

# THE ITALY ELT ARCHIVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR SECOND LANGUAGE AWARENESS RESEARCH AND TEACHER EDUCATION

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The relevance of archives and special collections in education has been widely acknowledged, particularly in the humanities, and the ways in which both physical and digital archives can be utilised to support learners at different levels of education is demonstrated by a substantial body of research (see Osborne, 1986; Cook, 1997; Hendry, 2007; Vong, 2016; Press, Meiman, 2021; Baines, 2023). However, the use of archives and special collections specifically designed to train pre- and in-service foreign and second language teachers has been overlooked. Indeed, there is a general lack of this type of resources, and therefore their potential for foreign and second language teacher education remains untapped. At the same time, research into the history of language learning and teaching (henceforth HoLLT) has been expanding in Europe (see Howatt, Smith, 2014; McLelland, Smith, 2018; Coffey, 2020; Smith, 2021), and recent initiatives have shown how this area can be further developed through the implementation of archives collecting language teaching materials (see 3.1 below).

On this premise, a project is underway at the University of Milan to create an online, open-access archive of ELT materials published in the twentieth century targeting Italian learners of English, the Italy ELT Archive (henceforth IELTA)<sup>2</sup>. Relying on the assumption that HoLLT and teacher training can benefit from the implementation of this type of resources, the purpose of the project and of the archive itself is to promote research and provide pre- and in-service English language teachers with tools to understand the principles underpinning ELT materials and develop their awareness of second language teaching methods. After considering the role of archives and special collections in education in Section 2, in Section 3 we will describe the design and development of IELTA in depth, highlighting the challenges in the process and the strategies adopted to address them.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://italy-elt-archive.unimi.it/>.

Examples of how IELTA can facilitate linguistic research will be illustrated in Section 4. Indeed, the textbooks collected in the archive represent reliable sources for the diachronic investigation of two fundamental areas within language awareness research, namely language variation (Kristiansen, 2017), and language attitudes (Garret, 2010). Since IELTA has also been designed to afford valuable tools and resources to enhance teachers' awareness of teaching methods, in Section 5 we will illustrate how it can be implemented to design materials evaluation tasks which were carried out in a module attended by postgraduate teacher students in the Masters' Degree program in European and Extra European languages and literatures at the University of Milan.

As the IELTA project is still ongoing, in Section 6 we will indicate areas of improvement for our archive, further applications in the context of teacher education, as well as pathways for future research.

## 2. ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS IN EDUCATION

As stated in the Introduction, one of the primary aims of IELTA is to provide resources and tools for English language teacher education in Italy. The pivotal role of archives and special collections in education, particularly in the humanities, has been researched for many years, with scholarly discussions around the topic dating well before the introduction and subsequent spread of digital archives (see Osborne, 1986; Cook, 1997). The fact that nowadays archives and collections are often disseminated online has given users outside typical academic audiences the opportunity to consult primary sources which, in the past, would have been more difficult to access in person.

When it comes to students as users of online archives, it has been noted that these can be as engaging and valuable as physical ones, despite the widely held idea that tangible primary sources are more suitable for educational purposes than their digitised, intangible counterparts (Press, Meiman, 2021). However, the quality of the learning experience offered by online archives depends on how potential issues related to their search interface are resolved. Another crucial element to be considered is the amount of information they provide to contextualise the sources they store, which sometimes may not be sufficient for appropriately understanding the digital items consulted (Press, Meiman, 2021).

Archives and special collections can assist students in developing their skills in researching, investigating, and analysing, and their adoption for pedagogical purposes is particularly student-centred (Cook, 1997). Consulting primary sources challenges traditional, asymmetrical teacher-student models of knowledge transmission by actively involving students in a process of discovery (Hendry, 2007). Moreover, students working with archives and special collections show high levels of information retention and the acquisition of metacognitive skills. The development of metacognitive skills is promoted by the implementation of primary sources in real-life tasks which encourage students' reflection on their achievements as well as on aspects which require additional work (Vong, 2016). Information evaluation, critical thinking, and independent research are additional skills which may be acquired (Baines, 2023).

Research has so far investigated the application of archives and special collections in primary, secondary, and higher education contexts, primarily for the teaching of history and social sciences (see Hendry, 2007; Malkmus, 2010; Şentürk, 2013; Carini, 2016; Baines, 2023). Other subjects such as English, religion, political science, and architecture have been considered as well, albeit to a lesser extent, i.e. (see Garcia, Lueck, Yakel, 2019). In higher education, instruction informed by primary sources has been shown to target undergraduates rather than postgraduates. While postgraduates may be often involved in

archival research as part of their academic path, undergraduates are, in general, less experienced with archives and special collections, and therefore they may benefit from extra training in that area (Johnson, 2006).

Based on our understanding of the literature available, the use of primary sources for teacher education appears to have been overlooked, including the training of pre- and in-service teachers of foreign languages. Investigating primary sources (e.g. learning and teaching materials) can assist teachers in uncovering the link between the formal description of teaching methodologies, and their actual implementation in the teaching practice in given local contexts and periods of time (McLelland, Smith 2014; Nava, Pedrazzini, 2019). It is our assumption that the analysis of materials in foreign language teacher education will profit from the implementation of specifically designed archives and special collections such as IELTA. This obviously raises important questions related to the criteria for the design of this type of resource, as well as which challenges may emerge during its development. These will be discussed in depth in Section 3.2.

### 3. THE ITALY ELT ARCHIVE

In this section we will describe the background and inspiration behind the development of IELTA (3.1), and we will discuss the criteria informing its design and the process leading to its development (3.2).

#### 3.1. *Background and inspiration*

Over the last few years, international research into HoLLT has gained in importance (see Howatt, Smith, 2014; McLelland, Smith, 2018; Coffey, 2020; Smith, 2021), as shown, for example, by the activities conducted by the Henry Sweet Society for the History of Linguistics Ideas, the AILA Research Network for History of Language Learning and Teaching (HoLLT.net), and by numerous national and language-based associations<sup>3</sup>. However, compared with historical research into French language teaching, for example, the history of ELT in different European contexts still needs to be expanded. This stands in stark contrast with the scholarly relevance of English language learning and teaching within English Studies in general.

In Italy, while historiographical research into the learning and teaching of French (e.g. Minerva, Pellandra, 1997; Minerva, 2003; 2010; Mandich, 2007; Barsi, 2018; 2023) and Spanish (e.g. San Vicente, 2010; Lombardini, 2014; 2016; Castillo Peña, Lombardini, San Vicente, 2021; Castillo Peña, San Vicente, 2023) has become well established in the last two to three decades, the history of ELT appears to be a relatively undeveloped field of enquiry, which has begun to attract scholarly attention only recently (e.g. Vettorel, Lopriore, 2013; Nava, 2014; 2018; 2024a; Pedrazzini, 2018; 2023; 2024; Shvanyukova, 2024; Vicentini, 2024). Historical investigation into the production of materials targeting Italian learners can help fill this gap. This has a positive impact on linguistic research, as it provides considerable insights into the type of English which has been taught and learnt in the Italian context over time. This type of investigation has important practical

<sup>3</sup> Some of these associations are based in Europe, namely APHELLE (Portuguese Association for the History of Teaching Foreign Languages and Literatures), CIRSIL (Italian Inter-university Research Network for the History of Language Education), SEHL (Spanish Society for Linguistic Historiography), and SIHFLES (International Society for the History of French as a Foreign or Second Language). Together with HoLLT.net, these societies hold a conference in Europe every two to three years.

implications for English language teacher education, too. For instance, its results can be harnessed to develop tools to assist pre- and in-service teachers in becoming more aware of how language teaching methodologies have been adopted and adapted in the Italian context, and thus in making informed choices when it comes to selecting the appropriate materials for their classes.

IELTA is a digital archive of English language learning and teaching materials published in Italy in the twentieth century (Nava, Pedrazzini, 2019) which has been designed bearing in mind the needs of both research and teacher education. It takes inspiration from another fundamental resource for conducting historical research into ELT, namely the Warwick ELT Archive<sup>4</sup>. This is a physical collection of ELT texts created by Prof. R. Smith in the Department of Applied Linguistics at the University of Warwick. The Warwick ELT Archive features published and unpublished sources documenting the history of ELT and applied linguistics between the 1880s and 1990s, and it currently includes 4,672 items referring to both learning and teaching materials, as well as other sources attesting to the historical, social, cultural, and pedagogical context within which those materials were designed and adopted. The website of the Warwick ELT Archive provides the full bibliography of the items hosted in its collection<sup>5</sup>, as well as a wealth of digitised contents regarding ELT history and important figures of the past who made a major contribution to its development. The website is linked to a blog that promotes the various research activities related to the archive itself. The Warwick ELT Archive is primarily a physical collection of texts which has been growing organically since its foundation in 2002. As such, it accounts for ELT history between the late 1800s and late 1900s in an extensive fashion, but it lacks the depth of metadata attributes (see 3.2) which characterises IELTA. Indeed, the holdings in the Warwick ELT Archive are not catalogued using bibliographic records, but they are presented as items in a reference list published as a pdf document<sup>6</sup>.

In recent years, other archives have been built in digital format as part of projects focusing on specific periods of time, learner and text typologies. These have also inspired the design and development of IELTA. An important example is *Contrastiva*<sup>7</sup>, a database set up in the context of a project led by Professor F. San Vicente at the University of Bologna, which began in 2005 to trace the history of the teaching of Spanish to Italian native speakers and of Italian to Spanish native speakers from the sixteenth century onwards. The database adopts a contrastive approach to the teaching of Spanish and of Italian and combines two digital collections, one containing lexicographical publications (324 bibliographic records) and the other grammar books (391 bibliographic records). Additionally, *Contrastiva* allows users to request access to the digitised version of the items stored in the database<sup>8</sup>.

