

Original scientific paper

Cinzia Bacilieri ⁽¹⁾

(1) University of York,
Department of Language
and Linguistic Science,
YO10 5DD, York, UK
cinzia.bacilieri@york.ac.uk
[k](#)

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Corresponding author
Cinzia Bacilieri
cinzia.bacilieri@york.ac.uk

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Developing LSP Teaching in Higher Education in the Context of Italian Through History of Art

Abstract: *This paper presents a historical overview, curriculum development, and applied teaching methodologies underpinning the University of York's Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) "Italian through History of Art" umbrella, featuring a range of LSP courses. Such a programme is specifically designed for specialist and non-specialist ab-initio students of Italian, with a particular focus on fostering the acquisition of language skills to boost employability and preparation for the Year Abroad in Italy in the Art History context. The first part of the paper offers a historical overview of the curriculum's development, from an initial pilot project with a reading skills-focused course, to integrating credit-bearing modules into a degree pathway and creating extra-curricular courses and activities to support learners. It discusses the challenges language teachers encounter in planning and developing interdisciplinary, content-based language modules that are fully embedded within undergraduate degree programmes or open to the public. In addition, the paper examines how Italian Art is a motivational factor for students of Italian, thus employed as a vehicle for developing language proficiency and critical thinking skills within a broader learning framework. The final part of the paper highlights key LSP pedagogical strategies that lead to the creation of content-integrated materials with a focus on History of Art and employability, catering for first-time language learners up to proficient language users. In particular, it presents recent syllabus adaptation as a follow-up from a revision of teaching objectives in response to students' needs across different cohorts.*

Key words: *Italian, Art History, Interdisciplinary, Employability, Collaborative approach*

1. Introduction

In the past few decades, the study of foreign languages, whether undertaken as an elective, a discovery module, or through extracurricular engagement on an extra-curricular basis, has continued to play a significant role in enhancing students' preparedness for employment (University of York 2020; EURES 2021), facilitating Year Abroad placements, and contributing to the enrichment of the broader university curriculum (Corradini, Borthwick Gallagher-Brett 2016; Carvalho, Olim, Campanella 2022; Duff 2007; Universities UK International 2024). With regard to the national landscape, the most recent Association of University Language Communities (AULC)'s survey report (AULC 2024) provides a comprehensive overview of 46 Institution-Wide Language Provision (IWLP) across UK universities, reflecting both its diversity and challenges. The survey reveals a positive panorama of the current language provision: the student numbers in the post-pandemic era are finally rebounding, with the highest enrolments since 2016-17. As a demonstration of this, the University of York (UoY) demonstrates its dedication to integrating language learning into its current internationalisation strategy (University of York, 2020), thereby aiming to better prepare students to navigate and contribute to an interconnected, rapidly changing global world. In addition to offering language degree programmes, the institute currently provides a wide range of language learning opportunities through three key initiatives: the York Language Electives (YLE), Languages for All (LfA), and Languages for International Mobility (LfIM) pathways. The YLE programme enables undergraduate students from different disciplines to incorporate language study into their degree by taking 20-credit modules as part of their academic curriculum. In contrast, LfA and LfIM offer extracurricular language learning opportunities: LfA features both year-long and eight-week short course options in several languages, all designed to enhance communicative skills and cultural understanding, catering to purposes ranging from personal enrichment to professional development. Its courses are available to University of York students, staff, and members of the public, creating links between the university and the local community. The LfIM programme, meanwhile, offers free language and intercultural competency courses specifically for students preparing for international experiences, including study abroad, work placements, volunteering, or research activities.

While the IWLP language provision varies greatly across the UK, Italian is still among the more widely offered languages according to recent surveys (AULC 2020, AULC 2022, AULC 2024), with 37 language providers including it in their portfolio (of these, 31 provide it for credit and 27 as

non-credit-bearing) in 2022-23. Like in the case of other conventionally described 'minority languages' (Marshall 2001), Italian is currently available at beginner level in all 37 institutions, but only 18 offer it at B1 or above (AULC 2024), indicating limited progression pathways compared to French, Spanish, and German and with a focus on beginners. Additionally, Italian seems to have a relatively strong online presence, with nine institutions providing it in this mode, suggesting efforts to expand the provision and to reach a wider audience (often this being 'external learners' outside the university). Italian sustained presence in the IWLP context nation-wide (across course types, delivery modes, and levels) demonstrates its continuing relevance within UK language education, even though its growth seems to be tempered by systemic issues such as limited advanced-level provision, which might be a deterrent for learners, and staffing gaps, especially post-Brexit. Alongside the IWLP provision, Italian degree programmes across the UK (for instance, the University College London, the University of Warwick, Leeds and Durham among others) offer a rich and intellectually diverse experience, combining advanced language learning with deep cultural immersion. These programmes are available as both single honours and joint honours degrees (the latter, in most cases, the most predominant option), allowing students to tailor their studies to a wide range of academic interests and professional goals, complemented by a year abroad in Italy. For the majority, the general syllabus includes Italian literature, history, art and politics from the Middle Ages to the present, integrating high-level language proficiency with the study of aspects of Italian society. It can be argued that, no matter the institute and programme of studies, graduates in Italian in the UK are well-prepared for careers in fields such as international relations, education, translation, and other sectors that value strong communication and analytical skills, as a key motivator factor for its enrolments (feedback analysis from Visit and Open Days at the UoY). As in many other higher education contexts, at the UoY, Italian can be studied as part of a BA in Linguistics with Italian, in combination with another language, or as part of various joint honours programmes. In the specific, this Italian degree programme aims to develop not only linguistic competence but also critical thinking and cultural awareness, through content-based learning delivered in the target language.

