

**Employing a Genre-based Approach to Teach Written Communication in Italian as a Foreign Language**

by

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# **Employing Genre-based Approach to Teach Written Communication in Italian as a Foreign Language**

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In foreign language classes the teaching of oral and interpersonal communication usually plays the most prominent role, not only because interpersonal communication is critical to supporting social interactions, but also because most instructors lack sufficient training to confidently teach written and presentational communication. My dissertation seeks to counter this deficit by proposing the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) as a viable pedagogy for teaching written presentational communication. GBA, deeply rooted in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), is about teaching learners how to make meaning in socio-cultural situated contexts by showing students how various genres are organized, how the text develops from beginning to end, and how each stage of the text communicates purposeful meaning. Genre provides a context that allows teachers to integrate the learning of language simultaneously with informational content in a socio-cultural context.

With my intervention I aimed to improve the presentational communication in writing (ACTFL Standard #1) in students of Italian in their third semester of instruction employing GBA instruction. In this study I used a pre- and post-instruction assessment to investigate the efficacy of the GBA in increasing students' awareness of texts and genre, and the ability to produce a culturally informed text. The genre I used was the biography, in an instructional unit about Italian Art. The students' pre- and post-instruction biographies were assessed through a rubric that considered content, organization, vocabulary and language use. I also investigated the

reactions to the employment of GBA in both instructor and students through pre- and post-instruction surveys.

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## **Preface**

The completion of this dissertation could not be possible without support, help, and guidance of many people over the last few years: Cinzia Delfini, Dr. Lorraine Denman, and all of my colleagues in the Department of French and Italian at the University of Pittsburgh. Also, I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Rick Donato, and Dr. Emily Rainey and Dr. Linda Kucan. A special thanks to Myriam Abdel-Malek, for the extra support! Finally, I need to thank my husband, who is the inspiration for everything I do, and my family and friends for their unconditional love.

## **1.0 Naming & Framing the Problem of Practice**

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem of Practice**

I have been teaching Italian for more than ten years, and I continue to notice that students in my classes have difficulty with writing across a variety of genres. Supporting students in improving their writing performance is imperative for multiple reasons. First, humanistic Foreign Language (FL) education in the last few years moved to a sophisticated and rich content-based model of instruction (Byrnes, 2011; Donato, 2021), but this type of pedagogy falls short of showing a great interest in writing (Byrnes). It's therefore necessary for the students to be able to match in written communication what they are achieving in the other skills.

Second, when students move to upper-level classes of language study, writing becomes central, and students are required to demonstrate writing competency in order to succeed. For example, students majoring in Italian at University of Pittsburgh need to cover the writing requirement attending at least one 1000-level writing intensive course taught in Italian (Dept. of Italian at University of Pittsburgh). When students reach that class, they need to be able to master more than interpersonal written communication in Italian.

Finally, when I was interviewing a former student of mine (then a TA in the Italian MA program) she confirmed something I had suspected: for some students there is also an affective component attached to the ability of writing. Students have a sense of frustration at being incapable of writing in a more formal way in Italian.

In order to understand the scope of this problem, I conducted a survey to determine how instructors support their students in becoming proficient writers. I received 18 anonymous

responses from other language instructors in the United States and Italy across different universities. Almost 45% of the language instructors that I surveyed shared that they do not explicitly teach written communication. The survey also revealed that 30% of the Italian language instructors focused almost exclusively on grammar when assessing written communication, with 56% stating that they focus on “everything”, with special attention to grammar.

## **1.2 Broader Problem Area**

One of the key issues in FL instruction is teaching FL learners how to effectively write in various genres for different sociocultural purposes (see O'Brien, 2004, for a survey of the literature on teaching and learning to write in a FL published in English since the early nineties). The survey I conducted confirmed my experience that many instructors don't know how to teach writing, or at least don't employ a well-thought method or approach, but simply expect that the grammar instruction will translate into writing. Also, in my interview with one of my former students, she communicated that her main concern when writing in Italian is sentence structure and the organization of the written text, more than just accurate word-level grammar, because it is this area of instruction that she found lacking in the Italian courses she had taken.

There are entire journals dedicated to this topic, as the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, and many methods, approaches and solutions have been proposed. For my project, I focused on the employment of the Genre-based Approach (GBA). GBA is an approach used to teach ELA, SL or FL and is deeply rooted in Halliday's theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). GBA is not about teaching prescriptive rules for creating various genres. Rather, GBA is about teaching learners how to make meaning in socio-cultural situated contexts by showing

students how various genres are organized, how the text develops from beginning to end, and how each stage of the text communicates purposeful meaning. (Donato, 2021; Hyland, 2003, 2007). This pedagogical approach has the benefit of making text construction explicit. Teachers using this approach make clear the goals and expectations of a particular genre, (e.g., a recount, a narration, a set of directions, a biography, etc.), facilitating for the students their ability to write in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes (Hyland 2007, p.150-151). GBA is also systematic. Moreover, genre provides a context that allows teachers to integrate the learning of language simultaneously with informational content in a socio-cultural context. Teachers play a key role in facilitating students' learning and autonomy by supporting student creativity during their writing of texts in various genres. GBA is also critical because it "provides the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses" (Hyland 2007, p.150), increasing at the same time the teachers' knowledge and awareness of texts and genres.

### **1.3 Organizational System**

I work at University of Pittsburgh as a part-time Italian language instructor in the Department of French and Italian. The University of Pittsburgh is the largest university in the Pittsburgh area and a top-tier research university. The university is composed of 17 undergraduate and graduate schools and colleges at its Pittsburgh campus, among which there is Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences, where my department belong. In 2016, the University issued a strategic plan for the years 2016-2020 called "Embracing the World. A Global Plan for Pitt" (University of Pittsburgh 2016). Pitt's strategic plan states how Pitt intends to achieve its global vision "by engaging in research, policy, partnerships, and the study of language and culture, we open the door

to global citizenship.” (University of Pittsburgh 2016, p.2). On the same page the university also affirms that it will foster “social mobility of people here and around the world,” noting that “we are all members of a global community, and our role is to integrate local and transnational perspectives”. This strategic plan seems to be strongly directing Pitt toward global citizenship and cultural awareness. But the Dietrich School’s policy about foreign language requirement seems to state the opposite: students are required to complete the first two semesters of university-level study in a second language other than English. However, there are four exceptions to this requirement: having completed three years of high school study of a FL with a grade of B or better, passing a proficiency test, transferring credits for two terms or more of approved university-level instruction in a second language with grades of C or better, having a native language other than English.

As the data I collected from my language coordinator and chair show, the Department of Italian has been experiencing a decrease in enrollments for some years now. In Fall 2010 the students enrolled in Italian 0101 were 141, and enrollments touched the lowest point so far in the Fall 2016 with 66 students. They have been now rising again, with 97 students in the Fall 2019.

The department of French and Italian, where I teach, is composed of twelve full-time faculty members, of which only four are for the Italian side, and a variable number of visiting and part-time instructors. The Italian side of the department offers major and minor tracks in Italian for undergraduate students, and an MA for graduate students.

## 1.4 Stakeholders

The stakeholders involved in my problem of practice can be divided in two large groups: the ones with a direct impact on my work, and on which my work has a direct impact, and those that are more remotely impacted by my work and decisions. The latter category comprises people, organizations and institutions, like the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences, beyond my sphere of influence, therefore I am not including them in this description.

The students. The student body of the classes of Italian is composed of 62% female students and 38% male students. According to the first-day questionnaires I collected from my coworkers, at least 49.5% of our students are of Italian heritage and they want to study the language to reconnect to their roots and to some of their relatives. Among the reasons why they are learning Italian, the 33% listed the desire of going to study in Italy, and almost all of them aim to being able to have a basic conversation with other Italian speakers. From the grade rosters I collected from my coworkers, 57% of students of Italian obtain a grade in the A range, 26% in the B range and 9% in the C range. Less than 3% fail the class.

As highlighted in my semi-structured interview with one of my former students, students sometimes lack knowledge of grammar and syntax not only in Italian, but also in their native language, which is usually English. I was able to observe this in class. Many of my students lack the metalanguage necessary to talk about the language. For example, many of them don't know the difference between articles and prepositions, but they can explain the function these words fulfill in a sentence. Sometimes students are unaware of how a dictionary works and believe that Google Translate is an acceptable resource for a FL learner.

All these aspects show how our students in Italian 0103 are interested in improving their performance in Italian, but also indicate areas that require attention in the curriculum. Student

motivation is important, but it does not solve the problem of language learning. What is needed is a new pedagogy of language learning as meaning-making, which is efficient, not time-consuming, user-friendly, easy to grasp and implement. From this perspective, GBA seemed to be a good methodological candidate to explore.

FL instructors. There are two types of language instructors in the dept. of Italian. There are the TAs, who are MA students, and they teach one class of either Italian 0101 or 0102 every semester. We currently have three TAs, two females and one male. MH. is completing her second year in the MA program and already has teaching experience from teaching Italian for a few years in a private high school. MZ. is in her first year of the MA program, she holds a BA in Italian Studies. A., our third TA, is also in his first year in the MA. He grew up in Venezuela, and his first language is Spanish, but he holds a BA from an American university. The three TAs never get the chance to teach Intermediate classes of Italian, and therefore they did not actively take part in my project. However, there is the possibility for me to teach a workshop about GBA for the Dept. of French and Italian and they would be learning how to implement this approach in their classes too.

Beyond the TAs there are the part-time instructors and full-time lecturers. Currently I am the only part-time instructor teaching in the department, and I usually teach two classes per semester, from Italian 0101 to Italian 0104 and Conversation. There is also a full-time lecturer, DC, with a three-year contract. She teaches 18 credits a year, spread over two semesters. She teaches a range of classes from Italian 0101 to 0103 and Conversation. DC holds an MA in Italian from our department, and previously earned an MA in Russian in Italy, where she taught Russian for a while, and also lived and worked in Russia for three years. DC is very interested in improving our students' performance, and in the past she has been a keen participant in other projects involving the study of new pedagogical approaches.



The main issue with language instructors is that often, when getting their training in teaching a second language, they neither receive training on the pedagogy of writing nor are instructed on why proficiency in written communication is important. Therefore, one of the most important steps in my intervention involved the professional development of a language instructor in the department. This is the reason why I decided to have an instructor other than myself implement this approach. DC was a perfect candidate for this role. She has experience with students of Italian in their third semester, and she's open to learning new approaches. In this way, I also had the chance to explore how the instructor reacted toward the use of GBA for the teaching of writing. I have already worked with DC during the Spring 2020 in order to initiate the professional development necessary for her to successfully implement GBA in her classes.

Language coordinator. LD is the language coordinator for the Department of Italian. She is also an alumna of the EdD program, LLC ARCO. She holds an MA in Italian and an MA in Linguistics from the University of Pittsburgh. LD teaches a load of 3+2 classes, and her teaching experience spans from all four basic language classes, plus Conversation, intro to Italian Linguistics, and other classes about Italian culture, that are taught in English.

LD has been working on a topic similar to mine: how to improve giving and receiving feedback in written assignments. Therefore, I know that she shares my same concerns and wishes for the same outcomes. She has an extensive experience, she is dedicated to the department, to her students and to her instructors and very open to improvements and changes.

## 1.5 Review of Supporting Knowledge

For my intervention I propose the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) as the approach for my project. This approach is rooted in the tenets of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which is based on a functional approach to language. According to this approach, the point of departure when we talk about language is the question “how does language function?” A functional model describes language as a meaning-making system, with a tight relationship between the context and the choices we make from the language system. When we are creating a text, we need to ask two fundamental questions: what is the purpose of the text? In which context are we creating this text? Hence the importance of the genre. Genre can be defined as “The ways in which we achieve our social purposes through language” (Derewianka & Jones, 2012, p.8). Every text we produce – using the word “text” in its widest possible meaning (e.g., oral and written) – belongs to a genre. It is therefore paramount for speakers to be able to master different genres in order to obtain what they want through the use of the language.

