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Applying specialised linguistic knowledge in the classroom: ESP in social work discourse in Italy

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Abstract

The Social Work Corpus (SocWoC), a specially compiled repository of material of relevance to undergraduate trainee social workers consisting of almost 2 million tokens, has been presented in detail as regards compilation and description in previous work (Johnson 2016, 2017). Briefly, containing both spoken and written material in English, the corpus brings together service user interviews, case studies and other training materials, academic papers from the field of social work, newspaper articles on relevant issues, and government guidelines. Its validity is thus guaranteed since it features "actual examples of use which are drawn from the content area and which the learner is likely to have come across" (Flowerdew 1993, p. 239). Closer examination of the individual sub-corpora in SocWoC has enabled a more specifically linguistic focus on the world of social work, identifying a number of language patterns inherent to and typical of the different genres. These findings are further elaborated in this paper in order to develop classroom resources for use in an Italian undergraduate social work context in relation to the compilation of classroom material. The findings are also discussed in the light of examination of a small corpus of students' assessed essays (SocSEC) produced both before and after using SocWoC in the classroom. The focus is thus on the transmission of specialised linguistic knowledge from the corpus findings to practical application in the classroom, with considerations which may also be extended to other ESP disciplines.