Making it meaningful: 
teaching Italian language and culture with the telegiornale

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Abstract

The Italian news service or telegiornale, broadcast each morning on SBS Television, is an invaluable resource of authentic contemporary Italian language and culture. Freely available and up-to-date, the telegiornale should be exploited in the teaching and learning of Italian in Australia. This paper discusses the way the telegiornale was integrated into a third-year Italian language unit at the Australian National University, with positive results.

Students and instructor watched the Thursday edition of the telegiornale and met later that day to discuss it in class, with a student nominated at random each week to lead the discussion. The routine of watching the telegiornale was an essential factor in the success of the exercise. The pedagogical approach adopted was based on the premise that, in order to successfully utilise the telegiornale, students needed to understand its structure, appreciate the idiosyncrasies of the language used and broaden their knowledge of modern Italian culture. Over the duration of the semester, the students reported a leap in linguistic comprehension and cultural understanding and, more importantly, an increase in confidence. They claimed that watching the telegiornale was no longer demoralising and demotivating, as it had been in the past. This paper profiles the approach adopted, which was aimed at simultaneously improving students’ linguistic skills, providing valuable exposure to Italian culture, and equipping students with a means to continue their learning outside the formal context of university.

1 Introduction

One of the challenges facing university teachers of Italian in Australia is that of integrating up-to-date representations of Italian language and culture into their courses, while one of the challenges of a university education in general is to provide learning experiences that go beyond the superficiality of a transmission model and promote meaningful student learning, as discussed by Ramsden (1992) and Laurillard (2002). Combining these two imperatives as the basis for a semester unit in Italian raises a further set of issues: in order for students to arrive at meaningful learning using authentic, contemporary material, certain sorts of knowledge will need to come into play, which may not necessarily have developed naturally out of previous language study.

This paper discusses the way the Italian news service – the telegiornale or simply tg – which is broadcast free-to-air every morning on SBS Television¹, was used in a third year Italian unit at the Australian National University in 2000. While this may appear, at first sight, an obvious strategy for providing students with exposure to modern Italian language and culture, what sets this apart as an example of good teaching is the way in which the telegiornale was integrated into the teaching and learning programme of the
course in question. The critical aspect of this project, and its success, lay in equipping students with the conceptual tools and content knowledge to be able to interpret and understand the *telegiornale*, not simply as a linguistic event but also as a cultural artifact. Students were polled using questionnaires during and at the end of the course, and their responses form an interesting narrative of their individual journeys towards greater understanding of the *telegiornale*.

The paper is structured as follows. After a survey of selected literature on the characteristics of television news as a text type, I outline some recommended pedagogical applications of the *telegiornale*. A detailed profile of my teaching project follows, along with a discussion of the student feedback. In the final section I explore some implications of this experience.

2 Literature review

2.1 Television news as a text type

Cooper (1996:10) identifies four common student perceptions of the barriers to understanding television news: speed, number of speakers, image and language simultaneity, and assumed knowledge. The first three of these impediments can be broadly categorised as related to performance, in that they create circumstances in which it is difficult for students to perform comprehension, while the fourth concerns sociocultural knowledge. Notably, what is absent from this scheme is the purely linguistic: there is no mention of lexis or syntactic structure as posing potential problems. However, Balboni (n.d.) highlights these aspects in his description of news services and current affairs programmes as “very interesting but often linguistically complex texts”2, while also “important cultural documents”. The cultural significance of the *telegiornale* is encapsulated in Balboni’s statement that “on television you do not talk about cultural models, you see them in action”.

Losi (2001) provides an in-depth discussion of the didactic possibilities of the *telegiornale*. The focus here is on the linguistic aspect, as Losi draws out certain specific features of the Italian *telegiornale* in the areas of syntax, lexis and phonology, as well as those of a sociolinguistic nature. She describes the *telegiornale* as “a creative linguistic instrument” and lists various neologisms and expressions coined in this arena: ribaltone, sexgate, ago della bilancia, mucca pazza. Due to its fleeting nature, the *telegiornale* is characterised by repeated specific reference to the subject of each news item through reformulations and the use of hypernymy. This allows viewers to “‘catch on’ even at different moments”. In the language of the *telegiornale*, Losi notes the prevalence of arguably ‘unsuitable’ traits such as anadiplosis (where the last word of one sentence is the first word of the next) as well as a range of syntactic errors relating to subordination, use of the subjunctive and verb-subject agreement. From a phonological point of view, the modern *telegiornale*, unlike that of the period from 1954 to the early 1980s:

reflects and is evidence of a number of linguistic habits... We have moved from a pompous and sterile news service, in which both the language and the reading were extremely formal, to the linguistic model of today’s news which has even embraced regional variation (Losi 2001).
Losi places the telegiornale between spoken language and written, as a kind of spoken-read text which accommodates gestural, iconic and non-verbal sound cues. The telegiornale also integrates sound, text and image. Losi notes the centrality of the newsreader, which serves to highlight the culturally specific construction of the role:

At times [the newsreader] stands or changes position to suit the camera angle. The overall impression is of a subject who tells a story, often in a not impersonal fashion, commenting on the news with a smile, facial expression or a quip (2001).

