LEXIS EDUCATION

# Recipe for success: Using Functional Grammar in English and Italian

By Lina Russo

*In this article, we get a comprehensive insight into the work undertaken by Lina Russo as part of a Spencer Foundation Action Research Project carried out in 1999. As a teacher of both English and Italian to the same group of students, she set about introducing a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) metalanguage through both English and Italian. Although this research was well documented at the time, it was never widely disseminated. We are making it available here because it remains an excellent example of the gains to be made when a shared functional metalanguage is a key part of any literacy pedagogy. It is also, as far as we are aware, the first example of a SFL metalanguage being used in the context of teaching Italian.*

In 1999, students from my Year 8[1] English and Italian classes were involved in a research project sponsored by the Spencer Foundation. In this project, two units of work were developed that introduced students to key concepts in functional grammar, both in English and Italian.

The main focus of the project was to observe the benefits of teaching functional grammar in two curriculum areas. Some questions that I hoped to answer were: Would what students learned about grammar in English be brought to their study of Italian? Would they make connections between the two languages? Would a functional approach develop students' knowledge of the similarities and differences between the two languages? Was the functional metalanguage going to be accessible to students? How would they use it to talk and write about language?

## An Argument for Functional Grammar in the Languages Other Than English (LOTE) classroom

In most Italian language classrooms, there is typically a strong focus on grammar. Although language teachers have generally moved away from the grammar translation-approach towards more communicative approaches, we all accept that there is a basic need to actively teach grammar. At times, we feel that students need to know more about English grammar in

1 Year 8 students are generally 13 years old.

order to gain a clearer understanding the grammar of the target language. Although I share this view, I was not convinced that teaching traditional grammar was the answer.

In 1997, I completed the Language and Literacy course for teachers of Italian, which was underpinned by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). As I was studying for my Masters in Applied Linguistics and reflecting on my own teaching practice, I felt that I had a good understanding of traditional grammar and that I could effectively teach the structures and grammatical rules of the Italian language. Students in my classes were very successfully completing cloze type exercises and achieving very good test results. However, when it came to constructing their own texts in Italian, it was evident that many were not drawing on their knowledge of the grammar that had been taught. As a result, literal translations and 'ungrammatical' texts were being written. The following example illustrates this nicely.

English: I watch television.

Italian: Io orologio la televisione.

Here, the word *orologio,* which is a noun, has been used instead of the verb *guardare*. The error indicates that the writer does not have a clear understanding of how watch is functioning in the sentence.

This example is typical of the kind of error that would appear in some students' work, even after weeks spent practising verb conjugations. And it was happening year after year. The problem was not a lack of grammatical knowledge. I had always taught students grammar, traditional grammar that is. In this kind of grammar, we set out rules for students to apply and through exercises that repeat the structure being taught, students eventually learn the rule. They become very good at inserting the missing word or writing out all of the conjugations of a particular verb or placing the correct definite article in front of a noun. But what do they actually learn about the language and how to use it to create their own texts? How does a student develop the skills needed to understand and produce the sophisticated kinds of texts they are expected to be able to read and write at senior levels? Traditional grammar does not focus on language in use but instead, what the ideal use of the language would look like. In short, traditional grammar becomes too abstract for junior students to grasp and apply in their own writing. It is a set of tools that we can use in language teaching, but it is not the right set for the kind of work that students and teachers need to do with language.

While a great deal of work in Italian teaching focuses on developing students' vocabulary (their Field knowledge) as well at clause level, where we talk about the role of various grammatical elements such as verbs, adjectives and nouns, teaching traditional grammar alone does not help to develop students' understanding of genre and how grammar functions to organise texts and make meanings. Since I began my studies in SFL, I have been very conscious of this and my aim has been to actively teach about genre in Italian, focusing the grammatical patterns that exist in the genres that we look at.

# Functional Grammar

## Language as a meaning-making system

In functional grammar, texts are considered to be constructed through language choices made within systems of meanings. As a result, the explicit teaching of patterns which exist within genres scaffolds students into a greater control of a variety of text types.

> 'The main point of exploring the grammar is so that children can see how language works and thus develop their writing and their general language competence.
>
> ... the insights gained from grammar can enhance children's learning right across the curriculum.' (Collerson 1997: 115)

## The metalanguage of functional grammar

Functional grammar is basically a description of how language works to make meaning. It has a rich language to talk about language, a metalanguage, which was taken up in both units of work. The challenge for teaching such a metalanguage in Italian was that there was no functional grammar description of Italian available at the time the research was undertaken. The functional grammar written by Michael Halliday is a grammar of the English language. Consequently, we had to be mindful that we could not transfer the metalanguage easily. Halliday was consulted about this, and his position was that because a functional description of the Italian language had not been written, we should invent our own functional labels where possible. Of course, some categories were immediately adaptable where others proved more challenging (see later discussion on this point).