GBA was a perfect fit for my problem of practice for several reasons. First, although not very popular in the US, it has gained positive findings in other countries, mainly in the contexts of ELA and ESL (e.g., Chen & Su, 2012; Derewianka, 1990; Derewianka & Jones, 2012; Martin & Rose, 2008; Nordin, 2017; Yang, 2016). GBA is especially popular in Australia, where it was developed in 1979. The reasons for its success are related to the strong link this pedagogy creates between the writing practice and culture, the opportunity to foster a dialogue between learners and instructors, and the fact that it allows the learners to play an active role in the learning process. The instructor mediates the text with the students’ contribution, keeping the students highly involved in every step of the process. Second, although GBA has mostly been used for instruction in ELA, ESL and EFL, numerous recent studies have shown that the principles of the approach are

also suitable for any FL instruction, making it an ideal fit for my project (e.g., Abdel-Malek, 2019; Byrnes, 2011; Cheng & Chiu, 2018; Ramos, 2014; Troyan, 2014, 2016; Yasuda, 2015). Because genre is common to every culture, and every language is a meaning-making system, it is therefore possible to apply the same principles to the instruction of a foreign language. Third, my problem of practice involves students of Italian FL in their 3<sup>rd</sup> semester, because that is when, in my place of practice, we begin teaching our students more complex topics, we start talking about abstract ideas, and this is where our students struggle to express the complexity of the topics in their writing. In her study Byrnes (2011) shows how GBA is best suitable for students of FL who are at least at the low intermediate level. Yasuda (2015) in her study also showed that the higher proficiency group demonstrated relevant changes in the meaning-making choices, while the lower proficiency one stuck to formulaic choices with minor changes. Finally, GBA does not only focus on the word or sentence-level of the written communication, but on the text as a whole, and links the structure (the genre) to the cultural and social significance of the communication. Despite not focusing specifically on grammar, studies show that GBA results in a higher level of grammar accuracy (e.g., Abdel-Malek, 2019; Hyland, 2007). In conclusion, the main goal of GBA is to make the structure of a genre clear to students and to approach the writing of a genre as a making-meaning process in a sociocultural context.

## **2.0 Theory of Improvement & Implementation Plan**

### **2.1 Theory of Improvement**

The final aim for my project was to improve the presentational communication in writing ability in college-level students of Italian as Foreign Language in their third semester (low-intermediate) of language instruction. Developing presentational communication in writing differs from developing speaking proficiency and requires its own set of pedagogical practices (Donato, 2021). Currently, in most FL programs, written communication is not explicitly taught using a coherent pedagogy (Donato). In many FL classes written communication is approached implicitly and through the lens of grammar correction (Donato). This practice often results in learners thinking that the purpose of writing in a FL class is to display accurate grammatical knowledge, without awareness of content and genre (Donato). My goal was to counter these trends.

I have three main drivers to support my work toward reaching my goal. First, the lack of knowledge of a viable and successful pedagogy in teaching written communication. Second, many teachers and language instructors do not know how to teach written communication. Third: there is the need for the explicit instruction on written communication, because cohesively writing in a FL is not a skill that learners can simply infer from language observation.

The change ideas connected to these drivers are also three. First and foremost, it is necessary to select a pedagogy that has been proven successful in the past in teaching written communication in a third semester college-level FL class. Many language instructors do not know how to approach written communication, therefore it is necessary to instruct teachers about the new pedagogy, so that they will be able to use it in their classroom. Finally, with the tool of the

GBA teachers will be able explicitly to instruct their students using student-friendly metalanguage and authentic material that will show the learners how to approach writing in a more coherent and cohesive way. I measured the improvement through impact and process data.

I developed this intervention within the framework of Improvement Science (IS). In IS “Impact data compare the relevant beliefs, attitudes, or practices among study participants at the beginning and end of the study on a common metric” (Mintrop, 2016 p.168). Impact data is collected to determine whether the intervention worked or not. I gathered impact data analyzing the students’ pre- and post-instruction essays. This allowed me to observe in what measure they were able to employ the genre’s specific functions, stages and lexico-grammatical features.

“Process data capture the implementation of the intervention. [...] Process data are collected for one specific purpose, to explain impact” (Mintrop, 2016 p.173). I gathered process data administering surveys to the students pre- and post-instruction. With these surveys I aimed to understand how the students’ attitudes toward producing written communication in Italian shifted with the implementation of GBA, how GBA changed their practicing in writing, and how they reacted to learning with a completely new pedagogy. I also interviewed DC, the lecturer in charge of teaching using GBA, after the end of the instructional unit, in order to gather her reactions to the approach, to understand how and why her practice of teaching shifted in using GBA, and her opinion about integrating GBA in future practice.

## **2.2 Purpose of the intervention**

The purpose of my intervention was to support college-level students of Italian foreign language (FL) in their 3<sup>rd</sup> semester of instruction in improving their written communication performance. There were three questions leading my inquiry:

- 1) To what extent did the use of GBA in the design of course units impact my students' writing ability in Italian?
  - a) What are the functions, stages and lexico-grammatical features of the biography genre in Italian?
  - b) What are the stages and the lexico-grammatical features of the biography genre that the students were able to use after the instruction in the GBA in comparison to the stages and the lexico-grammatical features they had used before the GBA instruction?
- 2) How can I support other teachers in successfully implement GBA in their instructional units?
- 3) What is the relationship between the instructor's teaching practices using GBA and the written texts of the students produced during the independent construction phase of the teaching and learning cycle?

## 2.3 Methods and Measures

### 2.3.1 Intervention

The procedure for the genre-based pedagogical intervention followed the teaching and learning cycle created first by Rothery (1994), and then edited by Rose & Martin (2012). The teaching and learning cycle is the graphic representation of my intervention. I followed the one from Derewianka & Jones (2012, p.45), since I find that it is the closest one to my experience of teaching FL, but I applied a change in the wording (Figure 1). Derewianka and Jones called the stage after Building Knowledge of the Field, Modelling the Genre. I changed it to Deconstruction, according to the original Rothery's cycle (1994). The word Deconstruction better highlights the kind of work that needs to be done in this stage, the teacher supports the students in deconstructing the model text in order to develop the students' awareness of how the text makes meaning in the context.

#### My Teaching and Learning Cycle

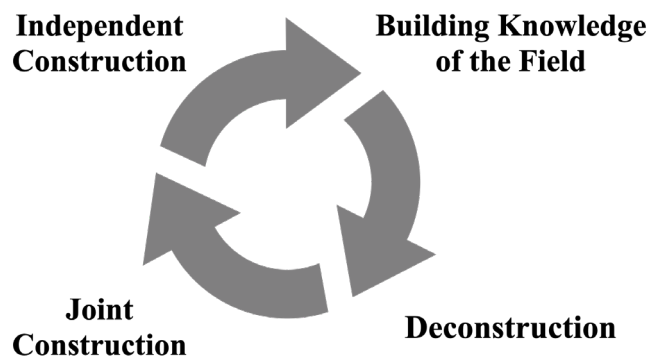


Figure 1 Teaching and Learning Cycle (Derewianka & Jones, 2012, p. 45, with my editing)

The purpose of the first stage, Building Knowledge of the Field, is to engage all students in the topic and build a shared background in order to write collaboratively. The second stage, Deconstruction, is devoted to supporting students in developing awareness about the genre and its stages in text construction. In order to achieve this, the instructor guides the students in reading, analyzing, and deconstructing the model text that illustrates the genre in question. In the third stage, Joint Construction, the instructor still plays an important role in helping the students develop control over the genre. Instructor and students write together a piece based on the genre of the model text they previously deconstructed. Finally, in the Independent Construction, the students independently write a text related to the field, according to the genre that they learned with the support of the instructor during the Deconstruction phase.

The intervention has been implemented in a three-week unit of Italian 0103 about Italian art history. A genre that fits organically with this topic is biography. The course is a mixed context-based/content-based class taught almost completely in Italian (but some phases of this intervention has been conducted in part in English, in order to ensure students' comprehension and participation) by an experienced instructor who has been teaching this course for several years, DC. She instructed her students in the new approach during the Fall 2020. Before the in-class instruction, during the Spring semester 2020, I personally supported DC in learning the tenets of GBA with the aid of some chapters from Derewianka & Jones (2012, chapters 1, 2, 3), and we found and analyzed together an authentic text that could be used as the model text for analysis and deconstruction (Fig. 2).



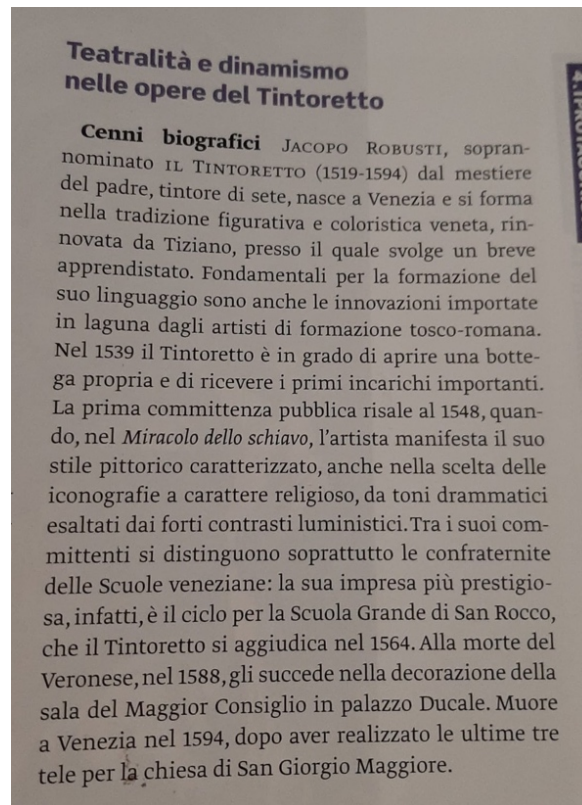


Figure 2 Short biography of the painter Tintoretto from the Italian high school textbook “Opera” (Dioniso, Onida, & Colombo, 2017, p. 241)

### 2.3.2 Procedure

In this section I explain the intervention step-by-step. Table 1 shows the timeframe of the intervention.

**Table 1 Timeframe of Intervention**

Timeframe	Intervention
Spring 2020	Instructor's Professional Development. The instructor read foundational texts about GBA and then together we worked on finding and analyzing a model text to use in class. We also created a whole instructional unit, with all the material needed to implement the GBA intervention.
Fall 2020-2021 Before October 19th	Pre-instruction survey to students. In order to gather process data on students' beliefs and perception about writing and especially writing in a foreign language.  Baseline. Students wrote a biography without any specific instruction about this genre. This pre-instruction essay constituted the baseline for my comparison and to understand whether and how the intervention was successful or not.
Fall 2020-2021 Mon., Oct. 19 <sup>th</sup> , and Wed, Oct. 21 <sup>st</sup>	Building Knowledge of the Field. Different activities to support the students in acquiring content knowledge about Italian Renaissance art and the painter Tintoretto. During this phase the instructor also conducted a reading lesson to ensure that the students comprehend the main ideas and supporting details of the model biographical text before the Deconstruction phase.
Fall 2020-2021 Friday, Oct. 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Deconstruction. Through the model text the instructor and I had chosen and analyzed previously, the instructor guided the students in recognizing the features that constitute a biography. Based on these features, I used the language the students used to describe the biography genre to compose a shared rubric that was the base for the grading for their final assignment.
Fall 2020-2021 Monday, Oct. 26 <sup>th</sup>	Joint Construction. All the students with the guidance of the instructor re-employed all the features they recognized as foundational for the genre and wrote a biography together. They used the shared rubric to guide and double-check their composition. They wrote the biography of painter Paolo Veronese, mentioned in Tintoretto's biography.
Fall 2020-2021 Wednesday, Oct. 28th	Review and assessment of joint construction based on shared rubric

Fall 2020-2021	Independent Construction. Post-instruction essay. The students, with the guide of the
Deadline: Sunday, Nov. 1st	shared rubric, independently wrote the biography of the painter Marietta Robusti, daughter of Tintoretto.
Fall 2020-2021	Post-instruction survey to students. Gather process data on students' reactions to the new
Weeks Nov. 2 <sup>nd</sup> –	pedagogy.
Nov. 15th	Post-instruction survey to instructor. Gather process data on the instructor's reaction to the use of the new pedagogy in class. Was it easy to implement? Is it something that could be easily applicable to other instructional units? Shortcomings and new perspectives. I sent the instructor the survey questions via e-mail. After she had the time to take notes on the questions, we had a semi-structured interview to follow up and expand on her answers.

