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Translanguaging-Empowered Production-Oriented Approach: Exploring Innovation of Basic Italian Curriculum

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Abstract: To address core pedagogical challenges in the "Basic Italian" course series, namely the disconnect between input and output, conflicts between Italian and English learning, and limitations in textbook design, this study constructs an integrated teaching framework: the Translanguaging-empowered Production-Oriented Approach (POA). Utilising POA as the core framework and Translanguaging as the key lever, this model transforms students' existing multilingual resources into cognitive scaffoldings that facilitate effective output. The feasibility of this framework is subsequently validated through a concrete example of unit teaching reconstruction. This research expands the application boundaries of POA within the teaching of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) and provides a practical reference paradigm for the pedagogical reform of Basic Italian.

Keywords: Production-Oriented Approach (POA); Translanguaging; Italian language teaching

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1. Introduction

Since the initiative "telling China's stories well" was launched at the National Conference on Publicity and Ideological Work in August 2013, strengthening international communication and building discursive power commensurate with China's comprehensive national strength and international standing has become a national strategic task and a central orientation in the training of foreign-language professionals. The 2020 *Guidelines for Undergraduate Programmes in Foreign Languages and Literatures* register this shift clearly: objectives have moved from mastery of target-language skills to diversified, interdisciplinary graduates who love their country, have an international vision, understand international rules, command knowledge of foreign languages, literatures and cultures, and can participate in international affairs and competition with linguistic and intercultural competence [1]. Foreign-language education must therefore transcend an instrumental role and take on the missions of value formation, cultural awareness and interdisciplinary knowledge integration.

In sharp contrast to these strategic demands, foreign-language programmes have encountered an unprecedented crisis. Admissions have cooled, with falling entry scores and a deteriorating intake; some universities, comprehensive ones in particular, have reduced or suspended undergraduate recruitment in certain languages, reflecting declining recognition and the lag of traditional training models. In the labour market, demand for single-language graduates has contracted: employers prefer LOTE-plus-English or interdisciplinary candidates with language advantages, and monolingual graduates face difficulty finding employment. The explosive growth of artificial intelligence has intensified the pressure, as machine translation and intelligent language assistants challenge conventional teaching models and erode the core competitiveness of these programmes. Systemic reform is therefore urgent. Basic Italian, the entry-level core course in LOTE programmes, directly conditions all subsequent training; breaking its bottleneck, optimising its model and producing graduates who meet national strategies and labour-market needs is a pressing task, and supplies the practical impetus for a translanguaging-empowered POA in Basic Italian teaching.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Production-Oriented Approach

"Production-Oriented Approach" (POA) is a theory of foreign-language teaching developed in China to overcome the separation of learning and use in Chinese classrooms [2]. It comprises principles (learning-centredness, integration of learning and use, whole-person education), hypotheses (output-driven, input-enabled, selective learning) and procedures. The procedure has three phases: *motivating*, which presents a communicative scenario to arouse the desire to produce; *enabling*, which supplies scaffolding for the production task; and *assessing*, which uses teacher-student collaborative evaluation so that assessment serves learning. The distinction between POA and task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been sharpened: POA replaces student-centredness with learning-centredness, corrects the bias towards use at the expense of learning, and raises assessment from an appendage to an inseparable part of instruction, shifting from the separation of assessment and learning to assessment-as-learning [3]. Procedurally, TBLT divides teaching into pre-task, during-task and post-task stages and advocates input before output, whereas POA organises motivating, enabling and assessing into nested cycles of larger and smaller phases, with advantages in stimulating intrinsic motivation, strengthening students' sense of achievement and realising assessment-as-learning [4].

In application, POA has been widely used in English courses as well as in LOTE teaching, including Indonesian audio-visual and speaking courses and Romanian comprehensive courses, confirming its applicability beyond English [5-6]. Research combining POA with Italian-language teaching, however, remains to be undertaken.