Another significant project is the *Eighteenth-Century English Grammars database* (ECEG)<sup>9</sup>, conducted by Dr. N. Yáñez-Bouza (University of Vigo) and Dr. M. E. Rodríguez-Gil (University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria) between 2006 and 2010. The project aimed to create a database of grammars of English targeting native speakers of the language, written between 1700 and 1800, which would “meet the demands of the growing research community in the field of normative linguistics and the eighteenth-century grammatical tradition” (Yáñez-Bouza, Rodríguez-Gil, 2013: 143-144). The database features the bibliographic records of 323 grammar books, which were compiled based on a set of 21

<sup>4</sup> [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/research/collections/elt\\_archive](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/research/collections/elt_archive).

<sup>5</sup> [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/research/collections/elt\\_archive/catalogue/](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/research/collections/elt_archive/catalogue/).

<sup>6</sup> [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/research/collections/elt\\_archive/catalogue/](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/research/collections/elt_archive/catalogue/).

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.contrastiva.it/wp/>.

<sup>8</sup> This is done by sending an email to the project’s principal investigator.

<sup>9</sup> <https://eceg.iatext.ulpgc.es/>.

metadata attributes, some with further sub-classifications<sup>10</sup>. The metadata attributes pertain to three areas: one related to the characteristics of the books themselves (e.g. their title, year and place of publication, target audience), one related to their authors (e.g. name, gender, occupation), and one to the sources consulted for analysing the books (e.g. bibliographies, studies, and other scholarly publications); the latter type of information may be useful for other scholars conducting research in the field (Yáñez-Bouza, Rodríguez-Gil, 2013).

IELTA follows in the footsteps of these three resources while introducing new elements in accordance with its specific aims and the digital platform utilised for its development. While the texts and documents stored in the Warwick ELT Archive primarily represent ELT materials production from a British (and to a lesser extent American) perspective, and thus enshrine mainstream views on ELT approaches, IELTA seeks to challenge such views by concentrating on the Italian context. Additionally, IELTA takes stock of the digital affordances of *Contrastiva* and of ECEG and gives access to bibliographic records of materials, their authors and publishers, which can be browsed by selecting from a variety of attributes describing the items in the archive, as explained in the next section. As will be seen, the presence of records for authors and publishers gives users of IELTA the opportunity to obtain in-depth information to properly contextualise ELT materials production in Italy in the twentieth century. Knowledge of the context of production is indeed key to fully understanding how second language methods were taken up in Italy in the period considered. A case in point is represented by the events characterising the 1970s, which led to the subsequent introduction of communicative language teaching (CLT) in Italian textbooks in the 1980s and 1990s. The 1970s were times of lively debates inside language teacher associations such as *Associazione Nazionale Insegnanti Lingue Straniere* (ANILS), *Lingua e Nuova Didattica* (LEND), and *TESOL Italy*. These debates were promoted by a number of journals (e.g. *Scuola e Lingue Moderne*, *Lingue e Civiltà*, *Rivista Italiana di Linguistica Applicata*) which “gave voice to teachers’ experiences and practices concerning textbook evaluation, the use of teaching techniques and visual aids, testing, and so on” (Pedrazzini, 2018: 233).

The contribution of foreign language teacher associations and journals provided a fertile ground for the Italian school reform of 1979, which introduced a new syllabus for lower secondary schools. In the new syllabus, language was regarded as a means of communication, and the aims of learning a language were framed in terms of the acquisition of skills for understanding and producing written and spoken texts (Pedrazzini, 2018). Given the new syllabus, a pressing need emerged for language teachers to be trained, and such need was addressed beginning with 1978, when the in-service education program *Progetto Speciale Lingue Straniere* (PSLS) started. The program provided teachers with opportunities to develop professionally, leading to a gradual improvement of foreign language education in Italy (Lopriore, 1998). The trainers were teachers themselves, who had attended methodological courses in the UK and in the USA. Many of them were also active members of the teacher associations mentioned above, as well as authors of ELT materials published by Italian publishers (e.g. Giuliano Iantorno and Mario Papa, whose textbooks were published by Zanichelli in Bologna). An in-depth understanding of the pedagogical design of the textbooks in IELTA is thus closely related to the analysis of their authors’ profiles and of their publishing context.

<sup>10</sup> The full list of metadata attributes and their subdivisions can be consulted at [https://varieng.helsinki.fi/CoRD/corpora/ECEG/basic.html#database\\_entries](https://varieng.helsinki.fi/CoRD/corpora/ECEG/basic.html#database_entries).

### 3.2. Design and development

This section begins with a discussion of the criteria adopted for selecting the materials for the Archive, the challenges we faced in defining such selection, and the solutions we adopted. In the second part we describe how we developed the Archive, focusing on the Books catalogue, the bibliographic records it contains, and possible ways of browsing them.

#### 3.2.1. Selection of the materials

IELTA has been designed to provide a representative coverage of ELT materials for Italian learners published throughout the twentieth century. The bibliographic records in the digital archive are compiled beginning with the holdings in the physical collection housed at the Department of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Mediations at the University of Milan. To expand this selection, additional books have been consulted in Italian libraries (e.g. the National Central Library in Florence, the *Biblioteca Estense Universitaria* in Modena, the State Library in Cremona). The materials to be included in IELTA need to meet the following criteria:

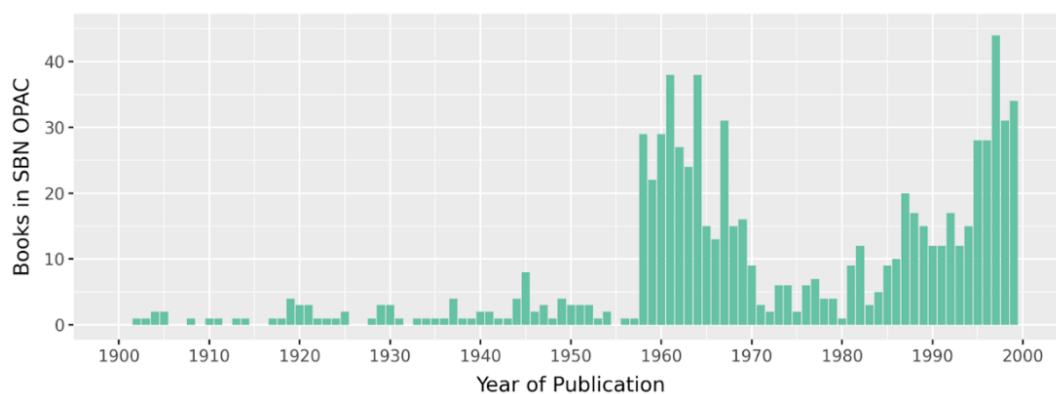
- year of publication: between 1900 and 2000;
- type of learners they target: Italian native speakers;
- learning contexts: primary and secondary schools, higher education, vocational training, self-study;
- type of book/ genre: coursebooks, grammar books, readers, conversation books, spelling books.

IELTA is intended to cover ELT materials production in a representative rather than extensive manner. This poses a major challenge in the selection of the books, since, to the best of our knowledge, there is no previous systematic research into the overall publication patterns of these materials in the Italian context. To tackle this issue, we decided to adopt as our reference point the Open Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) of the Italian National Library Service (SBN – *Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale*). As detailed in Ruskov, Tenca (2025), we first identified the major subject categories in OPAC SBN that are related to the English language (*‘lingua inglese’* in the catalogue), and we extracted those that appeared to reference ELT materials. From this list we singled out those categories that the OPAC interface indicates to contain more than 30 items. This resulted in 10 subcategories and a total of 1981 items (with duplicates)<sup>11</sup>. We removed the duplicates and selected only ‘monographs’<sup>12</sup> published in Italy in the twentieth century and written in Italian, English, or a combination of the two languages. At this stage, we also discarded titles referring to abridged novels for learners. In the case of books with multiple editions, we retained only the first one to appear on the market. This resulted in 786 books which we adopted as our reference point. The temporal distribution of these is shown in Figure 1.

<sup>11</sup> The sub-categories (and the number of items shown in the OPAC interface for each of them) are: *grammatica* (560), *testi scolastici* (442), *manuali* (249), *manuali di conversazione* (197), *manuali di corrispondenza commerciale* (154), *apprendimento* (97), *manuali per italiani* (92), *pronuncia* (76), *lessico* (66), *temi di versione* (48).

<sup>12</sup> The term *Monograph* used in OPAC designates books in contrast to other types of publications, e.g. magazines.

Figure 1. *Distribution of the ELT books available in OPAC SBN over the twentieth century*



Currently, IELTA contains the records of 88 books published between 1900 and 2000. Their distribution over time is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. *Distribution of the books catalogued in IELTA over the twentieth century*



As can be seen, IELTA now has little coverage of the materials produced in the first half of the century. This, however, seems to reflect the trend in OPAC, and therefore we believe that IELTA has reached a fair level of representativeness of ELT materials production in Italy in the twentieth century. However, a gap can be noted as regards coverage of the 1960s. To enhance the representativeness of the Archive, we are in the process of cataloguing additional books published between the 1900s and the 1960s.

