

MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK: COLLABORATIVE CLIL ACTIVITIES FOR UNIVERSITY COURSES IN MEDIEVAL FUNERARY ARCHAEOLOGY

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Abstract

This paper describes the activities performed by the students of the course of funerary archaeology held at the Division of Palaeopathology of Pisa University in collaboration with the Institute for Computational Linguistics (ILC) of the National Research Council (CNR) in Pisa in the period April-June 2014. The lessons, which used a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach, were aimed at studying the funerary beliefs and burial practices in Italy and England in the Middle Ages. The 2014 course followed on from the courses of the year 2012 (focused on the more general issue of taphonomy; primary and secondary burials; single, double, or multiple burials), and 2013 (which examined the world of the ancient Romans and their burial customs of cremation and inhumation). The lessons were conducted by using extracts from self-contained specialized texts that were simple to read and that offered the basic concepts of medieval funerary archaeology. The students were supported by a reference text for funerary archaeology, which established the correct nomenclature to use when describing bodies, grave goods and tombs. Powerpoint slide presentations helped students break up the monotony of the text work and made the material more interesting and engaging. The slides were used to illustrate different types of burials in filled or empty spaces; the position of burials in both rural and urban environments; the disposition of the limbs in the burial; the rise of the Monasteries in the early Middle Ages and of the religious Orders of the Dominicans and Franciscans in the late Middle Ages. Each student was responsible for researching and reporting on a particular topic, and was supported by the use of information and communication techniques. Particular attention was devoted to the Books of Hours, important illuminated medieval manuscripts (containing psalms, short prayers and biblical quotations) that marked the different parts of the day and that were specifically composed for wealthy people. Classroom activities ranged from the simpler multi-matching and gap-filling exercises to the more complex tasks of providing definitions for given words, creating mind-maps, enriching a bilingual English-Italian glossary and providing contextualized examples for an English grammar book. Educational videos from the BBC or other channels and pertaining to the topics treated during the lessons were projected each time and were followed by direct questioning and more general conversation, to help students gain proficiency in oral communication. In the last three years, the Italian students from Pisa University have been working in collaboration with those of Ohio University on an excavation project carried out at the Field School in Medieval Archaeology and Bioarchaeology at Badia Pozzeveri (Lucca, Italy), to which the prestigious International journal SCIENCE dedicated a special issue and cover in December 2013. Finally, multidisciplinary elements were also included in the courses, by exploiting the information extracted from videos related to disciplines other than funerary archaeology, for example a BBC Channel 4 video describing the British meals of the day, the origins of which date back to medieval times.

Keywords: CLIL, collaborative learning, medieval funerary archaeology, computer technology, archaeological field work.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper will discuss the teaching in English of content and language integrated (CLIL) courses in funerary archaeology held in the academic year 2013-2014, following the experiences of the previous years 2011-2012 [1], [2] and 2012-2013 [3], during which we conducted courses in funerary archaeology for second-cycle degree students and first-cycle degree students respectively. In all

cases, the courses were run by a native language researcher of the Institute for Computational Linguistics (ILC) in Pisa, working in collaboration with the subject teacher of the Division of Paleopathology of Pisa University, where the classes took place. The first of these courses, i.e. the specialist course on general funerary archaeology, was supported by various texts, in particular by Duday's *The Archaeology of the Dead* [4], and ended with Powerpoint presentations dealing with specific subjects assigned to each student. The second of these courses was instead focused on funerary archaeology in the Roman period, by contrasting the burial practices in Italy and in England, on the basis of the text *Death and Burial in the Roman World* [5]. The third and most recent experience, which we are describing in this paper, was instead concerned with funerary archaeology in the Middle Ages (500-1500 C.E.), the period connecting the ancient with the modern period, covering the period between the Roman civilization and the Renaissance. As a starting point, and as constant reference during the course, we used the slides that had been prepared in Italian by an expert in archaeology and bioarchaeology, also instructor and supervisor working on the summer field schools at Benabbio and Badia Pozzeveri near Lucca, Tuscany [6]. The slides covered various aspects of medieval archaeology, in particular the different phases of medieval funerals and burials, and analyzed the various types of tombs that have changed over the centuries. Extracts from a number of acknowledged texts describing the background history and philosophy of the Middle Ages also supported the teachers and students. CLIL methodology, i.e. the teaching of a particular discipline in a second language, which has become an important issue in the Italian educational system, was constantly used throughout the course.