**Baseline.** Pre-instruction written assignment (biography). At the end of a three-week unit on the topic of immigration/emigration, the students wrote a pre-instruction essay. During the weeks before the GBA instruction, the students learned about Italian immigrants in the USA, and they watched the movie *Nuovomondo* (Crialesi, 2006). The pre-instruction essay's prompt was to write a 200 words biography of one of the characters of the movie. This pre-instruction essay was the term of comparison for the post-instruction written assignment.

**Building Knowledge of the Field and Deconstruction.** On Monday the instructor helped the students build general knowledge about the topic (Italian Renaissance art), through different activities both in class and as homework. On Wednesday, the class was dedicated to building knowledge about Tintoretto, a Venetian painter. The instructor conducted a reading lesson using the model biographical text on Tintoretto chosen for the Deconstruction phase. The students needed to comprehend the text before being able to effectively deconstruct it. The instructor

supported their comprehension through skimming and scanning reading tasks, questions on main ideas and supporting details, and direct instruction on content and language, if needed.

On Friday the instructor guided the students in the Deconstruction phase. They analyzed the model text (the biography of Tintoretto they had already read on Wednesday) through the guiding questions (Appendix A) the instructor asked them in order to deconstruct the genre by drawing their attention to the stages and related functions of the biography (Table 2), to the use of specific lexical-grammatical features, and the structure of paragraphs and sentences (Table 3).

**Table 2 Deconstructing the model text: Stages and functions of the biography of Tintoretto**

Stages	Functions
Title	Identify the characteristics of Tintoretto's painting style ( <i>teatralità</i> and <i>dinamismo</i> )
Subtitle	" <i>Cenni biografici</i> ", signals a very short biography
Early life	When/where, the beginning of his life
Character	Show through evidence what kind of person/artist was Tintoretto
Later life	When/where, the end of his life
Significance	Highlight the significance and role of the artist

**Table 3 Lexical-grammatical features of the biography and examples from the model text**

Circumstances (time)	Nel 1539; risale al 1548, quando...; nel 1564, alla morte del Veronese; nel 1588; nel 1594, dopo aver...
Circumstances (place)	a Venezia; in laguna; per la Scuola Grande di San Rocco; in palazzo Ducale; a Venezia; per la chiesa di San Giorgio Maggiore.
Descriptors related to the field	tintore; tradizione figurativa e coloristica veneta; fondamentali innovazioni; primi incarichi importanti; prima committenza pubblica; stile pittorico caratterizzato; carattere religioso; toni drammatici; forti contrasti luministici; scuole veneziane; la sua impresa più prestigiosa
Verb tenses	The paragraph is built with almost only historical present verbs
Events	Chronological sequence of significant events.
Cause/Effect correlation between events	Nasce a Venezia → si forma nella tradizione veneta; apre una bottega → riceve i primi incarichi → prima committenza; alla morte di Veronese → gli succede nella decorazione della sala.
Judgment, relevance	It's not a personal judgment, but to the relevance of the artist.  Why are we writing a biography of this artist? What makes him relevant in his field? Most prestigious works, important locations.
Length	Being " <i>cenni biografici</i> " means that is a condensed biography, therefore it needs to be quite succinct.

Table 2 and table 3 show the stages, functions and lexical-grammatical features that the instructor and I identified as fundamental for the genre *cenni biografici* and that we wanted the students to understand. In the Deconstruction stage, it was important that the instructor created a shared language with the students to talk about genre and language features, a student-friendly metalanguage that could be employed over the whole intervention. In order to encourage all students to participate, to make the material developed in this stage understandable to all the

students, and to make metalanguage as functional as possible, the Deconstruction stage happened mostly in English. The class is a meaning-making space, and the language needs to be used in a functional manner, therefore translanguaging (Wei, 2018) in this specific case seemed to fit perfectly with the class' needs. The use of L1 helped the students negotiate the meaning and functions of Italian in their own terms (Abdel-Malek, 2017).

After the Deconstruction phase, I created a shared rubric using the students' language (see Appendix B for the shared rubric) and I shared it with the instructor. The instructor asked the students to bring to class the following Monday at least one fact about the painter Veronese that could fit in every stage they created together in class.

***Joint Construction.*** On Monday of the second week of instruction the instructor reviewed with the students all the characteristics that make a biography (Tables 2 and 3). All these characteristics formed the shared rubric that became the basis for the assessment, but at the same time these criteria worked as a checklist to guide the students' work during both the Joint Construction and Independent Construction stages. In the Joint Construction stage, students and instructor collaboratively wrote a biography about the painter Veronese according to what they learned during the previous phases. In this stage the instructor fostered the students' autonomy but still guiding them toward the correct linguistic choices or to alternative linguistic choices to consider. The instructor pointed out salient features and showed how deliberate linguistic choices are made. The instructor used the metalanguage previously developed in the Deconstruction stage in order to help the students gain control over the genre.

***Independent construction.*** Students wrote a biography without the instructor's guidance, following the criteria they developed with the instructor over the Deconstruction and the Joint Construction stages. The students were provided with the shared rubric during their independent

work as a guide as they complete their assignment. The instructor asked the students to add to the biography a brief explanation of some of the language choices they made in their biography, in order to understand how well the students have learned the biographical genre in Italian during the GBA unit and the reasoning behind what they wrote during the Independent Construction.

### **2.3.3 Measures**

With the implementation of this intervention, I hoped to see learners gain a new understanding of written cultural conventions, and the instructor's professional development on the topic of GBA. I collected both process data and impact data that helped me answer my inquiry questions.

In terms of impact data, I measured the learners' improvement in written communication through a pre- and post-instruction test. The analysis of these data helped me answer my first inquiry question: to what extent did the use of GBA in the design of course units impact my students' writing ability in Italian? I compared their pre-instruction essay on their favorite character from the movie *Nuovomondo* (Crialese) with the post-instruction essay about the painter Marietta Robusti in order to analyze their use of the stages, phases, and different features that they found necessary in a biography while they were working in the Deconstruction phase.

I also collected process data that measured the perception and reaction of both instructor and students to this approach. These data helped me answer my second inquiry question: how can I support other teachers in successfully implement GBA in their instructional units?

These data also helped me interpret how and why the intervention worked as well as possible shortcomings and what part of the change process I need to tweak in future iterations. However, the data also gave me a different perspective on my first inquiry question, revealing to



what extent the shift in unit design impacts my students' learning to write in Italian and their writing ability. In order to collect the necessary process data, I administered a post-instruction survey to the instructor (see Appendix C for the survey protocol) aimed at understanding her perception of the GBA and how it was implemented in the classroom. I consider the part of my project related to the instructor professional development and perception and implementation of the approach to be very important: from my literature review I noticed that almost all the scholars and practitioners who ran a project involving GBA always implemented the approach themselves in their own classrooms. Including a second instructor in the project I achieved several scopes: I distanced myself from the instruction part; I supported another instructor in developing her teaching skills; I saw whether she was implementing the approach correctly; and I understood if this approach is easy to understand and implement without a burdensome preparation and study.

I also observed the recording of the lessons to gather data to answer my third inquiry question: what is the relationship between the instructor's teaching practices using GBA and the written texts of the students produced during the independent construction phase of the teaching and learning cycle? Before the observation, I created some questions to guide me in the evaluation of the instructor's teaching practices (Appendix D).

I also administered a survey to the learners, before and after the instruction. The pre-instruction survey was centered on their perception of themselves as writers, both in English and in Italian (see Appendix E for the questions in the survey). The post-instruction survey was about their perception of the GBA, whether and how much they felt it helped them improve their writing, which aspects they found more impactful, and whether and how their genre awareness improved (see Appendix F for the questions in the survey).

### 3.0 Findings

#### 3.1 Analysis of participants' written production, pre- and post-instruction

In this section, I compare the two essays the participants wrote before and after the GBA instruction (one sample of a pre-instruction and post-instruction essays can be found in section 3.1.1 p.37, and in Appendix G the English translation). The comparison is based on the rubric I designed using the charts that the students, with the guidance of the instructor, created by analyzing the model text during the Deconstruction phase. The rubric measures the use of the main parts (stages, functions and lexical-grammatical features) that compose the biography sub-genre *cenni biografici* [biographical notes]. In this section I use the term “genre” to refer to this particular sub-genre of biography called *cenni biografici* [biographical notes]. I distinguished five main categories, with several sub-categories. The five categories are: Stages and functions; Vocabulary; *Presente Storico*; Places, dates, cause/effect, chronological sequence of main events; and Relevance. Per each category the possible points range from 0 to 5, where 5 points correspond to a full and appropriate use of that category's features, and 0 to a non-use or a completely inappropriate use of that category's features.

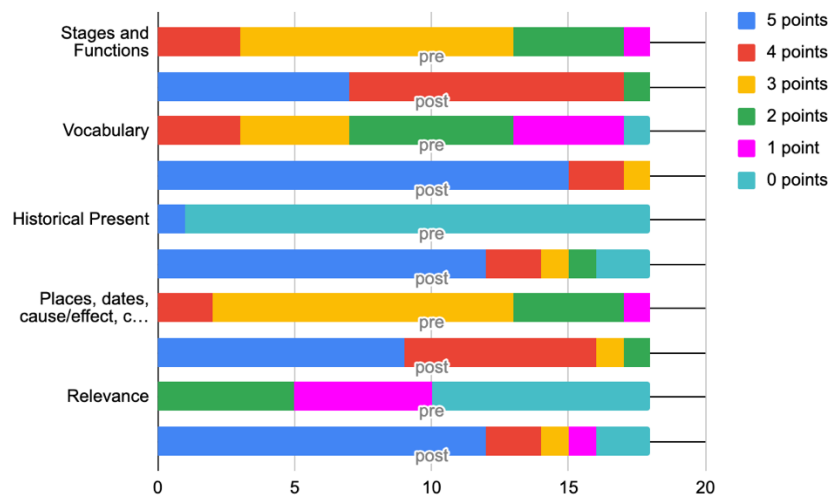
Table 4 shows the shift in overall grade between the pre- and post-instruction essays, based on the shared rubric, while Figure 3 shows the same grade in detail, according to the five categories.

**Table 4 Shift in overall grade between pre- and post-instruction based on shared rubric**

Name	Overall Grade (out of 25 pts)	
	Pre	Post
Sandra Bianchi	10	25
Carla Donati	6	25
Loretta Soffici	12.5	25
Alessia Tremonti	7	25
Enrica Onesti	10	24.5
Nicoletta Testa	8.5	24.5
Corinna Rovi	10	24
Marisa Zeri	9	24
Clara Esposito	10.5	23.5
Emilia Ruggeri	8.5	23.5
Ginevra Testi	7	23.5
Gianna Corti	10	22
Donata Giorgi	16	22
Cecilia Marino	10	22
Nina Giuliani	10	19.5
<b>Gino Sani</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16.5</b>
<b>Ester Ughi</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14.5</b>
<b>Caterina Moretti</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>
Students' average	9	22

The students' average grade in the pre-instruction essay is 9/25, while in the post-instruction essay the average grade was 22/25. In the pre-instruction essay, the lowest grade is 5/25, and the highest is 12.5/25. In the post-instruction essay, the lowest grade was 12/25, and the highest was 25/25. In the pre-instruction essay, none of the students were able to employ the lexical-grammatical features and the stages that pertain to the genre to a level high enough to reach the grade of 17.5/25 (C-, 70/100), a grade that is considered the threshold of a passing grade in our department. In the post-instruction, only three students out of 18 did not use what was learned in class about the genre enough to reach 17.5/25. Despite the fact that 3 students (see bold in Table

4) did not use what was learned to reach the passing threshold, they nonetheless improved on the post-biography: Moretti improved her understanding and use of stages and lexical-grammatical features enough to move from 7/25 to 12/25, Sani from 8/25 to 16.5/25, Ughi, showing the highest divide among the three, from 5/25 to 14.5/25. Among the students who surpassed the 17.5/25 threshold, 11 students out of 18 surpassed the grade A- threshold ( $22.50/25 = 90/100$ ), four students ranged between 19.5/25 (78/100) and 22/25 (88/100).



