

Newsletter 01/25

ELTA-Rhine

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March 2025

From the editor

Dear members,



Greetings from sunny South Africa, where I'm currently staying for two months. It's a joy to work online with a view of the pool from my "office." The sliding doors are open, inviting a gentle breeze on this sweltering, 30-degree-plus day. I share this not to make you envious — of course not! — but to highlight the evolving nature of teaching as we embrace new, state-of-the-art approaches. Flexibility is truly a gift.

In this spring edition, we are delighted to offer a touch of nostalgia. A longstanding and honorary member of ELTA-Rhine, Kate Cowe, takes us back to the days before mobile phones, digital devices, and social media — when committee meetings were free from technological distractions. What a joy it was to connect in person over a cup of tea (or a preferred drink), working and socialising as the occasion required. Oh, the memories!

Furthermore, Jane shares insights from her journey with the International Language Coaching Association (ILCA), now qualified after having completed the course. As communication remains the most sought-after skill in Business English and corporate training, the integration of coaching techniques into language instruction is becoming increasingly popular.

We also feature a fascinating article on forensic linguistics. Victoria, a valued member of our editorial team, delves into the meticulous art of linguistic investigation, illustrating how a sharp, investigative mind is trained to detect linguistic clues.

Our events have been gaining considerable traction, thanks to the exceptional efforts of our events coordinator, Laura. Be sure to read the review of the AI Fireside Chat, where the knowledgeable James Quarterly explored various AI tools that significantly enhance material development and research for trainers. Additionally, don't miss Sandra Ling's summary of the latest book club meeting, which, judging by the feedback, has sparked lively discussions and inspired readers to explore new topics in fresh and engaging ways.

With that, I wish you all an enjoyable read. Keep your articles, ideas, and comments coming—we love hearing from you!

Warmly,

Johanna and team
newsletter@elta-rhine.de

Letter from the chair



Dear members,

A Time for Renewal and Reflection

Dear Members,

As we embrace the refreshing spirit of spring, we find ourselves reflecting on both new beginnings and moments of sadness. This season brings with it the opportunity to recharge, reconnect, and grow in our shared mission to support and elevate the field of English language teaching.

First and foremost, it is with a heavy heart that I announce the passing of our Vice Chair, Tim Phillips. Tim was an exceptional leader, a compassionate mentor, and a dear friend to many of us in the association. His unwavering dedication to our community and the English language training profession leaves an indelible mark on all of us. We will forever cherish his contributions and the impact he made on the lives of teachers and learners alike.

While we mourn this great loss, we are also inspired by Tim's legacy of kindness, professionalism, and commitment to excellence. In the spirit of honouring his memory, we pledge to continue advancing the goals he so passionately championed. Our thoughts are with Tim's family and loved ones during this difficult time.

As we look ahead to the future, we are reminded of the importance of our association and having a vibrant community. Spring is a time of growth, renewal, and we have our AGM in May, where I wish to stand down as Chair after seven years. Just as nature begins its cycle of rejuvenation, so too does our association. We hope to carry on with our continuous professional development and support your professional development, enhance our shared knowledge, and foster greater connections within our community.

As we move forward together, let us honour the memory of Tim Phillips by continuing to strengthen our bond and support one another in our shared journey. Thank you for being a part of this community of English language trainers. We are stronger together, and we look forward to an inspiring season of growth and renewal.

With warm regards,

Rosemary Bloy

Chair, English Language Trainers Association-Rhine

International Language Coaching Association (ILCA)

Are you curious about language coaching and wondering what a language coach *actually* does?

Answers to these questions were exactly what I was searching for when I invested in the International Language Coaching Association's (ILCA) FEEL programme. It was an investment in both time (16 weeks) and money (\$1000). I hoped this would be a key step towards being a better language coach and English trainer, ultimately adding more value for my clients. I was keen to get the certification so I could deepen my skills and feel I could credibly call myself a language coach.

The reason I chose this course over other language coaching programmes was that I met Gabriella Kovács, one of the ILCA founders and programme leader at IATEFL BESIG in Stuttgart. She is a very down-to-earth and approachable person who shares her knowledge generously. I recommend her book **A Comprehensive Language Coaching Handbook** (Pavilion ELT, 2022), if you want to find out more about Language Coaching.

I'm pleased to report that my decision to take part in the FEEL programme was a good one and I found the course brought me a wide range of benefits. Firstly, it gave me a tangible idea about what *exactly* language coaching is (and is not). I see that coaching is not about giving advice or instruction, it's about empowering learners to take charge of their own progress and we learned the techniques to facilitate this.