As an entry point for my students, the key elements of the Transitivity system, Processes, Participants and Circumstances, became the main focus. The table below provides a brief explanation of these terms and where applicable their Italian equivalents.

| Term | Italian equivalent | Explanation |
|---|---|---|
| Field | Campo | The topic of the language in a particular context, realised through Processes, Participants and Circumstances. |
| Participant | Partecipante | The element of the clause that identifies who or what is participating in the Process of the clause — expressed with a nominal group or embedded clause. These were coded red. |

| Term | Italian equivalent | Explanation |
|---|---|---|
| Process | Processo | The element of the clause that is the core of the clause and construes experience as actions or sensings or sayings or beings and havings. These were coded green. |
| Circumstance | Circostanza | The part of a clause (expressed by adverbial phrase/group or prepositional phrase) which gives the details of when, where, how, why, with what, with whom, for whom and according to whom/what. These were coded blue. |
| Schematic Structure | Struttura schematica | The distinctive way that a text of a particular genre is structured, having identifiable stages or parts which enable it to achieve its purpose. For example, a recount has an orientation (sets the time, place and people involved), a series of events (ordered by time and perhaps evaluated) and an evaluation or re-orientation to conclude (eg 'It was a great day.' or 'Finally, at four o'clock, we all went home.') |
| Process | Processo | The element of the clause that is the core of the clause and construes experience as actions or sensings or sayings or beings and havings. These were coded green. |
| Transitivity | Transitività | In traditional grammar the term *transitive* applies to verbs which can have an object-that is, in an active clause, the effect or goal of the process. In theory, verbs are either transitive or intransitive (i.e. unable to take an object), though in practice many verbs can be both, with slightly different meanings. The term *transitivity* as used in functional grammar is derived from this traditional concept; it is the way that Participants in a clause are related to each other through the process. |
| Experiential | Esperientiale | The function of language concerned with the representation of experience. |

## Using Functional Grammar in the classroom

The unit that follows was a first attempt at teaching functional grammar in Italian to Year 8 students. There were 25 students involved in the research project. The class had 11 boys and 14 girls. It was a mixed ability class with a wide range of abilities represented. At the time, the same students were using functional grammar in my English class. The English and Italian units both focussed on the Field of cooking and Procedural texts (recipes and recipe poems) were used in both units of work. The key elements of Participants, Processes and Circumstances were introduced and identified using a colour coding system. Analysis and class discussion of the major grammatical features took place throughout both units of work. As well, students' responses to specific questions and other work samples were collected.

### Teaching and learning model

A genre-based teaching and learning model (Figure 1) was adopted for both units of work. All of the activities and exercises students participated in were aimed at developing their critical orientation to and control of the procedural genre.

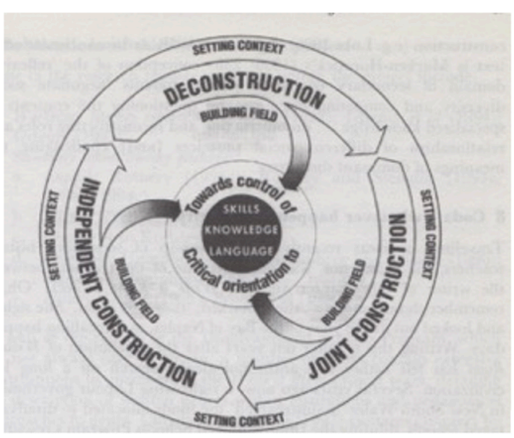



Figure 1 (Write it Right 1994)

Throughout the teaching and learning cycle, there was a strong focus on Field building. This focus was critical to the success of the Italian unit. Students participated in teacher led deconstruction and analysis of texts, followed by independent deconstruction, joint construction and finally independent text construction activities.

The aim of each unit was for students to independently construct a text of the same genre. In Italian, students would write a procedural text by translating a recipe from English to Italian. In English, students were to creatively employ the procedural genre to write a poem which would be a pastiche of a recipe that drew together two unlikely Fields, for example, instructions on cooking and school life—take thirty sweaty students and mix them together in a classroom.

## Italian Unit: Le Ricette Italiane (Italian Recipes)

The Italian unit was initiated in the second to last week of the English unit. It was readily accepted by students as a logical progression. There was a strong focus on building the Field and using visual aids to assist students with text deconstruction, analysis and construction.