2.2 Translanguaging: Connotations and Applications

Translanguaging originated in Wales in the 1990s in connection with Welsh-language revitalisation education. Observing Welsh-English switching in Welsh classrooms, Cen Williams coined *trawsieithu* in his doctoral thesis, arguing that switching enhances bilingual learning; his supervisor Baker introduced it to English-language scholarship, first as *translanguafying*, finally as *translanguaging* [7]. Later work widened its connotation. Translanguaging no longer treats bilingual practice as two independent systems but as one integrated repertoire, whose features are socially constructed as belonging to distinct languages yet remain

inseparable in practice [8]. It is meaning-making through an individual's personal repertoire, unconstrained by social and political naming and labelling of languages; language is reconceived as a multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory and multimodal resource, and multilinguals as agents who recognise the political entity of languages and deploy their structural features flexibly [9, 7]. Unlike traditional pedagogy, which treats languages as separate codes and attends only to structure, translanguaging dissolves boundaries between languages, between language and non-linguistic behaviour, and between language and other cognitive and semiotic modalities [10].

Implementation nevertheless faces multiple difficulties and critiques. Translanguaging may bring peer isolation, vague learning objectives and higher implementation costs [11]. A study on native English teachers in TESOL classrooms in Hong Kong, China found low acceptance of translanguaging, with some teachers resistant or ambivalent [12]. It is argued from a second-language acquisition perspective that the "boundlessness" assumption conflicts with bilinguals' inhibitory control mechanisms and with L2 transfer [13].

3. Course Context and Pedagogical Problems

Basic Italian is the disciplinary foundation course of the Italian programme at the author's institution. Offered to first- and second-year students across four semesters at six credits per semester, it carries the largest share of credits and contact hours of any course in the programme. Starting from zero, it aims to develop systematic knowledge of Italian phonetics, lexis and grammar and integrated listening, speaking, reading and writing skills sufficient for everyday communication. This matches other Chinese universities with Italian majors, where the series runs four semesters at six to ten credits each, reflecting its shared positioning within LOTE training.

To identify weak links, earlier iterations of the course triangulated questionnaires, classroom observation and in-depth interviews in a needs analysis. Students rated the input components highly, finding vocabulary explanation, sentence analysis and grammar instruction strongly practical, but identified output as the principal difficulty: grammar application, sentence translation and retelling requiring Italian production were the most challenging. Three findings emerged. First, students held a positive attitude towards language learning and showed keen interest in phonetics, grammar and cultural knowledge. Second, the separation of learning and use was pronounced: students relied heavily on passive classroom input, understood new knowledge on the spot yet remained unable to convert accumulated knowledge into actual use. Third, Italian and English learning conflicted, most visibly at the beginner stage, in sharp contrast to employers' expectation of bilingual graduates with solid Italian and strong English.

Two questions follow. How can the bottleneck between understanding grammar rules and producing language skills be broken, and the broken chain between knowing and doing repaired? And how can negative transfer between Italian and English be reduced so that students develop as multilingual talents? POA and translanguaging provide the handles for addressing them.

4. Course Design: A Translanguaging-Empowered POA Framework

4.1 The Textbook and Its Limitations

The course uses the Chinese translation of volumes 1 and 2 of *Nuovissimo Progetto Italiano (Student's Book)* [14-15], a widely adopted and highly regarded comprehensive textbook in Chinese Italian programmes.

Written on communicative principles, it balances communicative goals with grammar, and each unit supplies communicatively oriented dialogues set in everyday Italian life, constructing immersive input. As an imported textbook, however, its sequencing rests entirely on the L2 acquisition logic of Indo-European-language speakers and on European contexts of use, producing a marked mismatch with Chinese learners' cognition and needs in four dimensions.

First, the ordering of language points violates the cognitive progression of Chinese learners and overloads beginners. The preliminary *Unità 0* packs the alphabet, six core pronunciation rule sets, noun-adjective gender and number agreement, basic definite articles, and the present indicative of *essere*, *avere* and *chiamarsi* into a few pages; the regular present-indicative conjugations of all three verb classes (*-are*, *-ere*, *-ire*) then concentrate in Unit 1. European learners with French or Spanish can transfer an existing inflectional system, but Chinese is an isolating language without inflection, and a mass of novel rules and paradigms at the zero-baseline stage far exceeds beginners' cognitive load.