Before the beginning of each of the above-mentioned courses, the applicants were submitted to a grammar test prepared by the English teacher, and to a listening test, both of which allowed to understand the students' level of language competence. The students were in any case expected to have previously achieved at least an intermediate level in English, and to have already attended the course in medieval funerary archaeology in their own language with the same subject teacher.

The information was delivered at different levels, using slides, textbooks, Internet materials and resources, pictures, videos, and listenings. The students were involved in a number of tasks, by working individually, in pairs, or in small groups, in order to develop the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking and to improve the vocabulary and knowledge of the subject.

The trainees interacted with one another, in order to achieve and complete specific information, or to express their opinion about particular aspects of funerary archaeology. Presentation of the material was generally supported by visual aids, including slides, videos, Powerpoint presentations, projected during the lessons. In an active and learner-centred environment, the students were involved in a variety of activities, by collaborating with their peers in small groups, working at the pace and level that best fitted their abilities and adapting to the availability of classroom equipment on the day of the lesson (for logistic purposes, the classroom was generally the same one each time, but not always). With the assistance of the teacher, the students focused their attention on specialised subject-specific vocabulary, which was integrated into their existing knowledge of the English language. They were divided into different groups, and it was not the teacher passing on information to the other participants for completion of the tasks, but the trainees sharing different portions of information and achieving effective learning. When the students forgot that they were speaking in a second language that was not their own, they became strongly involved in the learning process, gaining increased interest in the subject matter. The development of a number of social and organizational skills, combined with repeated exposure to the material, was essential and beneficial to learning. We moved as much as possible from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach, in which the students were taking responsibility for their learning, and constructing knowledge by interacting both with the teachers and their peers.

2 DEATH IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The grammar and the subject teachers first needed to plan the lessons by selecting from the Internet appropriate text books, readings, recorded listenings and videos about medieval funerary archaeology. A number of readings on the concept of death in the Middle Ages were taken from different sources, generally from acknowledged texts, such as *The Archaeology of Disease* [7] and *Death and Burial in Medieval England* [8].

Life in the Middle Ages was marked by the continuous presence of death, as a result of the high rates of mortality, disease and famine that medicine at that time was unable to cure. According to

Christianity, the scope of life was to prepare for the afterlife, and the destiny of the soul depended not only on one's behaviour in life, but also on the way in which one's death occurred. Christians hoped for a good death taking place at home with friends and family, with a priest administering the last rites, in contrast with a bad and sudden death, which increased the likelihood of spending a long period of time in Purgatory (the concept of which took widespread hold in the 11th and 12th centuries), or in Hell. People in the Middle Ages thought that the suffering of the dead could be eased by prayers of intercession of the living, who were invited to pray for the deceased, in order to reduce their time in Purgatory. Starting from the beginning of the 14th century a constant image found in manuscripts, paintings and sculptures was that of three living princes meeting three dead princes in the form of worm-eaten cadavers who, in turn, warned the living that they would soon look like the deceased (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 - The three living and the three dead princes. Arundel 83 II f.127, c.1310-1320.
<http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/medieval/death/medievaldeath.html>

Another useful and interesting text was *Burial Practices in early Medieval Britain and their Interpretation*, parts of which were distributed during one of the lessons [9]. The students concentrated on the problem of grave goods found with the burials in the southern and eastern parts of Britain, in contrast with those of western Britain, where the burials were barren with no grave goods, reflecting the gradual abandonment and decline of these habits with the adoption of Christianity.

The slides prepared by the archaeologist and used by the subject teacher for the funerary archaeology courses in Italian were translated into English and used during the lessons conducted according to the CLIL approach (Fig. 2).

The reading *Learning Medieval Realms* of the British Library [10] and the video *Medieval Europe: Religion in Medieval Europe* [11] were important to deepen the study of the Parish churches, which were at the centre of the community of that time. The bodies were usually oriented West-East, as it was believed that the dead facing the East would see the resurrection of Christ on Judgement Day. The constant message was that bodily death could not be avoided and that the living should concentrate on spiritual matters for eternal life.