### Building the Field

The starting point for this unit was Field building activities. Students each received a handout of illustrated cooking Processes (see Figure 2). Using the illustrations, they made flash cards which were used to learn the infinitive forms of cooking Processes. Students devised and engaged in word games like memory game, fish, snap and word tombola (bingo) to familiarise themselves with the vocabulary needed for this unit. Approximately four lessons were required for students to make the cards and become familiar with the vocabulary.

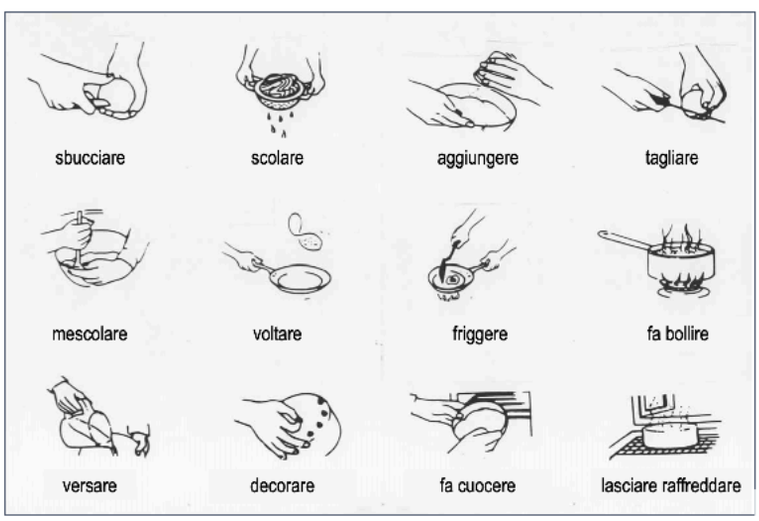



Figure 2

### Text Deconstruction

The first text presented was a recipe for meringues, *Le meringhe* in Italian (see Figure 3). It was set out in clauses with the Experiential elements colour-coded.

1. Accendi il forno al minimo.
2. Ritaglia un quadrato di carta da forno con cui rivestire la placca.

Figure 3

Red font was used for Participants, green for Processes and blue for Circumstances. Conjunctions were left in black. Each step was numbered and accompanied by a representative diagram.

> 'Different words in different groups because of the colours … reminds me of English.' (Student)

This student's comment, when the first text was presented, revealed that the connections I was hoping students would make were possible.

Without any prior explanation or discussion, the text was projected and read aloud. Students wrote responses to the following questions:

1. What kind of text was it?
2. How did you know? (Be specific)
3. Were there any words you recognised?

### Student Responses to the Le Meringhe text

> 'The text was written in Italian, it had three different types of colours in it: red, blue, green. I think that the text was talking about how to make cookies – a recipe.
>
> **Student 1**

> 'I knew because there were some words I understood and the pictures in the top corner showed me. I understood most of the words and some of them sounded like the verbs we just did.'
>
> **Student 2**

> 'It was steps to making something - a process. I know because of the way it is set out with little pictures and numbers next to the steps. I didn't recognise any words.'
>
> **Student 3**

> 'It was a recipe – method for Gingerbread men. I know because of the pictures and the numbers on the side- therefore they were steps.'
>
> **Student 4**

> 'The text was of instructions to do something. I knew because I could tell by the pictures on the top of the page and some of the words I could recognise from the cooking words. I recognise aggiungere, lo zucchero, carta, cinque and lots more I just can't remember them.'
>
> **Student 5**

### Comments and observations

These responses clearly indicated that students knew that they had seen and heard a procedural text. Most were able to distinguish that it was a recipe.

The written responses were followed by general discussion and key words were translated to reveal that the text was a recipe for meringues. The schematic structure became a strong focus of discussion as students' responses indicated that they relied heavily on the organisation and staging of the text in determining the genre. Many referred to 'the pictures,' 'the numbers,' as well as 'the way it is set out.'

With their limited Field knowledge, it was clear that students were making their own connections between their understanding of the procedural genre, specifically recipes, and the text presented. They were inferring meaning from the way the text was set out as well as the few words that they knew.

The second text, *Ricetta* per *patatine fritte* (see Figure 4) - a recipe for French Fries, was also colour-coded and presented on overhead. Diagrams were again used to illustrate ingredients and the method. As a group, students inferred the meanings of the written text by focusing on the diagrams and the processes they were already familiar with from their previous flash card games. They were then given a copy of the recipe without diagrams or colour-coding. Their task was to reconstruct the text by reading for meaning and adding appropriate diagrams to illustrate the ingredients and method.