The course consists of four modules **Foundation, Expansion, Elevate and Lead** (hence FEEL), each module includes well-structured video introductions and reading material plus four live sessions where we discussed coaching concepts and practised peer-to-peer coaching.

At the end of each module, I submitted a logbook with my reflections on both client and peer practice coaching sessions I had done. Two recorded client sessions were also essential for course assessment. Participants are assessed against the ILCA language coaching markers, a clear set of benchmarks outlining the skills, competencies and approaches that make language coaching effective and professional. (You can download the markers for free on the ILCA website). As you can probably tell, the course kept me very busy and I found it sufficiently challenging.

But what skills did I actually develop? One the next page are my top five learning takeaways (in no particular order).

International Language Coaching Association (ILCA)

Cont.

- **Applying coaching frameworks:** I learned and practised using models such as GROW or Starfish. I found this especially helpful for needs analysis, setting goals, helping my learners stay motivated or reviewing English skills.
- **Harnessing visual thinking:** I developed ways to integrate graphic facilitation in language learning.
- **Improving my own communication skills:** I became a better listener and now place even more importance on giving learners the time and space they need to reflect and express themselves effectively.
- **Using scaling techniques:** These help me understand my learners' mindsets and how they perceive their own abilities, progress and aims.
- **Asking powerful questions:** I witnessed firsthand how empowering it is when clients find their own answers, take responsibility for their own learning and learn independently, with me as a language coach there to support them.

Writing about the FEEL programme has reminded me just how transformative this experience was. It was a such boost in my ELT professional development that it's hard to include everything in one article. Overall, the ILCA FEEL programme not only added to my skillset but also created strong connections with other language coaches around the world while giving me a deeper sense of professional fulfilment and renewed energy.

If you'd like to know more about the programme send me a message on Slack; I'd love to chat about it. Come on over to my blog (www.jcenglishtraining.com) for more in-depth musings on Business English, language coaching and visual thinking.

Author: Jane Carvell



Webinar review

AI Fireside Chat with James Quarterly, ELTAU (20 Feb)

Following up on an invitation from ELTAU to attend an AI Fireside chat with James, we dove into the fascinating world of artificial intelligence. Currently, AI comes in various forms, from narrow AI, which focuses on specific tasks, to more ambitious general AI, aiming to perform any intellectual task a human can. AI is rapidly evolving, pushing boundaries in areas like natural language processing, computer vision, and machine learning. Reasoning plays a significant role, allowing AI to make informed decisions, solve problems, and even engage in meaningful conversations.

However, there is doubt as to whether AI is really reasoning or simply using algorithms based on Big Data. James is sceptical “of what AI is doing – for example thinking or reasoning”. He also differentiates between the “safety sphere” of AI research, i.e. “building tools after having considered all the human compatibility questions” versus the “ethics” position, i.e. “building the tools and seeing what happens” before making guidelines.

For language trainers, AI offers immense benefits. Tools like large language models (LLMs) can provide personalised learning experiences, instant feedback, and interactive practice sessions. However, it's crucial to recognise the advantages and disadvantages. While AI can enhance learning efficiency and accessibility, it may lack the nuanced understanding of human emotions and cultural contexts that a human teacher provides. James' view is the following:

“... there are compelling reasons for us to incorporate the tools into our workflows proactively. It is possible to delegate many more mundane tasks to AI and concentrate on the higher value aspects of what we do as trainers/coaches. In the medium term, the best way to safeguard or build future work opportunities is by establishing ourselves with the tools and demonstrating our ‘added’ value to our clients/learners. Emphasising the aspects that only a human can bring.”

Overall, the potential of AI is vast and exciting, promising new horizons in education, business, and beyond. The fireside chat left us eager to see where AI will take us next!

On the next page you will find a few of the AI tools mentioned (according to James, “Fundamentally, most of them use the foundation LLMs (OpenAI, Anthropic, Google, etc) as their backend.”), while some tools are audio or avatar based and not LLM based.

Webinar review

AI Fireside with James Quarterly from ELTAU on 20 Feb

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- NotebookLM: A free tool from Google with massive potential that only interacts with the data you upload to it which includes audio, Q&A functions, podcasts etc.)
- Miro: A rapidly developing collaboration platform.
- Twee: Great for a language learning experience.
- CoPilot: Microsoft's AI. It creates great language worksheets:
- TurboScribe: For audio and video transcription
- ElevenLabs: Create realistic speech using generic voices or upload your own voice recordings (James warns, "Do not trust any audio or video as authentic unless you are certain of the source! My family have agreed secret passcodes to identify each other in the case of telephone calls that seem unusual.")
- HeyGen: Useful to generate an avatar of yourself, but the file is huge

And, finally here's an old joke used to see if AI can give reasons as to why it is funny. What it reveals are that there are differences of thought and processing time depending on the AI and parameters given:

- "Knock knock."
- "Who's there?"
- "Isabel."
- "Isabel who?"
- "Isabel necessary on a bicycle?"