2. Bridging general and specific: integrating LSP within IWLP and Degree programmes

2.1. LSP teaching in the IWLP context

The scope of activities encompassed by IWLP is notably diverse, with Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) consistently ranking among its most prominent and strategically significant components. Data analysis from the last few AULC Surveys (AULC 2020, AULC 2022, AULC 2024) highlight the presence of LSP within the broader landscape of university-level language education, with an average of 30% in the overall language provision. A possible reason for this is that, as universities increasingly emphasise graduate employability, internationalisation, and interdisciplinarity, the integration of LSP within IWLP is perceived as a key mechanism for equipping students with contextually relevant language skills that extend beyond general proficiency. Said this, bespoke LSP courses constitute a distinct but still comparatively limited component of IWLP as they attract a smaller proportion of enrolments, consistently only around 10% of total language learners. Within the IWLP context, LSP courses tend to be organised around three principal categories: skills-based and academic (45%), discipline-specific (40%), and vocational (28%) (AULC 2020). While these classifications are not mutually exclusive and often exhibit degrees of overlap, they illustrate a targeted pedagogical aim to support students in their academic, professional, and disciplinary-specific contexts. Engagement and popularity with LSP are also concentrated within specific fields: as such, the AULC 2020 survey identifies that Arts and Humanities account for the highest proportion of LSP course alignment (50%), followed by Medicine (approximately 40%) and Business (33%). It is also important to recognise that while some LSP content is delivered through dedicated modules, for the majority, a component of LSP teaching might be embedded within more general language courses, and thus is not identified in surveys and statistics. Finally, the AULC has established several Special Interest Groups (SIGs) to focus on key areas of shared concern and professional interest among its members. Among these, the SIG “Languages for Specific Purposes” is one of the eight active in existence, in particular post-pandemic (AULC 2022). The interest in LSP among language teaching staff across Europe is further evidenced by the increasing number of workshops, scholarly publications, and the high attendance at the annual conference organised by the Languages for Specific Purposes in Higher Education group (LSPHE).

2.2. Contextualising LSP within language degrees programmes

While undergraduate programmes in the UK may not explicitly categorise modules under the LSP umbrella, they often incorporate components that develop language skills applicable to specific professional contexts, thereby aligning with the principles of LSP. Of course, different is the postgraduate level that most commonly offers a range of MA in Translation and Professional Language Skills, visible across different institutes, combining practical training with theoretical study and, in many cases, specialisations in areas such as audio-visual translation, localisation, and subtitling. Notable institutions for this are the UoY, the University of Leeds, Essex, Strathclyde, and SOAS, to name a few. Their programmes vary in focus, with some emphasising technological applications, others offering regional language expertise, and many incorporating industry-relevant tools and practices.

However, it can be argued that elements of LSP are often integrated into various aspects of the undergraduate programmes, particularly in modules that focus on practical language applications and professional skills development. For instance, the UoY's BA in Italian programme includes the module Translation into English: Methodology and Practice, which equip students with skills pertinent to professional translation contexts, but also The Role of Art in Italian Society (RoA), which, while not explicitly labelled as LSP, delivers content teaching through LSP methodology (Bacilieri 2023; Bacilieri 2024).

3. The LSP approach: Italian through Art History at the UoY

3.1. Teaching Italian in the context of Art History

In general, LSP courses are characterised by their targeted alignment with specific academic disciplines or professional domains, addressing the linguistic and communicative demands of students preparing for careers in specific areas. A case in point of this is the Italian taught through History of Art range of LSPs offered at the UoY, which perfectly illustrates the pedagogical and disciplinary value of LSP within the institute's IWLP and the Italian language degree context. Born as a result of a close collaboration between the Department of Language and Linguistic Science (LLS) and the Department of History of Art (HoA), these LSPs aim to support students preparing for study abroad periods in Italy or to reinforce their ability to navigate research environments in Italy. What distinguishes York's LSP approach, at least in its early incarnation and conceptualisation, is the collaborative aspect between Art Historians in HoA and a language specialist with a research

background in art and heritage, as well as a demonstrated scholarly record in the development LSP pedagogies within the domain of art (Bacilieri 2014; Bacilieri 2018). The programme integrates authentic materials, including excerpts from art historical texts, exhibition catalogues, and conservation reports, into its syllabus, in addition to fostering a general language learning side. As universities increasingly emphasise graduate employability, interdisciplinarity, and global engagement (University of York 2020; Universities UK International 2024), it should be noted that this LSP programme enhances students' subject-specific expertise but also contributes meaningfully to their academic development and international mobility. In fact, the programme not only delivers content learning in the context of Italian History of Art but also boosts employability skills through bespoke practical use of language in Art-related real-life context (Bacilieri 2023; Bacilieri 2024), thereby helping students to bridge the gap between language learning, subject-specific academic practice and employability (Grey 2020; Bacilieri 2024). Such a targeted aspect of this LSP syllabus perfectly illustrates the UoY recognition of language learning as both an academic and professional asset (University of York 2020).