Diadori also emphasises the importance of the sociocultural aspect of the telegiornale, with reference to intonation and rhythm of speech, gestures and interpersonal distance as well as “all the sociocultural conventions which are so important in a real communicative context” (2000).

In her profile of learning technologies, Laurillard (2002:90) provides a useful classification of educational media, which she relates to a typology of learning experiences. This is summarised in the following table, adapted from Laurillard, with emphasis added:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning experience</th>
<th>Methods/technologies</th>
<th>Media forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attending, apprehending</td>
<td>Print, TV, video, DVD</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigating, exploring</td>
<td>Library, CD, DVD, Web resources</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing, debating</td>
<td>Seminar, online conference</td>
<td>Communicative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimenting, practising</td>
<td>Laboratory, field trip, simulation</td>
<td>Adaptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulating, expressing</td>
<td>Essay, product, animation, model</td>
<td>Productive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Laurillard describes television as, essentially, a narrative medium whose “common core property [is] non-interactive…[it] cannot respond to [its] audience’s enquiries, and the learner must make what they can of [it]” (2002:90). As a narrative form, she says television news:

creates a global coherence in a text that contains many coherent parts. The structure provides a linear dynamic that links the components to each other via relationships, which may be causal, temporal, or motivational, depending on content… [Television] use[s] a variety of structural cues… [that] allow learners to maintain a sense of the overall structure of the narrative, and hence understand its meaning. Narrative is fundamentally linked to cognition by providing the structure that enables the reader to discern the author’s meaning (2002:91-92).

Laurillard makes two important points regarding the use of television in an educational setting. First, she highlights the close relationship between structure and comprehension, noting that, in one case, “[t]he internal structure of the programme was elaborate and yet obscured from the students, so they found it difficult to discern the overall meaning conveyed through that structure” (2002:100). Second, Laurillard warns that television should not be seen “as primarily a means of transmitting information” as it is actually a “poor informational medium…[in which] the viewer is too easily swamped with information; alternatively, the information is meted out in digestible quantities, which then makes it inefficient” (2002:100). She suggests instead that a “more interesting” role for television would be one that exploits its rhetorical power, as she describes television as possessing the “frequently underestimated power to assist in the difficult trick of conveying a particular viewpoint or idea” and highlights its ability to “represent a particular way of experiencing the world” (2002:99). In this sense, television represents an ideal means for representing Italian culture to students: instead
of theorising about the nature of Italian culture, they are able to see it in action. This connects with Balboni’s point that the telegiornale is indeed a cultural artifact.

2.2 Pedagogical applications of television news

Both Diadori (2000) and Losi (2001) make specific recommendations relating to the pedagogical use of television programmes. For Diadori, television can be integrated into the teaching of Italian with the following provisos:

- that the linguistic and cultural models chosen suit the learners
- that pedagogical approaches appropriate to the use of audiovisual resources are adopted
- that the various phases of class work (both inside and outside the formal context) are planned and integrated with other teaching activities.

Diadori (2000) acknowledges that this is very time-consuming and a challenge to the teacher’s creativity and capacity to include authentic materials seamlessly into the syllabus. She suggests this may be why many teachers are discouraged and turn to commercially available pre-packaged video material instead of television. She also describes television as providing many grammatical, textual, sociocultural and non-verbal elements “which students’ attention can be focused on through techniques such as discovery learning”. This recalls Laurillard’s (2002) notion of attending. Using a programme such as the telegiornale can be particularly effective in situating and contextualising student learning, the importance of which is discussed in detail by Laurillard (2002 chapter 1).

Diadori (2000) suggests a number of exercises to employ with transcripts of television programmes, such as cloze exercises and matching games, in order to develop comprehension skills beyond the oral/aural. She claims, however, that the most crucial benefit comes from reflection on, and then generalisation of, the new linguistic and sociocultural phenomena found in the television programmes concerned, as well as the take-up of new discourse strategies observed by the students. This can only occur, according to Diadori, once the students begin to ‘own’ the contents through “activities directed at concrete objectives, that can foster a genuine acquisition of the communicative behaviours observed in the target language and culture”, such as watching an entire film at home or using the Internet to research a news story for presentation in class.