We are left with the questions – can AI really think and reason or is it simply new technology at our disposal and will we be replaced as trainers?

P.S. The text in blue was generated by AI after prompting, but the rest was human generated!

James Quartley can be contacted at:

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Author: Victoria Sheppard

PRICING Q & A



FOR FREELANCE TEACHERS AND TRAINERS

ONLINE WITH MIKE ALLISON

Pricing Q & A for freelance teachers and trainers

Aka: Ask Mike anything (on pricing)

Pricing is a topic that challenges many freelance language professionals. In this webinar, we want to help you with your pricing problems.

To make the session as relevant as possible, we will be addressing your specific questions. When you register for the webinar, let us have your questions on the topic. What do you want to know about pricing? What do you have most difficulty with? What do you want to improve?

We'll take the most common questions and work together to bring you answers that you can apply to your specific work situation.

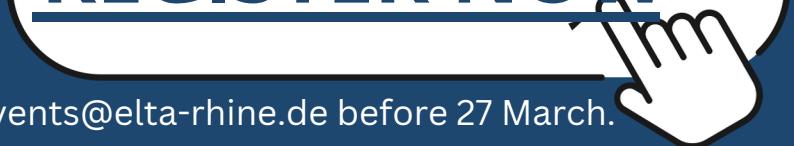
In his first career, Mike Allison learned how to consistently quote higher prices than the competition and still book the work. Since switching to business English training, he continues to be fascinated by pricing dynamics and its role in the sales process.



5 April, 2025
Online at 2pm

Send your pricing questions for Mike to events@elta-rhine.de before 27 March.

REGISTER NOW



Retrospective: The ELTA-Rhine Days of Yore

In May this year, I'll be giving up my office in Köln, though not my old clients. It is full of my Business English/ESP books, concepts, seminar materials, files: relics of my past career that I no longer need, and have to be thrown away...But as I sort through all this, I am constantly struck by the scale of my enterprise, what interesting clients there were and what exciting and challenging things we did in our sessions!

This is also true of the old ELTA-Rhine e.V. material and memories that I come across in my office. The early days of ELTA, and indeed English teaching itself, were largely technology free, and the success of the association depended on people making a commitment and doing the business. There were no smartphones or Zoom to make things easier, and if we wanted to see what ELTAF in Frankfurt were doing, we had to go there and see for ourselves.

The content of the ELTA-Rhine newsletters was of high quality right from the start, and it was an important organ for the association, as everything – information, reviews, upcoming events – had to be packed into the current edition, this being the sole medium of communication. No website in the early days!

The newsletters may have been written on the members' PCs, but then the pages had to be put together physically, put into order, taken to the printers to be transformed into a newsletter, and then – horror of horrors – stuffed into envelopes by committee members, addressed, stamped and posted to the growing membership! There was no editor at the beginning, only a committee joint venture: teamwork writ large.

Over time, we got to know the representatives of EFL book publishers at conferences and book fairs, and then newsletters were sponsored (saving us all that printing and stamping) in return for publicity for their books, leading to a more professional looking and colourful product.

What is the difference between ELTA-Rhine then and now? It seems to boil down to, a) more personal contact and b) less technology. A good example of the latter can be found in the current ELTA upcoming events email, which advertises an event accessed online, offering to "make your lesson slides come alive". Years before, in contrast, we had a workshop offering techniques on how to make your state-of-the-art flipcharts come alive, or at least look less chaotic than usual!

A good example of personal contact was the membership fee collection: I was the first treasurer and all fees passed through my hands on the way to the Postbank ELTA account. Everyone got a receipt and a membership card. The result of this directness was that I more or less knew all the members - useful for the cohesion of the association.

Retrospective: The ELTA-Rhine Days of Yore

Cont.

After an event, the members and the speaker would usually go for a drink, thus offering ample opportunity to network and find friends, or even work, and also to secure a volunteer to write a review for the newsletter. My first ever visit to the Früh brewery in Köln was after one such event held in the science lab of a girls' school behind the main station. The speaker was Nick Brieger, and his topic on that evening may be lost in the mists of my memory, but not so the pub experience! ELTA-Rhine was set up as a forum for local English teachers to meet and exchange ideas, information and so on, and it certainly fulfilled this role. In my office, I came across handouts for a workshop in 1994(!) that I had done with fellow members Fiona Penny and Phil New on "*Minimalist Teaching in the Classroom*", with the ideas seemingly now as fresh as ever.