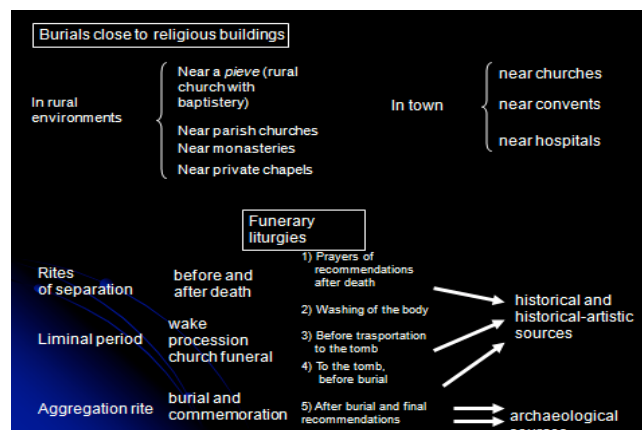


Fig. 2 - Introductory slide.

3 MONASTERIES

The teachers helped the students activate and develop any previous knowledge they might have on specific issues in the field of funerary archaeology. The illustrations in the slides, the pictures and photographs extracted from the textbooks or available on the Internet were used to enhance the students' comprehension of a particular concept, or process, or description.

One of the interesting aspects of the Middle Ages - which aroused great interest during the course - was the rise of the different Christian Mendicant Orders. The subject teacher explained the principal features of the Benedictine Abbeys (or Monasteries), in which the most important buildings were the Church (built in the shape of a cross); the Cloister (built in the form of a square with an open space in the middle); the Chapter House (where they held their daily meetings); the Refectory (where the meals were served) (Fig. 3).

Among the other rooms, there was the Scriptorium, the room in which the monks were dedicated to the copying, writing and illuminating of manuscripts, namely the Gospel and other ancient texts (Fig. 4). The Benedictine preachers and teachers, who had little interaction with the outside world, taught the elements of reading and writing in Latin, and provided the only source of education in the Middle Ages, so as to place them in the forefront of the intellectual life of the Middle Ages. From the activities that the students carried out individually, we obtained additional information than that achieved in the classroom, for example one student (whose text has been corrected) wrote that:

“...thanks to Charlemagne and his reforms, people learned a new form of writing and reading in an easy way. The use of lowercase letters with capital letters at the beginning of some words (when, on the contrary, the Romans wrote all words in capitals) is the system still used nowadays...From the 1200s, besides, Universities were born from Cathedral schools: students studied Latin grammar, rhetoric, logic, geometry...”

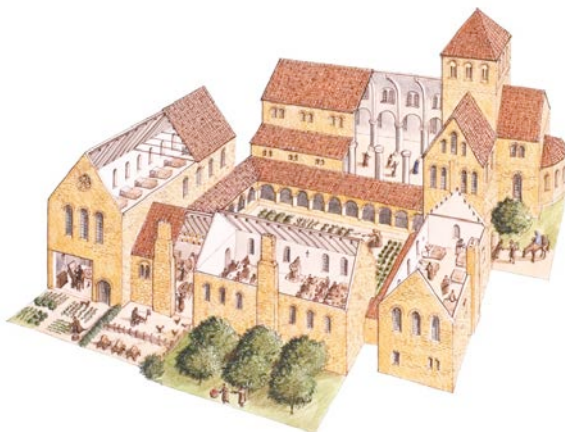


Fig. 3 - Image of a Medieval Monastery inside.
<http://becuo.com/medieval-monastery-inside>

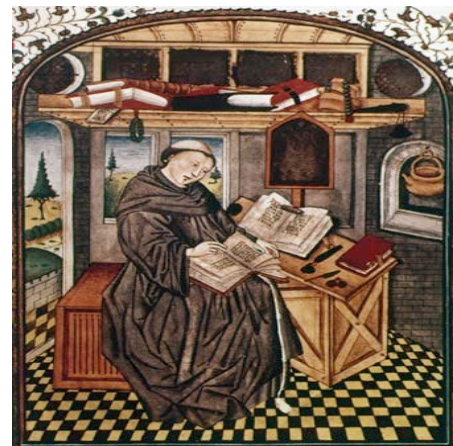


Fig. 4 - A scriptorium.
<http://pixgood.com/middle-ages-monastery.html>

The subject teacher contrasted the Benedictine Order with the Franciscan and Dominican ones, also called “Mendicant” or “Beggar” Orders, which depended on charity for their survival. The architecture of the churches belonging to these Orders was also very different: the churches of the Benedictine Order - generally isolated in the countryside - were especially built for the monks, while the churches of the Franciscan and Dominican Orders, which forbade the possession of property, were larger, and were situated in the rapidly growing towns, as the friars (in contrast with the monks) needed to reach the wider public of laymen inside or near the city, helping the poor, the ill, and the elderly.