**Figure 3 Breakdown of overall grade shift between pre- and post-instruction based on the shared rubric's five categories**

**Stages and Functions.** Every genre has a structure made by a variable number of stages. Every stage exists in order to fulfill a specific function that works toward achieving the general purpose of that genre. The instructor and I analyzed the model text before the instruction, and we identified eight stages with their related functions. Table 5 shows the stages and functions named and explained using the shared language that instructor and students created in class.

**Table 5 The eight stages and related functions identified during in-class instruction**

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Functions</b>
1. Title	Gives an indication of style
2. Subtitle, genre	What type of reading. Short.
3. Early life, beginning of life	Nickname, birth, life span, family
4. Early career	Trainings, foundation as an artist, her influences, apprenticeship
5. Early commissions/works	She became established
6. Style	Characteristics of her style and importance of it
7. Later works, middle life works	The majority of her career achievement, important artist
8. End of life	Death, what she left behind, legacy

In this section I present the findings regarding the first category, Stages and functions. I analyze some stages and related functions, and precisely: Title, Subtitle, Early life/Beginning of life, and Style. In the category Stages and functions, the students' average improved from 3/5 to a 4.5/5 points. The lowest grade in the pre-instruction essay was 1/5, and the highest was 4/5. In the post- essay the lowest grade was 2.5/5 and the highest was 5/5. Sixteen students out of 18 improved their knowledge and ability to implement coherent stages into the writing of *cenni biografici*. Breaking this category down, the data shows that, among the different stages and relative functions the participants learned in class, some proved to be more effectively taught, understood and employed than others. The stages and relative functions that the students improved upon the most were Title, Subtitle, Early Life, and End of Life. The improvement of these four stages may be related to the fact that when students think of biography, these stages are the most salient and universal. In other words, it is no surprise that students would focus on the essential characteristics of a biography and improve on how these stages are expressed in written language.

**Title and Subtitle.** Regarding the first two stages, Title and Subtitle, none of the students included a title and/or a subtitle to their pre-instruction essay. In the post-instruction essay, 15 students out of 18 added both a title and a subtitle, 2 added only the subtitle, 1 student didn't add

either title or subtitle. The titles the students created were also very well crafted and fulfilled the function of the title, giving a glimpse into the subject and its relevance: some students highlighted her relevance as female artist, as the student Donati who titled “Marietta Robusti: Una donna famosa nel mondo maschio dell’arte” [Marietta Robusti: a famous woman in the masculine world of art]; others stressed the fact that she, as a woman, couldn’t sign her own works, as Bianchi “Il talento segreto della Tintoretta” [The secret talent of the Tintoretta], and Tremonti “L’artista completo senza arte” [The complete artist without art]. Other students prefer to simply show what was Marietta’s specialty, portraits, like Onesti “Marietta Robusti: La vita di un ritrattista italiano” [Marietta Robusti: the life of an Italian portraitist].

**Early life/Beginning of life.** The third stage, Early life/Beginning of life, has the function to inform the reader about birth and family of the subject. In this stage, 13 students out of 18 in the pre-instruction essay wrote material that remained very superficial, in a way that could not fulfill the stage’s function since specific details were missing, especially circumstances. Twelve students didn’t mention any circumstance; they introduced the character in a disorganized manner, as I show in the examples in Table 6. The difference is noteworthy in the post-instruction essay. All the students included the necessary information about the early life of Marietta Robusti: the year and place of birth, her relationship with the painter Tintoretto, and the majority also included her nickname (Tintoretta). Table 6 shows a comparison of some samples of Early life stages in the pre- and post-instruction essays.

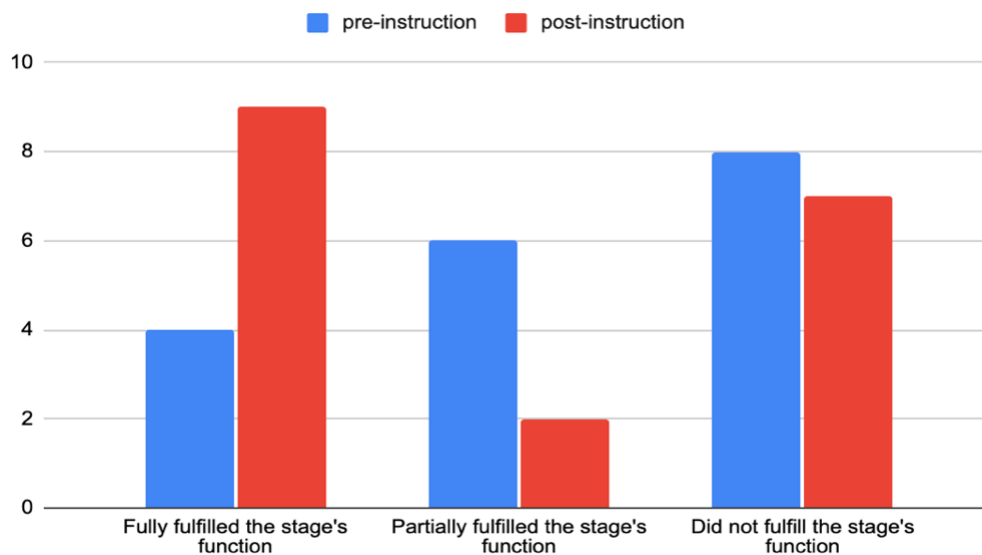
**Table 6 Comparison of some Early life stage samples, pre- and post-instruction**

Students	Pre	Post
Sandra Bianchi	Quando è nato, Angelo si è sentito amato nella famiglia. Però, sua madre è morta quando lui era cinque anni, e tutto ha cambiato. [When he was born, Angelo felt he was loved in his family. However, his mother died when he was five, and everything changed]	Marietta Robusti, la figlia del pintore famoso Tintoretto, nasce circa nel 1560 a Venezia. È conosciuta come Tintoretta a causa del suo padre, ed è famosa per i suoi ritratti. [Marietta Robusti, the daughter of the famous painter Tintoretto, is born circa in 1560 in Venice. She is known as Tintoretta because of her father, and she is famous for her portraits]
Enrica Onesti	Penso che la madre di Salvatore Mancuso, Fortunata Mancuso, sia nata nel 1838 in Sicilia. [I think that Salvatore Mancuso's mother, Fortunata Mancuso, was born in 1838 in Sicily]	Maria (Marietta) Robusti è la figlia dell'artista Tintoretto. Si chiama "Tintoretta" in base al soprannome di suo padre. Nasce a Venezia tra il 1554 e il 1560. [Maria Robusti is the daughter of the artist Tintoretto. Her name is "Tintoretta" because of her father's nickname. She is born in Venice between 1554 and 1560]
Gino Sani	Quando era un bambino in Italia, Salvatore Mancuso giocava con i suoi amici. La sua mamma è morta quando lui aveva due anni. La sua nonna cucinava pasta per lui spesso. [When he was a kid in Italy, Salvatore Mancuso used to play with his friends. His mother died when he was two. His grandmother used to cook pasta for him often]	Nel 1560, probabilmente, Marietta Robusti nasce a Venezia. Lei vive a Venezia per la sua vita tutta. Il suo soprannome è La Tintoretta. Il suo padre è Il Tintoretto. [In 1560, probably, Marietta Robusti is born in Venice. She lives in Venice her all life. Her nickname is La Tintoretta. Her father is Il Tintoretto.]

The examples show how the students in the post-instruction essay incorporated coherent content, i.e., circumstances, that fully fulfills the stage's function.

**Style.** Style is the stage that proved to be the most challenging for students, as they did not incorporate it in their post-instruction essays as successfully as the stages I previously showed. Style is intended as pictorial style of the artist in the case of the post-instruction essay, and as the

personality of the character for the pre-instruction essay. The findings are uneven both in the pre- and the post-instruction, and the improvement is not as great as in the other stages. Figure 4 shows the number of students who fully fulfilled the stage's function, the students who partially fulfilled the stage's function, and the students who didn't fulfill the stage's function, comparing pre-instruction and post-instruction essays.



**Figure 4 Pre-instruction and post-instruction comparison of the performance in the stage Style per number of students.**

As the Figure 4 shows, the students improved their understanding and use of the Style stage, but not as noticeably as they did in other stages. In the post-instruction essay only nine students included explicit mentions to Marietta Robusti's pictorial style. They mentioned that she painted mainly portraits, "Tintoretta è famoso per i suoi ritratti" [Tintoretta is famous for her portraits] (Zeri), and the types of colors she used, "Il suo stile ha colori tenui e un forte contrasto tra luce e bui" [Her style has tenuous colors and a strong contrast of light and dark] (Onesti).

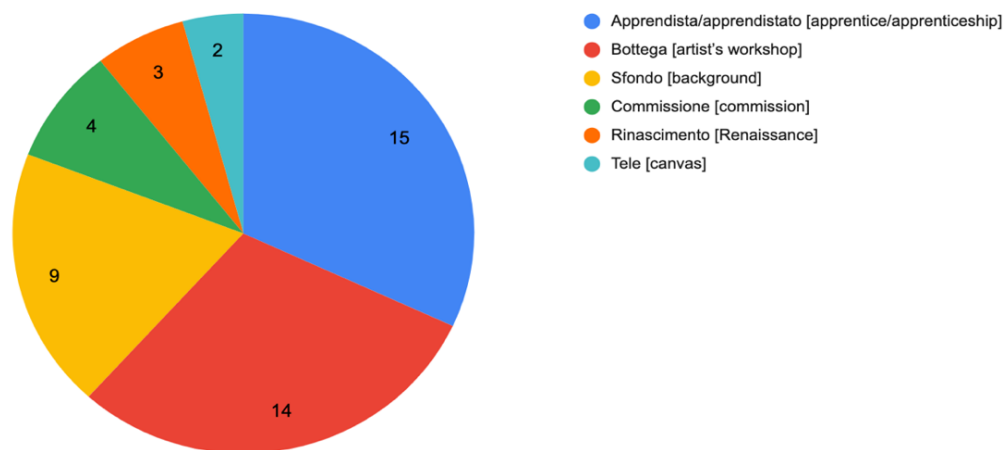
The uneven improvement may be caused by different reasons: it is possible that the instructor and I did not plan to spend a sufficient amount of time and material in teaching the



students how to express appreciation, which is a very difficult system to learn. It is also possible that the topic, art, was intimidating for many students who are not pursuing a degree in humanities, and maybe they preferred to write about facts, instead of evaluating qualities of a work of art.

**Vocabulary.** The shift in use of appropriate and rich vocabulary between pre- and post-instruction is noticeable: the participants' average grade increased from 2/5 to 4.8/5. The lowest grade in the pre-instruction essay is 0/5 and the highest is 4/5. In the post-instruction essay, the lowest grade is 3/5 and the highest is 5/5. In the pre-instruction essay, only a few students used appropriate vocabulary for the topic "immigration", as learned during in-class instruction during the previous three weeks. For example, instead of using the verb "emigrare" [emigrate], the students used a variety of verbs that were inappropriate for the context, as "trasferire" [move] or "viaggiare" [travel].

In the post-instruction essay about the painter Marietta Robusti, all the students showed a sufficient grasp on the specific vocabulary necessary to talk about a visual artist. All the students used at least part of the vocabulary learned during class instruction, and all the students searched for appropriate words and expressions beyond the vocabulary from class. Figure 5 shows the number of occurrences (where the occurrences were >1) of vocabulary learned in class that the students used in their post-instruction essays.