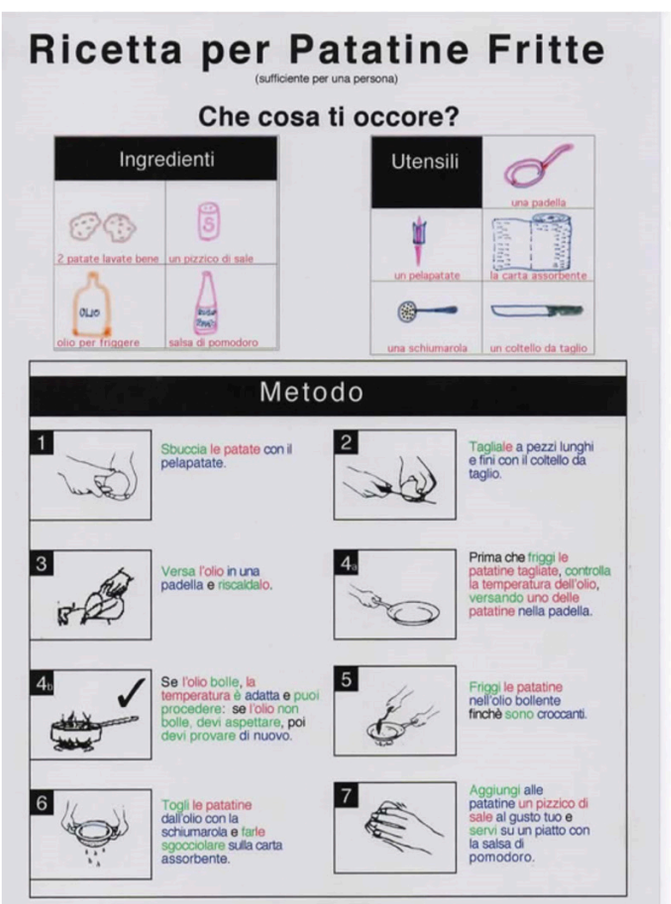



Figure 4

The scaffolding activities were a combination of independent, group and whole class tasks. Independently, generally as homework tasks,

students used colour-coding to identify Processes, while Participants and Circumstances were identified at school in pair and group work. Analyses were carried out on the *Le Meringhe* and *Ricetta per patatine fritte* texts. Homework was always corrected as a whole class so that any difficulties could be discussed. Approximately 8 @ 40 minute lessons were required before students had gained enough Field knowledge to move to the next stage of the teaching and learning cycle.

## Independent Deconstruction

In this stage of the unit, students carried out their own analyses of the texts presented. They used the colour coding system to find the Participants, Processes and Circumstances.

The third text, *Frullato di fragole* (see Figure 5), a recipe for strawberry milkshake, was used to test students' ability to read and understand a recipe in Italian. To assist with translation, dictionaries were permitted. Once translated, students had to colour code the text to identify the Experiential elements and respond to some questions in English.

Figure 5

### Questions on the Frullato di fragole text

1. What kind of text is it?
2. How did you know?
3. Were there any words you recognised without looking them up?
4. How has your knowledge of functional groups (participants, processes and circumstances) helped you?

## Student Responses to the Frullato di fragole text

1. It was a procedural text.
2. I knew because it was telling you what to do
3. Yes, aggiungi, frullato, zucchero, latte, minuto, bicchiere.
4. It helps me to understand which words are what to do, or the ingredients etc.

**Student 6**

1. A recipe text, in step-by-step form: a procedure.
2. By the words used, the steps.
3. Yes, add, pour, sugar, milk, for, one, minute, of.
4. Because I can understand it's a recipe because of the way it's written, with all the "What to do's" at the start, etc.

**Student 4**

1. Procedure text
2. Because of the participants, processes, etc...
3. Only a few like versa.
4. I don't think that my knowledge of participants, etc... would help me much yet.

**Student 7**

They have helped me to understand the text because they help me to identify each word and what they are.

**Student 8**

I now know what kind of text I am looking at and it helps me to distinguish them.

**Student 9**

It has helped me to understand it more and know how it has to be set out (a recipe). It helped me to know what order everything went in like process, circumstance, etc, etc.

**Student 10**

If I didn't know what a word was and it was at the start of a step I knew the word would probably be a process. Apart from that I didn't really think of processes, participants and circumstances.

**Student 11**

## Comments and observations

Most students successfully identified the functional groups. A number of students had adopted and were accurately using the functional metalanguage. Many used the name of the genre in their responses. Some commented that they had used the image as a clue with the majority responding that they knew that the text was a procedure because of the

numbered steps and the position of the Process in each instruction.

