated). Bearing in mind that the two manuals

⁴ More information on the history of the different European editions of Anderson's *Practical Mercantile Correspondence* can be found in Shvanyukova (2014).

under examination addressed a restricted audience of Italians who wished to learn how to write business letters in English, it will be argued that similarities and differences in the ways Millhouse and Cann used translation to teach a commercial style of writing reveal their assumptions about what kind of nineteenth-century English was associated with professional communication.

2. John Millhouse and Theophilus C. Cann: Two English teachers in nineteenth-century Italy

The rapid expansion of the British sphere of commercial and political influence in the course of the nineteenth century was reflected in the growth of the book market of teaching materials for the study of English as a foreign language. Proliferation of a wide range of didactic publications, among which we find grammars of English, new English-Italian and Italian-English dictionaries, comprehensive English courses for beginners frequently composed of several volumes, reading books, as well as other kinds of didactic literature, are an example of such development. In addition to these more traditional types of didactic materials, in the same period also specialised letter-writing guides, catering for the needs of EFL learners in nineteenth-century Italy, started to circulate in increasingly greater numbers.

In Britain, two influential letter-writing guides specialising in English commercial correspondence appeared in the first two decades of the century⁵. First it was E. Hodgkins, who published a volume entitled *A series of mercantile letters, intended to give a general knowledge of business to those young persons whose views are directed to commerce, and for the use of schools* (Hodgkins 1808). This was followed by William Keegan's *Universal British Merchant; embracing, in a systematic manner, the epistolary style of commercial correspondence between Great Britain and the principal trading cities of Europe, etc.* (1815, 2nd ed. 1820). Interestingly, Keegan's English manual was a revised version of his own letter-writing guide originally written in

⁵ The precedents in the English tradition of specialised business letter-writing guides include John Browne's *Marchants Avizo*, of 1589, the first business handbook in English, containing also models of commercial letters (see McGrath 1957); a few examples of letters with requests for payment, etc., in Nicholas Breton's popular letter-writer *A Poste with a Packet of Mad Letters* (1660); two chapters containing advice on business letter-writing in Daniel Defoe's *Complete English Tradesman* (1727, 2nd edition) and, last but not least, several model letters on business matters in *Letters Written to and for Particular Friends, on the Most Important Occasions* (Richardson 1741).

French, *Le Négociant Universel; ou, Recueil de lettres originales de commerce, écrites par les meilleures maisons de Russie, Hollande, Angleterre ... &c.* (Keegan 1799): in the new English edition this was adjusted to meet the needs of the domestic market. An even more striking case is that of Hodgkins – Schor’s 1858 bilingual English-Italian volume. Published in Trieste under the title of *English-Italian Secretary, collection of familiar letters ... extracted from Percy Sadler’s Art of English Correspondence, and a series of commercial letters originally by E. Hodgkins; with explanatory Italian notes for the use of Italians* (Hodgkins – Schor 1858), this manual was in fact a hybrid volume, containing a selection of commercial letters extracted from the above-mentioned Hodgkins (1808), together with a selection of familiar letters from Sadler (1829), another very popular nineteenth-century letter-writing guide, originally published in Paris for French learners of English⁶. The existence of Hodgkins – Schor (1858) is proof that the borders of the national book markets in didactic materials for the teaching of modern foreign languages in the nineteenth century were easily permeable. Percy Sadler’s *Art of English Correspondence* circulated in different versions in Italy, with the original English text with explanatory notes in French (Sadler 1835a), the English-Italian version of the same manual (Sadler 1835b), an expanded, two-volume English-French bilingual edition (Sadler 1842), and, finally, the hybrid 1858 guide (Hodgkins – Schor 1858)⁷.

It may be argued that circulation of such guides boosted transmission of modern foreign language teaching practices within the nineteenth-century European framework. Moreover, judging by the number of specialised

⁶ The fact that the manual was not original work was explicitly acknowledged in its extended title in Italian: *Il Segretario Inglese-italiano, ovvero raccolta di lettere familiari e regole sullo stile epistolare tratte dall’Arte della Corrispondenza Inglese di P. Sadler, nonché modelli di lettere commerciali inglesi ... di E. Hodgkins: il tutto con la versione italiana a fronte* (Hodgkins – Schor 1858).

⁷ John Millhouse was also familiar with Sadler’s works. He acknowledges Sadler’s influence explicitly in a passage in which one of his own ELT publications is advertised to the reader: “Given that my Grammar is the most complete one in circulation, be it in French or Italian, so that these Themes, which can be used as complementary materials to the Grammar, are the most comprehensive and numerous ones. They are twice as many as those by Sadler, the most exhaustive and, at the same, the best there are in this language, and they are six times more than Vergani’s, as little inadequate and artificial as his. Indeed, the latter, the entire lot of them, cannot compete with mine on future and conditional alone” (Millhouse – Bracciforti 1865: vii, my transl.). Moreover, Millhouse also plagiarised some material from Sadler’s *Art of English Correspondence* in his *Dialogues anglais et français* (Millhouse 1851): commercial model letters in this work (1851: 142-146) are copied, with minor modifications, from Sadler (1835a: 279-283).

business letter-writing guides published in Italy alone, and the number of reprints of the most popular of them, Italians were starting to show interest in English as the medium of international business networking. To the list of the five guides presented in Del Lungo Camiciotti (2005a and 2007) we can add the different versions of Sadler's *Art of English Correspondence*, Hodgkins – Schor (1858) and its second reprint (Hodgkins – Schor 1869), Melzi (1878), at least two more editions of Millhouse – Anderson (1856, 1882)⁸, and six editions of Cann's manual published between 1878 and 1906. All of these guides circulated on the Italian book market in the same period, competing with one another, and with other imported works available, for the same target group of EFL learners⁹.

As already mentioned, both Millhouse and Cann were prolific authors of works dedicated to the teaching of English to Italian learners. John Millhouse's name is familiar to scholars of English-Italian historical lexicography (O'Connor 1978, 1990)¹⁰. The two volumes of his *New English and Italian Pronouncing and Explanatory Dictionary* (1849-1853) earned Millhouse the fame of a lexicographical innovator, largely due to his efforts to offer new ways of teaching correct pronunciation. Millhouse's specific contribution consists in introducing diacritic marks to make English pronunciation more accessible to Italian learners (O'Connor 1990: 104-105). This innovation obviously proved to be successful, as the two volumes of the dictionary were still being reprinted at the beginning of the twentieth century¹¹. As will

⁸ Millhouse – Anderson (1856) is the first English-Italian edition of Anderson's 1836 *Practical Mercantile Correspondence*; the 1873 volume is introduced on the title page as the third edition, while the 1882 one as the fourth. So far it has not been possible to recover the information on the year of publication of the second edition.