### 3.2.2. *The bibliographic records in the Books catalogue*

IELTA is hosted in WordPress<sup>13</sup> with the addition of Tainacan<sup>14</sup>, a free, open-source plug-in for creating digital collections (de Andrade Santos, da Silva Salgado Araujo, 2023). As reported in Ruskov, Tenca (2025), during the preliminary stages of the project other platforms were also considered, which adopt the metadata terms maintained by the Dublin Core Metadata Initiatives (DCMI)<sup>15</sup>. The DCMI metadata terms (or Dublin Core terms) offer a standardised solution to describe digital objects, thus providing interoperability with other digital archives and collections. Given our purposes, we eventually decided to opt for WordPress and Tainacan, despite the potential for interoperability shown by other platforms. Indeed, the affordances of Tainacan offered more flexibility in the development and implementation of customised metadata

<sup>13</sup> <https://wordpress.com/>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://tainacan.org/en/>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.dublincore.org/>.

attributes for describing the items in the Archive<sup>16</sup>. These items are collected in three catalogues, Books, Authors, and Publishers. Here we will focus on the Books catalogue, although it should be underlined that the Authors and Publishers catalogues play a fundamental role, as they provide users of the Archive with important contextual information. For the purposes of this paper, it suffices to say that the records for the authors show their professional background (indicated as *type of author*) and their country of origin. A short biography and a list of secondary sources which were consulted to write it are supplied as well (when available). The records for the publishers indicate their primary location, and they include a short description, a URL to their website (if they are still active in the publishing industry), and a list of secondary sources. When this is available, information about any archive or historical library held by the publisher is given as well.

The records in the Books catalogue describe our materials in both bibliographic and pedagogical terms. In order to compile them, we applied an analytical framework based on the metadata attributes in the ECEG database (see 3.1), complemented by insights drawn from the literature on the analysis of language teaching materials (see Littlejohn, 2011; 2022; Vitta, 2023). In this sense, we considered information about the materials “as they are” (Littlejohn, 2022: 64), namely their production (e.g. publisher, year and place of publication, edition number), physical aspects (e.g. number of volumes and pages, use of visuals) and, most importantly, aspects connected to the use of the materials as “an aid to teaching and learning a foreign language” (Littlejohn, 2011: 182), i.e. their genre, proficiency level, context of use, the age of the learners they target, and the methodologies they apply. Information about the authors is provided too (e.g. their country of origin and occupation). Further attributes in the records indicate the availability of supplementary materials and a teacher’s book. These convey a more precise idea regarding the presence of additional resources for supporting both learners and teachers (Tomlinson, Masuhara, 2017; Tomlinson, 2023; Morady Moghaddam, Parsaiyan, 2024).

Given the purposes of IELTA, information about the teaching methodologies plays a central role in the bibliographic records. This was obtained by analysing the books in the light of the literature around methods and approaches for foreign language teaching (Richards, Rodgers, 2001; Howatt with Widdowson, 2004; Rizzardi, Barsi, 2005). At a macro-level, the analysis accounted for the general structure of the books (e.g. division into lessons, chapters, or units); at a micro-level, it focused on the activities they present and the techniques implemented in the exercises; this allowed us to draw inferences regarding the type of knowledge, skills, and competences which they aim to develop. The investigation also considered statements made by the authors about their methodological choices, as can be read in the prefaces and introductions of the books (when available); further insight was gleaned from other paratextual components such as titles and the tables of contents.

In addition to providing a snapshot of the overall design of the materials, the records contain a short description of the books, they embed a digitised copy of their cover and a few sample pages, and they indicate whether the books are stored in the physical collection in Milan. Finally, a link to OPAC SBN is supplied, which will indicate Italian libraries holding the book. An example of a bibliographic record is shown in Figure 3.

As mentioned above, the Authors and Publishers catalogues are important as they complement the data in the Books catalogue with details regarding the context of production of the materials we sampled. From a technical point of view, the three catalogues are interconnected, so that the information about the authors and the

<sup>16</sup> Part of the flexibility of Tainacan lies in the option for users to map their metadata to the Dublin Core terms (Siqueira *et al.*, 2022).

publishers in the bibliographic records of the materials is extracted from the other two catalogues in the Archive. This interconnectedness is afforded by the Tainacan plug-in, which also enables users to explore the items in the archive in a flexible manner. Tainacan features three functionalities for browsing digital catalogues. The first one is a simple search input element, through which users can browse a catalogue by entering keywords or phrases. This element is placed below the logo of the catalogue on the left-hand side of the screen (Figure 4). Once users press Enter (or click on the magnifying glass icon in the input element), the search engine integrated in Tainacan will look for any bibliographic entry in the catalogue containing those keywords or phrases in the metadata attributes or in the short description of the book<sup>17</sup>.

Figure 3. *A bibliographic record in the Books catalogue: New wave English (E. Menascè and A. Zambonini, 1988)*

**Italy ELT Archive** ABOUT THE PROJECT - CATALOGUES - RESOURCES - NEWS & EVENTS - MEDIA LIBRARY CONTACT US

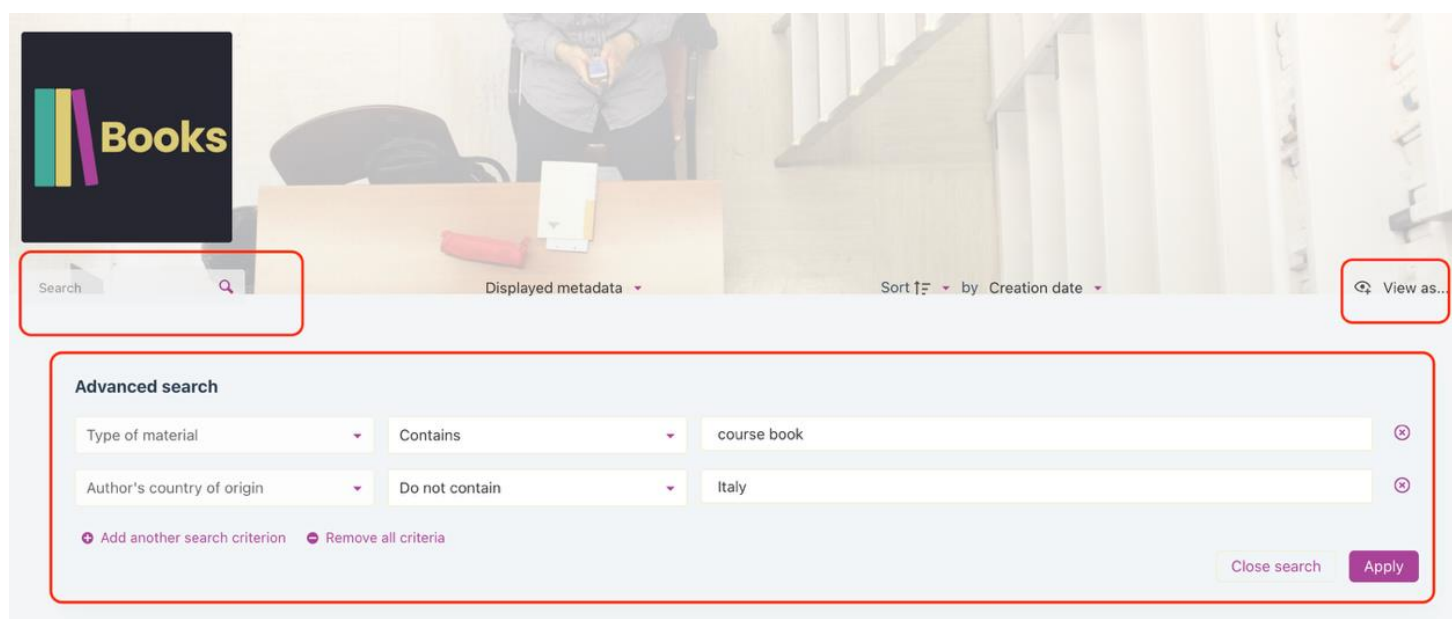
### New wave English: an integrated course for Italian teenagers

<b>Author</b> Menascè, Esther   Zambonini, Anthony Joseph	<b>Teacher's book</b> No
<b>Year of publication</b> 1988	<b>Supplementary materials</b> <a href="#">Audiocassettes</a>
<b>Edition</b> 1	<b>Visuals</b> <a href="#">Drawings</a>   <a href="#">Photos</a>
<b>Place of publication</b> Italy   Italy > Milan	<b>Is the book stored in the physical Italy ELT Archive?</b> No
<b>Publisher</b> <a href="#">Bompiani</a>	<b>Where else can I find the book?</b> <a href="http://id.sbn.it/id/CFI0298250">http://id.sbn.it/id/CFI0298250</a>
<b>Number of pages</b> 635	<b>Short description</b> The coursebook targets learners in the first two years (biennio) of upper secondary school. It is divided into two parts. The first one consists of 72 units: the first half of the units are meant for the first year, the second for the second year. Units 1, 2, and 37 are for revising the contents learnt at lower secondary school and at the end of the first year of the biennio; starting from unit 6, every six unit is for consolidation. Instead, the second part of the book is for language study, and it provides rules and examples for grammar and pronunciation topics (in the sections titled respectively The Music of English and Forms and Structures), as well as an overview of language functions (section Functions and Communication). Learners are invited to refer to this section whenever a new linguistic feature is introduced in the units in first part of the book. Except for the consolidation units, the units in the first part of the book revolve around two "scenes" which aim to represent authentic life in the UK, focusing on the lives of a group of adolescents. Scene One in each unit introduces a new grammar structure, while Scene Two a new function of the language. The scenes are supported visually by photos, they are recorded in the audiocassettes accompanying the book, and they are transcribed at the end of each unit. Every scene is followed by a section dedicated to pronunciation, and other two sections titled Practice and Activities, which are designed to help learners absorb the contents of the scenes. This organisation of the contents is in line with the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) model. As indicated by the Authors in the preface, the Practice section consists of exercises where learners use the language in a controlled way, while the Activities section is for freer practice, also based on pair work. Additionally, the units include sections dedicated to reading skills based on real-life texts (articles, brochures, etc.) and writing skills (letter writing, summarising, etc.).
<b>Number of volumes</b> 1	
<b>Proficiency level</b> <a href="#">Intermediate</a>	
<b>Type of material</b> <a href="#">Course book</a>	
<b>Target learners' age</b> <a href="#">Adolescents</a>	
<b>Teaching/Learning context</b> <a href="#">Upper secondary school</a>	
<b>Method/Approach</b> <a href="#">Communicative</a>   <a href="#">Notional-functional</a>	
<b>Type of author</b> <a href="#">Academic</a>   <a href="#">Other language professional</a>   <a href="#">Professional materials writer</a>   <a href="#">Teacher</a>	
<b>Author's country of origin</b> Italy   UK	

<sup>17</sup> In the Authors catalogue, the simple search functionality looks for keywords in the metadata attributes as well as in the biographical information included in the entries. In the Publishers catalogue, keywords are searched in the description of the publishers, as well as in the information about archives and historical collections, where available.