It is interesting to note that Student 7 has used the metalanguage to describe the text. He has indicated that he knew it was a procedure because of the Participants and Processes, even though he only knew the meanings of a few of the words. It would be reasonable to conclude that by teaching students what to expect grammatically in a given genre, their skills in reading comprehension will improve.

Of particular interest was the number of students who commented that their knowledge of functional groups helped them to decode the text because they were familiar with the patterns and staging of a procedural text. They had learned what to expect and even if they didn't know a word, they were more attuned to how the word may have been functioning in the text.

Two students commented that they did not use their knowledge functional groups to read and translate the text because they had a dictionary.

In the lesson that followed, students were shown the *Frullato di fragole* text mapped onto a grid of participants, processes and circumstances (see Figure 6). At this stage, the metalanguage was also introduced in Italian and again, students easily made the connections between the work we had been doing in English and the Italian metalanguage. Using the leading questions under each functional label, the text was decoded and translated.

| | Processo | Partecipante | Circonstanza |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Fare che cosa? | Chi o cosa? | Dove? Where?<br>Come? How?<br>A che cosa? To what? |
| 1 | Metti | le fragole | nel frullatore |
| 2 | Aggiungi | un po' di latte | |
| 3 | Aggiungi | un po' di zucchero | |
| 4 | Frulla | | per un minuto |
| 5 | Versa | | nel bicchiere |

Figure 6

## Sample classroom interaction

| | |
|---|---|
| Question | What do you have to do in the first step? Fare che cosa? |
| Answer: | Metti. Put. |
| Question: | Put what? Metti che cosa? |
| Answer: | Le fragole. The strawberries. |
| Question: | Put where? Metti dove? |
| Answer: | Nel frullatore. In a blender. |

Question: What do you have to do in the second step? Fare che cosa?

Answer: Aggiungi. Add.

*Il risotto giallo* (Saffron rice) the last text analysed. The recipe was presented with diagrams and the Processes were given to students on the grid (see Figure 8). Their task was to fill in the gaps on the grid as demonstrated for the *Frullato di fragole* recipe, then translate the text. This time dictionaries were not allowed. The majority of students successfully completed both the Transitivity analysis and the translation, with more able students including ellipsed participants in brackets, as modelled in the *Frullato di fragole* text.

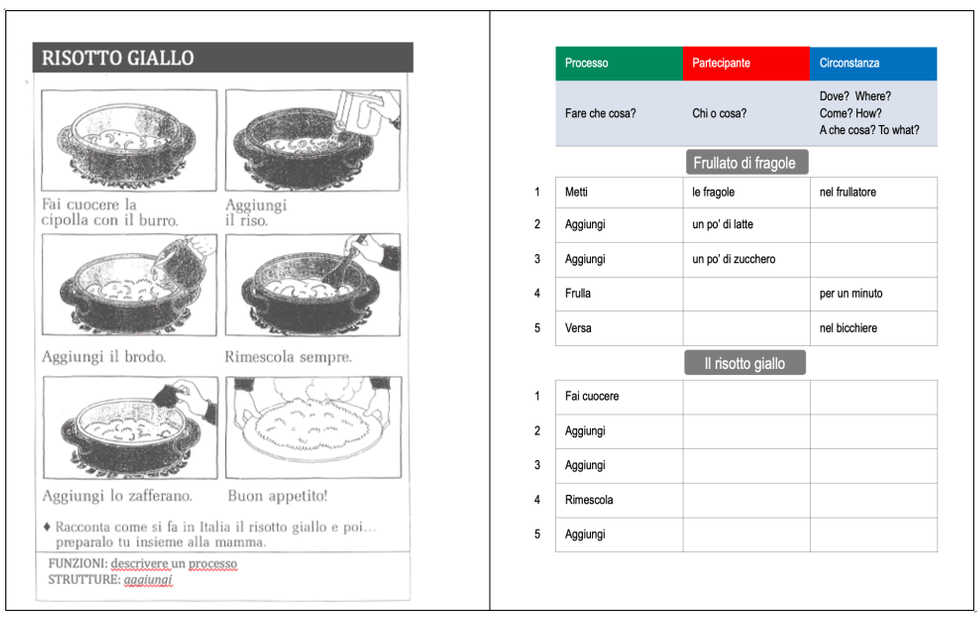



Figure 8

## Independent Construction

The success of the last deconstruction task indicated that students were ready to construct their own recipe texts in Italian.

*Student task*

- Find a recipe for something that you would like to make.
- Simplify the text and write the recipe in Italian.