3.2. Italian through Art History in the IWLP context

The UoY currently offers students the opportunity to study Italian through History of Art as an LSP via its YLE and LfA programmes, both under the IWLP umbrella. The options include two YLE 20-credit, credit-bearing modules that form a progressive language learning pathway, *Introducing Italian for Art History (IntIfAH)*, aligned with beginner up to A1+ Council of Europe's Common European Framework (CEFR) (Council of Europe 1998), and *Continuing Italian for Art History (ConIfAH)* aligned with A2+ CEFR. This progression is further supported by an extracurricular 8-week LfA course, *Italian and Italy's Cities of Art (I&ICoA)*, pitched at B1 CEFR, which is conducted for the most in the target language. As opposed to IntIfAH and ConIfAH, this short course is open to students across the university and the general public, as all the courses under the LfA umbrella, yet it is specifically designed for undergraduates (for the majority HoA students) who have completed IntIfAH and ConIfAH. I&ICoA seeks to bring these students to a full B1 CEFR level, the language requirement for Year Abroad placements in many Italian institutions, among which the University of Florence, undoubtedly the most popular destination among HoA students who opts to spend a Year Abroad in Italy. Collectively, these three courses allow students of Italian to develop language competence via LSP learning from an absolute beginner level to B1 CEFR. With regard to the

specificity of their LSP content, students in the programme gain a comprehensive overview of Italian art from the Greek and Roman periods through the Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, and Fascist eras. The overall programme also adds practical knowledge, including navigating transport, booking accommodation, and acquiring employability skills relevant to the arts and heritage sectors (e.g., preparing for job interviews in museums or conducting archival research in Italy) (Bacilieri 2023; Bacilieri 2024).

The aspect of Italian Art within the context of language learning is further evidenced by *Serate Italiane (SE)* (*Serate italiane a York 2012-present*), a series of extracurricular cultural talks organised by LLS, which has been running at the UoY since 2012. The series has served as a platform for exploring various aspects of Italian culture, aiming to give attendees exposure to 'authentic' academic talks in the target language. As such, it attracts an extremely diverse audience (with an average attendance of 30-40 participants per event) that includes learners of Italian, Italian native speakers (in particular academics but also visiting students), and members of the public with an interest in Italian language and culture. The popularity and longevity of such event series support existing scholarship that highlights the role of culturally embedded content, talks and social events in sustaining learner motivation and engagement in language acquisition (Ushioda, 2011). Notably, art-themed talks in the series have consistently recorded the highest levels of attendance since the inaugural SE's mini-conference in 2012 on the theme of "Italiano attraverso l'Arte (Italian through History of Art)". Furthermore, SE audience feedback (2012 - present) reveals a strong correlation between the inclination for studying Italian and a general or specific interest in Italy's artistic and cultural heritage. This is evidenced by the fact that regular attendees in the series have repeatedly expressed a preference for topics related to art and have actively requested an expansion of programming in this area.

3.3. Italian through Art History in the context of the BA in Italian

Concerning undergraduates' linguistic studies, LLS has been continuously offering the RoA as an optional module for the second year in the BA in Italian since its introduction in 2014. While not specifically pitched as an LSP, the module provides an overview of key periods in Italian History of Art and well as case studies on the conservation and heritage protection of Italy's historic cities: its overall goal is to stimulate critical thinking on various facets of contemporary Italian society and foster engaging debates among students. Over the years, this content-integrated module has

consistently attracted a significant proportion of students in the BA, with selection rates ranging from 65% to 85% of the Italian degree cohort in the past five years. Of particular notice, following the introduction of joint honours programmes in 2024-25 (i.e. BA in History and Italian, BA in History of Art with Italian, and BA in Philosophy with Italian), the module's popularity has surged, with 98% of the cohort selecting it as their optional choice for 2025-26. Additionally, the module has been made available as an elective from 2024-25 and has since been selected by students from different undergraduate programmes (this represents a distinctive minority, mostly due to the B1 CEFR language competence level needed to enrol, a barrier for those students who have an interest in the content-specificity but lack the required language skills). The popularity of RoA underscores the evident connection between the study of Italian language and cultures, and an interest in art and conservation studies, which is also highlighted by recent studies in both UK and European learning context (Bacilieri 2023; Boglioni 2011; Grey 2020). These have confirmed that the integration of art and heritage within higher education's language curricula can enhance students' affective engagement and deepen intercultural understanding. Of particular interest, it appears that Italian Art as a topic seems to attract interest among general language students (i.e. not those seeking to learn Italian via an LSP in History of Art context) simply because discussions about famous Italian artworks are considered and perceived by students as an integral part of the Italian culture. As such, Art is perceived by students as an ideal platform for the development of communicative competence, such as speaking and listening (RoA Module evaluation survey analysis; Bacilieri 2024).

4. Integrating Italian language learning and Art History: developing an LSP curriculum in an IWLP setting

4.1. The pilot phase: developing Italian reading skills for Art Historians

The teaching of Italian through the media of Art at the UoY began with a five-year pilot (2004-09), during which HoA students could enrol in a non-credit bespoke LSP course titled Italian Reading Skills for Art Historians (IRSfAH), commissioned by HoA and delivered through the LLS's LfA programme. The initial pilot consisted of a 19-week course delivered in a dual-level format, integrating beginner and intermediate students in the same cohort. This focused exclusively on developing reading, translation, and summarising skills using specialist texts, such as those by Vasari and Italian art critics (Bacilieri 2014; Bacilieri 2018). As already illustrated in the most recent scholarship (Bacilieri 2023; Bacilieri 2024), in this phase oral and communicative component were

excluded in line with general approaches already used in the field of English for Academic Purposes, which emphasise reading and writing in LSP contexts (Hutchinson, Waters 1987; Dudley-Evans, St John 1998; Hyland 2002). This initial approach reflected the belief that reading proficiency and translation skills were the most relevant to the academic and professional needs of art historians, whilst communication competence was not of interest or even considered as a barrier for enrolments (Bacilieri 2024).