The second search functionality is an advanced search tool which allows users to browse a catalogue in two steps. The first step is the selection of search criteria based on the metadata attributes of the items in the catalogue. These criteria are set by means of drop-down menus, and users can decide how many search criteria (or metadata attributes) they would like to select. The second step consists in entering keywords or phrases for each metadata attribute previously selected. Users can decide whether the keywords have to be included in or excluded from the search by selecting the option “Contains” or “Do not contain” [sic] from a drop-down menu (Figure 4).

Figure 4. *Simple and advanced search functionalities in Tainacan, and “View as...” button for downloading search results*



While the simple and advanced search functionalities give users the opportunity to browse the digital archive freely, they have a major limitation. Indeed, Tainacan will yield results as long as the keywords match the contents of the entries in the catalogues. This is particularly problematic when using the advanced search functionality, as users need to enter keywords that match the exact phrasing of all the metadata attributes in IELTA. To solve this issue, a detailed list of all the terms adopted as metadata in IELTA may be made available on the website in the future. Although the inclusion of this information could contribute to making the design of IELTA more transparent to its users<sup>18</sup>, the process of searching the archive by typing in keywords selected from a list appears to be unintuitive and overly complicated.

Instead, the third search functionality available in Tainacan, i.e. its faceted search interface, is the most accessible and refined tool to browse IELTA. For example, thanks to this interface, users can browse the Books catalogue by selecting the metadata attributes in which they are interested, that is, by using those attributes as filters (or “facets”) for their search. Figure 5 exemplifies this by displaying the results obtained by filtering the records in terms of type of author (teacher), type of material (course book), method (communicative), and year of publication (between 1980 and 1989).

<sup>18</sup> Information about the design of IELTA and ways of browsing it is available at <https://italy-elt-archive.unimi.it/catalogues/>.

Figure 5. An example of faceted search in the Books catalogue

The screenshot shows the Italy ELT Archive website interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links: ABOUT THE PROJECT, CATALOGUES, RESOURCES, NEWS & EVENTS, MEDIA LIBRARY, CONTACT US, and a search icon. The main content area displays search results for books. On the left, there is a 'Filters' sidebar with various categories: Author, Type of author (with checkboxes for Teacher (5), Academic (3), Consultant (1), N/A (2)), Author's country of origin, Publisher, Place of publication, and Year of publication (with input fields for 1980 and 1989). The main search results area shows 5 items found, with 4 filters applied. The filters are: Year of publication (1980 - 1989), Type of material (Course book), Method/Approach (Communicative), and Type of author (Teacher). The search results are displayed in a table with columns: Thumbnail, Title, Author, Year of publication, and Publisher. The table contains five rows of book entries.

Thumbnail	Title	Author	Year of publication	Publisher
	Got the message? - New Edition	Elviri, Fiorella   Rizzardi, Maria Cecilia	1987	Principato
	New learning to communicate. A functional appr...	Di Giuliomaria, Sirio   Carra, Fiorella	1982	La Nuova Italia Editrice
	Ready, steady, go!	Angeletti Meirano, Graziella   Fox, Gwyne...	1985	Paravia
	Password	Radley, Paul   Sharley, Alan	1987	Edizioni Scolastiche Bruno Mondadori
	New wave English: an integrated course for Italia...	Menascè, Esther   Zambonini, Anthony J...	1988	Romolani

At the bottom of the search results, there is a pagination bar showing 'Showing items 1 to 5 of 5.', 'Items per Page: 12', and 'Go to Page: 1'. There is also a green button with the number '1' on the right side of the pagination bar.

Regardless of the search functionality adopted, the items retrieved can be downloaded as tabular data by clicking on the “View as...” button displayed on the right-hand side of the catalogue header image (see Figure 4). The formats available for download are Tainacan API (Applican Program Interface), HTML (Hypertext Markup Language), CSV (Comma-Separated Values), and Simple JSON (JavaScript Object Notation).

#### 4. THE USE OF THE ITALY ELT ARCHIVE FOR LANGUAGE AWARENESS RESEARCH

In the fourth and fifth parts of this paper, we will consider how IELTA can be (or, to a more limited extent, has already been) used to investigate and foster language awareness, in particular within the context of teacher education. The concept of language awareness has been chosen as an overarching term to represent the domains of knowledge that whoever is involved in language learning, teaching and research needs to acquire, albeit with different degrees of sophistication. For the purposes of this paper, we draw on a definition of language awareness as “explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use” as provided on the website of the *Association of Language Awareness*<sup>19</sup>. According to this definition, which has been generally accepted as the most useful working definition of the concept since the 1990s (Svalberg, 2007; Cots, Garrett, 2017), being ‘language aware’ is not just a matter of ‘how’ a language is known (having declarative as well as procedural knowledge of it, being able to talk about it explicitly), but underlying the concept of

<sup>19</sup> <https://languageawareness.org/>.

language awareness is a changed view of language itself. The language aware individual – be they a language learner, teacher or researcher – is not a passive experiencer of a language, but through the processes of using, learning and teaching a language they are thought to play an active role in shaping it. The aim of the rest of this paper is to show how IELTA can help become more English language aware as regards the use, learning and teaching of this language. In particular, Sections 4.1 and 4.2 will primarily consider the domain of use, and section 5 the domains of learning and teaching.

#### 4.1. *Investigating English language variation and language attitudes*

IELTA features a representative sample of English language textbooks published in Italy in the twentieth century. It is thus a historical database, and as such holds great potential as a source of information on how this language was used in the twentieth century. Some caveats are in order, however. Textbooks (as well as other metalinguistic materials, McLelland, 2021) are “repositories of information on a language” (Leitner, 1986: 1) and thus differ from ‘usage’ corpora (e.g. historical English usage corpora based on letters, literature, transcripts of court proceedings, etc., such as ARCHER and COHA<sup>20</sup>). They can be sources for precept corpora (Yañez-Bouza, 2016) given that the language is the target of metalinguistic descriptions and evaluations<sup>21</sup>.

Grammarians, lexicographers and language textbook authors “do not merely record from life, they create the details of the language in the process of recording it” (McLelland, 2021: 285). While the ‘language creation’ process they undergo may be thought to detract from their usefulness in language awareness research (how reliable as sources of information on English language use can they be?), metalinguistic texts, particularly those aimed at non-native speakers, may yield invaluable types of data.

As precept sources, grammars, dictionaries and other metalinguistic texts can usually be placed along a continuum in terms of their descriptive, normative or prescriptive orientation (Vorlat, 1979; Yañez-Bouza, 2016)<sup>22</sup>. Textbooks aimed at non-native English speakers, such as those featured in IELTA, cater to language users who “can neither rely on their native speaker intuition, nor enjoy the immediate and full access to the ‘target’ culture that might allow them to form their own judgements with confidence” (McLelland, 2015: 196). The onus placed on the authors of these materials is thus particularly heavy, as, until perhaps the last decade of the twentieth century (with the advent of the world wide web), ELT textbooks were the main source of input – as well as precepts – about English as a foreign language. As their aim is to foster English language proficiency and not (or not primarily) to impose a more “proper” variety of English (Finegan, 1998), at least with regard to grammatical descriptions, ELT textbooks may prove to be more forward-looking than their counterparts aimed at native speakers (McLelland, 2008). In particular, as remarked by McLelland (2021: 276), “works aimed at

<sup>20</sup> ARCHER (A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers, Biber, *et al.*, 1994) is a balanced corpus covering British English, and to a lesser extent American English, from 1650 to 1909. COHA (Corpus of Historical American English, Davies, 2010) is made up of 400 million words spanning the years 1810 to the 1990s, divided into four text types: newspapers, magazines, fiction, and non-fiction books.