### Drafting

The Drafting Grid (see Figure 9) was used to help organise the instructions. It also enabled me to evaluate students' control of the Experiential elements and their organisation within a procedural text. In simplifying the original text, students were encouraged to break longer steps, those with more than one process, into a series of shorter steps. This made the task more manageable, particularly for those students experiencing greater difficulty.

| | Processo | Partecipante | Circonstanza |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Fare che cosa? | Chi o cosa? | Dove? Where?<br>Come? How?<br>A che cosa? To what? |
| 1 | | | |
| 2 | | | |
| 3 | | | |
| 4 | | | |
| 5 | etc | | |

Figure 9

### Editing and Conferencing

The planning grids were submitted to me for editing and conferencing. It was clear that students had grasped the notion that within each instruction, Processes would generally come first, followed by Participants and Circumstances. Ticks on students' work were used to indicate that the chosen word was in the right column and therefore the correct word order for the instruction had been used.

## Some differences in English and Italian Grammar

It is helpful at this stage to briefly consider some of the particular grammatical challenges students learning Italian would face given English as a starting point.

### Participants attaching themselves to Processes

In discussions during the planning stages of this work, it became clear that some structures of the Italian language were different to the English constructions. A highly significant moment occurred when preparing the transitivity analysis of Text 1: *Le Meringhe*. The fourth instruction of this text analysed for Transitivity would be as follows:

| | Italian version | English version |
|---|---|---|
| Clause 1 | *Aggiungi un pizzico di sale agli albumi* | Add a pinch of salt to the egg whites |
| Clause 2 | *e montali a neve ferma* | and whip (them) until stiff, |
| Clause 3 | *sbattendoli con la frusta* | beating (them) with a whisk |

Unlike English, in the Italian text, the pronoun 'them' which refers to the egg whites, is not ellipsed. It is attached to the Process. As this construction, a Process with a Participant attached to it, does not exist in English, there wasn't a functional label from English that we could use to describe it. Once again drawing on Michael Halliday's advice, a new functional label was created: the *Partecipante Attaccato* or Attached Participant. The colour-coded text presented to students had '*monta*' in green to represent the Process with '*li*' in red to represent the Participant, '*sbattendo*' in green and '*li*' in red again. Students discussed the notion of an Attached Participant and tried to find examples of this structure in English. As there were none to be found it was accepted as a construction of the Italian language only and each time one was encountered, arrows were used to link the *Partecipante Attaccato* to the ingredient to which it referred.

### Verbal and Nominal forms

Initially, students made many errors in their selection of processes. It was common for nominal forms of key words to be selected by mistake until it was formally explained that Italian processes generally end in *are, ere* or *ire*. It was explained that many nouns and verbs in English are the same regardless of whether they are functioning as Processes or Participants. The word *place,* for example, has nominal and verbal meanings and these are determined by the position of the word within a clause. In Italian, this is not the case. *Place* in its verbal form is *mettere,* while the nominal form is *posto* or *locale*.

### The Imperative Mood

Part of a lesson was dedicated to teaching the singular form of the imperative mood and its formation in Italian. It was explained that the imperative is formed by removing the '*re*' of '*are*' verbs e.g. *versare* = to pour, *versa* = pour!. For '*ere*' and '*ire*' verbs, the last 3 letters are replaced with *'I'* e.g. *aggiungere* = to add, *aggiungi* = add! and *servire* = to serve, *servi* = serve!. This was recorded on the whiteboard with a list of examples which students noted in their workbooks. There was evidence of self correction on students' drafting grids after this explanation. To indicate the need for an imperative where an infinitive had been used, I simply underlined the last three letters.

Although the 'ungrammatical' texts still appeared in the drafts, explaining why the chosen word was inappropriate became easier through the use of the functional metalanguage. Figure 10 is an extract of the second draft of Student 12's recipe for *Torta di cioccolato* (Chocolate cake).

| | Processo | Partecipante | Circonstanza |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Fare che cosa? | Chi o cosa? | Dove? Where?<br>Come? How?<br>A che cosa? To what? |
| 1 | Ungere | tortiera | |
| 2 | Locale | forno attaccapanni | 180 C |
| 3 | Separato | uovo tuorlo da parte uovo bianco | |

Figure 10

The second instruction, '*Locale il forno...*' was discussed and it was explained that although '*locale*' means "place," it actually means 'a place', not the process 'to place'. If '*locale*' were to be used in a text, it would be functioning as a Participant, not a Process. Similar explanations were used whenever this type of error appeared in drafts and significantly fewer of them appeared in students' final drafts. Throughout the editing and conferencing process, the functional metalanguage was effectively used in noting and correcting errors as well as highlighting strengths.