⁹ On the basis of Gomes Da Torre (1999), we may compare this situation with what was happening with ELT materials in Portugal at the same time. In his survey of popular textbooks for teaching English that circulated in Portugal in the second half of the nineteenth century, Gomes Da Torre observes that imported (mainly French or German) manuals dominated the market: "In our libraries and secondhand bookshops it is relatively easy to find copies of the complete battery of books published by Percy Sadler in Paris for the teaching of English in France such as the *Manuel de phrases française et anglaises*, the *Cours de thèmes gradués* as well as of the *Petit cours de versions*, and translations of French adaptations of German publications by the well-known Heinrich Gottfried Ollendorf (1803-1865)" (Gomes Da Torre 1999: 292).

¹⁰ Very little is known about John Millhouse's biography. His publishing activity seems to be concentrated in the period between 1842 and 1855. O'Connor remarks that Millhouse "did not live to see the republication of the Italian-English volume, which was completed in 1857 by Ferdinando Bracciforti" (O'Connor 1990: 106). That would put the year of Millhouse's death between 1855 and 1857.

¹¹ Volume One, with the Italian-English dictionary, was published in 1849. Volume Two, with the English-Italian part, was published in 1853, followed by the second edition

be shown in the section dedicated to the analysis of the Italian edition of Millhouse – Anderson (1873), Millhouse's background as a professional lexicographer undoubtedly influenced his approach to the realisation of the explanatory notes in Italian.

Before his popular dictionary saw the light, Millhouse had been busy producing a multi-volume *Graduated and Complete English Course: A didactic, moral and literary work (Corso graduato e completo di lingua inglese: opera ad un tempo didascalica, morale e letteraria)*. Its first installment, *Il primo passo all'inglese, ossia The English Narrator, etc. (First Step to English, or The English Narrator, etc.)*, came out some time in the early 1840s (2nd ed. Millhouse 1842a). *Il primo passo all'inglese* can be described as a comprehensive self-study resource book, furnished with an extensive treatise on English pronunciation and detailed instructions on how to work one's way through the exercises. Here Millhouse emphasises the importance of the learners' native language, Italian, and translation as the method of foreign language teaching: all explanations are given in Italian, English texts are supplied with interlinear translations into Italian, while the main type of exercises are translations into and from Italian.

After *Il primo passo all'inglese*, four more installments of the course followed. In 1842 a dedicated collection of translation exercises (from English into Italian and vice versa) was published under the title *Temi sceneggiati ossia dialoghi italiani ed inglesi per isvolgere le regole grammaticali, ecc.* (Millhouse 1842b). Solutions to this part were made available separately as *Chiave, ossia Traduzione dei Temi Sceneggiati, ecc.* (Millhouse 1842c). Millhouse's grammar of the English language was published in 1844. In 1847 the course's last volume, *Elegant Extracts*, offered Italian EFL learners excerpts from the writings of major English authors. The individual parts of the course were reprinted throughout the century, with the first volume, *Il primo passo all'inglese*, and the 1844 grammar boasting the highest numbers of reprints. The twentieth-century edition of the grammar (revised by Ferdinando Bracciforti) was even adopted as a textbook in secondary and technical schools (Millhouse – Bracciforti 1914).

of the same volume in 1855 (O'Connor 1990: 106). In the second part of the nineteenth century, after the revisions made by Ferdinando Bracciforti, the title of the dictionary was changed to acknowledge the contribution of the second author, and became *New English and Italian Pronouncing and Explanatory Dictionary: with many additions by Ferdinando Bracciforti* (Millhouse – Bracciforti 1864). O'Connor (1990: 110) gives 1924 as the year of the last known reprint of the dictionary. Ferdinando Bracciforti also revised Millhouse's grammar, which was last printed in 1914 (Millhouse – Bracciforti 1914).

Millhouse's portfolio of ELT materials was further diversified when he decided to produce new versions of important English works of literature (Millhouse – Sheridan 1851, Millhouse – Beecher Stowe 1853), religious treatises (Millhouse – Challoner 1845) and popularising works (Millhouse – Brewer 1851) by adding explanatory notes in Italian and/or instructions on correct pronunciation¹². If we are to accept the opinion expressed in the promotional material regularly inserted in Millhouse's publications, the author's achievements in promoting English language teaching in nineteenth-century Italy cannot be underestimated:

With his *Course*, of which every part is comprehensive on its own and is sold separately, he [Millhouse] made English accessible to everyone; to those who limit themselves to reading English books, as well as to those who would like to write books in English, to those who content themselves with learning how to say *How do you do?*, to those who would like to engage in conversations in clubs or in Parliament.

And Millhouse's exertions were not in vain. His books have become ubiquitous. They are found everywhere in Italy. In seven years he has sold thirty-two thousand copies. If in the past only a few Italians would study English, today there has been a tenfold increase in the number of learners. (Millhouse – Bracciforti 1865: v, my transl.)

It is quite possible that Theophilus C. Cann was familiar with John Millhouse's different publications, although more research would be needed to provide concrete evidence of that. At any rate, what brings together these two expats is their role as key promoters of English language teaching. As we learn from the presentation of the author on the title page of his books, Cann had an established connection with the Italian school system: "Member of the R. College of Preceptors of London and other various literary societies, Appointed professor at the Scuola Normale Femminile in Florence" (Cann 1878)¹³. Moreover, in the preface to Cann (1878) the manual is introduced as Cann's fifth scholastic publication (Cann 1878: vi). In the same preface it

¹² Millhouse also authored another version of his *Temi*, a bilingual English-French *Dialogues anglais et français* (Millhouse 1851). See fn. 7 on the influence of the English-French tradition of ELT materials on Millhouse.

¹³ This is what we read on the title page in Italian. The English version of the title page informs us that Cann is "Member of various literary societies, Author of 'Theoretical and practical grammar of the English language', 'Manual of English literature', 'Social Chat' &c. &c. Awards conferred at the Philadelphia & Paris International Exhibitions" (Cann 1878: titlepage).

is also stated that Cann's works were recommended to be included in the syllabi approved by the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Italy for use in professional schools (1878: iv). The sixth (and last) edition of Cann (1878), published in 1906, lists the following works by the same author:

The Theoretical and Practical Grammar of the English Language. Forty-fifth Edition, 542 pp.

First English Reading Book. Eighth Edition, 184 pp.

Manual of English Literature. Fifth edition, 450 pp.

A History of the British Rule in India. Fourth edition, 100 pp.

Friends at Home and Abroad; or, Social Chat. Eighth Edition, 270 pp.

Cann's Shakespeare. Julius Caesar. 120 pp.