4.2. The accreditation phase: the birth of Italian for Art Historians

Following the successful five-year pilot, the popularity of IRSfAH among HoA students led to its formal accreditation during the modularisation process in 2010-11 (Bacilieri, 2014). The course's appeal was reinforced by HoA's strong research focus and specialism on Italian art, as well as a true commitment to integrating language learning within their BA curriculum (for several years following modularisation, HoA students were required to take a compulsory language module in Year 1, which was later reclassified as optional for recruitment purposes). In response to student feedback and recipient departmental demands, during the accreditation, IRSfAH was transformed into Italian for Art Historians (IfAH), a four-skills language module designed to offer a more holistic language learning experience. This shift addressed two key limitations of the original pilot format: the narrow focus on solely reading and writing, and the lack of communication competence, which posed challenges for students wanting to pursue further study of Italian or travelling to Italy to conduct research. Data analysis from module evaluation surveys and student progression patterns during the pilot-project period revealed that students who learned Italian throughout a reading-focused course struggled with the speaking component when subsequently levelling up by enrolling on general language modules (Bacilieri 2024). This underscored the need for a more balanced and communicative approach to their language learning to further their language skills.

From the outset, IfAH consistently attracted a good proportion of first-year HoA undergraduates who opted to embed a language elective within their programme (an average of 65%). Its popularity underscores the pedagogical effectiveness of embedding LSP in disciplines like Art History, where language, heritage, and visual culture are deeply interwoven (Bacilieri 2018; Grey 2020). Furthermore, although the module was designed for undergraduate students in HoA, it was subsequently extended to postgraduate cohorts in response to demand from HoA's PhD and Master's students specialising in Italian Art. However, postgraduate enrolment in the course

remained relatively low, typically accounting for no more than 10-15% of the total cohort. For the majority, this limited uptake was attributed to financial factors: postgraduate students were required to self-fund their participation, and the specialised nature of IfAH resulted in a significantly higher fee compared to general language courses offered in the LfA programme. These findings align with broader trends in language provision in higher education, where cost and accessibility remain key barriers to participation: since education costs are shifting from state to individual (Coleman 2009; Lanvers, Coleman 2013) the financial impact is particularly relevant in LSP contexts, where enrolment costs are generally higher, due to the bespoke and specialist nature of the course.

Significantly, between 50% and 57% of enrolled students in IfAH had previously studied a different foreign language at GCSE or A-level, yet opted for this Italian Art-focused module due to its LSP nature and a disciplinary alignment with their studies (Module evaluation student feedback analysis 2012-2022). However, a limitation in progression options was evident: upon completion of IfAH, the only pathway available to students was to further their Italian language studies by switching into a general Italian Level 2 module, which lacked the specialism that students had valued and particularly enjoyed in IfAH. As a result, only approximately 35% to 40% of IfAH students continued to study Italian at a higher level, while enjoying starting their Italian language learning journey through LSP. Module evaluation feedback analysis and correspondence with alumni students seemed to indicate that such lower uptake was due to the switch from LSP into a more general language learning setting, which was perceived as negative. These observations validate the theory that the IfAH's integration of art-historical materials (e.g., readings from Vasari and art critiques or discussing Italian artworks) provided an authentic context for linguistic development, which many students perceived as a key engaging and motivational factor (Bacilieri 2024; Grey 2020). This pattern pointed to a broader challenge in the LSP implementation of Italian through History of Art and its delivery: the need for cohesive curricular design that supported a vertical progression in specialist language learning. Feedback from IfAH alumni who discontinued their language study (as well as requests in the module evaluation surveys) often cited the absence of an option for a continuation module that maintained an art-historical focus as a key reason for disengagement. Conversely, those who persisted with Italian beyond IfAH were generally only students preparing for postgraduate research in Italian Art, indicating a long-term commitment to Italian as a discipline for their career trajectories.

4.3. The semestralisation phase: broadening the curriculum

As part of a strategic effort to enhance recruitment to the BA in History of Art (with a Year Abroad), it was recognised in 2022 that the development of the LSP programme in Italian would significantly benefit the programme. Specifically, the inclusion of a continuation module also in the second year of the BA in History of Art was deemed vital to successfully prepare students for Year Abroad placements in Italy. In response, during the University of York's shift to a semesterised academic structure in 2023-24, the LSP Italian through History of Art programme was expanded with a continuation module. Initially, the new pathway included Italian for Art History: Beginner and Italian for Art History: Elementary, to reflect the title used for more general language modules (such as Italian Language and Culture: Beginner and Italian Language and Culture: Elementary) offered under the newly created YLE provision. However, such naming appeared to create confusion among potential students, since the LSP modules progressed at a significantly faster pace than the general YLE modules (thus, there was no real overlap). This divergence in pace was largely attributable to the content-specific nature of the modules, the adoption of LSP pedagogy (Bacilieri 2018; Bacilieri 2023; Bacilieri 2024), and the need to attain a higher language proficiency level (B1 CEFR) required for Year Abroad placements. To address these issues, the two modules were promptly rebranded in 2024-25 as IntIfAH and ConIfAH, this to enhance their distinct LSP nature and progression route, and to diverge from general language electives. With semestralization, enrolment was also no longer restricted to and extended beyond HoA students, opening the modules as electives across the university. This was done as a consequence of a growing interdisciplinary interest in Italian for academic and professional purposes by students from different departments (such as Philosophy, History or Archaeology). The expanded LSP Italian for Art History programme with IntIfAH and ConIfAH proved to be highly successful, with an average continuation rate of 67% into Year 2 between 2023-24 and 2024-25. Furthermore, to further support students' preparation for the Year Abroad -particularly in developing listening and debate skills related to heritage protection, engaging with authentic Italian academic content on art historical themes, and deepening their understanding of key monuments and heritage legislation in Italy- a short extracurricular LSP course, I&ICoA, was introduced as a continuation of ConIfAH in the second semester of 2023-24. Notably, despite its extracurricular status thus the additional workload that it entailed for students, the majority of the first ConIfAH cohort (91%) wanted to continue with the course. Sadly, recruitment in the short course was much lower in 2024-25 (42%), but mostly due to unavoidable