### Ellipsis

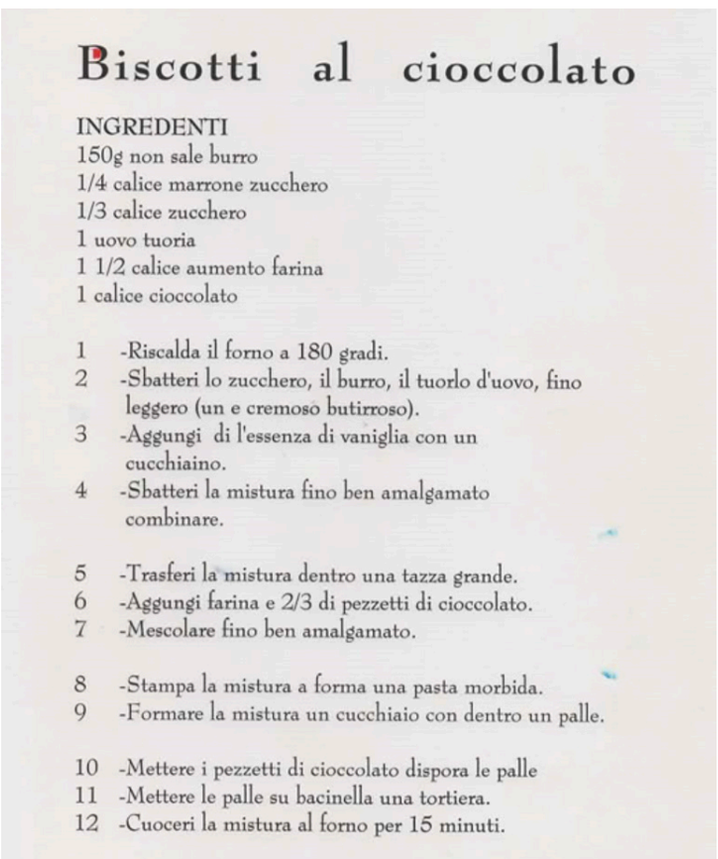
In conferencing drafts, it became apparent that students were mimicking the structural elements and intuitively employing the grammatical conventions of the English procedural genre. This occurred to me when I noticed that many students had omitted articles in their instructions. In English, it is quite common to read, 'Pour oil into pan', the ellipsed form of 'Pour the oil into the pan' or 'Pour some oil into a pan'. In Italian, this ellipsis does not occur. When this was explained, students were encouraged to check that they had used definite and indefinite articles in the Participant and Circumstance columns.

## Student outcomes

In final drafts, even though errors remain, all students demonstrated a strong control of the procedural genre. The schematic structure of a recipe was successfully employed by all students. All stated the goal of the text through a title, most divided the text into *Ingredienti* and *Metodo* sections. The majority of students also divided the instructions into numbered steps, each beginning with a Process.

Figure 11 shows one of the many examples of students demonstrating control of the procedural genre as a result of the scaffolding provided by this unit of work. There are still many errors in the student's Italian text, but it is clear from the outset that it is a recipe. Even with the mistakes,

most of the steps make sense and one could follow the steps to achieve the stated goal, *Biscotti di cioccolato – Chocolate Biscuits.* The student has successfully staged the text after stating the goal, beginning with a list of ingredients, followed by a method that consists of twelve numbered steps. There is evidence of extended knowledge of the Field, through the use of words that are specific to cooking. While the student has used a dictionary to find some unfamiliar words (and some of the words selected are not right for this context, such as *calice* instead of *tazza*), many of the words that were introduced as we were building the Field, during the joint deconstruction, analysis and joint construction stages of the unit have been used, such as, *riscalda, sbattere, aggiungi, mescolare, uovo, zucchero, sale, forno, gradi, burro and amalgamato.* The text has 12 steps, each starting with a cooking process and following the Process> Participant> Circumstance clause structure.



Biscotti al cioccolato

INGREDENTI
150g non sale burro
1/4 calice marrone zucchero
1/3 calice zucchero
1 uovo tuoria
1 1/2 calice aumento farina
1 calice cioccolato

1 -Riscalda il forno a 180 gradi.
2 -Sbatteri lo zucchero, il burro, il tuorlo d'uovo, fino leggero (un e cremoso butirroso).
3 -Aggungi di l'essenza di vaniglia con un cucchiaino.
4 -Sbatteri la mistura fino ben amalgamato combinare.