Gems from Byron and Tennyson. 68 pp. (Cann 1906: iv)

Cann's most popular ELT work was his *Theoretical and Practical Grammar*, first published in 1872. According to the author, with this grammar Cann aimed to "offer the general public a method for studying English [...] that would enable learners, in as little time as possible, to read fluently and understand with ease the best English authors, to comprehend idiomatic expressions found in speech and speak this idiom effortlessly" (Cann 1872: 5, my transl.). Cann indicates Lindley Murray's 1795 grammar as his model, specifying that "recent grammatical changes that occurred in usage" were incorporated in his book (Cann 1872: 5). The grammar is divided into two parts. Its main part comprises sixty lessons, with each lesson dedicated to one or more grammatical topics, while the much shorter second part is a collection of miscellaneous materials¹⁴. The grammatical topics are introduced at the beginning of the lesson in Italian, with linguistic examples in English and their translations into Italian. The exercises are provided in the second part of the lesson. These usually include a translation task from English into Italian, followed by the second translation task this time from Italian into English, and a short reading. The teaching method employed in Cann's grammar is analogous to the method adopted by Millhouse: both rely on the resources of the native language to transmit knowledge of English. Translation here remains the main teaching strategy.

¹⁴ The second part starts with a theoretical section which gives an overview of the topics discussed in the main part of the book. It also includes some poetry, additional readings, texts to be translated, etc. (Cann 1872: 305-455). A short glossary of "the most interesting nouns, verbs and adjectives from this grammar" is also provided (Cann 1872: 456-472).

The grammar seems to have been received with interest by the Italian public. Its second and third editions followed quickly, in 1873 and 1875 respectively. In the 1877 edition, which was reprinted until 1914, the grammar was officially divided into two separate volumes. The first volume was recommended for students in Technical Institutes, while the second one could be adopted by all other types of schools in Italy. Two revised versions of the grammar were produced in the twentieth century. In 1916 the updated Cann – Molinari grammar appeared under the title *Grammatica razionale teorico pratica della lingua inglese* (Cann – Molinari 1916). The last version of the grammar, edited by Olivero, was published in 1926 (Cann – Olivero 1926) and was reprinted until 1947 (Cann – Olivero 1947).

Other titles of Cann’s ELT publications (see above) may echo those published earlier by Millhouse. To quote a few examples, Cann’s *First English Reading Book* (1873), his manual of English literature (1875), dialogues compiled in *Friends at Home and Abroad, etc.* (Cann 1876), as well as Cann’s versions of works by English authors furnished with Italian notes (Cann 1884, 1885, 1887) replicate patterns of diversification of the portfolio already made by Millhouse. Thus, it may be concluded that these two authors, with Cann likely following in his predecessor’s footsteps, partake in a specific contemporary tradition of foreign language teaching. Neither chose to limit themselves to producing one type of ELT materials only, but worked hard to offer as wide a range of works as possible. Across this range, translation into and from Italian was employed consistently as the main teaching strategy, in Millhouse’s and Cann’s books alike. In the case of their grammars specifically, the organisation of Millhouse’s and Cann’s versions also relied on the same sequential arrangement, i.e. “a statement of the rule, followed by a vocabulary list and translation exercises” (Kelly 1969: 52), a convention disseminated by H.G. Ollendorff through his popular language courses in the 1840s. As such, the two authors can be placed within the nineteenth-century tradition of the Grammar-translation method, whose “principal practice technique [was] translation from and into the target language” (Stern 1983: 453)¹⁵. In the next section the different

¹⁵ A more thorough and systematic analysis of the full portfolios of Millhouse’s and Cann’s ELT publications is needed to establish the extent to which the approaches of two authors to teaching English were shaped by the Grammar-Translation method. Stern’s description of the method as placing “little or no emphasis on the speaking of the second language or listening to second language speech”, or as “a mainly book-oriented method of working out and learning the grammatical system of the language” (Stern 1983: 454) clearly contradicts statements made by both authors on the importance of correct pronunciation and acquisition of fluent conversational skills.

uses of translation as the main strategy for teaching nineteenth-century business English will be analysed by examining explanatory notes in Italian in the two letter-writing guides published by Millhouse – Anderson (1873) and Cann (1878).

3. Teaching business English through translation in Millhouse – Anderson (1873) and Cann (1878)

The nicety of writing in Business consists chiefly in giving every species of goods their trading names; for there are certain peculiarities in the trading language, which are to be observed as the greatest properties, and without which the language your letters are written in would be obscure. (Defoe 1727: 27, quoted in Myers 2003: 379)

Millhouse – Anderson (1873) and Cann (1878) can be categorised as letter-writing manuals or epistolary guides (the two labels can be used interchangeably), a popular nineteenth-century genre of self-help literature. Typically, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century guides produced in England would only rarely include actual instructions on how to compose letters, contrary to what the label ‘guide’ would seem to suggest. In most cases, these guides consisted entirely of a collection of model letters, whose success, as Mitchell rightly observes, “was helped by their role as works of reference [...] letters were often not intended literally as examples to be copied; instead, they offered sample language and modelled correct stances to be taken in a range of situations” (Mitchell 2003: 333). A hybrid genre, an eclectic miscellany or anthology which aimed to supply “as much relevant material as possible” (Mitchell 2003: 333) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a conduct book that would provide moral advice and impart social norms¹⁶, nineteenth-century letter-writing manuals offered a comprehensive account of contemporary society.

As a rule, model letters in eighteenth-century manuals were divided into fuzzy categories of ‘business’, ‘social or familiar’, ‘love and marriage’, etc. In the nineteenth century, epistolary guides with collections of miscellaneous

¹⁶ Myers connects this development, or “return, to [letter-writing manuals’] moral function” (2003: 373) with the publication of two key English epistolary guides in the first half of the eighteenth century, Defoe’s *Complete English Tradesman* (1727) and Richardson’s *Letters to and from Particular Friends* (1741), whose authors sought to “fus[e] conduct book with letter-writing manual” (Myers 2003: 383).

letters, aiming to reach the broadest possible audience, continued to be produced. The above-mentioned *Art of English Correspondence* (Sadler 1829/1835a) is an example of such a guide. Cann implicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to this tradition by including examples of the typical commercial letters found in eighteenth-century guides¹⁷. In a letter entitled "Inquiring into the references of a Country Tradesman", which was still reprinted in the last 1906 edition (Cann 1878: 33 – L31; Cann 1906: 57 – L69), Cann addresses the inquiry to no less than "Messrs. Virtue & Co.", in an attempt either to amuse his reader¹⁸, or to collocate his guide within the tradition of the earlier eighteenth-century manuals that conventionally supplied moral guidance.