<sup>21</sup> An example of a historical database of native speaker English grammars that has been used to create a precept corpus is the ECEG database mentioned in 3.1 (Rodríguez-Gil, Yañez-Bouza, 2009; Yañez-Bouza, Rodríguez-Gil, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> According to Vorlat (1979: 129), metalinguistic texts have a descriptive orientation if they describe a language «without value judgements», they are normative if they are «still based on language use, but favoring the language of one or more social or regional groups and more than once written with a pedagogical purpose»; they are prescriptive if they are «not based on usage but on a set of logical (and other) criteria». These three orientations can be best thought of as poles on a *continuum*.

learners who are not native speakers may be more open than the more conservative ‘native grammar’ tradition to acknowledging – and thus codifying – language change that is well underway”. An example of this more innovative outlook is to be found in Cann’s grammar aimed at Italian learners (Cann, Molinaris, 1915)<sup>23</sup>, which introduces the *have got* periphrasis although its use was often considered a mistake by prescriptive grammarians. Cann highlights a contrast between ‘grammar’ and ‘usage’, with the former following different ‘laws’ from the latter:

According to ‘grammar’, which, as was often maintained by 19th century British and American grammarians (Finegan 1998), is ruled, among other principles, by ‘logic’, *got* in *have got* is redundant and the combination has to be judged ‘ungrammatical’. However, Cann points out that this construction is upheld by usage which is widespread among all classes. This is reason enough to lead him to contravene grammaticographical practice and advise readers to pay more attention to the use of this verb (Nava, 2019: 136).

As less weighed down by the need to enforce what are viewed as the more socially prestigious (and often more conservative) linguistic norms, ELT textbooks may be more reliable sources than native speaker metalinguistic texts for historical research into English language variation. This is indeed a key area of language awareness research, as cogently argued by Kristiansen (2017: 387):

Language awareness is not only influenced by language variation and change – language awareness is the product of language variation and change, in the fundamental sense that we as human beings would not become aware of anything were it not for the fact that everything around us is subject to processes of variation and change.

Another area of English language use that could be investigated diachronically using ELT textbooks as sources of data is language attitudes. There is no gainsaying that «foreign language textbooks and teaching often ‘prescribe’ (at least strongly encourage) not just certain grammatical forms, but also a certain attitude to the target language» (McLelland, 2015: 196). The study of language attitudes (Garrett, 2010) is a more recent avenue of investigation in language awareness research and is tightly connected with the emerging fields of critical language (and critical cultural) awareness (Svalberg, 2007, 2016; Huang, Guo, 2024; Stegu, 2024). While metalinguistic materials are still underexploited as sources for language attitude research, recent extensive investigations, relying on both native speaker (Anderwald, 2016) and non-native speaker texts (McLelland, 2015) have yielded promising results. Language change and language attitudes are inextricably linked as it is mainly language features that have changed or are changing that tend to become the target of metalinguistic comments. The assumption is that “linguistic features (pronunciation, lexemes, constructions) which undergo change become subject to criticism” (Anderwald, 2016: 18), with such criticism usually triggering “a normative response” (Mugglestone, 2006: 282). In her study of linguistic aspects undergoing change in the nineteenth century as described and evaluated in native speaker English grammars, Anderwald (2012, 2018) highlighted that it was the “the quickest change, the rise of the progressive passive” that “elicited the most strongly negative comments”, while “the very slow changes, especially the rise of the progressive and the decline in BE-perfect” were “either not commented on, or elicit[ed] positive comments” (Anderwald, 2012: 43).

<sup>23</sup> This is the 93rd edition of Cann’s grammar (revised by Molinaris) and is included in IELTSA. The first edition was published in 1872.

In the case of foreign language texts, attitudes to the foreign language may be influenced by wider sociocultural issues concerning both the L2 and L1 of the intended readers. Cann's grammar, which was mentioned above, provides an example of how the principle of "elegance", which played an important role in the representation of the English language in eighteenth and nineteenth century grammaticography (Finegan, 1998), was drawn on to label those English constructions that were unusual, i.e. diverged from the Italian constructions – as in the option of expressing relationships using the 'dative' rather than the 'genitive' ("Quel signore è il medico *della* regina That gentleman is physician *to* the Queen", Cann, Molinaris, 1915: 251). The dative construction is described as more "refined" and readers are implicitly urged to prefer it to the genitive, which follows the Italian construction.

So far we have been trying to identify some potential areas of language awareness research that the analysis of ELT textbooks might fruitfully shed light on. Much of what has been said applies to the possible use of IELTA as a source of data on English language use in Italy from a diachronic perspective. Italian produced ELT textbooks can provide us with information on the history of the English language in Italy, in particular the extent to which changes affecting the language in the twentieth century were taken up in English use in the Italian context. Exploring the changing attitudes to the English language in Italy as sociopolitical changes on a global scale meant that non-British varieties gained prominence in the twentieth century is also a worthwhile area of investigation using IELTA as a source of data.

Exploratory investigations of IELTA have to date been carried out to analyse, from the twin perspectives of language change and language attitudes, the conceptualisation of spoken English and its grammar, focusing on sources from the first half of the twentieth century. It is well known that the history of English language teaching has been marked by changes in 'fads', 'pendulum swings' (Howatt, Widdowson, 2004; Richards, Rogers, 2014), so that prominence may have been given to either the acquisition of reading and writing skills and accuracy of expression or the ability to use the language in oral communication. Research on the representation of English in historical metalinguistic texts, however, has shown that on the whole the type of English featured in these texts is literary, more formal, written English (Finegan, 1998; Carter, McCarthy, 2017). This is a result of an 'ideological' view of spoken English which gained traction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Milroy, Milroy, 1999), whereby spoken English was considered a 'careless', less accurate form of English, and thus not worthy of codification. Given, as we said, that metalinguistic texts are a key – and until very recently the only – source of language input for non-native learners of a foreign language, the analysis of the representation of spoken English in the materials featured in IELTA can shed light on an important, more general aspect of linguistic research, "the effect of linguistic thought on actual language usage" (Yañez-Bouza, 2016: 168).

Preliminary research reported in Nava (2021, 2024b) has attempted to uncover the attitudes embodied in ELT texts published in Italy towards spoken English, and whether descriptions of lexicogrammatical features account for variation and change in language use associated with spoken English. Findings were yielded by a qualitative analysis of the textual and paratextual materials in a restricted sample of IELTA textbooks published in the first half of the twentieth century. Although the results are still provisional, and, given the limited sample, they can hardly be generalised, they seem to provide further confirmation that metalinguistic texts aimed at non-native speakers may be more responsive to language change than their counterparts aimed at native speakers:

A key aspect of the representation of spoken English and its grammar that [...] mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Italian grammars of English share is the

conceptualization of spoken usage as the locus of change in the English language, and the identification of two possible ‘determinants’ driving this change: colloquialization (i.e. a move towards less formal modes of expression) and Americanization (i.e. the adoption of American usage in other varieties of English) (Nava, 2021: 156).

Those ‘hunches’ about the sources of language change, while often expressed in footnotes and associated with negative evaluations, do appear to align with what recent research into twentieth century English diachronic variation has shown (Leech *et al.*, 2009). Throughout the twentieth century, changes in “discourse norms” meant that written English tended to adopt more informal norms and “move closer to speech” (Leech *et al.*, 2009: 20). At the same time, although most recent changes in British English lexicogrammar do not seem to have been driven by a process of ‘Americanisation’, since the mid-twentieth century, British English speakers have been concerned that “their variety might be being ‘Americanized’ on a large scale” (Leech *et al.*, 2009: 21).

#### 4.2. *From language awareness to teacher language awareness*

The previous section has shown how language awareness research can benefit from the analysis of IELTA materials, as historical linguists have done from the analysis of metalinguistic texts aimed at native English speakers. These types of investigations focus on the language use dimension of language awareness, but, as was stated above, becoming language-aware may also entail developing knowledge about the processes of language learning and language teaching. These latter domains are of particular interest to a category of language-aware professionals, language teachers and teacher trainers. As illustrated in Section 3, the overarching aim of IELTA is to be a resource for teacher education so we need to briefly elaborate on the concept of teacher language awareness.

We will start from a definition of teacher language awareness as “a label applied to research and teacher development activity that focuses on the interface between what teachers know, or need to know, about language and their pedagogical practice” (Andrews, Svalberg, 2017: 220). As pointed out by Andrews and Lin (2017: 58), recently, this definition has been widened to include both teachers’ “language-related cognitions more broadly (their feelings, beliefs and understandings about language in general and the specific language they teach)”<sup>24</sup> and their “awareness of students’ developing interlanguage”, thus catering to all three domains of knowledge (language use, learning and teaching) identified by the *Association of Language Awareness*. It has also been argued (Lindahl, 2016) that the three domains are not static or separate entities but change and interact dynamically.

Underlying the concept of teacher language awareness is a view of the language teacher as fulfilling three roles (Edge, 1988; Wright, 2002) as a language-aware professional: the role of language user, which means that teachers should have a high degree of both implicit and explicit knowledge of the target language; the role of language analyst – teachers should become adept at analysing language in order to increase awareness of their own and students’ language use; the role of language teacher: teachers should – among other things – acquire the ability to identify and correct learners’ errors in the use of the target language. What is distinctive about teacher language awareness is the interface that is thought to obtain between declarative and procedural knowledge

<sup>24</sup> «Any teacher’s SMK [Subject Matter Knowledge] is inevitably bound up with his / her beliefs about subject matter. For that reason, it may be better to use the overarching term ‘cognitions’ in considering what constitutes TLA [Teacher Language Awareness]» (Andrews, Lin, 2017: 59).