The students appropriately prompted by the teachers took it in turns to describe what they had been asked to study individually, while the classmates added any pertinent related information that could provide a wider picture of the topic, and bring new insights to what had just been said.

The language teacher, on the other hand, insisted on how to define words, and how to use appropriate terminology for the description of a particular word or concept, using the formula “A (noun) is a (noun) that (verb)”. The learners were repetitively invited to respect the word order (time) + subject + verb + object + place + (time), in order to build their self-confidence when they were speaking English, and to

be facilitated when communicating with the teachers, their Italian peers in the classroom, or foreign peers on the excavation sites in Italy or abroad.

4 BURIALS

The illustrations contained in some of the slides helped explain the different types of burials, e.g. the simple fossa, the complex fossa, the two-part sarcophagus, the stone tomb, etc., which were all fixed elements. These tombs found in a filled, or in an empty space, could be accompanied or not by grave goods, according to the different history periods and circumstances, which reflected the beliefs of the populations.

The students had to describe the images of the burials that were a salient feature of the Middle Ages. They examined slides related to different types of burials (primary or secondary, individual, double or multiple; in filled or empty spaces, etc.); the position of the limbs during burials, mobile and static elements; chronological dating; different phases of development of churches; grave goods found in graves, etc.

Emphasis was placed on different types of graves, from the *cappuccina* grave, with the corpse placed into a shallow pit backfilled with soil, to the grave with small stones set in mortar, to the so-called pit or soil graves without a tile or stone mortar cover; finally, to the cremation (burning of the corpse by intense heating) burials.

Some slides showed the body previously washed by women or by the monastic infirmarer (the person responsible for looking after and caring for the sick) in the case of monks or nuns, and then shrouded or placed in a coffin. Burial customs, mourning rituals and practices were also examined, as well as the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, from the Priests, to the Bishops, Archbishops, Cardinals and the Pope.

5 BOOKS OF HOURS

Some of the images in the slides used for the course were those showing the *Books of Hours*, devotional books (containing psalms, short prayers and biblical quotations), which started to appear in the 13th century. The origins, history, contents, illustrations and materials related to the books of hours were examined and discussed [12]. One of the most common scenes of a Book of Hours was that of a priest reciting the Office of the Dead over a corpse buried in a shroud and without a coffin. (Fig. 4).

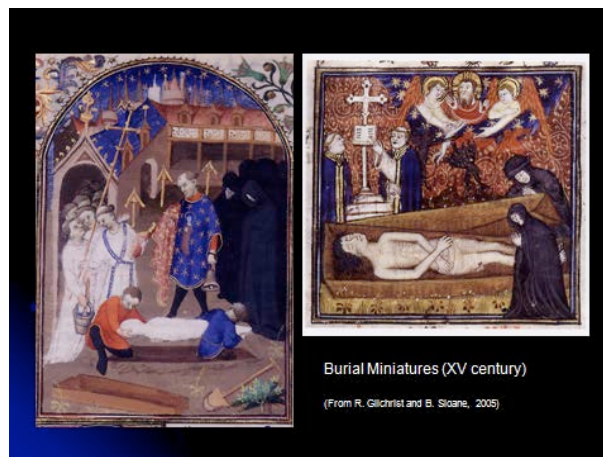


Fig. 5 - Burial Miniatures from the XV century.

Other images showed the deceased carried in procession to the church and then to the cemetery for the funeral. The slides were often used as a starting point to explain a concept, or to share information that the students, working at home, had achieved. For example, one of the students was asked to describe what was happening, and the others, prompted by the subject teacher, added comments, made hypotheses, or provided further information. The students' achievements and performances improved significantly, when we compared the very first lessons with the last ones.

In the video *Medieval Books of Hours in the Public Library of Bruges* a medieval history expert introduces to the origins and history of the Books of Hours [13]. In this, and in other cases, the students were asked to write a short summary of what they had seen and heard during the lessons. The summaries were read out loudly, so that the language teacher could check and eventually correct any pronunciation mistakes.