5 -Trasferi la mistura dentro una tazza grande.
6 -Aggungi farina e 2/3 di pezzetti di cioccolato.
7 -Mescolare fino ben amalgamato.

8 -Stampa la mistura a forma una pasta morbida.
9 -Formare la mistura un cucchiaio con dentro un palle.

10 -Mettere i pezzetti di cioccolato dispora le palle
11 -Mettere le palle su bacinella una tortiera.
12 -Cuoceri la mistura al forno per 15 minuti.

Figure 10

Prior to adopting a genre-based teaching and learning model, it was common practice among Italian teachers, and therefore my own practice, to teach grammar systematically: articles and verb conjugation in Year 8, present perfect tense in Year 9, imperfect tense in Year 10 and so on. Even though we were using pedagogy from a communicative approach, advocating point of need teaching of grammar, we were still largely following a structured sequence. To teach Year 8 students the singular imperative forms of verbs was not a very common practice at the time, but the genre called for that structure to be used, so that's what we did. As previously stated, there are still errors in the text, but for a Year 8 student

in his second term of learning Italian, the standard and quality of the writing is high. There were many more that were equally impressive Italian language texts created by students in their first six months of learning Italian in high school.

Every student in the class successfully translated a recipe into Italian and the majority wrote extended texts consisting of six or more steps. The explicit teaching of the grammatical features of this genre and the comparisons made between the English and Italian conventions contributed significantly to the development of students' control and critical orientation towards the procedural genre. Students learned that texts in Italian are predictable, just like they are in English. If you can recognise the genre, you have started to make meanings whether you understand the words or not. As we analysed and deconstructed texts together, students transferred their knowledge from one language to the other and at times paused to reflect on the similarities such as staging (Goal>Ingredients>Method) and clause structure (Process>Participant>Circumstance) and differences such as ellipsis in English and the '*Partecipante Attaccato*' in Italian.

Students can 'crack the code' when they are supported, through thoughtful and planned scaffolding, to decode the words and the meanings being made. Building the Field is an essential part of the learning experience when teaching a genre in another language. When we give students the words and explain how the texts are staged and constructed, we are giving them the tools to create their own texts. The metalanguage becomes a shared language to discuss texts and how they make meanings. When language learning is contextualised, it becomes meaningful, goal-oriented and fun. Students enjoy reflecting on the similarities and differences between the two languages and they feel less stressed about learning another language, because they can see the connections. It's not all so foreign after all!

## Conclusion

As I reflect on the work that this group of students did in 1999, I am still amazed at the length and density of the texts they created. What if we looked at recounts in Italian and English? What about narratives? Would students be able to make the connections? What about scientific texts like information reports or explanations? What about expositions? What if the two curriculum areas were programmed to complement each other? What if students were exposed to the same genres in English and Italian throughout the year? What if there was a whole school approach so that the language features of these text types could be highlighted across the whole curriculum? How would this affect students' learning? What notions about language would they develop? Is any of this possible without a functional grammar of the Italian language?

There were many benefits gained by adopting a functional approach in the Italian and English classes. The greatest benefits were the opportunity to make connections between the languages and explicitly teach the patterns that exist within the genre that we were studying. Colour coding activities

were meaningful and motivational. In addition, they provided a meaning system that worked effectively in both languages. Students became more aware of the choices available to them in their writing. They also began to view texts as constructed through a series of language choices. Opportunities for grammatical comparisons were available throughout both units of work and they were the point of departure of numerous class discussions about language and how it operates to create meanings.

I am convinced of the value of a functional model in developing students' control of genre. The explicit teaching of the grammatical patterns which exist within a specific genre is possible when a functional model is applied. Students feel empowered as language users when they understand why one text is more successful than another. By using the functional labels in providing feedback, teacher comments can be specific and students can understand areas that may be targeted for improvement. As students' metalanguage develops, they are able to critically analyse texts and give specific feedback, opinions and reactions. The functional metalanguage provides them with the discourse required to view, read, discuss and respond to texts analytically. They develop the language required to express what they know intuitively about texts, within the context of our culture.

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to my mentor, Brian Dare. He deserves much of the credit for the success of the project. We had regular meetings to discuss the teaching and learning outcomes, as well as the data collected throughout the project. Directions for the future scope and sequencing were also discussed. His knowledge of functional grammar and his expertise in a number of areas, including Italian and desk-top publishing were invaluable and much appreciated.

My colleague, Angela Benedetti, also provided inspiration and creative ideas in the planning stages of the unit. Her feedback on the Italian unit which she trialled with her own students later in the same year was highly valued.

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