(Andrews, 2007). The procedural knowledge required of teachers is not just the ability to use the language effortlessly but the ability to use their knowledge about language use, learning and teaching in carrying out the procedures (Johnson, 2003, 2005) associated with their profession – evaluating and designing materials, planning lessons, giving students feedback, etc. Whether and how the declarative-procedural interface in teacher language awareness is implemented is a crucial issue as having a high degree of declarative knowledge does not necessarily mean that it will be applied in pedagogical practice (Andrews, 2007). Given the assumption that teachers' knowledge and beliefs are inextricably linked (Borg, 2006), one of the most fruitful strands of research into teacher language awareness has focused on tapping teachers' cognitions about language, its learning and teaching (Sanchez, Borg, 2014; Svalberg, 2015), with a view to shedding light on “the beliefs and models of language that underlie language teachers' practices” (Andrews, Svalberg, 2017: 222-223). This aspect of teacher research and development will be explored at some length in Section 5.1.

Since the 1980s, pedagogical grammars for EFL/ESL teachers (Nava, 2008) have been published to provide both reference (e.g. Celce-Murcia, Larsen-Freeman, 1983, 1999, 2016; Cowan, 2007) and classroom oriented (e.g. Thornbury, 2017) materials to foster teacher language awareness, in the three domains of language use, language learning and language teaching. There seems to be consensus among researchers that the acquisition of teacher language awareness is not best served by transmission mode courses in linguistics, applied linguistics and pedagogical theories (Bartels, 2005, 2009). Given the ‘situated’ nature of teacher knowledge (Johnston, Goettsch, 2000), teacher education activities aimed at the acquisition of teacher language awareness should be “organized around the activities typical of L2 instruction” (Bartels, 2009: 127), which is thought to facilitate the proceduralisation of declarative knowledge (Johnson, 2005). One of the activities language teachers are constantly called upon to perform is evaluating and adapting coursebook materials. For this reason, IELTA might be the ideal tool to implement an interface between teachers' declarative and procedural knowledge of the processes of use, learning and teaching of L2 English, as will be illustrated in Section 5.

## 5. THE USE OF THE ITALY ELT ARCHIVE FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

After illustrating the main design and development features of IELTA and how it can be used to enhance teachers' awareness of specific linguistic phenomena, this section aims to shift the focus to how the archive can be a resource for teacher education providing examples of activities to develop language teachers' awareness of teaching methods.

### 5.1. *Language teacher cognition*

Within the field of teacher education, the study of language teacher cognition has witnessed a rapid growth since the mid 1990s investigating different themes (Borg, 2003, 2012; Wang, Zhang, 2024). Language teacher cognition can be broadly defined as what second or foreign language teachers think, know and believe in relation to their work (Borg, 2006). Together with beliefs, knowledge (for example knowledge about language and the processes of language learning and language teaching) and the knowledge-belief relationship, which are well-established aspects of teacher cognition, other constructs such as attitude, motivation, commitment, identity and emotion have also been investigated. All these aspects tend to be mutually influential and constitute the ‘unobservable’ dimension of becoming and being a teacher (Borg, 2003). Teacher

cognition research aims not only to describe these factors but also to understand their influence on what teachers do and how they develop. Along with recent critiques of teacher cognition research as being mainly ‘cognitive’ (Kubanyiova, Feryok, 2015), researchers have widened the spectrum of investigation using a sociocultural lens and addressed questions such as how teachers develop their knowledge and understanding through socialisation, how they make informed decisions mediated by the context, or make sense of their learning and teaching (Li, 2020: 33). Building on these critiques, Borg (2019) suggests a more comprehensive scope for teacher cognition research which acknowledges the role of the contexts in which teachers operate and learn: “Inquiry which seeks, with reference to their personal, professional, social, cultural and historical contexts, to understand teachers’ minds and emotions and the role these play in the process of becoming, being and developing as a teacher”.

Teacher cognition research may employ different methods of inquiry which are both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative; the latter include interviews of various kinds (semi-structured, focus group, and stimulated recall), observations and document analysis (Borg, 2012; 2019). While questionnaires seem to be the preferred method in large scale studies, techniques drawing on narrative and interactional approaches are mainly used in small-case studies. Semi-structured interviews involve individuals and unfold as extended conversations guided by some predetermined questions, but which allow to build on participants’ responses. Focus groups are discussions in which small groups participate; the goal is to get participants to explore issues through questions or a problem-solving task. Stimulated recall interviews are individual sessions in which participants are provided with some kind of stimulus (frequently a video recording of their own teaching) which they are asked to comment on or analyse. This type of technique is supposed to facilitate the investigation of the connections between teachers’ thoughts and their actual teaching. Finally, the use of different types of documents such as lesson plans, teaching materials or technological aids is aimed at engaging teachers in the process of analysis and evaluation of these tools, as in an individual and group activity.

Despite the extended body of teacher cognition research, the uptake of its findings in actual teacher education still appears limited (Kubanyiova, Feryok, 2015: 436). Looking at the general scenario of second language teacher education, including the Italian scenario, programmes seem “to lie at the interface between ‘teaching in theory’ and ‘teaching in practice’” (Hall, 2019: 285). Some programmes, especially those at an academic level, seem to be more concerned with equipping teachers with theoretical aspects of teaching that they can subsequently draw on, explicitly or implicitly, in their own teaching. Others, instead, especially those for in-service education, mainly aim to develop teachers’ procedural knowledge by providing them with tools and techniques to deal with more practical aspects of their teaching. In either case, teacher education programmes do not appear to foster teachers’ awareness of the relationship between these two types of knowledge and the way they may be related to actual contexts of experience. As argued by Farrell (2022: 9) for TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) training programmes:

on the one hand, we have TESOL teacher educators providing the knowledge (both content and pedagogical) they consider important and necessary for learner TESOL teachers to become effective teachers throughout their careers. Yet, on the other, we also have recent evidence from research studies that TESOL teachers are struggling when trying to implement what they have learned in their TESOL teacher education once they begin teaching in their first years.

In terms of the type of methodology implemented, most teacher education programmes seem to favour transmissive over inquiry-based approaches. While the former are focused on the teaching of a preselected body of knowledge, the latter are aimed at enhancing teachers' thinking, analytical skills, and their ability to verbalise previous knowledge, experiences, beliefs and attitudes about teaching and learning. Inquiry-based and more interactive approaches have indeed proved effective in helping teachers make sense of new or enhanced knowledge and experiences (Svalberg, 2015).

Although language teaching cannot be conceptualised in terms of teaching method alone, the method construct can be considered a key area in teacher education (Hall, 2025), but still an unexplored theme in teacher cognition research<sup>25</sup>. The term *method* is used here in the sense suggested by Stern (1983: 452-453):

A method, however ill-defined it may be, is more than a single strategy or a particular technique; it is a 'theory' of language teaching [...] which has resulted from practical and theoretical discussions in a given historical context. It usually implies and sometimes overtly expresses certain objectives, and a particular view of language; it makes assumptions about the language learner; and underlying it are certain beliefs about the nature of the language learning process.

One of the challenges for teachers is to conceptualise what a method involves. Although they may be familiar with the names of many methods, what constitutes a particular method is not always clear. Another challenge is to bridge the gap between the theoretical knowledge about teaching methods and their operationalisation in teaching materials and implementation in the classroom (Sun *et al.*, 2022). In the following part, we discuss the main issues involved in the development of teachers' knowledge and understanding of second language teaching methods, with a particular attention to the need to develop a sense of 'history' about teaching. The study of methods should not be seen as a straitjacket but, as Stern (1983: 452) points out, as an opportunity for theoretical clarification and for understanding "what they have contributed to current thought on teaching". In the last part, we provide examples of how IELTA was used to enhance teacher students' awareness of teaching methods through activities that involved the analysis and evaluation of ELT materials published in Italy in the twentieth century.

## 5.2. *Teacher awareness of language teaching methods*

The field of second language teaching has undergone many shifts over the years, displaying a variety of methods and approaches that have come and gone, and occasionally been resumed. What do teachers know about methods and how do they learn how to use them in their teaching? A method often comes to be adopted simply because it is advertised in textbooks or in the media as the best to achieve success in the classroom. Given the lack of institutional pre-service teacher training that characterised the Italian teaching context until the end of the 1990s, textbooks served, and may be said to still serve, as the main means for the introduction and use of methods and methodologies in the classroom. Celce-Murcia argues (2014: 3) that most teachers seem to lack a sense of history in terms of teaching methods and are "unaware of the linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural underpinnings of the many methodological options they have at their

<sup>25</sup> A distinction is usually made between 'method' as "established methods constructed by experts in the field" and 'methodology', that is "what practicing teachers actually do in the classroom to achieve their stated or unstated teaching objectives" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006: 84).

disposal”. Among the high number of general textbooks of language teaching published for the ELT market, only very few include a section on the analysis of teaching methods aimed at developing a historical sense of language teaching. Nunan (1991: 228) identifies two main reasons for providing a description and critique of the most prominent methods in the history of language teaching. In the first place, it is useful for teachers “to note the ways in which theoretical and ideological beliefs about the nature of language and learning as well the results of empirical research have been realised at the level of pedagogical action”. Secondly, it gives them the opportunity “to evaluate some of the methods which have influenced and continue to influence classroom practices and teaching materials”. Knowledge about the various approaches and methods is also necessary to help teachers gain better insights into their previous experience as learners and make informed decisions about which options may prove more suitable in a specific teaching context.