From the very first lesson, the learners were encouraged to communicate in English; all the information that the students had achieved in Italian needed to be processed in English, and this required great effort on the part of both the students and the teachers.

The students were involved in a number of tasks, for example they extracted words from the passages that had been read, summarized and commented during the lessons. They were also asked to produce short compositions by which they practiced and improved the vocabulary and knowledge of the subject.

The most relevant grammar points and constructions were examined each time during the lessons, taking into account the grammar errors that were made either at the oral or written level. Emphasis on grammar was necessary to improve the participants' performance in the four skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) and to exploit this knowledge for the enrichment of an English grammar, constantly updated with contextualized examples extracted from acknowledged sources [14]. Particular words and grammar structures were studied in context, and students were assigned exercises which also helped them better understand the grammar and semantics of the English language.

During the course, particular emphasis was given to the correct vocabulary to be used with regard to the different parts of the body, in order to describe the positions in which the corpses were found. We used the text *Burial terminology: a guide for researchers* by Sprague, whose objective was to standardize the use of burial terminology, so that burials could be compared, independently of region, method of excavation, or time period [15]. The illustrations in the book allowed the students to visualize the positions of the body and the placement of the various body parts (Fig. 6).

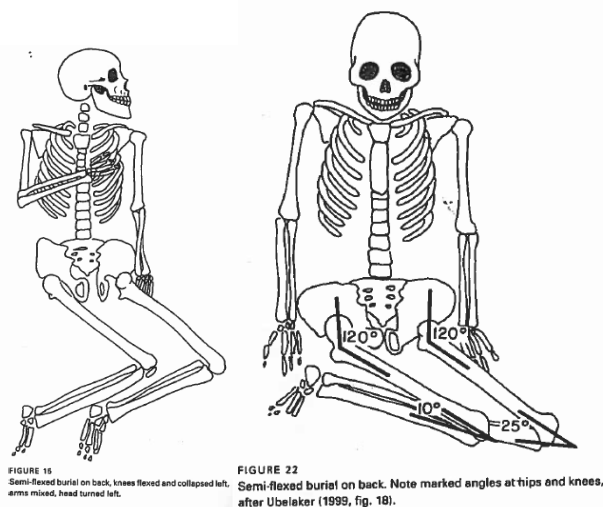


Fig. 6 - Images from Prague's *Burial terminology: a guide for researchers*.

In one exercise assigned to the students, we asked "What exactly should we intend by the word "arm"?", "What exactly should we intend by the word "leg"?", "What is the difference between a coffin and a bier?", "What is the difference between an individual burial and a complex burial"?, "Name some grave goods that can be found near a corpse".

6 FURTHER ACTIVITIES

The students were repetitively invited to respect the word order (time) + subject + verb + object + place + (time), in order to build their self-confidence, and to be facilitated in speaking and communicating with their peers. They were taught on how to define words, and to use appropriate terminology for the description of a particular word or concept, using the formula "A (noun) is a (noun) that (verb)".

The tasks assigned to the students consisted in using prompts to write short descriptions of a particular concept or process or phenomenon, or in filling in a table or fact-file regarding a particular issue, or in doing crosswords, or in completing cloze tests (in which the students were to insert the missing word or words in a sentence). Moreover, the learners were given a number of words, and asked to match these words with their definitions; or to say whether or not a statement was correct (true/false answers); or to perform multiple choice tests, in which they had to choose the correct answer out of a number of options; and open activities, in which they had to express their opinion about a particular subject; or to create a mind map. In other cases, a second or third student was asked to repeat what two previous students had said, and to provide any possible additional information on a particular topic. All these activities helped the students improve their language, by exposing them as much as possible to the second language.

One of the homework activities consisted in answering some basic questions on what had been taught in previous lessons, for example: "Answer the following questions (between 6 and 12 lines). 1) Outline the importance of the Parish Church in the Middle Ages. 2) How could people gain salvation for their souls? 3) How did the Church provide education for the people living in Medieval times? 4) What was the Book of Hours, and how was a monk's day centred around it? 5) Can you describe the death and burial practices in Medieval Europe?" The following is an extract from one of the answers, related to question 1, in which a student enriched with new information what had been learnt in class:

"...The church was the centre of life in the Middle Ages: every village had a church and bigger cities had a cathedral... the square in front of the church hosted merchant shops, markets, festivals and fairs,...the church buildings served also as school buildings, for the priests were also the teachers of their village ...".