timetable clashes between I&ICoA and the academic timetable in HoA. Said this, in its second year of existence, I&ICoA attracted additional enrolments from LfA Italian alumni, including students from different departments and members of the public, who were drawn to the opportunity to develop their Italian through an LSP with a focus on Italian Art and Heritage protection. Furthermore, the marketing campaign developed to promote I&ICoA generated significant interest among local Italian Societies in the themes addressed by the course. In response, two outreach talks, “Italy’s Cities of Art Through History” (in English) and “Beni culturali e città d’arte italiane attraverso la storia (Italian heritage and cities of Art through history)” (in Italian) have been scheduled for the second half of 2025. The talks aim to engage broader audiences and disseminate the course’s content beyond the university setting.

Ultimately, it is worth highlighting that French and German were also offered to students in HoA as a specialist module in Art History between 2004-12, but both provisions were eventually discontinued. Since then, Italian has remained the only language offered in York in the context of LSP through History of Art, both as credit-bearing and extracurricular formats. This sustained offering and popularity of Italian as LSP is particularly notable given that Italian is typically classified as a ‘less widely taught language’ in UK higher education institutions, and it is sadly in decline (Kelly 2016; Duff 2017; AULC 2020-24). The enduring success and expansion of the LSP Italian through History of Art programme in the UoY’s IWLP context validates the relevance of the LSP pedagogy, as well as demonstrating the value that language students place on acquiring subject-specific linguistic competencies.

5. Adapting interdisciplinary LSP pedagogy across different cohorts and stages

5.1. Collaborative approach and curriculum design

The Italian through History of Art programme in York offers a replicable model of how content-based LSP can enhance disciplinary learning while directly contributing to student employability and curriculum internationalisation. Said this, its early development phase was shaped by a rare interdisciplinary collaboration between a language specialist with a background in Art History and research-active staff in History of Art with native or near-native proficiency in Italian. This collaborative approach led to an innovative “real” interdisciplinary teaching, with bespoke material designed as a cross-departmental joint effort to meet the specific academic and employability needs of students in the arts and humanities (Bacilieri 2018). This integration of

disciplinary and linguistic expertise is highly uncommon in LSP contexts and often represents a key issue for language teachers approaching LSP teaching. For instance, a study examining English for Legal Purposes (Hartig 2017) highlights the complexities faced by teachers when integrating legal concepts into language instruction, emphasising the need for a 'pedagogical model that bridges linguistic and discipline-specific knowledge'. Undoubtedly, the York approach has been central to the sustained success and popularity of its LSP programme (Bacilieri 2018; Bacilieri 2023). Such close interdisciplinary collaboration between the language specialist and History of Art academics enables strong alignment between IfAH content with the existing BA programme in HoA: authentic art-historical material - including artist biographies, original texts (e.g. Vasari, Palladio), museum guides, and contemporary critiques - are integrated, all to develop all four language skills in a LSP setting. Furthermore, from its inception, the IfAH curriculum was created with targeted learning outcomes in mind, with particular emphasis on developing receptive and productive skills necessary for academic research and mobility within Italian-speaking contexts (this was informed by the direct research experiences of numerous scholars in HoA, many of whom acquired Italian language proficiency in order to conduct research effectively in Italy). The pilot syllabus prioritised the acquisition of reading comprehension skills for accessing Italian-language art historical sources, however, as the programme developed, it progressively started to integrate speaking and listening tasks contextualised to real-life (general language teaching) and discipline-specific settings (specialist vocabulary and content knowledge). The key innovation for this was the creation of bespoke communicative activities, including role-plays and speaking exercises situated in disciplinary Art-related contexts, such as discussing artworks or navigating museums and archives (Bacilieri 2018; Bacilieri 2022).

By maintaining its LSP focus while broadening communicative competencies, the programme enhances learner engagement and better equips students for real-world academic and professional scenarios in the field of Art History (module evaluation feedback analysis; Bacilieri 2022). This aligns with the UoY employability agenda, which emphasises students' ability to conduct independent research and participate in study-abroad or professional experiences, supports graduate attributes promoted in UK higher education, including intercultural competence, subject-specific language literacy, and global mobility (University of York 2020). A comparable approach to communicative skills and employability has been adopted by other specialists in the field of Italian through History of Art, most notably Debora Grey (Grey 2020), who developed Italian language

courses embedded within Art History curricula across German institutions. Similarly, Grey's methodology emphasises the integration of authentic History of Art materials and task-based learning, aligning closely with the communicative and content-driven principles of LSP pedagogy in York.