As already pointed out (see Section 2), research into HoLLT has made significant progress in the last three decades characterising itself as a “newly emerging interdisciplinary, intercultural and plurilinguistic field of enquiry” (Introduction to McLelland, Smith, 2018: 1), also enhanced by the creation of historical archives of primary and secondary sources, such as the Warwick ELT Archive and IELTA. This field of research can also have practical relevance for language teaching. Smith (2016: 76) suggests that “developing ‘historical sense’ is an important aspect of language teacher education”. Among the questions he sets out for future research, one aims indeed to address “how historical sense, that is, teacher critical perspective and autonomy which come from an awareness of history, can be developed via an emphasis on history in language teacher education programmes” (Smith, 2021: 745). This section aims to unpack this question into more specific issues that will be investigated here through a review of some examples of tools for pre-service and in-service teacher education aimed at developing teachers’ knowledge and awareness of language teaching methods:

1. What type of tools are used in teacher education to provide knowledge of teaching methods according to a historical perspective?
2. Which main features do these tools present?
3. To what extent do these tools aid teachers develop awareness of teaching methods in order to make informed choices in their own present and future teaching experience?

Two of the most influential books that aim to provide teachers with knowledge of the major approaches and methods used in second and foreign language teaching are *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* by Richards and Rodgers, which was first published in 1986 and is now in its third edition (2014), and Larsen-Freeman’s *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* (1986), now in its third edition (Larsen-Freeman, Anderson, 2011). Richards and Rodgers present a framework aimed at describing and analysing language teaching methods. They use ‘method’ as the overarching term under which three elements are considered:

- a) approach (theories of the nature of language and of language learning);
- b) design (objectives, syllabus, learning and activities, learner roles, teacher roles, the role of instructional materials);
- c) procedure (techniques, practices, and behaviours observed when the method is implemented in the classroom).

Besides guiding the analysis of each method, the framework is intended to help teachers conceptualise the main elements and sub-elements that constitute a method and facilitate a comparison of the different methods. However, the approach implemented in the book was criticised for providing a ‘packaged’ view of the history of foreign language teaching as a chronological sequence of “named ‘methods’, within which it seemed each

one replaced the one before” (Howatt, Smith, 2014: 91). Hunter and Smith (2012) argued that this view tends to underline more ‘breaks’ and differences between methods than similarities and continuity. Research into the history of ELT materials in the Italian school context has indeed shown the coexistence of innovative and traditional methodological options for long periods and even a return to past methodologies that seemed to have been set aside (Nava, 2018; Pedrazzini, 2018; 2023). Moreover, although some methods have become less prominent, others are still present in some form in the design of contemporary coursebooks and classroom teaching. In its latest edition, Richards and Rodgers’ (2014) book seems to go beyond the aim of fulfilling a descriptive function by including in the final part of each chapter some discussion questions aimed at developing a more critical analysis of the methods described. The questions also guide teachers to think about possible implementations of each method, which however, take into account hypothetical teaching contexts rather than ‘real’ ones. In this way, teachers are not engaged in thinking about the relevance of a specific method in their learning experience and in their present or prospective teaching.

Larsen-Freeman and Anderson’s book (2014) adopts a different perspective which can be defined ‘ahistorical’ (Howatt, Smith, 2014: 756). The authors set forth three main goals for their book. The first is to have teachers learn about different language teaching methods. By ‘method’, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson mean “a coherent set of links between the actions of a teacher in a classroom and the thoughts that underlie the actions. The actions are the ‘techniques’, and the thoughts are the ‘principles’” (ivi: 20); ‘techniques’ and ‘principles’ are indeed the two key words in the title. A second goal is to help teachers uncover their thoughts and beliefs about teaching; a third goal is to introduce teachers to a variety of techniques that can be tried out and adapted to their teaching context. The authors also highlight the importance of recognising that “methods link thoughts and actions”. Given the complexity of language teaching, teachers need to become aware of their thoughts (beliefs, attitudes, values) about language, learning, and about teaching and “perhaps choose to think about or do things differently” (ivi: 21). To facilitate the understanding of the link between principles and techniques that characterises a method, teachers are engaged in the viewing of video recorded lessons in which the method is enacted and in follow up reflection activities in which they are led to make a connection between what they have understood and their own teaching situation and beliefs. The approach implemented in Larsen-Freeman and Anderson’s book has the advantage of supporting teachers in making connections between a theoretical and practical knowledge of teaching methods, acknowledging the role of their thoughts and previous learning and teaching experiences in building their cognition of teaching methods. One main limitation, however, is its ‘ahistorical’ perspective, which fails to provide teachers with a sense of history of the methods showcased in the book, for example why and in which contexts each method was developed, for what type of teachers and learners, which teaching materials were produced, how its history is related to the history of other methods and so on.

While Richards and Rodgers’s and Larsen-Freeman and Anderson’s methodology books are aimed at a wider readership, Rizzardi and Barsi’s (2005) book is mainly directed at Italian teachers and educators of foreign languages. It originated from the authors’ teaching experience and research on the history of methods for the teaching of French and English carried out at the University of Milan. The authors implement Richards and Rodgers (1986)’ framework for the description and analysis of the methods presented, proposing a further categorisation into three main ‘strands’ (linguistic, humanistic-psychological, and communicative), being aware of the problems that such categorisation of teaching methods may involve. In a comparison with the books reviewed above, Rizzardi and Barsi provide an account of the history of language teaching methods

supported by a rigorous analysis of a wide range of language teaching materials, thus acknowledging the role of primary sources in helping teachers seeing teaching methods “in the context of their own times” (Smith, 2016: 77). The sample selected is largely based on internationally produced materials, but it also includes materials authored by Italian textbook writers and published in Italy which provide a contextualised perspective of the way teaching methods were applied locally. Inspired by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson’s approach, the book is also supplemented by a video aimed at showcasing how each method is applied in class, hence the title (“*Metodi in classe*”). Through a checklist of questions, teachers are engaged in a critical observation of each method ‘in action’ while a limited space is given to the reflection on the possible relevance of each method for their experience.

Lastly, we would like to mention a research-based project carried out by Nicola McLelland and Simon Coffey at the University of Nottingham, “Language Teaching: Learning from the Past”, which addresses the need to develop language teachers’ historical perspective on teaching methods in order to help them reflect on language teaching practice and policy<sup>26</sup>. The output of the project consists of five teacher training units, each focused on a key theme, accompanied by a short introductory video, a handbook of activities for teachers, and a teacher educator’s handbook. Each handbook also includes a short historical overview and some reading suggestions. The five themes all tackle topical concerns in language pedagogy, providing a historical perspective on each of the themes:

- 1) Differentiation and diversity;
- 2) What does it mean to teach culture?;
- 3) Grammar: ‘The art of speaking well?;
- 4) Target language and (m)other tongue use;
- 5) Making the case for languages – Policy and advocacy.

The aims set for each unit cover different aspects of learning and teaching in relation to a specific theme: how each theme has been addressed over time and in different settings, what advantages and disadvantages are provided by the different methods or approaches to deal with the theme, why these approaches have changed, how they may inform decisions about present day practice today and help evaluate it. A wide variety of historical primary sources, both in terms of typology (textbooks, grammar, policy documents, exam papers, dictionaries, etc.), mode (visual, written) and coverage of historical periods are presented throughout the units. Although some of the sources selected appear to be far away from present day teachers’ cultural background and teaching experience, the analysis of each type of source is engaged through questions that also relate to teachers’ previous knowledge about a topic, their learning and teaching experience and beliefs. This approach is aimed at helping them hone their cognitions about teaching methodologies by developing at the same time a historical perspective about how these methodologies have been used. If on the one end, the theme-based approach adopted in the book is intended to take into account teachers’ present needs and interests in second language teaching, it appears to be rather too sophisticated, especially for the use of some primary resources dating back to a distant past history.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/CLAS/Research/Modern-languages-research-groups/Learning-from-the-past/Language-Teaching-Learning-from-the-Past.aspx>.

### 5.3. *Analysing (and evaluating) English language teaching materials through IELTA*

In the previous part, we discussed a number of issues involved in the development of teachers' knowledge and understanding of second language teaching methods through a review of examples of tools (mainly books for pre-service and in-service teachers and teacher educators). In this last part, we illustrate how IELTA was used to enhance teacher students' cognitions of teaching methods presenting two examples of tasks that involved the analysis and evaluation of ELT materials published in Italy in the twentieth century.

As pointed out, the use of archives and collections in second language education, including teacher education, is still limited. Being intended as an archive of primary sources supplied by different types of materials or texts (see Section 3.2.1), IELTA is a suitable resource not only for researchers and academic students but also for EFL teachers and teacher educators alike. Immersing teachers in primary sources helps them consider how methods can be applied in different teaching materials in the context of the time in which they were produced and used. 'Immersion' should lead teachers to continually ask themselves questions that require further data, as argued by Smith (2016: 83) and be considered "an important prior step that should be undertaken before narrowing down of focus and selection occur". IELTA can also be a useful resource for teacher educators to develop data-based tasks (Borg, 1998). Data is provided by the teaching materials collected in the archive; tasks can be designed by educators so that teachers will be able to analyse these materials to appreciate the implementation of teaching methods and approaches throughout history, and improve their practical skills at material evaluation.

Tasks have emerged as an influential type of activity in second language pedagogy and research (Samuda, Bygate, 2008). Task definitions may vary according to the purpose for which a task is being designed and used, for example by teachers, researchers, material writers. Compared to other tools used in teacher education (for example interviews, questionnaires), tasks have the advantage of supporting teachers in their development of cognitions of different aspects of language, language learning and teaching and facilitating the so-called nexus between technical or theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge (for example see Pedrazzini, 2015; Nava, Pedrazzini, 2018). According to Samuda (2005: 234), a task can be characterised by "a set of common properties", which we slightly adapted for the context of second language teacher education. A task:

- a) poses some kind of challenge, relevant to the teachers for whom it is intended which gives a purpose for engaging;
- b) engages aspects of language use and language processing, with the overall purpose of promoting language development and awareness;
- c) has some kind of outcome or goal as an end point;
- d) uses some kind of information/data/content material as a starting point;
- e) requires some kind of action to be taken on the data provided through a process of thought/transformation/manipulation.