In the preface to Cann (1878) it is stated that the guide was written "to supply a want long felt for a Reading-book composed entirely of English Letters, and adapted to the Students of the English Language" (1878: v). This manual is divided into two parts. Part I, entitled *Modern and Practical Letters of Business, Bills of Exchange, Receipts, Trade Circulars, and Forms of Other Commercial Documents* (Cann 1878: 9-62), is the dedicated commercial section of the guide. In Part II *Miscellaneous Letters on the most Useful and Common Matters, Notes, Cards, &c. &c. &c.* (Cann 1878: 63-130) are collected. Cann's

¹⁷ According to Mitchell, among the most common commercial letters we would find "Tradesman in the country to a merchant in London about unsatisfactory goods", "London merchant to the country tradesman about unsatisfactory goods", "Tradesman requesting payment from a customer", "Tradesman to merchant, inquiring about delay of payments", "Tradesman asking for a loan" (Mitchell 2003: 332). Some of these are found already in Breton (1660), some in Defoe (1727), most in Richardson (1741), some in Sadler (1829/1835a) and Cann (1878). A good example in Cann (1878: 13) is Letter 6, "Requesting a payment of an account", modelled on an analogous letter in Richardson (2012[1741]: 371, Letter XLII, "To a Country Correspondent, modestly requesting a Balance of Accounts between them") and Sadler (1835a: 280, LXVII, "To request payment of an account").

¹⁸ The following example, with another speaking surname, corroborates the first hypothesis: "I may add (1) that Captain Fairwind has been well known in our city for a long time as an experienced sailor, and is highly respected for his integrity and uprightness (2)" (Cann 1878, L42, 42). At the same time, this example also displays a conduct dimension. The glossing of 'integrity and uprightness' (as 'onestà e lealtà') draws the reader's attention to the positive characterisation of Captain Fairwind. 'Integrity' is glossed again in L19 (Cann 1878, 24), this time in combination with 'general qualifications', as 'onestà e capacità'. In Millhouse – Anderson (1873) a similar example is found in L25: "Sir, – Desirous of establishing in the city of Rio de Janeiro a branch of my London house, I beg to acquaint you that I have committed the management of that department to Mr. John Newman, a gentleman on whose zeal, ability, and integrity I place the utmost reliance (1)". However, here Mr. Newman's integrity is duly acknowledged only in the English version. The only Italian gloss given by Millhouse is 'massima fiducia' (1873, L25, 34).

collection of model letters is preceded by a short introductory chapter “containing General directions for English letter-writing” (Cann 1878: 3-8). Unlike Cann’s manual, that is a miscellaneous reference work with familiar, social and commercial model letters, Millhouse – Anderson (1873) offers commercial model letters only, making it a specialised guide addressed to the specific target audience of traders. The two guides are also structured in different ways. While in Cann the division into sections is meant to reflect the distinction between business and non-business letters, in Millhouse – Anderson (1873) model letters are grouped according to the specific sub-categories of business letters (Circulars, Millhouse – Anderson 1873: 22-39; Letters of Introduction, 1873: 39-47; General Correspondence, 1873: 48-182). Millhouse and Cann hence opt for two different solutions in producing a letter-writer adapted to the needs of Italian EFL learners. Millhouse, on the one hand, reprints a highly successful, specialised business manual produced originally for the English audience, adding his explanatory notes in Italian¹⁹. On the other hand, Cann claims to have composed an original work for the Italian market, although some of its materials have been borrowed from earlier manuals.

In order to draw a systematic comparison of the decisions made as to what kind of explanatory notes were included, what kind of lexical items were glossed and in what way the translations were realised, 55 out of 65 model letters from the first part of Cann (1878) (*Modern and Practical Letters of Business, etc.*) were examined together with 55 model letters in Millhouse – Anderson (1873). As for letters extracted from Cann, the ten samples from the business letter section that were excluded were forms of documents (e.g., Bill of lading, L58), together with two letters (L55, On England’s natural wealth, and L56, On the Best Means of Increasing the Trade of Italy), which dealt with topics other than routine business interactions. To produce a balanced sample, only 55 letters out of 310 in Millhouse – Anderson (1873) could be included. The first 55 letters, excluding L1 (Advice to a person commencing business) and L2 (Ditto), that had glosses, were extracted from the sections containing Circulars and Letters of Introduction in Millhouse – Anderson (1873). This decision proved to be optimal, as the two final sets of 55 letters from Millhouse – Anderson (1873) and Cann (1878) respectively were thematically coherent. In fact, the same sub-categories of business letters (e.g., circulars announcing a change in

¹⁹ It has to be noted that Millhouse is not consistent in his addition of notes. Up to page 87 the notes are inserted regularly, from page 88 to page 129 no notes are provided, and, finally, four more notes are added, with the last one on page 138.

the firm's management, letters of introduction, etc.) were represented in both sets. All glosses in the final set of 110 letters were collected and examined manually. In what follows, the findings of the investigation will be presented.

3.1 Overview of the types and distribution of glosses in categories

This section starts with an overview of the total number and distribution into individual categories of the glosses inserted in the 110 model letters collected from the two guides. The glosses have been divided into categories according to the number of lexical items in the original English version (see the column with "Examples" in Table 1 below). The smaller numbers in brackets in Table 1 indicate the number of unique items that were glossed. These numbers exclude repetitions of the same glossed units.

Table 1. Types and distribution of glosses in Millhouse – Anderson (1873) and Cann (1878)

Number of lexical items	Millhouse – Anderson	Cann	Examples
1. Single-item units	135 (122)	174 (145)	transact (PMC); according (CLW)
2. Two-item units	31 (29)	78 (70)	stationary business (PMC); commercial securities (CLW)
3. Three- or four-item units	17 (16)	123 (117)	at fifteen days' sight (PMC); stagnation in trade (CLW)
4. Five- or more-item units	9	96	may not be worth your while (PMC); great fear is entertained just now of Russian privateers (CLW)
5. Letter titles		25	Applying for an Employment as a Clerk (CLW)
6. Abbreviations, geographical names	6	26 (22)	Nos. (PMC); C.E., the East (CLW)
Total	198 (182)	522 (475)	

The main finding of the quantitative analysis is that Cann (1878) contains 2.6 times more glosses than Millhouse – Anderson (1873), with 522 glosses against 198. This proportion remains unaltered even if we take into account the number of unique items glossed, with 475 against 182. This difference seems to indicate that Cann is much more thorough and exhaustive in

inserting the glosses. The analysis of the distribution of the glosses into categories reveals a number of additional trends that can help to explain the authors' choices. Firstly, looking at the distribution into categories, we observe that Cann has opted to gloss a much higher number of multi-item units than Millhouse – Anderson (categories 3 and 4). In categories 1 and 2, on the contrary, the differences between the two sets are less marked. In category 1 specifically, the total number of glosses in Cann (174), compared to the number of unique glosses (145), shows that it is this category that contains the highest number of repetitions in this manual, which results in the decrease of the difference between the number of unique glosses in category 1 in Cann (145) and Millhouse – Anderson (122) to 1.2 (from the overall 2.6 for Cann, total numbers considered).