Second, the core grammar sequence is logically discontinuous and its difficulty gradient uneven. The *passato prossimo*, a major difficulty, is concentrated in Unit 4 of volume 1, where auxiliary selection, regular and irregular participles and the adverb *ci* are compressed beyond a unit's teaching capacity. The *imperfetto*, the other pillar of the past-tense system and a focus of CEFR examinations, appears only in Unit 7, after an interval of two units later, after the future tense and possessive adjectives have interrupted the tense system. The imperative is split across volumes, appearing in Unit 10 of volume 1 and Unit 6 of volume 2.

Third, some units lack thematic consistency. Unit 10 of volume 1 is titled "What is on television tonight?", yet most sections shift to borrowing objects, asking for help, directions and instructions, so the theme exists in name only. Volume 2 Unit 6, "Let's go to the opera", devotes few sections to opera and otherwise piles up unrelated health-care and directions material.

Fourth, cultural content is one-directional. Cultural sections present Italian culture almost exclusively, with virtually no Chinese-cultural content or expression practice. This cannot satisfy the central intercultural need to tell China's stories in Italian, and leaves learners prone to "cultural aphasia".

4.2 The Instructional Framework

On the basis of this analysis, the study proposes a framework integrating POA and translanguaging for the localised reconstruction and secondary development of the textbook. Its central claim is that the POA cycle of motivating, enabling and assessing provides macro-level organisation and logical progression, while translanguaging scaffolds classroom implementation, bridging learners' existing resources (L1 Chinese, L2 English) and Italian to achieve cumulative language growth and coordinated cross-linguistic awareness.

POA places *motivating* at the start of a unit, with three steps: presenting a scenario, attempting production and clarifying objectives. Because textbook scenarios are Italian, Chinese learners lack direct experience and relevant schemas are hard to activate. The teacher therefore combines the unit's topic and grammar point with the local context and value-formation goals to reconstruct a situation close to students' study, work and life. Italian provides the communicative frame while Chinese supplies cultural background, communicative logic and core meaning; this prevents misreading caused by target-language comprehension difficulty and activates existing schemas.

Table 1. Steps and requirements of the motivating phase

Step	Procedure	Requirement
1	Teacher presents the communicative scenario	Reconstruct the textbook topic into a challenging, locally grounded, value-oriented scenario
2	Students attempt the communicative activity	Make learners aware of their linguistic insufficiency, arouse the desire to learn, permit L1 support
3	Teacher explains objectives and the production task	Clarify communicative and linguistic objectives, task type and content

In the second step, learners attempt the task in Italian but may draw on L1 resources, completing it through Italian-Chinese translanguaging to lower output anxiety. The third step follows POA's principle of selective learning: objectives are divided into communicative and linguistic goals, the latter covering required words, phrases, grammar and discourse structures, and new input items unrelated to the unit's communicative goal are excluded from mandatory language objectives. Experiencing insufficiency arouses the wish to communicate and clarifies the task's relevance.

Standard POA enabling centres on monolingual input, leaving multilingual resources unused; for Italian, which shares many Latin cognates with English, this wastes available knowledge. To the three core elements of ideas, language form and discourse structure, the framework adds cross-linguistic connection, this phase's most distinctive innovation. At the lexical level, students are guided to identify Italian-English cognate patterns, such as the correspondence between the English noun suffix *-tion* and Italian *-zione*, so that an established English vocabulary accelerates Italian lexical growth. Deliberate work on "false friends" accompanies this: Italian *camera* means "room" whereas English *camera* means "photographic device", and early discrimination prevents semantic errors caused by transfer.

Table 2. Steps and requirements of the enabling phase

Step	Procedure	Requirement
1	Teacher describes the production task	Ensure learners understand each step and its specific requirement
2	Students engage in selective learning; teacher guides and checks through cross-linguistic comparison	Enable selection of task-relevant content, forms or discourse structures; systematic Italian-English lexical and grammatical comparison
3	Students practise production; teacher guides and checks	Enable immediate application of selective learning to the production task

At the grammatical level, students compare the structural and semantic properties of Italian and English tenses. Both the Italian *passato prossimo* and the English present perfect use an auxiliary plus a past participle; such comparison makes the logic of the target grammar intelligible and supports positive transfer from an acquired system.