5.2. The evolution of the applied teaching methodology in Italian through History of Art

Research on the topic of teaching Italian through Art has emerged relatively recently, but has accelerated markedly over the past few years (Gobbis, Paoli Legler 2012; Bacilieri 2018-24; Grey 2020). With regard to teaching material and textbooks for classroom activities, the most comprehensive contributions up to date include *L'italiano attraverso la storia dell'arte* (Angelino and Ballarin 2006), Cernigliaro's fascicle *L'Italia è cultura: fascicolo Arte* (Cernigliaro 2011), *Percorsi italiani: L'Italia dell'arte* (Magnatti, Massei, Bellagamba 2016), *L'italiano dell'arte: Corso di lingua italiana* (Andriuzzi 2017), *L'italiano per l'Arte* (Porreca 2020), *Parliamo di arte* (Garelli 2020) and, in a German-speaking context, *La lingua dell'Arte* (Grey 2011). These key resources can effectively serve either as supplementary texts within general Italian courses or as primary course materials for dedicated LSP Italian through History of Art programmes. Like much existing LSP online material (e.g. *Accademia del Giglio* 2013), it predominantly targets learners at intermediate (A2 CEFR) to very advanced levels (C2 CEFR). All the instructions are in the target language, and most of the material especially emphasises reading comprehension activities: artist biographies and artwork descriptions are accompanied by vocabulary and grammar-focused tasks drawn from adapted text or authentic Art-historical sources. While experienced LSP instructors can repurpose such content for the four-skills development, all the activities presuppose a degree of language fluency beyond beginner competence.

Conversely, the overarching curriculum of *IntIfAH* and *ContIfAH* modules has been purposefully crafted for *ab initio* and post-*ab initio* learners (A1-A2+ CEFR), and in particular with first-time language learners in mind. For more than a decade, key factor for the curricular development and delivery of *IfAH* was to identify both the linguistic proficiency required for academic and professional engagement with Italian art historical materials, and the level of competence realistically achievable by students within one academic year (this because at the time of its conception, there was no continuation beyond *IfAH*) (Bacilieri 2018). It should be observed that the *IntrIfAH* and *IntIfAH* pedagogical focus gradually shifts from general to specialist language

learning, with discipline-specific content increasingly integrated into classroom activities as students' progress from absolute beginners to A2+ proficiency on the CEFR scale. On one hand, a structured A1-A2 CEFR pathway develops core linguistic structures and communicative competence akin to a general language course. On the other hand, class time is devoted to cultivating specialist language skills exclusively through History of Art-related materials at a much higher level (C1-C2 CEFR) (Bacilieri 2018; Bacilieri 2024) (Fig. 5.1).

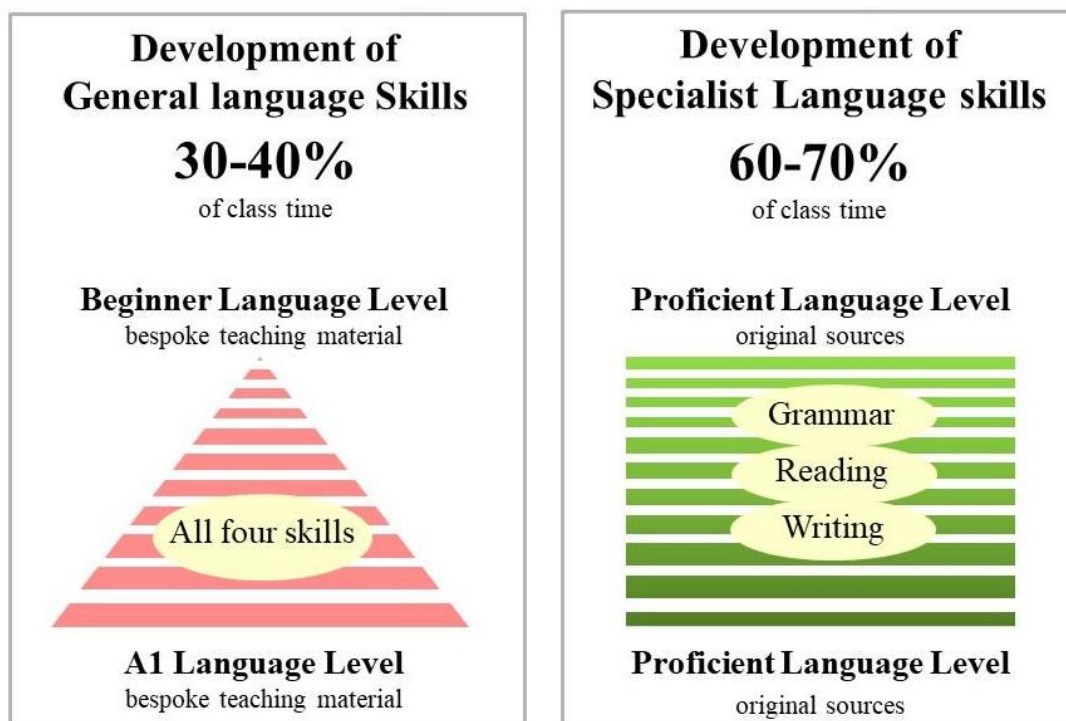


Figure 5.1: Allocation of class time to general versus specialist language skills in IntIfAH. The image shows that 60-70% of class time is initially devoted to specialist language skills (primarily grammar acquisition and the development of reading and writing) while 30-40% is allocated to general language skills. By the end of the module, this distribution shifts toward a more balanced split between general and specialist language skills will be more even, with a 40-50% or 50-60% split, respectively.

With the introduction of the continuation course, the experimental LSP methodology developed between the two key general and specific components is adapted as the programme progresses from IntIfAH to ContIfAH and students' language proficiency advances (Fig. 5.2).