**Figure 5 Occurrence in post-instruction essay of art-related vocabulary, per number of students**

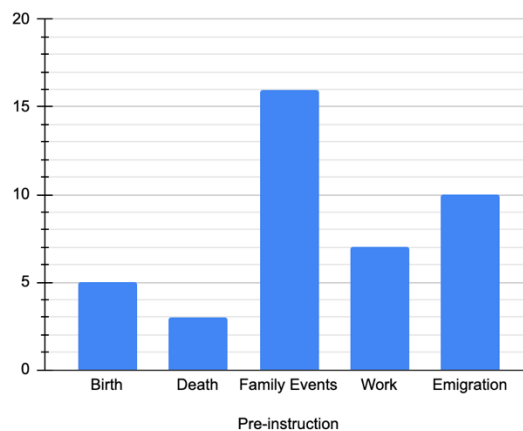
**Presente Storico.** Students showed the most noticeable improvement in the category “use of *presente storico*” on the shared rubric. The students’ average shifted from 0.3/5 to 4.1/5 points. In the pre-instruction essay, 17 students used tenses other than the *presente storico*. The 17 students who did not use the *presente storico* used usually *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto*. These tenses are normally the correct ones when talking about the past, but not in this specific genre, the *cenni biografici*. In the post-instruction essay 16 students out of 18 used the *presente storico*, 12 attained a grade of 5/5, showing an appropriate use of this category. Only two students failed to use the *presente storico* in the post-instruction essay.

**Places, Dates, Cause/Effect, Chronological sequence of main events.** Students demonstrated a notable increase in their ability to include places, dates, cause/effect links and arrange main events in a chronological sequence; the pre-instruction average improved from 2.8/5 to 4.2/5. Within this category, some components were more successfully employed than others. The use of circumstances like places and dates improved dramatically. In the pre-instruction essay only two students out of 18 added one or more dates to their biography, and 17 students out of 18 mentioned places only in a generic manner (i.e., “Stati Uniti” “Italia”). In the post-instruction essay

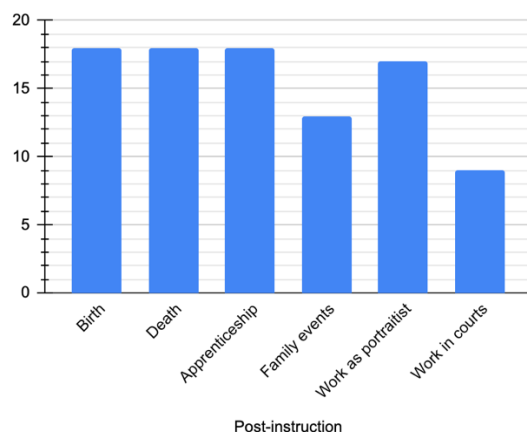
all the students included the necessary dates and places attached to the main events described: 18 students mentioned “Venezia” as the birthplace of Marietta Robusti, 17 mentioned it also as the place of death, and five students added the exact church in which she is buried. Seventeen students mentioned Marietta’s workplaces (i.e., bottega) and/or those cities where her works are now showcased (i.e., Vienna).

For the analysis of the pre-instruction essay, I consider “main events” in the life of a character of the movie *Nuovomondo* (Cialese, 2006) those related to birth, family, work, migration and death. In the post-instruction essay, I identified as “main events” those related to birth, death, apprenticeship, family events, work as portraitist, and the invitation to work in European courts.

Figures 6 and 7 show the improvement in incorporating main events from the pre-instruction essay to the post-instruction essay.



**Figure 6 Inclusion of main events in pre-instruction essay, per number of students**



**Figure 7 Inclusion of main events in post-instruction essay, per number of students**

In Figure 7, it is possible to see that all the students understood the importance of events related to birth, death and work, while in the pre-instruction essay the students focused their attention mainly on family events.

**Relevance.** Students improved their ability to discern the Relevance of the character's life and work in the material at hand: students' average increased from 0.9/5 in the pre-instruction to 4/5 in the post-instruction. For the pre-instruction analysis, I considered Relevance the importance of the movie character within the film, for example how the character impacted other characters or how they influenced the movie's narrative. The lowest grade was 0/5 (9 students) and the highest 4.5/5 (1 student). Nine students out of 18 did not write anything about the importance of their character, and eight students were not explicit about the relevance of their character, for example Onesti wrote "Fortunata sia ritornata in Italia con il nipote, Pietro. [...] Prima di morire, lei gli abbia insegnato la sua magia curativa" [Fortunata came back to Italy with the grandson, Pietro. [...] Before dying, she taught him her curative magic].

During the Deconstruction phase, the instructor asked the students to determine what they believed Relevance to mean when writing about the life of an artist, and they decided on the following criterion: the lasting impact of the artist. In the post-instruction essay, the lowest marks for Relevance were 0/5 (2 students) and the highest 5/5 (12 students). Several students wrote about how Marietta was the inspiration for Romantic painters Léon Cogniet and Eleuterio Pagliano, and added how she changed the way modern feminism looks at art and society. For example, Testa wrote “Marietta Robusti era un pittore rinomato, in un tempo dove i pittori era prevalentemente uomini. Le sue opere d’arte aprivano le porte per pittori donne, e hanno sfidato i stereotipi del tempo” [Marietta Robusti was a famous painter, in a time when painters were mostly men. Her art works opened the door for female painters, and she challenged the stereotypes of her time].

### **3.1.1 Sample of pre-instruction and post-instruction essays**

After the general analysis of the whole class’s performance, I present here one student’s pre-instruction and post-instruction essays (see English translation in Appendix G), framed into the shared rubric. The student is Carla Donati, her essays have been graded against the shared rubric, and scored a 6/25 in the pre-instruction essay, and 25/25 in the post-instruction essay.

Pre-instruction essay.

Nel film Nuovomondo, ci sono molti carratori interessanti con personalità uniche. Penso che Fortunata, la madre di Salvatore, sia onesta, complessa, e rappresenti il mondo vecchio. Fortunata ha lavorato come un medico per le persone nel suo paese d’origine. Ma Fortunata ha lavorato con erbe e medicina rustica, non come le persone e i medici del nuovo mondo. Fortunata è vecchia, testarda, e brusca. Non si piace gli ufficiali a Ellis Island e i loro test. Lei ha chiesto agli ufficiali se pensano di essere dio. Fortunata può essere maleducata, ma le sue domande sono valide.

Mi piace questa carratore perché lei mostra che il nuovo mondo è esclusivo e non per tutti. Penso che Fortunata abbia vissuto in Sicilia per tutta la sua vita e dopo il viaggio a Ellis Island, lei torni al suo paese d'origine.

**Table 7 Sample pre-instruction essay, framed according to stages and functions**

<b>Stages</b>	<b>Functions</b>	<b>Evidence from Carla's pre-instruction essay</b>
<b>1. Title</b>	Gives an idea of the character	X
<b>2. Subtitle, genre</b>	Type of reading. Short	X
<b>3. Early life, beginning of his life</b>	Birth, life span, family	X
<b>4. Early career</b>	Trainings, foundation, job	Fortunata ha lavorato come un medico per le persone nel suo paese d'origine. Ma Fortunata ha lavorato con erbe e medicina rustica, non come le persone e i medici del nuovo mondo.
<b>5. Early commissions, works</b>	They became established	N/A
<b>6. Style</b>	Character and importance of it	Fortunata è vecchia, testarda, e brusca. Fortunata può essere maleducata, ma le sue domande sono valide. Mi piace questa carratore perché lei mostra che il nuovo mondo è esclusivo e non per tutti.
<b>7. Later events, middle life events</b>		Penso che Fortunata abbia vissuto in Sicilia per tutta la sua vita e dopo il viaggio a Ellis Island, lei torni al suo paese d'origine.
<b>8. End of life</b>	What they left behind, legacy, relevance	Lei mostra che il nuovo mondo è esclusivo e non per tutti

**Table 8 Sample pre-instruction essay, framed according to the lexical-grammatical features**

<b>Lexical-grammatical features</b>	<b>Evidence from Carla's pre-instruction essay</b>
<b>Length (200-250 words)</b>	138 words (very short)
<b>Events in chronological order</b>	X
<b>Dates</b>	X
<b>Locations, places</b>	Ellis Island, Sicilia
<b>Word choice specific</b>	X
<b>Verbs (presente storico)</b>	X Carla used a mix of indicative past tense, indicative present tense, and subjunctive.
<b>Lasting impact, relevance</b>	Mi piace questa carratore perché lei mostra che il nuovo mondo è esclusivo e non per tutti.
<b>Cause and effect</b>	X

As tables 7 and 8 show, Carla Donati in her pre-instruction essay did not have a clear idea of what the genre biography entailed. There was no title, no chronological order of main events, no dates, few places and she used a generic vocabulary.

Post-instruction essay

### **Marietta Robusti: Una donna famosa nel mondo maschio dell'arte**

Cenni biografici

Marietta Robusti, soprannominato la Tintoretta, nasce a Venezia circa il 1560 da Jacopo Robusti, o il Tintoretto, un pittore famoso. Marietta è figlia più grande, e ha tre fratelli e quattro sorelle. Mentre la Tintoretta è una donna e ha meno diritti degli uomini, lei lavora come una apprendista nella bottega da suo padre perché lui è talentuoso e noto. Nella bottega impara tecniche delle pitture, aiuta suo padre con molte opere, e crea alcuni ritratti con la tradizione veneta. Inoltre, lei è musicista e viaggia con suo padre, così lei vede e capisce molte opere d'arte. Nel 1578 Marietta sposa un gioielliere tedesco, Marco Augusta. Lo stilo della Tintoretta è sfumato e realistico. Lei usa tecniche simile come suo padre, ad esempio colori luministici e toni drammatici. Non tutte l'arte della Tintoretta sono conosciute perché il suo nome è similare a suo padre,

Tintoretto. Marietta pintura un autoritratto con spinetta nel 1580 e soprattutto pintura ritratti. Per esempio, la Tintoretta creata *Ritratto di Ottavio Strada e Uomo vecchio e ragazzo*. Inoltre, lei lavora sulle pale d'altare con suo padre, ma le sue figure pinture sono i lavori più famose. Perché viaggia con suo padre, il re di Spagna, Filippo II, e Massimiliano II d'Austria vogliono la Tintoretta abitare e dipingere per i suoi tribunali. Marietta Robusti muore nel 1590 a Venezia quando lei ha solo trent'anni, ma il suo lavoro e ritratti belli sono uniche per una donna nello mondo maschio dell'arte.

**Table 9 Sample post-instruction essay, framed according to stages and functions**

Stages	Functions	Evidence from the Carla's post-instruction essay
<b>1. Title</b>	Gives an indication of style	Marietta Robusti: Una donna famosa nel mondo maschio dell'arte
<b>2. Subtitle, genre</b>	What type of reading. Short	Cenni biografici.
<b>3. Early life, beginning of life</b>	Soprannome, birth, life span, family	Nasce a Venezia circa il 1560 da Jacopo Robusti, o il Tintoretto, un pittore famoso. Marietta è figlia più grande, e ha tre fratelli e quattro sorelle.
<b>4. Early career</b>	Trainings, foundation as an artist, her influences, apprenticeship	Mentre la Tintoretta è una donna e ha meno diritti degli uomini, lei lavora come una apprendista nella bottega da suo padre perché lui è talentuoso e noto. Nella bottega impara tecniche delle pinture, aiuta suo padre con molte opere, e creata alcuni ritratti con la tradizione veneta. Inoltre, lei è musicista e viaggia con suo padre, così lei vede e capisce molte opere d'arte
<b>5. early commissions, works</b>	She became established	Perché viaggia con suo padre, il re di Spagna, Filippo II, e Massimiliano II d'Austria vogliono la Tintoretta abitare e dipingere per i suoi tribunali.
<b>6. Style</b>	Characteristics of her style and importance of it	creata alcuni ritratti con la tradizione veneta. Lo stilo della Tintoretta è sfumato e realistico. Lei usa tecniche simile come suo padre, ad esempio colori luministici e toni drammatici.