During its implementation phase, IELTA was used as an additional resource in a teaching module on the history of language teaching methods. The module was addressed to postgraduate teacher students attending an applied linguistics-oriented curriculum aimed at the development of basic skills in language teaching methodology within a Masters' Degree in European and Extra European languages and literatures at the University of Milan. We will describe two examples of tasks which were part of a discussion forum activity on the course learning platform. The students were asked to analyse and evaluate examples of teaching materials by using the Books catalogue in the archive, together with the book records and the faceted search tool provided (see Figures

3-4, Section 3.2.2). The tasks designed were aimed at gauging the students' knowledge of second language teaching methods they studied in class and their understanding of the way these methods are implemented in ELT materials published in Italy. The students were free to decide whether to carry out each task individually or in a collaborative way and asked to share their analysis and evaluation for further discussion in the forum. Examples of task cards are shown below (Figures 6-7)<sup>27</sup>.

Figure 6. *Material analysis and evaluation task: Example 1*

The Grammar-Translation method has been applied in several ELT textbooks published in the Italian context.

1. Use the Book catalogue of the Italy ELT Archive and search the textbooks below in which the Grammar-Translation method is applied. Read the bibliographic and pedagogical information in the book record and the extracts provided for each textbook.
  - Mario Hazon. Corso di lingua inglese moderna. Garzanti, 1933.
  - Maria Luisa Valpolini e Irene Bianchi. Lezioni di lingua inglese. Corso completo. Morfologia, sintassi, numerosi esercizi, nomenclatura, brani di versione, antologia di letture progressive. Casa Editrice Est, 1944.
2. Choose one of the textbooks you want to analyse in particular and answer the following questions:
  - a) Which design features of the Grammar-Translation method are implemented?
  - b) Do you find any differences in the way these features are implemented?
  - c) Which techniques of this method can you also find in the textbooks you have used in your learning experience? Which of these techniques do you think may still be relevant and useful?

Figure 7. *Material analysis and evaluation task: Example 2*

The Communicative Approach in its different variants (for example notional-functional, task-based, integrated and lexical-based) has been applied in several ELT textbooks published in the Italian context.

1. Search the Book catalogue of the Italy ELT Archive and find out which communicative oriented textbooks are available. Use the following key words as filters: method, approach, communicative, notional-functional, integrated, lexical.
2. Choose five textbooks. For each, read the bibliographic and pedagogical information in the book record and go through the extracts provided.
3. Choose two of the textbooks published in two different periods you want to analyse in particular and answer the following questions:
  - a) Which design features of the Communicative Approach in its one or more variants are implemented?
  - b) Do you find any differences in the way these features are implemented?
  - c) Which techniques, activities and materials of this approach can you also find in the textbooks you have used in your learning and/or teaching experience?
  - d) In comparison with other methods, which techniques, activities and materials do you think are particularly effective?

<sup>27</sup> The tasks instructions were originally provided in Italian but are presented here in English for consistency with the language used in this article.

A comparison of the two tasks illustrated allows us to highlight the design features of each task in terms of purpose, demands, and outcome. Both tasks are intended to ‘immerse’ students in the primary sources provided in the archive and give them the opportunity to try their hands at material analysis and evaluation. As pointed out (see 5.2), this immersion is considered essential to moderate the effect of exposing students to mainly secondary sources, which may provide a ‘static’ and potted view of teaching methods. Material analysis and evaluation help students become more aware of both the design features of a method, thus consolidating their previous knowledge, and of the way it is actually implemented, which is supposed to help their teaching procedural knowledge. The analysis is also supported by the use of the book records and the faceted search interface provided in the catalogue, which aids students retrieve the bibliographic information about each material and learn about its pedagogical features. By comparing different materials published in different periods in the Italian context, students can also develop a better ‘historical’ sense both in terms of each method and its relation to other methods thus helping them overcome the idea of a “typical ‘potted accounts of language teaching methods’” provided in some teaching methodology books. Moreover, the analysis of teaching materials produced locally leads students to consider teaching methods not in abstract terms but in their relationship to “attested, concrete, contextualized realities” (Smith, 2016: 75). Finally, on account of the role that beliefs and opinions may play in shaping new knowledge or revisiting and consolidating previous one (see 5.1), students are also asked to take a look at their realities and assess the impact and efficacy of the methods analysed in their learning and teaching experience.

Given the similarities in terms of purpose between the two tasks described, each task differs in the way it fosters the students’ processes of reflection and elaboration required in the material analysis and evaluation. Littlejohn (2011: 185) proposes an analysis of teaching materials at three levels, which both tasks seem to fulfil to a different extent: a) “what is there (objective description)”; b) “what is required of users (subjective analysis)”, that is a focus on tasks, their content, what the learner is expected to do and who with; c) “what is implied (subjective inference)” which involves deducing aims, principles of selection and sequence, teacher and learner roles and demands on the learner’s process competence. According to these levels of analysis, students are gradually led through the two tasks from a descriptive to a more interpretative type of analysis, thus gaining insights into the way the materials are designed. While the first task is more guided in terms of the selection of the sources and requires more of a descriptive type of analysis of the way the method is implemented, the second demands a higher level of autonomy in the selection of the primary sources and a deeper reflection regarding the extent to which the sources selected exemplify the implementation of the method and the relevance that the specific design features of the method may have for the students’ actual experience. All these issues in task design have a key role in taking decisions about what type of tasks may best develop students’ knowledge and awareness of teaching methods and their implementation in teaching materials.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this article we presented IELTA, which is the first digital archive providing a systematic overview of ELT materials production in Italy in the twentieth century. The uniqueness of the archive lies in the purposes it aims to fulfill, i.e. to contribute to historiographical research into ELT in the Italian context, and to support teacher education. Section 2 highlighted the relevance of archives and special collections for

different levels of education, while in foreign and second language teacher education they are still underused. Given the aims of IELTA, in Section 3 we described the design process and the challenges in selecting a representative sample of ELT materials.

In Section 4, some possible uses of IELTA for language awareness research were explored. Language awareness was posited to be a multidimensional concept embodying a view of language as a dynamic, usage-based phenomenon. This multidimensionality is mirrored in the make-up of IELTA. Given their complex nature, language textbooks aimed at non-native speakers can inform us about the implementation of language learning theories and language teaching methods in given contexts but can also provide us with information about ongoing language change and attitudes towards this change. It is our firm belief that these areas of research should feed into each other. Preliminary investigations of IELTA pointed to evidence of innovation in the representation of spoken English and its grammar in historical textbooks published in Italy in the first half of the twentieth century. This innovative thrust might have remained hidden if the analysis had been limited to the identification of textbooks' underlying learning theories and teaching procedures. Further work in language awareness research may take advantage of the fact that textbook extracts in IELTA are available in digital form, thus facilitating the creation of computer searchable 'precept' corpora.

In the final section, we examined some issues related to the development of teachers' knowledge and understanding of second language teaching methods, with particular emphasis on the need to enhance a historical perspective on teaching. In a post-method era in which second and foreign language teaching appears increasingly eclectic, a focus on the history of teaching methods can prompt teachers to reflect on the linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural foundations of the various methodological options available to them. In addition to the challenge of conceptualising what a method truly entails, teachers struggle to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge of methods and their practical application in teaching materials and classroom teaching. In addition to the resources offered by mainstream books designed to enhance teachers' knowledge and awareness of language teaching methods, IELTA can provide teachers with a wealth of primary sources to explore, enabling them to understand how different teaching methods have been incorporated into teaching materials produced and published in the Italian context over various periods. Given the key role of teachers' own contextually informed understandings and beliefs in shaping their cognition of second language teaching, this repository of materials can also serve as an ideal resource for teacher educators to create data-driven awareness tasks. Two examples of these tasks were presented to illustrate how, through the analysis of teaching materials, student teachers can assess the implementation of ideas and approaches 'in action' throughout history, *vis-à-vis* their beliefs about learning and teaching. The tasks were also designed to enhance their practical skills in materials analysis and evaluation, allowing them to experience the actual conditions of a real-life task, which is considered essential in their professional development.

We are currently in the process of expanding the number of books catalogued in IELTA in order to make sure it provides a more representative snapshot of ELT materials production in Italy in the twentieth century, compared to the books recorded in OPAC SBN, which we adopted as our point of reference. At the moment our Books catalogue presents some gaps pertaining to the first half of the century. The uploading of bibliographic records of books published in that period will arguably enable us to also enrich the Authors and Publishers catalogues with new items. Additionally, we are developing a model for mapping our metadata to the Dublin Core terms, so that the information contained in IELTA can be accessed and shared more easily.

As regards future research, IELTA can afford both qualitative and quantitative analysis of changes in the uptake of language teaching methodologies in the materials across the twentieth century, as well as in the use of learning aids and of teacher's guides, to name a few examples. Finally, the research could be extended to the Authors and Publishers catalogues, to gain deeper insights into the context of ELT materials production.

Finally, as for further applications of IELTA in teacher education, besides its use in teaching-oriented courses within Masters' Degree programmes, IELTA can be integrated as a resource in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) modules for in-service teachers of English, to be delivered in a blended modality. We are also working on a section of IELTA that will showcase examples of tasks that teacher educators can use or adapt to exploit the resources of the archive.

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