As will be shown in the next sub-sections, these quantitative differences between the two manuals are indexical of the divergent ways in which the two authors approached the teaching of English commercial style to Italian learners. Before the two approaches can be discussed in more detail, it may be useful to provide an example of how glosses were inserted in the two manuals. The example below is taken from Cann (1878, L21, 25). Here we are provided with a reply to L20, in which a request for a quotation for sugar, coffee, and rice was sent from Vienna to London. In L21 the London merchants answer their prospective trading partners in the following way²⁰:

Gentlemen,

We beg to acknowledge your favour (1) of the 20th. inst. and in reply we annex herewith our price-current (2), which you will compare (3) with yours, and will then be able to judge the articles that would turn to advantage (4) in this or your market. It seems that hemp and flax according (5) to your price-current would offer a good speculation. Tallow (6) is also much in demand just now (7). With respect to corn (8), we strongly advise you not to send any, as the market here is quite overstocked (9).

Terms of purchase (10) would be bill at three months, or 1 ½ per cent. Discount for cash. (Cann 1878, L21, Answer to the preceding with price-current, 25)

²⁰ All spellings and punctuation, both in the English and the Italian versions, have been left intact. The numbers referring to glosses have been amended to reflect the chronological order they are given in this paper.

The numbers in brackets refer to the glosses in Italian that are given after each individual letter, as in the example below:

(1) Abbiamo l'onore d'accusare la pregiata vostra – (2) Uniamo qui il nostro prezzo corrente – (3) Paragonerete – (4) Che riescirebbero vantaggiosi – (5) Canapa e lino secondo – (6) Segò – (7) Ricercato adesso – (8) In quanto al grano – (9) Sovverchiamente provvisto – (10) Condizioni d'acquisto

In Millhouse – Anderson (1873) the procedure is exactly the same, i.e., numbers are added in the original letter in English to refer to the Italian glosses. One minor difference is that here the glosses are given in footnotes, and not after individual letters, like in Cann (1878). In both manuals, however, the Italian gloss is inserted on its own and is not accompanied by the original passage in English. This means that the Italian learner is expected to be able to identify the exact passage (be it a single-, two- or more-item unit) in the original text that corresponds to what has been glossed in Italian. While this may not be problematic in cases like (6) (*tallow – segò*) above, where the gloss is a straightforward translation of an individual term, most of the other glosses in the same letter are potentially more complex. Among these we find two-item units (e.g., the Future Simple form (3), *will compare*, glossed as *Paragonerete*) and multi-item units, such as (1) *Abbiamo l'onore d'accusare la pregiata vostra*. Gloss (5) is an example of a preference for grouping words together for glossing because they happen to co-occur in this particular sentence, pointing to the lack of a more systematic effort to provide transparent and didactically useful glosses. In Millhouse – Anderson, as already noted, this kind of longer unit is rare, while the main bulk of explanatory notes is composed of categories 1 and 2 (glosses to one- and two-item units). In the next sub-section, which will discuss category 1, I will attempt to explain why glosses of this type in Millhouse – Anderson are less transparent than in Cann, representing a major challenge from the point of view of an Italian learner of English.

3.2 Analysis of one- and two-unit glosses

As already explained, Millhouse's intervention in Anderson's original manual limits itself to the insertion of glosses, which were added to approximately one-third of the volume. He reprints the preface to the first London edition (1873: v-viii), a short chapter entitled *Preliminary*

Observations (1873: 1-4), as well as a Note to the second London edition (1873: 4-5), all written by Anderson, with Italian glosses added also to these pages. As such, the English-Italian version of the manual does not contain a preface or a designated introductory chapter directed at the Italian readers of the manual, in which Millhouse could offer a rationale behind his edition of Millhouse – Anderson and the criteria for the insertion of the explanatory notes in Italian.

Cann's rationale, on the other hand, is presented in his Preface to CLW:

The numerous Italian notes which I have added at the foot of every page, offer in many cases not merely an interpretation of isolated words, but give the general sense of various idiomatic expressions peculiar to English. By this means the irksomeness, which is occasioned by poring over the columns of a dictionary, will be obviated. (Cann 1878: vi)

This is an important statement, in which the author informs his reader about the two main types of Italian glosses that have been inserted (“isolated words” vs. “peculiar idiomatic expressions”). However, the motivation provided to endorse the insertion of the glosses – to spare the learner the trouble of consulting a dictionary – implies an absence of a systematic approach to the teaching of technical vocabulary and specialised commercial style of writing. Hence it would seem that neither author approached the teaching of specialised business letter writing with a clearly-set agenda and a particular method. However, the analysis of single- and two-item lexical units shows that the authors shared a critical awareness that a core technical vocabulary of commercial life existed in English and had to be transmitted to Italian learners. Cann and Millhouse manifested this awareness by glossing a set of the same lexical items, in an effort to emphasise the importance of key commercial terms with which the users of their manuals had to familiarise themselves. Among these key lexical items we find terms designating the main participants in the mercantile community (such as clerks or customers), places of employment (counting-house and firm), routine practices of managing business transactions (trial, settlement (of an account), nett proceeds), to name but a few.

In what follows, examples will be provided to show how these key lexical items were presented to Italian learners, and what kinds of differences can be found concerning the strategies of glossing these items. The first key term glossed by both authors is *counting-house* (or *counting house*):

- (1) Mr. N having been managing clerk in my counting house (1) here for several years, is perfectly conversant with every kind of commercial operation, and with all the routine of business.
1 – Studio (ufficio). (Millhouse – Anderson, L25, 34)²¹
- (2) My age is twenty-five and I have been for the last three years employed in the counting-house (1) of Messrs. Ward & Lock, the publishers (2) of Paternoster Row, to whom I beg to refer you for further (3) information respecting me.
1 – Banco. 2 – Editori. 3 – Ho l'onore di rimandarvi per ulteriori. (Cann, L2, 10)

Millhouse – Anderson does not provide examples of the prototypical job application letter, of the type that is given in (2) extracted from Cann. Example (1) instead is a circular announcing the establishment of a new branch. The branch will be managed by Mr. N, whose credentials are presented to convince prospective customers to open an account with the firm. The protagonists in both the job application letter and in the circular are two clerks: one is introduced by the author of the circular (1), while the other introduces himself (2). On the other hand, another key term, the lexical unit *clerk* is not glossed in (1), but it is in (3) and (4) below:

- (3) Sir, – Referring to our circular of the 10th July last, addressed to you, on the demise (1) of Mr. John Allsop, senior partner in our late form of Allsop & M'Intosh, we have now the pleasure of intimating that articles of copartnership (2), commencing this day, have been entered into between Mr. James M'Intosh, the surviving partner; Mr. John Stephens, of Jeffrey's Square, London; and Mr. Alfred Bowring; a gentleman who has been for many years our confidential clerk (3).
1 – Trapasso, morte. 2 – Società, partecipazione. 3 – Commesso, ragioniere, giovine di studio. (Millhouse – Anderson, L5, 23)
- (4) Applying for Employment as a Clerk (1)
Gentlemen,
Having heard that you have a vacancy (2) in your house for a junior Clerk (3), I take the liberty of offering you my services.