<b>7. Later works, middle life works</b>	The majority of her career achievement, important artist	Marietta pintura un autoritratto con spinetta nel 1580 e soprattutto pintura ritratti. Per esempio, la Tintoretta creata <i>Ritratto di Ottavio Strada e Uomo vecchio e ragazzo</i> . Inoltre, lei lavora sulle pale d'altare con suo padre, ma le sue figure pinture sono i lavori più famose.
<b>8. End of life</b>	What she left behind, legacy	Non tutte l'arte della Tintoretta sono conosciute perché il suo nome è simile a suo padre, Tintoretto. Marietta Robusti muore nel 1590 a Venezia quando lei ha solo trent'anni, ma il suo lavoro e ritratti belli sono uniche per una donna nello mondo maschio dell'arte.

**Table 10 Sample post-instruction essay, framed according to the lexical-grammatical features**

<b>Lexical-grammatical features</b>	<b>Evidence from Carla's post-instruction essay</b>
<b>Length (200-250 words)</b>	243 words
<b>Events in chronological order</b>	✓
<b>Dates</b>	Nasce a Venezia circa il 1560 Nel 1578 Marietta sposa Marietta pintura un autoritratto con spinetta nel 1580 Marietta Robusti muore nel 1590
<b>Locations, places</b>	nasce a Venezia nella bottega Muore a Venezia
<b>Word choice specific</b>	Pittore, apprendista, bottega, tradizione veneta, sfumato e realistico, colori luministici e toni drammatici, ritratti, pale d'altare
<b>Verbs (presente storico)</b>	Appropriate use of presente storico
<b>Lasting impact, relevance</b>	Non tutte l'arte della Tintoretta sono conosciute perché il suo nome è simile a suo padre, Tintoretto. Ma il suo lavoro e ritratti belli sono uniche per una donna nel mondo maschio dell'arte.
<b>Cause and effect</b>	Perché viaggia con suo padre, il re di Spagna, Filippo II, e Massimiliano II d'Austria vogliono la Tintoretta abitare e dipingere per i suoi tribunali. Viaggia con suo padre, così lei vede e capisce molte opere d'arte. Perché viaggia con suo padre, il re di Spagna, Filippo II, e Massimiliano II d'Austria vogliono la Tintoretta abitare e dipingere per i suoi tribunali.

As tables 9 and 10 show, after the appropriate genre instruction, Carla Donati employed correctly every stage and every lexical-grammatical feature. She invented a meaningful title, presented the main events in chronological order, with the aid of dates and places. She also used a very accurate specific vocabulary, and she was even able to describe Tintoretta's style, the stage that the majority of the students found challenging.

### 3.2 Analysis of Participants' Surveys

In this section I show the findings from the analysis of the students' pre- and post-instruction surveys (Appendices E and F), and from the analysis of the instructor's post-instruction survey in form of an interview (Appendix C). I coded the three surveys using Dedoose, in order to see the surfacing of reactions and opinions related to writing in Italian as FL, to the use of GBA as a pedagogy to learn how to write presentational communication in Italian as FL, and whether these opinions changed over time.

**Students' pre- and post-instruction surveys.** In this section I present the findings about the most relevant themes that I found in coding the surveys. These themes are the use of verb tenses, vocabulary, stages and functions, and the use of material from class. Interwoven in these themes are others, of a broader scope, like the purpose of writing and the role of explicit instruction.

*Use of verb tenses.* In the pre-instruction anonymous survey, the students described their experience writing in Italian mostly as a grammatical challenge. Often the challenge is represented by knowledge of verb conjugations for various tenses. One student wrote "I think the most difficult aspect of writing in Italian is remembering which tense you are supposed to use in certain situations", and on the opposite side several students listed "conjugations" as a strength they have

in writing in Italian, conveying the idea that conjugating a verb in a specific tense is one of the main aspects of writing. This correlation is even more clear with this student, who wrote, “I started by determining the verb tense that I would have to use. [...] I decided that this assignment would be in the past tense.” From these statements emerged that students tend to equate written assignment with the use of a specific verb tense, and therefore they tend to write starting from the verb tense, not from the purpose and content required by the particular genre.

In the post-instruction survey, I required the students to reflect on what grammar they used in their biography of Marietta Robusti. The findings are revealing: the explicit instruction of the use of a verb tense as a functional choice in a contextualized genre, made a noticeable improvement in every student’s perception. Several students showed an understanding of the connection between the biography genre and the tense they used. For example, Corti wrote, “[...] using the present tense to describe something that happened in the past to show its historical importance.”

***Vocabulary.*** The other aspect of writing that almost all students mentioned in the pre-instruction survey is vocabulary. Six students lamented how limited their vocabulary is, and how difficult it is “recalling vocabulary from memory”. For example, only one student out of 18 recalled using “immigration vocabulary”, that they studied in class on the topic of Italian immigration. However, in the post-instruction’s survey, students referred explicitly to the GBA instruction as a source of appropriate vocabulary. Bianchi wrote, “I used the art vocabulary from the Canvas page and the words I remembered from class”. Four students connected the use of appropriate vocabulary to the genre and topic. For example, Giuliani showed the purpose of employing the vocabulary appropriate to the genre and topic “I tried to focus my grammar on word *[sic]* relating to the art world. [...] By using this specific diction, the reader understands the topic of discussion more clearly.” This student shows that she learned, through explicit genre-based

instruction in meaningful context, the correct vocabulary to employ. This student has a reader in mind when writing, and she is not thinking of the sympathetic instructor-reader, but an external Italian reader.

***Stages and functions.*** Many students admitted they didn't think about the organization and structure of the biography when writing their pre-instruction essay. One student wrote "I knew overall what I wanted to say and describe but I didn't focus too heavily on organization", similarly another "I made a bulleted list of ideas, and then expanded those into sentences and tried to make them a somewhat coherent thought" or "I thought about how i [*sic*] wanted the character's life to go. i [*sic*] didn't have a set plan, just an idea of which direction to head in".

In the post-instructions survey, the role of the explicit genre-instruction about the stages and related functions of the genre was noteworthy. The students' awareness of the genre's structure is noticeably improved. Giorgi is a fitting example:

I organized the writing in the 8 stages (title, subtitle, early life, early career, early works, style, middle life and later works, and end of life), researching Marietta's life in chronological order and then filling in the details. This was different from the Nuovomondo [*movie the students watched before the GBA lessons, for the pre-instruction essay*] character biography because it had more of a set structure and focused less on the events in the subject's life and more on her achievements.

Giorgi was not only aware of the stages necessary in a biography, but she has also redeployed the metalanguage for stages of the essay that the instructor used in class during the GBA instruction. This helped her notice the difference with the pre-instruction essay, when she had no "set structure" to support her in building her essay.

Similarly, Donati, was more aware of the genre stages, when answering the question that asked her to describe this genre to another student: “This genre captures the details of notable stages in a person’s life, such as their birth, significant achievements, family life, and death”. As her statement shows, Donati was able to identify the major stages as the key to the biography genre. Students also felt more ready to write a biography after the GBA instruction. They saw in the stages and functions the necessary support to write a cohesive essay that connects with the purpose of their writing. Donati is a fitting example of the connection between stages and purpose, “This assignment was much more linear and organized than my Nuovomondo character biography since I did not write that with a specific structure or goal in mind.”

*Use of material from class.* When the students write about having a “structure” to support their writing, they are often referring to the notes from class and the rubric I provided, designed starting from their own notes. None of the students mentioned explicitly using material from class in the pre-instruction survey. However, in the post-instruction survey several students mention the charts and the rubric. For example, Onesti wrote, “I used the diagram that we created for Tintoretto for this artist, which I had not had before when I wrote the biography for the character for Nuovomondo”. Similarly, Ruggeri notices the difference with the pre-instruction essay and also, she showed how she used the provided rubric in her writing process:

My process for writing the biography is I put the table used in class next to my essay, and I wrote out bullet points in English per each section. [...] This is different than when I wrote the biography for Nuovomondo because we did not have a specific chart to refer to like we did for this project.

Zeri explained her process using the rubric in a very practical and organized way “I picked a few facts for each section of the biography and then organize it from there. This way, I knew I would

have enough information or each section and that it would be in the correct order.” It seems from this statement, that the rubric gave the students assurance that they were following the correct process, in which they had a structure to support them, and at the same time the freedom to choose what information to include in the *cenni biografici*.

For some students it was especially beneficial in their writing process to use material they participated in creating. Bianchi highlights that she supported her writing by “using the outline we created all together in class”, similarly Marino wrote, “I organized my biography by following the format we decided on in class”. Soffici adds how the rubric helped her not only for the writing portion, but before writing for organizing her material in a cohesive way, “It was helpful to have the stages of life chart that we’ve gone over several times in class. That helped me organize my thoughts the most”.

**Instructor’s post-instruction survey.** The instructor DC gave me very positive feedback about the whole process, from the beginning when I instructed her about the GBA to its employment in class. DC thought that the amount of material, (articles, chapters of books, and face to face meetings to explain and review) that I proposed was sufficient to grasp the foundations of GBA. DC also complemented the supplied material with more research online to strengthen her understanding of the teaching and learning cycle, and she watched videos of other instructors who implemented the GBA in their classes. DC recommends to other instructors who want to work with GBA to allot substantial lead time to understand the approach and to prepare the material to use in class in every detail, at least the first time they employ this approach.

The most challenging part of the instruction in class for DC was the Deconstruction phase. During the Deconstruction phase, she had to guide the students toward the discovery of the many stages, functions and language of the genre. To accomplish the Deconstruction phase, we created

together scripted questions in order to cover all the aspects, while allowing for follow up reactions and contributions from the students.

DC identified several benefits in a GBA instruction. The main benefit of the GBA according to DC is the textual structure that it provides to the students. DC said that GBA gave the students the “*tranquillità di sapere cosa devono fare*” [the peace of mind of knowing what they have to do]. In DC’s opinion, another aspect that makes this approach effective is the fact that the students are personally called to participate in the discovery/creation of the necessary features of the genre, using their own language, and then they can work within those structures. DC thought that using the students’ own words to create the final rubric makes the writing process more friendly and immediate. When starting the writing process, the students can employ the rubric easily because they see their own words and thoughts represented. A third benefit DC noticed in her students is the transcendence, teaching written presentational communication explicitly through genre could support the students in transporting the knowledge they acquire during the genre instruction into their presentational speaking. After our post-instruction paper, DC’s students had to prepare a final project, they could choose a work of art or an artist and create an audio-visual presentation. DC said that many students used stages and lexical-grammatical features they studied during the genre instruction, i.e., *presente storico* and specific vocabulary. The teacher’s extension of the written project of this study to her own instruction is testimony to the power of this project, the positive effect it upon the teacher, and her awareness of specific aspects of language growth in her students.

**Instructor’s observation.** In order to answer my third inquiry question “what is the relationship between the instructor’s teaching practices using GBA and the written texts of the students produced during the independent construction phase of the teaching and learning cycle?”

I observed the video recordings of the classes, and I created a rubric to assess the instructor's teaching practices. The instructor carried out every phase of the cycle in a friendly yet authoritative manner. It is clear that the instructor has a very positive relationship with her students, making the students relaxed, happy to be in class, and participative. From my observation it emerged that in general the students reacted as anticipated, with few hesitations.

The most challenging part for the instructor was the Deconstruction, because she had to ask guiding questions, assess the students' comprehension, then re-phrasing questions when necessary and following up the students' answers with questions that were not scripted in advance. The instructor reacted very quickly and meaningfully to some unexpected feedback.

