

## PREFACE

*This issue of the Quaderni del Centro Linguistico marks the end of a project and of a long period of enthusiastic commitment and endeavour at the Centro Linguistico. Over a period of two years, a team of language teachers and computer technicians (hardware and software) dedicated themselves to the theoretical and practical aspects of testing, with the aim of developing online certification within a university environment.*

*What was uppermost in our minds, therefore, was a type of certification in which content and objectives were established by first identifying the specific cultural needs and interests of our students, thus avoiding the other forms of certification on the market which are predominantly based on general language (read 'general English') and which are presented as being virtually the only option for students wishing - or needing - to have their language competence scientifically certified for study and/or professional purposes.*

*"Within a university environment", however, also meant that the certification project was to be developed and administered within the university itself by staff with wide experience of the objectives, content and methodology of language teaching at all levels.*

*The project at the Centro Linguistico began with the large-scale production of traditional and online materials for all levels of language learning - English in particular - focussing mainly on reading and listening skills and, to a lesser extent, on productive skills.*

*The experience acquired during the development of these materials, which were closely related to the specific needs of language learners at the Centro Linguistico, led to a further project involving the construction of placement tests and exit tests, which were then tested themselves when admitting students to language courses and when assessing the level of their competence and achievement at the end of the 50-hour course cycles.*

*The production of teaching and testing material in General English and English for Specific Purposes (initially for the humanities) was expanded to include new and more specific work on English for*

*economics, English for business and, finally, English for foreign trade.*

*The team working on the Foreign Trade project concentrated on a variety of issues ranging from corpus construction, identification of grammar at intermediate/upper intermediate level and production of teaching material to test construction, test measurement, test validity assessment and test validation.*

*Throughout this long and complex process, constant and close attention was devoted to discussion and training, as well as to checking all the material and verifying its suitability through use and practice in class and in self-access.*

*Two people in particular should be singled out for their fundamental roles in this project. Gino Schiavinato (scientific coordinator at the Centro) supervised all the stages of the project and provided invaluable guidance thanks to his expertise in mathematics, statistics and language testing. Geraldine Ludbrook, researcher in English, coordinated the various stages of the language work and was responsible for producing the online test.*

*The spin-off from this lengthy and ambitious project has been considerable. In the first place, the work provided a real challenge for all the teachers, technicians and administrative staff working at the Centro in that they were all dealing with issues that do not usually arise in the day-to-day running of courses. The training and specialisation of staff have probably been one of the most rewarding aspects of this project.*

*Secondly, the undergraduates who were awarded the first Treviso Certificate in English for Foreign Trade at the end of the pilot project were fortunate enough to benefit from what we believe to be the very first online Certificate of English for special purposes available in Italy. What is more, they were able to do this free of charge.*

*Thirdly, the Centro Linguistico of the Università Ca' Foscari Venezia has been able to demonstrate the scientific and productive capacity of a university team, working in a scientific environment for the sole benefit of university students.*

*It is with great satisfaction and pride that we deliver our results to the readers, to scholars and to all potential users.*

*Finally, I should like to congratulate all the members of the team (a full lists of names can be found at the end of this volume) and thank them for their infinite patience, hard work and trust.*

*A particular word of thanks must go to the internationally-renowned expert in language testing and certification, Bernard Spolsky (Emeritus Professor, Bar-Ilan University, Israel), who believed in our project from the outset and who agreed to validate the certificate. During his various visits to Venice, he was so generous as to give us his expertise, support and advice and, what is more, the gift of his friendship.*

*Dario Calimani*

<sup>1</sup> Professor emeritus at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan, Spolsky is past president of the International Language Testing Association and in 2002 has received the ILTA-EXCELLENCE Lifetime Achievement Award.

Professor Spolsky has validated the National Certificate of Proficiency for Foreign Languages.