²¹ As explained above, glosses in Millhouse – Anderson are given in footnotes and are numbered in the order of their appearance on the individual page, and not according to the order in which they are introduced in individual letters. For the sake of clarity, I have renumbered the glosses in these examples, so as to make them appear chronologically in the given examples.

1 – Ricorso per impiego come commesso. 2 – Posto vacante. 3 – Giovane scrivano (Cann, L5, 12)

Example (3) from Millhouse – Anderson is another circular, announcing a change in the management of a firm which, once again, involves the figure of a clerk, while (4) from Cann is the second job application letter for a clerical position. A closer examination of the Italian glosses in (3) and (4) shows that, while both Millhouse and Cann select the same lexical item, the two authors implement different strategies in glossing it. In (3) Millhouse provides a gloss that is modelled on a dictionary entry: with three different choices, the gloss offers an exhaustive overview of the Italian translations of the word *clerk* – *commesso*, *ragionere*, *giovine di studio*. Clearly, Millhouse's background as a lexicographer influences his approach here. Cann instead opts for a single gloss, which is contextually motivated (*clerk*: *giovine di studio*), excluding any other possible translation as irrelevant in this particular letter. In fact, the other two glosses in (3) and (4) illustrate the same point: Millhouse provides synonyms (*demise*: *trapasso*, *morte*; *copartnership*: *società*, *compartecipazione*), while Cann is consistent in his single-gloss approach (*vacancy*: *posto vacante*). While the addition of synonyms does not necessarily hinder comprehension and may actually facilitate the learning of a term, finding several glossing options could make the learner unsure of how to interpret the item in the context of a particular letter (e.g., 'clerk' in Example 3). Cann's decision to limit the glossing to single (contextual) equivalents may have proved to be didactically more efficient.

Other items from the list of the same key terms glossed in both manuals include '*firm*' and '*customers*'. In CLW '*firm*' is the most frequently glossed single-unit item, translated in five different letters (L8, L12, L18, L38 and L53). Examples (5) and (6) illustrate the main uses of the term in CLW; (7) is the only instance of '*firm*' glossed in PMC:

(5) His son, Henry, a steady and promising (1) young man, is fully conversant (2) with our affairs, and is besides well acquainted with general business, having been employed for several years in the well known firm (3) of Smith, Elders & Co., Liverpool.

1 – Posato e promettente. 2 – Versato. 3 – Ditta. (Cann, L38, 38)

(6) We beg leave (1) to inform you that we have established a House of General Agency in this City at the above address, under the firm (2) of Thomas Cooper & Co.

1 – Noi prendiamo la libertà. 2 – Ditta. (Cann, L8, 15)

- (7) Gentlemen, – We beg to acquaint you (1) that we have opened a house of general agency at the Mauritius, under the firm (2) of Young, Forbes & Co. (3); the two senior members of which have been some years established at Port Louis in the same line (4), under the firm of Young & Forbes.
1 – Ci preghiamo di farvi avvertito. 2 – Ditta. 3 – Co. *abbrev. di* Company, Compagnia, Soc. 4 – Linea, genere. (Millhouse – Anderson, L3, 22)

Examples (6) from Cann and (7) from Millhouse – Anderson are extracted from two circulars dealing with the same type of event: an establishment of a new house of general agency. In both examples, the glossed item ‘*firm*’ is part of the idiomatic expression ‘under the firm of’. Neither manual acknowledges this, as both simply provide the Italian equivalent of the English term. Example (5) from Cann represents a different type of circular, announcing a change in the management of a firm. In its contents, as well as in the linguistic realisation of this specific passage, introducing a new partner in the management of a firm, (5) is strongly reminiscent of (1) taken from Millhouse – Anderson. More specifically, the use of the adjective ‘*conversant*’ in these two examples is an interesting case of a non-technical term which seems to have acquired the particular connotation of being associated with competence in business affairs (cf. “*conversant with every kind of commercial operation, and with all the routine of business*”, Example 1, Millhouse – Anderson; and “*fully conversant (2) with our affairs, and is besides well acquainted with general business*”, Example 5, Cann). As a matter of fact, Cann, unlike Millhouse, acknowledges the utility and specificity of the term by glossing the adjective.

Millhouse – Anderson’s preference for dictionary-like glosses added to short passages in the original is confirmed again in (8), which contrasts with Cann’s decisions to gloss much longer passages in (9):

- (8) Sir, – In announcing the opening of a *Wine, Spirit, and Beer Store* (1), on these premises (2), for the sale of these articles wholesale (3) and retail in casks (4) and bottles, I beg to acquaint you with my determination to select none but the choicest (5) and most approved qualities of the different descriptions of each; by which means I shall, at all times, have it in my power to ensure to my friends and customers (6) such articles as will, I trust, merit their approbation and obtain for me a continuance of their favours.
1 – Magazzini all’ingrosso. 2 – Locali, luoghi terreni. 3 – All’ingrosso. 4 – Barili. 5 – Più scelti, più squisiti. 6 – Avventori. (Millhouse – Anderson, L16, 50)

- (9) He is determined to supply (1) only the very best articles in the market (2), and to sell them at prices that can bear the test of comparison (3) with those of any other house in the trade (2), and while giving unremitting attention (4) to the wishes of his customers (5), he is led to hope that although he may not command, he may at least merit success, and thus ensure that patronage and support (6) which he now solicits.

1 – Fornire. 2 – Piazza. 3 – Che non temono la prova di confronto.

4 – Costante attenzione. 5 – Avventori. 6 – Protezione e appoggio.

(Cann, L57, 58)

One key term, that has been glossed in both examples, is *'customers'*. This is fitting, given that the addition of the Italian gloss helps to draw attention to the figure of the customer and, indirectly, to the ways an English customer should be treated. Additional lexical items, such as *'unremitting attention to the wishes of the customers'* and *'patronage and support'* in (9) or *'the choicest'* in (8) reinforce the cultural message.

Other instances of the same lexical items included in both manuals include mainly other nouns from the specialised lexical pool of commercial terminology (*invoice, nett proceeds, parcel, references, trial*), a number of key verbs related to the most important business activities (*introduce, refer, supply*), adjectives such as *'wholesale', 'steady', 'unassuming',* and *'thoroughly'* as the only adverb.

3.3 Extended glosses: Formulaic constructions, prepositional phrases and adverbials

With their selection of lexical items, Millhouse and Cann show how sensitive they were to the sophisticated technicalities of nineteenth-century English business discourse. These technicalities clearly were not limited to the usage of specialised vocabulary. As pioneering studies of authentic nineteenth-century correspondence have shown, the presence of particular linguistic traits in historical business letters in that period started to account for the standardised, *'frozen'* style of writing, characteristic of this epistolary sub-genre at the intersection of public and private discourse (Dossena 2010a, 2010b). The nineteenth century is thus the period when the personal dimension, typical of earlier business letters, gradually diminishes and *"the business letter in the modern sense of the word begins to emerge"* (Dossena 2010a: 48). In its linguistic realisation, this new form of letter relies heavily on

a set of conventionalised, crystallised and elaborated units of discourse, such as different kinds of formulae or standardised expressions.