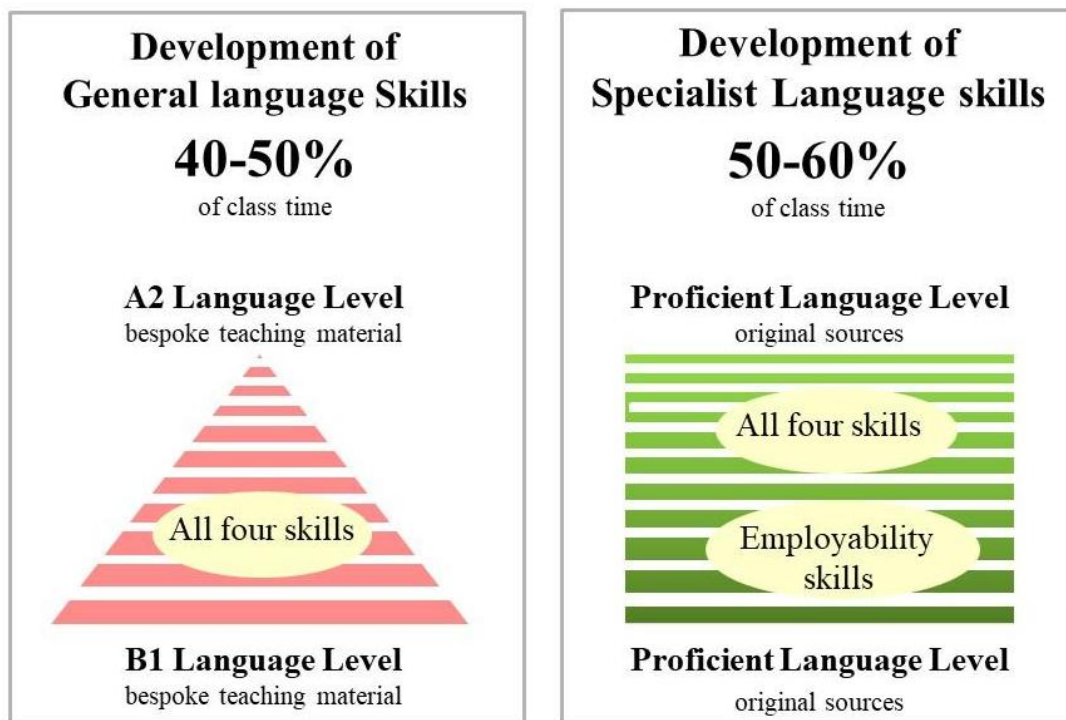


Figure 5.2: Allocation of class time to general, specialist, and employability-related language skills in ContIfAH. The integration of specialist material across all four language skills remains a key focus. Initially, the distribution shifts toward a balanced split, with 40-50% of class time dedicated to general language skills and 50-60% to specialist and employability-related skills. By the end of the module, the emphasis moves increasingly toward the specialist component, which becomes the predominant focus.

The shift towards discipline-specific content becomes more pronounced at higher levels of language proficiency (B1 and above), as seen in I&ICoA or RoA. At this stage, the specialist component focused on the History of Art occupies the majority, if not all, of the class time (Fig. 5.3), using materials and approaches more closely aligned with those found in well-established publications on learning Italian through Art.

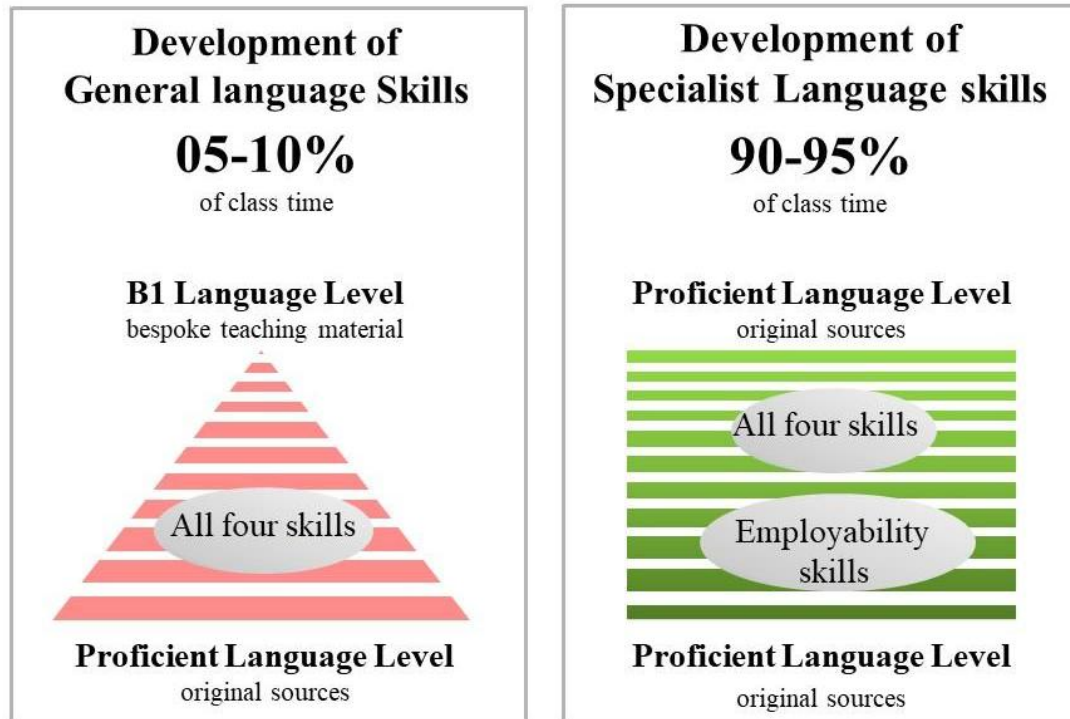


Figure 5.3: Allocation of class time to general versus specialist language skills in I&ICoA and RoA. The majority of class time is dedicated to developing discipline-specific content knowledge (with a particular focus on employability) while general language skills are largely acquired by students through independent study.