Such member workshops were certainly on the agenda in the early days, as was a stream of outside speakers from other ELTAs or from publishers whose committee members attending EFL conferences would often "bag" to come and speak to us. Highlights of the early period include excellent sessions with Vicki Hollett, Tony Lee, Michael Lewis, Crayton Walker, Frank Steele and Rita Baker. Some of these people wrote the very English teaching books that I am now throwing away, which shows me how time has passed so stealthily...

It was Lorcán who was responsible for CALL 2000, an international conference held by ELTA-Rhine at the University of Wuppertal in 1995 (I still have the t-shirt!), with speakers from all over the world as well as ELTA members presenting. How basic CALL then was can be seen from a language translation programme that I tried out before the conference: the question was "*Wie lautet Frohe Weihnachten auf Englisch?*" I typed in "Happy Christmas" and immediately had the message "Leider falsch! Die richtige Antwort is Merry Christmas!"

Nevertheless, this conference was a step in the right direction and proved to be a big landmark in ELTA's history – not just the conference, with a book exhibition and an address by the mayor of Wuppertal, but the whole organisation (restaurants included) that went into making it a new experience, and a success for the association. And, just to round off the camaraderie of ELTA that I found so appealing, the early Christmas parties were held in members' houses (those brave enough to volunteer) and were always a hoot! The ELTA walks were also very social events and we went to interesting places locally. It would be good if the walks could be reinstated, although the old book group and the choir still seem to exist.

ELTA-Rhine e.V is as old as the re-united Germany, being established in September 1989, and I am glad that it has evolved over the years and is still going strong. I hope it continues to fulfil a role in the local English teaching scene, especially in the now rather different and challenging times.

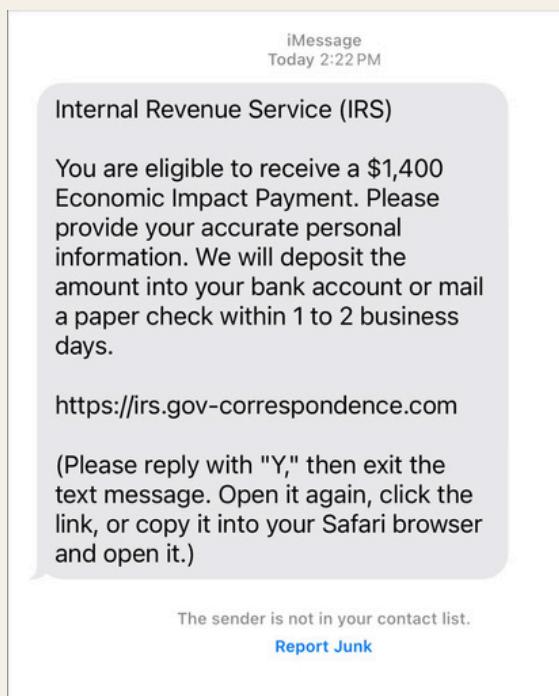
Author: Kate Cowe

What is a trainer's connection to "forensic linguistics"?

As trainers, are we also forensic detectives? If so, what are "forensic linguistics"? Normally used by specialist criminal investigators, forensic linguistics applies knowledge and techniques about language data to solve crimes and understand the nuances of communication in legal contexts.

Here are some aspects to help you find out more about forensic linguistics:

1. **Authorship attribution:** Did Shakespeare really write all his works himself or were others busy here? What can the police learn from a ransom note? How can you recognise a scam email? Stylistic markers, selection of vocabulary, syntax and other features help to identify or to exclude potential text composers. Did your student really write that assignment or did they have help? What tells you it might not have been their sole authorship?
2. **Voice identification:** In an emergency call, the operator's ability to extract linguistic information in a threatening situation is crucial to rescue. Any hesitation or signs of evasiveness could indicate a hoax call. Ransom demands and threats can be analysed for phonetic and acoustic features to identify accent, pitch and intonation patterns. Accents and the ability to stress specific syllables are often a focus when trying to develop L2 speakers, for example the pronunciation battle with "th" or "r", which may indicate which first language a learner has and how they might acquire L2 features.



One of the first Forensic Linguistic Scientists, Professor Shuy was consulted in a famous kidnapping case involving this note:

"No kops! Come alone!!," followed by a terse instruction— "Put it in the green trash kan on the devil strip at the corner 18th and Carlson."