Standardised expressions in business correspondence can be used as building blocks to produce the macrostructure of the letter. Such expressions can signal topic change, or they may place the letter within a specific sub-category. For instance, the standardised opening “In reply to your advertisement in” serves to categorise the letter as a job application. A comparison between the openings of the first two paragraphs from a circular in Millhouse – Anderson and Cann, announcing the death of a partner in a firm, illustrates the same function:

Table 2. Structure of a circular announcing death of a partner in Millhouse – Anderson (1873) and Cann (1878)

	Millhouse – Anderson, L4, 23	Cann, L38, 38
Title of the letter	Circulars: Death of partner	Announcing the Death of a Senior Partner (1) of a Mercantile firm.
	Sir, -	Gentlemen,
Par 1	It is with deep regret that we have to apprise you of the death of [...], which occurred [...].	It is with feeling of deep regret that we have to inform you of the death of [...], which occurred [...].
Par 2	At the same time we have the satisfaction of stating that this melancholy event will in no way interfere with the future conduct of our business [...].	As regards the conduct of our affairs, this melancholy event will produce little or no change [...].

The first sentences in the circulars contain a routinised expression: “It is with (feeling of) deep regret”, helping to identify the letter as a circular announcing someone’s death. The transition from the first to the second paragraph is performed with the help of further routinised expressions, such as “the melancholy event”, “the (future) conduct of our affairs/business”, emphasising the conventionalised style of business letter writing.

The analysis of the different categories of longer glosses in Millhouse – Anderson (1873) and Cann (1878) shows that both authors identify a set of conventionalised units whose usage is associated with nineteenth-century English commercial style. These sets of conventionalised units are consistently glossed in Cann, as well as in Millhouse – Anderson, with a high frequency of repetitions of the same units. However, the two sets are not

identical. While Cann's glosses emphasise the importance of the so-called "pre-fabricated chunks of discourse" (Elspaß 2012: 46), or conventionalised formulae proper (e.g., of the type 'I beg to do X'), Millhouse – Anderson draws the learner's attention to the use of standard prepositional phrases (e.g., 'prior to', 'in the meantime', etc.).

Table 3 presents an overview of the glossing of 'I/we/he + beg(s) + to do X' constructions in Cann (1878):

Table 3. Glosses of formulaic constructions with 'to beg' in Cann (1878)

I/we/he + beg(s) + to do X		
L2,10	I beg respectfully to offer my services	Mi prendo la libertà, traduzione letterale: chiedo rispettosamente di offrirvi i miei servizi.
L57, 58	[George Byfield] begs respectfully [to inform]	Prende la libertà rispettosamente
L35, 36	I [have to acknowledge your favour (1) of the 20 th . inst., and in reply] beg to enclose you a <i>pro forma</i> invoice	Mi prendo la libertà d'accludervi una fattura fittizia
L2,10	to whom I beg to refer you for further	ho l'onore di rimandarvi per ulteriori
L49, 46	I beg to say	Mi pregio dire
L33, 34	[We have to acknowledge your favour of yesterday, and in reply] we beg to say	Dobbiamo dire
L44, 43	We beg to add	Dobbiamo aggiungere
I/we + beg + to acknowledge		
L11,17	I beg to acknowledge [receipt of your favour of yesterday]	Mi pregio d'accusare
L21, 25	We beg to acknowledge your favour	Abbiamo l'onore d'accusare la pregiata vostra
L45, 44	We beg to acknowledge the receipt of your esteemed	Accusiamo ricevimento della vostra pregiata
I/we + beg leave		
L8,15	We beg leave [to inform you]	Noi prendiamo la libertà
L28, 31	We beg leave [to inform you]	Prendiamo la libertà
L39, 39	We beg leave to hand you herewith	Noi prendiamo la libertà di mandarvi qui accluso

Different constructions containing ‘to beg’ have been glossed in Cann a total of thirteen times²². The three distinct sections in Table 3 (Section 1: ‘I/we/he+beg(s)+to do X; Section 2: ‘I/we+beg+to acknowledge; Section 3: ‘I/we+beg leave) reflect the most frequent contextual uses of the varying forms of the construction, which collocates with specific verbs (e.g., to acknowledge, to inform) more frequently than with others. Like in the case of single-unit glosses, also in the case of such formulaic constructions Cann tends to provide contextually-motivated glosses, with translations that also exhibit a degree of variability: some are synonymous expressions (e.g., ‘ho l’onore’ instead of ‘mi pregio’), some are simply translated differently (e.g., ‘I beg to say’ is glossed as ‘Mi pregio dire’ in L49, while for ‘we beg to say’ in L33 ‘Dobbiamo dire’ is given as its Italian equivalent). In only one instance, in the gloss in L2, does Cann provide also a literal translation. In all remaining cases, the learner is expected to deduce independently that the gloss containing a formulaic construction in Italian corresponds to an equivalent conventionalised expression in English.

An attentive learner would quickly notice the frequency of conventionalised expressions containing the verb ‘to beg’. This repetition would make the acquisition of the formulae more effective. In Millhouse – Anderson we find only two glosses to ‘to beg’ constructions. In addition to “We beg to acquaint you (1)” inserted in (7) above, the formulaic ‘I beg’ is glossed only once:

- (10) Sir – I beg to (1) inform you that, under the auspices of the highly respectable house of Messrs. Burtwell Brothers, in whose service I spent thirteen years, I have commenced business as a broker (2) for colonial produce.

1 – Mi pregio di. (Millhouse – Anderson, L6, 24)

According to Millhouse – Anderson, rather than conventionalised expressions, it is specific prepositional phrases and adverbials that represent distinctive linguistic traits associated with English commercial style. In fact, these items constitute a substantial group of the multi-item glosses provided in Millhouse – Anderson. In Table 4 selection and glossing practices of prepositional phrases and adverbials are compared.

²² In L51 (Cann also glosses a complete sentence containing a non-formulaic instance of “to beg”: “He begs us to send you his kind regards” - “Egli ci prega di salutarvi cordialmente”. (Cann 1878: 49).