Other videos shown to the students during the classes were those relative to the excavations performed at Badia Pozzeveri (near Lucca, Italy), where the Italian students from Pisa University have been working in collaboration with those of Ohio University at the summer Field School in Medieval Archaeology and Bioarchaeology since 2011 [16]. The activities attracted strong worldwide attention from the press and were reported in the December issue of the International journal SCIENCE, which also dedicated the front cover to the event. The videos included "Resurrecting a Monastery", "Hunting the Black Death", and "The Lady of the Gold Earring" [17].



Fig. 4 - A lime burial from the cemetery of Badia Pozzeveri.

New terminology enriched the bilingual English-Italian funerary archaeology glossary that was started in the first year of the courses. New additions were, for example, tile = Italian *tegola*; tile-built tomb = Italian *tomba a cappuccina*, defined as "a type of burial composed of a leaning tile roof covering the deceased who was laid on a tile floor". Other words and expressions were limestone = Italian *calce*; the stone bottom of a simple fossa = Italian *pezzame*. These new words introduced in the glossary were taken in part from the Internet readings and textbooks used during the course, and also from the blog that the students of the excavations at Badia Pozzeveri kept to document the fieldwork that was carried out daily in the different excavation areas of the site: Area 1000 (adjacent to the apse); Area 2000 (the post-medieval cemetery; Area 3000 (an area in front of the Church); and Area 4000 (the presumed location of the medieval monastery's cloister) in the summer season of the years 2011-2014 [18]. Some instances of new words were: ditch = Italian *canaletta*; drainage ditch = Italian *canaletta di deflusso delle acque*; topsoil = Italian *strato superficiale del terreno*; sherd = Italian *coccio*; debris layer = Italian *strato di detriti*; topsoil layer = Italian *strato superficiale del terreno*.

Finally, *cassone* tombs were chest-shaped tombs taking various forms: they could be rectangular with stone slabs, or box-shaped stone tombs, or they could be travertine box tombs containing cremations (tile-built tombs composed of a leaning tile roof covering the deceased who was laid on a tile floor). In this pit a compact chamber, or *cist*, was built of tiles set in white mortar.

7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Interdisciplinary elements were also introduced in the course, which rendered the lessons much more interesting and appealing. We resorted to information available on the Internet and related to disciplines other than funerary archaeology, as in the case of the three-part BBC video titled *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner* [19], in which we were taken on a journey through the history of English food, from Medieval to present times. The programme was a TV series that appeared on BBC Four and was presented by the entertaining and informative Clarissa Dickson Wright (also author of various books, and co-chef on a famous television cooking programme), who died last year. The origins of the English breakfast, with the traditional bacon and eggs, date back to medieval times, when the Catholic Church determined what could be eaten and when: the different Monastic Orders were extremely rigid as to the need to adopt a diet without meat, and decreed that the Fridays and Saturdays should be the days in which to eat fish. It was actually the Monks who developed the idea of farming fish, which could be available at all times. In the third part of the BBC video, the presenter goes to the Museum of London, where she meets an archaeologist discussing the medieval people's perfect dentistry, which was due to the lack of sugar in the medieval diet, in contrast with the huge deterioration of the teeth in the Elizabethan period, when sugar was introduced in the diet. In her book *A History of English Food*, where Clarissa Dickson Wright describes the way in which food has shaped history, we also achieve some interesting lexical information about the Norman population, whose powerful impact on English food can be traced through language [20]:

“...the names of the various animals that were eaten were transformed at the moment of death and preparation for the table from Old English to Norman French, a bullock becoming beef, a sheep becoming mutton, pig becoming pork, a deer, venison, and so on....”.

Students preparing for a career in the professional world can take advantage of the collaborative work undertaken in the form of pair, group, or classwork, fundamental to improve interpersonal communication, and to carry out tasks and activities of various kinds. We believe that CLIL courses, which bring students together through way of communicating and interacting, with active participation and collaboration aimed at achieving shared objectives, can lead to improved outcomes. The learners are able to express what they have learnt, enriching the contents with their thoughts and personal opinions, interacting with their peers, and incorporating their own ideas into discussion.

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