Table 3. Steps and requirements of the assessing phase

Step	Procedure	Requirement
1	Teacher and students study the assessment criteria together	Criteria clear, intelligible and checkable, covering accuracy, effectiveness and appropriateness
2	Students submit the final product	Explicit deadline and format
3	Teacher and students evaluate the product in and out of class	Joint evaluation; judicious Chinese and English use to diagnose negative transfer, identify error sources and foster metalinguistic awareness

Conventional POA assessment takes formal accuracy in one target language as its core, diagnosing neither negative transfer in LOTE learners nor cultivating metalinguistic awareness. The reconstructed assessing phase establishes a layered system suited to translanguaging: Italian remains the core of product evaluation, assessed for accuracy, communicative effectiveness and appropriateness, while Chinese and English are introduced in a controlled way for contrastive analysis of errors. Learners are led to identify whether an error originates in L1 transfer or in English false-friend transfer, addressing the recurrence of the same error types at its root.

4.3 A Reconstructed Unit: Health and the Imperative

Volume 2 Unit 6, "Let's go to the opera", exhibits three structural defects. Its title and content diverge: only about half of the sections concern opera, the rest covering health care and directions. The grammar point of Section B, the imperative with clitic pronouns, is detached from its input text, a written expository passage on health that does not model the target structure, so that grammar appears only as isolated explanation and exercises. Finally, the imperative system is fragmented, with the direct imperative in volume 1 Unit 10 and the indirect form in this unit, breaking the continuity of grammar learning.

With POA as the core framework and translanguaging as implementation, the study reconstructs Section B around the thread "healthy living and the imperative", integrating its grammar points and setting the communicative task in a "traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) consultation" scenario that fits Chinese learners' cognition and carries intercultural value. In the motivating phase, an Italian-speaking TCM practitioner advises an Italian patient visiting China; students in that role must use the formal imperative to offer diagnosis, treatment and lifestyle advice. Chinese scaffolds the communicative logic of a TCM consultation and Chinese medical culture, lowering output anxiety, ensuring an accurate grasp of the task and embedding value-oriented education unobtrusively.

The enabling phase has three progressive modules. Lexically, groups extract words for symptoms, diagnosis and health advice from the textbook text and, through translanguaging practice, build an Italian-English cognate table, using English as a lever to expand Italian vocabulary by positive transfer.

Table 4. Italian–English comparison of scene-related words extracted from the unit text

Italian	English	English word with a related root
febbre	fever	
muscolare	muscular	
prevenzione	prevention	
prescrizione	prescription	
medico	doctor	medicine
farmaco	medicine	pharmacy
fame	hunger	famine

Grammatically, students explore the pragmatic function of the formal imperative, activating their knowledge of English imperatives for cross-linguistic comparison. The teacher then explains its conjugation, affirmative and negative forms, and clitic pronoun placement, and contrasts the imperative with the indicative in conjugation, communicative setting and pragmatic purpose, so that learners build a complete framework and move from rules to contextualised use. A situated production module follows: through the AI role-play function of the online learning platform, students act as that practitioner in real-time dialogue with

a simulated patient, responding to cough, neck and shoulder pain or a cold with formal-imperative health advice, and completing a full doctor-patient exchange.

The assessing phase uses teacher-student collaborative evaluation with three dimensions: linguistic accuracy, focusing on formal imperative conjugation and clitic placement; appropriateness, judging whether advice is clear, polite and congruent with doctor-patient pragmatics; and communicative effectiveness, judging whether TCM concepts are accurately expressed in Italian and whether the advice addresses the patient's condition. These criteria close the loop with the motivating-phase objectives, realising assessment-as-learning.

5. Conclusion

This study constructs an integrated translanguaging-empowered POA framework. The POA cycle provides macro-level organisation and logical progression, while translanguaging mobilises multilingual resources at the micro level, bridging learners' Chinese and English resources with Italian to multiply vocabulary and deepen processing of linguistic structure. Two limitations remain. Teaching that dissolves language boundaries demands stronger multilingual orchestration and professional competence from teachers. More importantly, the proposal is still at the stage of initial design and partial implementation: its long-term effects and applicability across learner populations require validation through larger-scale, longer-cycle practice and empirical research.

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