After studying the letters he asked if one of the suspects was a well-educated person born in Akron, Ohio. Recognising that "kop" and "kan" were likely to be intentional mistakes. "Trashcan" is typical American, and he knew that a "devil's strip" was the patch of grass between the footpath and street – and only called that in Akron, Ohio.

And thus, by narrowing down potential culprits, the kidnapper was caught.

Reference:

https://harvardpress.typepad.com/hup_publicity/2012/07/forensic-linguistics-and-regional-english.html

What is a trainer's connection to "forensic linguistics"?

Cont.

3. Discourse analysis: When examining witness statements, police interviews and other verbal evidence during court case interactions, linguistic analysis enables a better understanding of how language conveys meaning, how credibility is established or how lies are revealed in testimony. As trainers, we help learners understand which phrases and register are appropriate in different contexts. Politeness, turn-taking, requesting information, structuring to improve coherence and selecting appropriate lexical items for context are some of the tools we give guidance on.

4. Sociolinguistics: Social factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, social status, power and beliefs affect communication in legal settings. Do we prefer high context communication, where information is shared in the background and tacitly understood, or low context communication, where all relevant information is given at the beginning of a meeting to ensure everyone is on the same page? Do we speak like a member of the royal family or are we from the outback in Australia? How does this influence how others perceive and treat us? We've all watched gripping legal battles where, just at the last minute, the protagonist's lies are revealed. During the court martial in the film *A Few Good Men*, the colonel (Jack Nicholson) was provoked into divulging why he ordered "code red" - his language revealed his social status and belief system. The actors' interactions exposed underlying motivations and power dynamics through their choice of words and expressions within a court context.

5. Legal language: Legal documentation, laws, contracts, texts all have special and complex terminology which has to be "interpreted" by legal experts. An ambiguous clause such as: "Company agrees to pay vendor a bonus of €10,000 for exceptional performance, to be determined at the Company's sole discretion" is inherently disastrous. It does not specify what exceptional performance or determination of such performance or timing of payment is defined as, or even what constitutes partial payment. Translations of legal documentation are even more troublesome, especially when interpretation of law may differ considerably between countries.

As trainers, we too are forensic analysts trying to decipher what our learners really want to say or mean, and we give them the tools to express themselves more clearly in whichever cultural context they are communicating in.

Author: Victoria Sheppard

ELTA-Rhine Online Book Club

Seven ELTA-Rhine members “Teamed” up online on 18th March to discuss *The Country Girls* by Edna O’Brien. Three were new to the art of “book-clubbing” whilst others were old hands; almost all had a visceral reaction to the stories. Many recognised the chauvinism and sexism of the mid-20th century. The predatory behaviours of the male characters, the misogyny and whiff of paedophilia along with the limited options and restricted ambitions of the females, all of which combined to create a rather depressing read.

However, the group enjoyed discussing many of the still pertinent topics raised by the text such as “frenemies”, “gaslighting”, the stereotypical female search for a prince, the collusive role of the church and convents (in particular in the subjugation of women) alcohol abuse, poverty and sex. The poetic, realistic prosaic style of the book was regarded as a highlight.

What is the book about?

The Country Girls is a trilogy consisting of three novels: *The Country Girls* (1960), *The Lonely Girl* (1962), and *Girls in their Married Bliss* (1964). It is often credited with breaking silence on sexual social issues in Ireland following WWII and was adapted into a 1983 film. All three novels were banned by the Irish censorship board.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Country_Girls#/media/File:TheCountryGirls.jpg)

What do others think of the book?

Audiobook preview on Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4R0aDX-TwOQ>

Guardian Review:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/sep/30/edna-obrien-country-girl-review>

Goodreads:

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/517061.The_Country_Girls

What's next?

The next book to be discussed on the 20th of May is ‘*The Troubles*’ by James Gordon Farrell.

Author: Sandra Ling

Weaving the threads...

Save the date: ELTA-Rhine AGM

Saturday 10th May at 2pm in Cologne

Workshop: Andy Vogt-Nas on Pronunciation

NEW! ELTA-Rhine Book Club

Challenge yourself and nurture your inner critic in stimulating virtual meetings.

Join the Slack channel for more information.

The ELTA-Rhine Slack workspace

A superb communication tool, a place to find jobs, events and contact other trainers.

Here's how to join:

1) Download the link on your phone or computer to join the ELTA-Rhine workspace - it's free!

<https://elta-rhineworkspace.slack.com>

2) Set up your profile - Name, job title, photo

3) To make it really easy, put Slack on your browser toolbar:

Please contribute an article or workshop review to a future ELTA-Rhine newsletter!

We would love to hear from you.

Contact newsletter@elta-rhine.de

OR

post on Slack and tag @Johanna.