From a language teacher’s perspective, a particularly significant aspect of this approach is the rapid development of specific language skills essential for engaging with content in a History of Art context. The specialist language component concentrates on the targeted acquisition of selected skills and, from the outset, relies primarily on authentic or slightly adapted authentic source materials (C1-C2 CEFR). By contrast, the general language component is structured to develop all four core skills through materials that increase in complexity as the students’ progress from absolute beginner levels upwards. As the students’ language competence evolves, even this general component increasingly incorporates culturally rich topics related to Italian Art and Heritage. For instance, discussions about restrictions in Italian society due to the implementation of heritage protection laws may be introduced when teaching how to express opinions, while the biography of Artemisia Gentileschi might serve as a springboard for critical debates on women’s rights and gender equality across historical and contemporary contexts. By the time the LSP programme reaches its highest levels with I&ICoA (or even in RoA, since the teaching in the module is based on the same methodology), the art-related topic becomes the predominant, if not the sole, focus of the course.

At this stage, students develop language skills such as grammar largely independently, through engagement with content-based learning. For instance, by the end of *IntrIfAH*, students can create audio recordings and videos in which they describe an Italian masterpiece (e.g. Botticelli's *Primavera* or Caravaggio's *La Vocazione di San Matteo*) using technical vocabulary appropriate to that of an art historian, with attention to aspects such as composition, theme, character portrayal, and colour. Upon completing *ContIfAH*, students have then acquired the ability to compare two different artworks (e.g. Beato Angelico's *Annunciazione* and Artemisia Gentileschi's *Giuditta decapita Oloferne*), applying comparative and superlative forms effectively to articulate contrasts in style/periods and express opinions in simple terms using expressions like *secondo me*. By the conclusion of *I&ICoA*, their specialist content knowledge has deepened further, thus students are now able to distinguish between different types of *beni culturali* and articulate more nuanced opinions regarding their role in discipline-specific contexts such as *glorificazione*, *fruizione*, and *mercificazione*. From a pedagogical standpoint, the strategic integration of a specialist-to-general and general-to-specialist language instruction model (calibrated to the learners' stage of progression) facilitates both the acquisition of linguistic proficiency and the development of familiarity with authentic texts and complex disciplinary content.

5.3. Students' engagement with the LSP methodology

Analysis of recent module evaluation student feedback (2023-present; module evaluation for *ConIfAH* and *I&ICoA* was not collected in 2024-2025) (Fig.5.4) and student performance outcomes indicate high levels of engagement and perceived value, particularly among students undertaking independent research or planning careers in museums, cultural heritage, or academia. It is essential to point out that *HoA* students who elected to continue their Italian studies through *IntrIfAH*, *ContIfAH*, and *I&ICoA* were all successfully admitted to their preferred Year Abroad placements, particularly at the University of Florence. This data suggests a positive relationship between sustained engagement with the LSP pathway at York and successful placement in competitive international academic environments. Furthermore, qualitative feedback and tutor observations reveal that students who do not perceive themselves as strong language learners appear to benefit notably from the content-integrated language instruction model adopted in the programme (in particular those attending *I&ICoA*).

Student Module Evaluation Comments in IntrIfAH (2023-present)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I really liked how it was a range of different activities to help practice and learn Italian. ● The lessons are engaging and fun. It really has been such an enjoyable module. ● Every seminar is interesting and intellectually stimulating. ● I feel that there is a good balance between key language skills (e.g. basic grammar) and skills specific to a history of art context.
Student Module Evaluation Comments in ContIfAH (2023-24)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I felt like I learnt a lot of material during this module. ● The module is really interesting. ● It helped my preparation for the Year Abroad.
Student Module Evaluation Comments in I&ICoA (2023-24)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Really interesting overview of the timeline of History of Art, should be taught to all, and the influence of politics and society on the causes for art styles developing. ● This module gave me the chance to explore ideas and concepts in depth.

Figure 5.4: Selected comments from recent module evaluation surveys highlight students' strong appreciation for the integration of History of Art-related content. These responses also underscore the perceived value of the module in preparing for the Year Abroad, which emerges as a key and highly regarded component of the course experience.

In particular, the development of employability skills in the context of History of Arts, such as intercultural communication, subject-specific vocabulary acquisition, CV writing and interview skills, emerges as a salient motivational factor. This motivation is especially evident among students intending to specialise in Italian Art and planning future academic or professional experiences in Italy (the majority of the cohort that continue up to I&ICoA).

6. Conclusions

The development of LSP Italian through History of Art at the UoY, offers a compelling case study supporting key arguments in traditional (Dudley-Evans, St John 1998; Hyland 2002; Johns 2013) and most recent (Bacilieri 2018; Grey 2020) LSP literature that emphasises the critical role of specialist content relevance as a learner motivation in language learning. The sustained success of the programme highlights LSP's capacity to foster deeper disciplinary engagement and long-term

language retention among language learners across different cohorts. Far from functioning as a set of isolated elective modules, this LSP programme has evolved into an integrated pedagogical model that embeds language learning within the academic and methodological frameworks of the History of Art discipline. This integration not only aligns with students' academic trajectories of Italian studies but also enhances their ability to access and interpret discipline-specific materials in the target language, thereby fostering the development of both linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence. Moreover, the programme's appeal has extended beyond undergraduate cohorts to include postgraduate students and members of the public, further demonstrating the broad applicability and inclusivity of LSP when designed with a clear disciplinary focus. By supporting students' engagement with authentic Italian art-historical discourse and preparing them for study and research opportunities in Italy, the York model exemplifies the transformative potential of LSP in higher education and reinforces the value of language learning as an essential component of subject-specific academic and professional development.

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