As the students stated in their post-instruction survey, the way the instructor brought their attention to the many moving parts of the genre clearly made an impact in their post-instruction essays. The phase that had the highest impact on the students' writing process was probably the Joint Construction. During this phase the instructor made sure to support the students while writing collaboratively a biography, showing them at every step how to re-phrase, improve and re-shape their words according to the shared rubric. For example, the students were providing details about the life of painter Paolo Veronese,

Student: "Lui è un apprendista di Antonio Badile" [He is an apprentice for Antonio Badile]

Instructor: "Quando? Abbiamo una data?" [When? Do we have a date?]

Student: "1541"

Instructor: "Ok, *nel* 1541." [Ok, *in* 1541]

Student: "Lui è un apprendista di Antonio Badile nel 1541" [He is an apprentice for Antonio Badile in 1541]



Instructor: “Bene, quando mettiamo una data, mettiamola all’inizio: nel 1541 lui è un apprendista, vi ricordate questa espressione? *Presso* la bottega di Antonio Badile” [Well, when we add a date, let’s add it at the beginning: in 1541 he is an apprentice, do you remember this expression? In the workshop of Antonio Badile]

This activity and the way the instructor constantly called the students to be part of the linguistic choices, gave the students a clear vision on the process necessary to write their post-instruction essay, and in fact many students in their post-instruction survey praised the use of the shared rubric, as seen during the Joint Construction.

In the next section several of these findings will be discussed in light of an informed approach to teaching presentational communication in writing through genre-based pedagogy.

## 4.0 Discussion

In this section, I discuss the most relevant themes that surfaced from the findings, their implications, and possible future developments. The main themes I discuss are (1) genre awareness, (2) content instruction vs language instruction, (3) students' agency and (4) teachers' professional development.

### 4.1 Knowledge of genre matters

The findings and the observation of the in-class instruction show that both students and instructor at the beginning of the GBA instructional unit did not have a clear idea of what kind of genre they were presenting or how the genre differed from other kinds of texts. The instructor asked the students "What is a genre, and can you make an example?" The students thought she was referring to literary genres, and they started listing those, i.e., comedy, drama etc. The instructor did not correct them or expand their understanding. However, the GBA instruction is based on genres as purposeful text types (i.e., recount, biography, etc.), not exclusively literary genres.

After working with the teacher on the meaning of genre and the explicit GBA instruction of the *cenni biografici*, the students showed an increased genre awareness. In the post-instruction essay all the students, to different degrees, improved their use of the stages and lexical-grammatical features of the biography genre, and in the post-instruction survey the majority of the students showed metacognitively their increased genre awareness listing some of the most important

features of writing a biography, such as chronological sequence of main events, use of circumstances, use of *presente storico*, and the related functions. The positive impact of GBA in raising students' genre awareness in the present study aligns with earlier studies of GBA's application in FL/L2 at the university level, such as Abdel-Malek (2017), Byrnes (2009), and Yasuda (2011), among others.

Several students also showed an increased awareness for another key aspect of any genre, which is the relationship between the writer and the reader, and therefore a new awareness for the concepts of purpose and context related to the genre. For example, some students in the post-instruction survey mentioned specific vocabulary choices to help the reader have a better understanding of the content (the field in SFL terms). This improvement is relevant because, especially in FL classes, it is challenging to make the students understand that a language does not consist in simply applying grammatical rules, but in making informed linguistic choices depending on the nature of the communicative event. Students cannot make effective linguistic choices without learning the three key factors that, according to Halliday (1985), impact the writer's linguistic choices: field, tenor, and mode of the language system. The present study shows how students need to receive explicit instruction about the topic (field), the relationship with the reader or listener (tenor), and the channel of communication (mode) in order to be able to make informed linguistic choices, instead of mimic other texts.

## **4.2 Knowledge of the content matters**

From the analysis of the pre-instruction survey, it was found that students often equate writing with showcasing grammatical knowledge. For example, one student wondered how to fit

*congiuntivo* in their pre-instruction essay, and three students wrote their pre-instruction essay heavily using *congiuntivo*. However, the instructor had not required the use of *congiuntivo* in the pre-instruction essay, and the use of this tense was unnecessary and somewhat meaningless in this assignment. In employing a large amount of *congiuntivo* in a non-functional way, these students were revealing that they think of writing in terms of displaying grammatical knowledge.

Because “no language is ever taught in isolation from content” (Schleppegrell et al., 2004, p.68), it is even more necessary to teach the content of the genre explicitly when employing GBA in a FL class. GBA provides an effective way of balancing language and content instruction. In fact, GBA instruction during the phase Knowledge of the Field supports the students in expanding their content knowledge in the field of choice. When teaching a unit on an academic subject, for example on the painter Tintoretto, instructors need to remember that some topics are not common knowledge for the students. In our case, not every student is a major in humanities. Instructors should not require the students to write an essay on a subject like art history without teaching them the historical content of what they will write.

In hindsight, in this study we should have expanded the phase Knowledge of the Field and deepen some of the aspects of the art history field. For example, the findings show that the stage that was the most challenging for the students was the stage that requires writing about the style of the painter. Only a few students were able to improve noticeably their understanding and implementation of that stage in the post-instruction essay, in comparison with the pre-instruction essay. This makes me think that students were not adequately prepared to write that stage, because the instructor and I did not allow sufficient time and resources to explicitly teach the students how to express appreciation in this specific field, style of art. “Appreciation” is a SFL term, it is a category of the Appraisal System, defined as “evaluating the qualities of a thing” (Derewianka &

Jones, p.28). The weakness in this stage of the genre that we found is not surprising given that these students were not art history majors and lacked insight into how to present the style of an artists' work.

In order to correctly express appreciation, the instructor should teach the students, for example, the correct specific vocabulary of the field, the syntactical and grammatical structures necessary to express appreciation, and also the appropriate tone to use according to the register. The ways of showing appreciation are very different in different registers: the way I evaluate the quality of a painting if I am texting a friend from a museum (i.e., “OMG this Tintoretto is awesome!”) is extremely different from the way I evaluate the same painting in the biography of the painter (i.e., “All the scholars agree that Tintoretto’s style...”). These differences need to be explicitly taught to the students.

#### **4.3 Students’ agency matters**

As stated earlier, the pre-instruction survey shows how students equate writing with showcasing grammar knowledge. The pre-instruction essays also show how this equation took away the students’ agency in making informed linguistic choices. The majority of the students wrote their pre-instruction essay using past tenses, but often mixing up several past tenses that should not have coexisted in the same paragraph (i.e., *passato prossimo* and *passato remoto* together), while other students wrote the pre-instruction essay forcing the use of *congiuntivo*, which was the grammatical form introduced in the instructional unit. Before the GBA instruction, students were not able to make informed linguistic choices about verbs’ usage, showing very little control over processes. In contrast, in the post-instruction essay students show an informed

understanding of the tenses they need to use according to the register. Many students in the post-instruction survey stated that they used *presente storico* because they were writing about historical events, and therefore *presente storico* was the correct tense to use.

As noted also by Abdel-Malek (2017) GBA does not impede the learning of grammar. On the contrary, it supports the students in learning grammar in its socio-cultural context, allowing them to see the function of grammar, and because of that, GBA gives students agency on the necessary linguistic choices. GBA is able to put the required grammar in its own place, helping the students learning to use grammar for a function. For example, one student in the post-instruction survey stated that she used *presente storico* in the post-instruction essay because that was the correct tense for the genre, but she also wrote, “at the end I switched to *imperfetto* because I was talking about the impact she made as a female artist”. This student shows how she was able to purposefully use a tense she had studied in the past (*imperfetto*) in a new context compared to what she had learned in past semesters of Italian. Additionally, being able to apply what is known to a new context is a sign of language development in contrast to learning to use a form of the verb in only one context, for example in textbook exercises. Moreover, students in the post-instruction essay were able to create longer and more complex sentences, and to use structures they had not studied before. According to the literature on this subject, it is unclear why this happens, but it seems to be a quite common byproduct of teaching using a GBA. I suspect that language use in a meaningful context supports internalizing grammatical knowledge in ways that go beyond only explicit grammatical explanation and drill and practice in artificial context.

On the topic of students’ agency, the materialization of the tools is another relevant point of discussion. When implemented with the creation of the shared rubric as suggested by Derewianka and Jones (2012), GBA provides the students with the necessary explicit tools to

support their writing process. In the pre-instruction survey, none of the students mentioned the use of charts, rubrics, or other tools from in-class instruction to support their writing. In the post-instruction survey, on the contrary, many students mentioned how useful the charts they created in class with the instructor were in supporting their writing process. For example, Loretta Soffici wrote, “It was helpful to have the stages of life chart that we’ve gone over several times in class. That helped me organize my thoughts the most”. The shared rubric, comprehensive of stages, functions, and lexical-grammatical features, is the summary of the work that instructor and students did during the Deconstruction phase. The students are able to use the shared rubric to make informed linguistic choices because the instructor showed them how to use it during the Joint Construction phase and the students knew they participated in the creation of the tools, therefore they felt the tools were more approachable.

In the context of the present study, I think it is important to mention that teaching the students the formal metalanguage was beyond the scope of the study, and in general not a purposeful activity. The students, guided by the instructor, analyzed the text and co-created the charts. I used the students’ own words to create the shared rubric that the students would employ as a guide to write their post-instruction essay. Several students mentioned in the post-instruction survey how their involvement in the creation of the metalanguage had a positive effect on their writing. In other words, they felt they had agency in the whole process, from the analysis of the text to the rubric and linguistic choices for the writing process.

Another form of agency is students’ critical engagement with text. When teaching language at beginners’ levels, teachers need to focus on linguistic choices. However, Italian 0103 is an appropriate level in which teachers can start moving beyond linguistic choices, toward the analysis of textual choices. The students showed in the present study that they are ready for this

introduction. For example, many students in the post-instruction essay addressed the issues of being a female artist in a male-dominated world as art during the Renaissance. One student titled her biography “La tintura invisibile: Una storia sul talento nascosto de la Tintoretta” [The invisible paint: a history on Tintoretta’s hidden talent]. Consistent with Hyland comments about GBA being critical because it “provides the resources for students to understand and challenge valued discourses” (Hyland 2007, p.150), in future iterations of this instructional unit, the instructor could try to include not only linguistic analysis, but critical textual analysis in the teaching and learning cycle. For example, in the Joint Construction, instead of working collaboratively on the biography of another renowned male artist, the instructor could choose a female artist, and draw the students’ attention to the differences of the information and text available on that subject. Why for Tintoretto we have so many works of art with his signature, while for Marietta we do not? Why on Tintoretto we have so much information about his professional life, while for Marietta we have mostly information on her private life? Students will be able to see the text from different points of view, and this engagement could be transferred to the Independent Construction essay, adding the necessary material to the shared rubric.

#### **4.4 Professional development of FL teachers matters**

As stated earlier, FL teachers often do not receive adequate training to teach written presentational communication. As also stated earlier, I noticed that the instructor in the present study did not have a previous clear knowledge of the concept of genre. She, as many other instructors, comes from a literary background and therefore she was thinking within that mindset. As noted by other scholars (Abdel-Malek, 2017; Donato, 2021; Troyan, 2013) teachers need an



extensive professional development to teach written communication, since writing is not a skill that the students can simply transfer from speaking.

I spent the Summer 2020 and part of the Fall 2020 teaching the tenets of GBA to the instructor, with the support to the very approachable text by Derewianka and Jones (2012). The instructor initially struggled to grasp some of the foundations of GBA. For example, the idea of not including every grammatical feature in the final assessment of the post-instruction essay was hard for her to accept. Trying to create meaningful guiding questions for the Deconstruction phase was also a challenging task. However, the instructor, on her first attempt of using GBA in her class and despite the limited training, did an excellent job, and this shows in the performance of the students' post-instruction essay. The positive outcome in the instructor's teaching practice is a direct result of the professional development provided to the instructor. The effects of the professional development on the instructor are aligned to those noticed by Troyan in his work with a Spanish instructor (2013): increased genre awareness, improved text analysis ability, a new interest in the creation of functional tools, and an understanding of the importance of functions and purpose in a language system.