Table 4. Prepositional phrases and adverbials glossed in Cann (1878) and Millhouse – Anderson (1873)

Prepositional phrase	Millhouse – Anderson	Cann
as heretofore	Per lo addietro, finora (L4, 23)	1) Per lo addietro o fin'adesso (L38, 39); 2) continuata come fino a qui ('will be carried on as heretofore', L44, 43)
(as) hitherto	Come per lo passato (L4, 23)	1) Fin'adesso, voi avete tirato su di me ('hitherto, you have drawn on me, L16, 21); 2) Pagamento dei conti come ho fatto fin qui ('settlements of accounts as I have hitherto done', L35, 36); 3) Fino adesso ('hitherto', L43, 43); 4) Sono fin qui stati al commercio ('have hitherto carried on business', L53, 51)
as to	In quanto, riguardo a (L60, 50)	In quanto a (L19, 24)
in the meantime	Frattanto (L32, 57)	Sollecitudine per migliorare le nostre relazioni, e frattanto (readiness to improve our correspondence, and in the meantime (1), L4, 12)
prior to	Prima di (L25, 34)	Avanti lo sbarco di parecchi carichi (prior to the landing of several cargoes (1), L51, 48)
in compliance with	In adempimento di, conformemente a (L69, 54)	
in pursuance of	1) In seguito a, conforme a (L7, 48); 2) In seguito a, conforme a (L67, 53)	
in the interim	Frattanto, intanto (L61, 50)	
on behalf of	In favore di (L5, 24)	

It can be observed that five out of nine units are glossed in both Cann and Millhouse – Anderson. However, as already observed with the examples in category 1 (see 3.2), the authors adopt different strategies of glossing. Millhouse – Anderson consistently glosses shorter units: in this case, individual prepositional phrases and adverbials. The fact that the prepositional phrases and adverbials are glossed on their own (see 11 and 12), and not as part of a longer unit, as frequently found in Cann (see 13), could help the learner identify those units as characteristic of English business style. In Cann, instead, this identification is compromised once prepositional phrases and adverbials are glossed as part of an extended unit.

- (11) The surviving partner, Mr. James M'Intosh, will conduct the affairs of the house in this presidency, as hitherto (1); and we confidently hope, from the experience you have had of our uniform punctuality and regularity, that you will continue to favour us with your correspondence; resting assured that the same unremitting attention will be paid to the interests of all our commercial friends as heretofore (2).

1 – Come per lo passato. 2 – Per lo addietro, finora. (Millhouse – Anderson, L4, 23)

- (12) Sir, - In pursuance of (1) the orders given to my friends at Liverpool, as I advised you under date of the 20th. ult. (2), they have shipped, to your address, thirty bags of Maranham cotton of excellent quality, by the Ann, Captain Thomas Ball, to Havre.

1 – In seguito a, conforme a. 2 – Ult. *abbrev. ai ultimo, scorso*. (Millhouse – Anderson, L7, 48)

- (13) My means are too limited and the profits I realise too small, to admit of my waiting for the settlement of the accounts as I have hitherto done (1).

1 – Pagamento dei conti come ho fatto fin qui. (Cann, L35, 36)

In (11) and (12) from Millhouse – Anderson, three out of four glosses belong to this particular category. In (13) from Cann, 'hitherto' is embedded in an extended unit and is not glossed independently.

4. Discussion and conclusion

What emerges from an analysis of the lexical items glossed in Millhouse – Anderson (1873) and Cann (1878) respectively (Section 3) is that the English

teachers have been able to provide a comprehensive overview of the core specialised vocabulary of commercial English. Moreover, the selection of items indicates that, in transmitting specialised vocabulary through glossing, the authors also aimed to familiarise Italian EFL learners with the contemporary British mercantile environment. In this environment clerks, conversant in affairs and steady in character, were employed in counting-houses and firms, forwarding parcels and supplying their customers, to whose wishes they paid ‘unremitting attention’, with ‘the choicest articles’. In other words, the glosses drew attention to norms and customs of a different society, disseminating important social and cultural knowledge.

The acquisition of fixed formulae represents a major challenge for foreign language learners. The stakes for the learner are even higher when, as it is with domain-specific styles of writing, the efficiency and overall success of communication is largely dependent on the correct usage of standardised expressions. The need to acquire the proper style of commercial writing as distinct from “the general style of English miscellaneous letters” (Cann 1878: 4) is made explicit by both authors in their prefaces. In the original preface to the English edition of *Practical Mercantile Correspondence*, William Anderson writes that “[n]othing, [...], can better conduce to this end than a collection of genuine commercial letters, of recent dates, adapted at once to form the style and to afford a correct insight into the business of the counting house” (1872: v); while Cann includes “brevity”, “clearness”, “precision” and “methodical arrangement” in his list of “the chief characteristics of a good English business letter” (1878: 3)²³. The ability to produce letters that conform to the conventionalised style of English business writing thus becomes a priority for the target readers of Millhouse – Anderson 1873 and Cann 1878.

The use of conventionalised formulae, or “pre-fabricated chunks of discourse” (Elspaß 2012: 46), in authentic private correspondence of the nineteenth century has been shown to be associated mainly with the writing of less skilled and typically less schooled encoders, whose linguistic insecurity would manifest itself in a lack of epistolary creativity (Dossena 2007, 2008b, Elspaß 2012, Laitinen – Nordlund 2012). As such, formulaic usages would be condemned as “old-fashioned” in letter-writing guides (Elspaß 2012: 55), stigmatising, as a result, these less capable encoders, who would be labelled as

²³ These statements echo those made by Defoe on “Tradesman’s stile” more than a century earlier: “a Tradesman’s letters should be plain, concise, and to the purpose; no quaint expressions, no book-phrases, no flourishes; and yet they must be full and sufficient to express what he means, so as not to be doubtful, much less unintelligible” (Defoe 1727: 19, quoted in Myers 2003: 376).

linguistically inferior. However, linguistic formulaicity in the correspondence of a public kind (e.g., institutional or business correspondence) has to be approached from a different perspective. For example, in nineteenth-century institutional contexts, the ongoing “routinisation of the clerical work on correspondence” meant that lower clerks were responsible for reworking their superiors’ notes into actual letters by adding the formulae, as well as the epistolary frame (Włodarczyk 2015: 161-162). In this light, the routinised nature of written institutional as well as business communication (Dossena 2008a, Włodarczyk 2013), makes this type of writing activity distinctively specialised and inaccessible for non-experts²⁴. In other words, while the extensive usage of formulae in private letters of poorly skilled encoders betrayed their little experience of epistolary writing, correspondence clerks showed their competence as encoders of institutional letters by structuring letters through the use of appropriate formulae.

Very fittingly, then, in their explanatory notes both Millhouse and Cann drew their readers’ attention to the conventions of the English commercial style by glossing different types of multi-unit lexical items, in addition to individual technical terms. However, as this study has shown, the two authors made different decisions when it came to the selection of the items and the ways the glosses were realised. This indicates that Millhouse and Cann relied mainly on their extraordinary linguistic intuitions²⁵ as to what kind of linguistic features of the English commercial style of writing had to be taught to their EFL learners in nineteenth-century Italy.

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²⁴ This is in line with what has been demonstrated for present-day institutional settings, where, as Drew – Heritage (1992) have noted, the use of specialised lexis by professional speakers takes on the function of “display[ing] expertise in a particular domain and thus orient[ing] themselves and their audiences to the institutional context” (Crawford Camiciottoli 2007: 127).

²⁵ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful and helpful comments, and especially one of them, whose remark on the authors’ intuitions I am paraphrasing here.

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