The instructor plans on using this approach again in future classes with minor revisions, since the practice of GBA gave her several ideas for future improvement in her teaching practice. I believe that providing professional development to FL teachers when implementing GBA in their classes is a very rewarding practice, I imagine that teachers will see how GBA is an adaptable approach that, once learned and implemented for the first time, is easy to improve upon and to replicate with any genre in different registers, and easy to include organically in any FL/ESL/L2 syllabus. As Abdel-Malek (2017) noted, GBA also provides the instructors with the necessary structure to support a shift from designing curricula and syllabi centered on grammar

decontextualized from its sociocultural context, “to teaching language in relation to the sociocultural and purposeful context in which it occurs” (p. 156). This shift could support the students in thinking about writing in FL not solely as grammar use display, but as a meaningful and purposeful practice.

#### **4.5 Future Research and Conclusion**

In this section I describe my dissemination plan, some ideas for future research, and offer concluding remarks on the present study. My dissemination plan includes share my findings with my colleagues in the Department of French and Italian, and organizing a workshop for FL instructors at University of Pittsburgh. Moreover, I will submit my paper for publication, and I will apply to participate in conferences such as the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

Given the limited time to implement the present study, I could only have the instructor run one teaching/learning cycle. I think it would be interesting for future research to integrate the GBA instruction organically in a semester of Italian 0103, iterating the teaching/learning cycle three times with different genres and registers, in order to evaluate whether and how much the students’ genre awareness increases, how their use of tools changes, and whether they approach the written text in a different way, informed by the genre instruction received. Since the instructor noticed that many students gave their final oral presentations using some of the features they learned during the teaching/learning cycle, a second interesting direction of future research could be investigating the effects of GBA on oral communication. A third idea for future research could be investigating the relationship between GBA and creative writing: GBA is a highly structured approach that

leaves plenty of agency to the writers' creativity. Therefore, does genre knowledge become foundational for creative writing?

A final idea for future iterations could be to implement an intertextual approach to the genre. The limited amount of time and students' language knowledge forced the present study into certain boundaries, but in the future, a fruitful direction could be to work with a companion text. We do not want the students to leave the class thinking that the model text the instructor proposed to them was the only possible way to write in that genre. Therefore, the instructor could submit to the students two or three texts, belonging to the same genre, but from different contexts. That way, with the appropriate guiding questions, the instructor could engage the students in thinking critically about the genre, the texts, the subject and the authors. For example, students could analyze one biography from Wikipedia, one from a high school textbook and one from a magazine. Why are they different? What is the purpose of those texts? Who is the reader? What are the authors trying to accomplish? What information are the authors providing and what are they holding back?

In conclusion, this study shows that GBA instruction supports students of Italian as FL in writing the *cenni biografici* subgenre, increasing their genre awareness and agency. The study also shows that some features of the genre result more challenging to acquire than others, such as those features that require the expression of personal reactions in the form of appraisal about particular content that student may not know. The acquisition of those features by the students will require the instructor to allow more time and resources during in-class instruction. This study also shows how GBA provides the instructors with an accessible, systematic and functional approach to teach written communication, of course, after a thorough training.

On a more personal note, I learned a great deal during my three-year journey in the Doctor in Education program at University of Pittsburgh. I learned about Improvement Science, a new

systematic method for practitioners to do research, something that I had always thought was reserved to PhDs; I also learned a successful approach to teaching written communication to my students, a field in which I always felt I was deeply lacking; but more than anything, and the most surprising for me, I learned that I am able to teach not only my college students, but also to support other instructors in improving their teaching practice.

## Appendix A Guiding questions for Deconstruction phase

These are the questions that the instructor used to guide the students in the Deconstruction of the *cenni biografici di Tintoretto* model text. The instructor and I crafted these questions in advance in order to guide the students in discovering the characteristics that are necessary to the genre.

- 1) What is a genre? Can you make an example of a genre? (warm up)
- 2) Which do you think are some characteristics of a biography? (warm up, several possible answers)
- 3) Do you think in this biography we read together are **all** the events in Tintoretto's life?  
(anticipated answer: no. So this is a specific kind of biography → *cenni biografici*.

### **Length)**

- 4) Which events then you think are included in this *cenni biografici*? (anticipated answer: the most important events)
- 5) And these important events, in which order are recounted? (anticipated answer: chronologically → **chronological recollection of events**)
- 6) How do we know they are chronological? (anticipated answer: there are dates → **time**)
- 7) Beyond time, what is another important information in a person's life of biography?  
(anticipated answer: **places**)
- 8) How do we know that this is the biography of a painter, and not, let's say, a writer? Can you give me evidence in the text? (anticipated answer: **vocabulary specific to the field**)

- 9) We haven't talked about grammar so far. What is the first thing you notice in terms of verb tenses? What tenses are used here? (anticipated answer: present tense → **historical present**)
- 10) In your opinion, why the author of the *cenni biografici* used the historical present and not some kind of past tense? (anticipated answers: more friendly, easier to understand, makes the subject immediately closer to the reader, etc)
- 11) This biography is in a high school textbook of art history. How do we know that this painter is actually relevant? Why do you think the authors of the textbook included him? (anticipated answer: painted in many important places, important works etc. → **relevance**)
- 12) Why is this painter called Tintoretto? (→ because the father was a *tintore*)
- Why does he study and paint in the *tradizione veneta* and not in the *tosco-romana*? (→ because he's from Venezia)
- Why does he decorate the *Sala del Maggior Consiglio*? (→ because Veronese died)
- what is the relationship between these events? (**cause-effect**)

## Appendix B Shared rubric

After the Deconstruction phase, I used the metalanguage the students and the instructor created in class to compose this shared rubric. Instructor and students used it the following Monday during the Joint Construction and later for the Independent Construction.

/25 pt

	5 points	4-3 points	2-1 points	0 points
Stages/functions	The biography is organized according to <u>all</u> the stages and related functions discussed in class.	The biography is organized according to <u>most</u> of the stages and related functions discussed in class.	The biography is organized according to <u>some</u> of the stages and related functions discussed in class.	The biography is organized according to <u>few to none</u> of the stages and related functions discussed in class.
Vocabulary (specific word choice)	Appropriate choice of all the specific words, as noted in class.	Appropriate choice of most of the specific words, as noted in class.	Appropriate choice of some of the specific words, as noted in class.	Inappropriate choice of specific words or no use of specific words.
Verbs: <i>Presente storico</i>	Accurate use of <i>presente storico</i> , when appropriate.	Mostly accurate use of <i>presente storico</i> , when appropriate	Some inaccuracies in the use of <i>presente storico</i> .	Mostly inaccurate use of <i>presente storico</i> . Most to all the text in <i>passato prossimo/imperfetto</i>
Places Dates Chronological sequence of main events Cause-effect	The text is appropriately arranged according to chronological sequence of main events, with all the necessary cause-effect links between events, and all the necessary dates and	The text is mostly appropriately arranged according to chronological sequence of main events, with some the necessary cause-effect links between events, and many	The text is partially arranged according to chronological sequence of main events, with few to none cause-effect links between events, and few dates and places explicitly expressed.	The text is not arranged according to chronological sequence of events, with few to no dates and places explicitly expressed. No distinction between main and secondary events.

	places explicitly and correctly expressed.	dates and places explicitly expressed.	Some secondary events are also present.	
Lasting Impact Relevance	In the text is explicitly expressed the lasting impact of the painter.	In the text is somewhat expressed the lasting impact of the painter.	It is possible to implicitly infer the lasting impact of the painter.	In the text is not expressed the lasting impact of the painter.



## **Appendix C Instructor's post-instruction interview protocol**

After the end of the fall semester, I emailed the instructor a few questions regarding her reactions and comments on the GBA. I gave the instructor plenty of time to think about them, jot down some answers and thought, and then we met virtually and we extensively and freely talked about it. I conducted the interview in Italian to put the instructor at ease.

- 1) Was it easy to grasp the foundations of GBA?
- 2) What was the most challenging part of the pre-instruction part (theory, gathering material, analysis, lesson-planning, etc)
- 3) What was the most challenging part of the instruction in class?
- 4) How do you think that being online impacted your instruction and the outcome?
- 5) What were the benefits and the shortcomings, in your opinion, of teaching written communication using this approach?
- 6) What improvements would you propose?
- 7) While grading the post-instruction essays, were you able to only grade against the shared rubric, disregarding other potential mistakes (i.e., grammar)?

## **Appendix D Guiding questions to evaluate the instructor's teaching practices**

I used these questions to guide my observation of in-class instruction and the instructor's teaching practices.

What kinds of questions the students have? How does the instructor answer?

How the students look? Confused, engaged, etc...

How are the students processing the inputs? In the way we anticipated? Unanticipated?

How does the instructor respond to that?

Were there any tech issues that could impede on the learning process?

## **Appendix E Students' pre-instruction survey**

This survey was administered via Google Forms, during the week before the GBA instruction.

Question 1. What was your process when you were writing your assignment on the movie *Nuovomondo's* character? How did you organize your thoughts and your material? Did you revise? Did you write down some notes before? What grammar and vocab you felt you needed to use?

Question 2. What do you think are your strengths when you are writing in Italian?

Question 3. What is for you the most difficult aspect of writing in Italian?

## **Appendix F Students' post-instruction survey**

After the Joint Construction, the instructor provided the students with the directions and the shared rubric to write their post-instruction essays in the Independent Construction. With the directions, she also asked the students to answer these three questions after writing the post-instruction essay.

- 1) What was your process in writing this biography? How did you organize your thoughts? How was different writing this biography from the biography on *Nuovomondo*'s character you wrote before the genre instruction you received in the last two weeks?
- 2) What grammar and vocabulary you felt you needed to use and why?
- 3) If you had to explain the biography genre to a student of Italian from another class, how would you do that?



## **Appendix G Pre- and post-instruction essays sample, English translation**

The following are the translations in English of the pre- and post-instruction essays from one student, Carla Donati.

### **Pre-instruction essay**

In the movie Nuovomondo there are many interesting characters with unique personalities. I think that Fortunata, Salvatore's mother, is honest, complex, and represents the old world. Fortunata worked as a doctor for the people in her hometown. But Fortunata worked with herbs and rustic medicine, not like the people and the doctors in the new world. Fortunata is old, stubborn, and brusque. She doesn't like the officers in Ellis Island and their tests. She asked the officers if they think of themselves as gods. Fortunata can be rude, but her questions are legitimate. I like this character because she shows that the new world is exclusive and not for everybody. I think that Fortunata lived in Sicily her whole life and after the trip to Ellis Island she goes back to her hometown.

### **Post-instruction essay**

#### **Marietta Robusti: a famous woman in the masculine world of art**

##### **Biographical notes**

Marietta Robusti, nicknamed la Tintoretta, is born in Venice approximately in 1560, from Jacopo Robusti, or il Tintoretto, a famous painter. Marietta is the oldest daughter, and she has three brothers and four sisters. While Tintoretta is a woman and has less rights than men, she works as an apprentice in her father's workshop, because he's talented and famous. In the

workshop she learns painting techniques, she helps her father with many works of art, and she creates some portraits in the venetian tradition. Moreover, she is a musician, and she travels with her father, and so she sees and understands many works of art. In 1578 Marietta marries a German jeweler, Marco Augusta. Tintoretta's style is sfumato and realistic. She uses techniques similar to her father, for example luminous colors and dramatic tones. Not all the works of art of Tintoretta are known, because her name is similar to her father's, Tintoretto. Marietta paints a self-portrait with harpsichord in 1580 and especially she paints portraits. For example, Tintoretta creates *Ritratto di Ottavio Strada* and *Uomo vecchio e ragazzo*. Moreover, she works on altarpieces with her father, but her portraits are her most famous works. Because she travels with her father, the king of Spain, Philip II, and Maximilian II of Austria want Tintoretta to live and paint for their courts. Marietta Robusti dies in 1590 in Venice when she is only thirty years old. But her work and her beautiful portraits are unique for a woman in the masculine world of art.

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