Losi (2001) points out that the structure of the telegiornale lends itself very well to segmentation and thus to use in the language classroom. In contrast with student views outlined by Cooper (1996) above, Losi is of the opinion that text-image simultaneity is not problematic, but that the images actually contribute greatly to the comprehension process because they can be understood without the auxiliary input of text or voice-over. She therefore terms the relationship between word and image “complementary and parallel”. The main ways in which Losi suggests using the telegiornale in language classes are as a stimulus for oral work – which can focus on either a reconstruction of the text or a comment on it – and as a departure point for discussion of pertinent issues. She also proposes having students summarise the content of the telegiornale and perhaps produce their own filmed version of it.
2.3 Teaching with the telegiornale: making it meaningful

Meaningful learning can be characterised as moving students away from the simple tasks of memorising and regurgitating towards the integrated activity of understanding and connecting (for further discussion see Ramsden 1992; Marton & Säljö 1997). In order to harness the potential of a medium such as television news, which, as Laurillard (2002) points out, is narrative and out of the direct control of both teacher and learners, it is crucial that the teacher structures learning activities to facilitate an orientation towards understanding and connecting. While this may seem an enormous challenge, a number of important clues as to how it may be done emerge from the points made in the previous sections.

As noted, Laurillard (2002) suggests that television is best used for the experiences of “attending and apprehending”. This prompts the questions “attending to what?” and “apprehending what?” Laurillard herself signals the importance of structure, while the other authors reviewed identify the twin concepts of language and culture. The project described in this paper sought to take account of, and focus the teaching on, all three dimensions of the telegiornale: its unique structure, its linguistic features and its construction as a cultural moment. A further distinction was made in each of these interrelated categories between macro and micro issues. For example, in dealing with structure, we explored that of the entire telegiornale (macro) as well as the internal organisation of individual stories (micro).

Teaching and learning activities must themselves model a high degree of connectedness if they are to promote connected learning. In the project described below, the telegiornale-related activities were not ancillary to other tasks; on the contrary, an entire strand of the course revolved around the telegiornale. Not only was the regular watching and discussion of it a central component, but specific language issues arising from the broadcast formed the foundation for linguistic extension activities and the major assessment task was the production of the students’ own telegiornale. In this way, the course reproduced the levels of Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives (see Dembo 1988:238), moving from observation, reflection and analysis to practical application, synthesis and creation.

A final aspect of meaningful learning relates to the active participation of students, not only in learning but also in constructing the environment for doing so (Laurillard 2002:67-69). In this case, the students negotiated contact hours, course content and assessment tasks, with little intervention from the teaching staff apart from the proviso that the telegiornale be integrated.

3 The project

3.1 Context

In semester 2 of 2000 I taught a group of eight students in the course Italian Studies – Intermediate 2 at the Australian National University. They had all completed five semesters of Italian language study in the ab initio stream. The course was made up of nine weeks of four contact hours and four weeks of one contact hour. These two periods were separated by an unusual four-week break owing to the Sydney Olympic Games. In
the nine-week block, one hour was devoted to contemporary Italian literature, while the
remaining three hours were dedicated to the *telegiornale*: two hours in a general
language-skills workshop and the final hour to an exploration and discussion of the
issues presented in the *telegiornale* of the same day. For nine weeks, both teacher and
students watched the Thursday edition as it was broadcast free-to-air on SBS from 6.55am. This was a replay of the evening news shown on *RAI1* or *RAI2* in Italy on the
Wednesday evening. The class discussion took place from 11am to 12 noon on
Thursdays.

3.2 Scaffolding learning

To assist the students to “attend” to various aspects of the *telegiornale*, I devised a
range of scaffolding activities. In the first week of the course, the students and I
discussed the types of strategies required and I then circulated the advice shown in
Figure 1 on approaching the task of comprehending the *telegiornale*, together with a
section from *How to be a successful language learner* (Rubin & Thompson 1994).

**Figure 1 Advice to students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW TO WATCH THE tg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Here are some hints to help you understand the Italian News better:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Get into the habit of watching it – this is really the key</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have a look at the news headlines at <a href="http://www.corriere.it">www.corriere.it</a> before you watch the news – the day/night before. This will give you an idea of what’s happening in Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Set concrete goals. For example, decide to concentrate on every second story. Listen for numbers. Try to pick out people’s names.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Don’t try to understand everything. You have to learn to let things go and not get caught up on a word or a sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Look for the central theme or nocciolo. Most news stories include a lot of extra information. Try to focus on the central issue and forget about the trimmings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before we began watching the *telegiornale*, I distributed the exercise shown in Figure
2. As an introduction to the *telegiornale*, this exercise required the students to look only
at the major textual features of each segment, instead of expecting them to
simultaneously attend to structure, language and culture.

**Figure 2 Exercise as introduction to the telegiornale**

*Italian Studies – Intermediate 2*

*Il telegiornale della RAI comincia alle 6.55 e finisce alle 7.30 dal lunedì al sabato sulla SBS.*

Descrivi la struttura del telegiornale. Qual è l’ordine degli argomenti? Usa una parola per raggruppare i vari servizi. Per es. all’inizio del telegiornale c’è sempre il *sommarion* delle notizie.

UN PO’ DI LESSICO:

• economia, politica interna/internazionale, cronaca, sport
• …sentiamo l’inviato/a…
• …eccò il servizio…
• …il nostro corrispondente…

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The *telegiornali* broadcast on SBS were either *Tg1* or *Tg2*, both of which always placed a strong emphasis on Italy’s domestic situation. It became immediately clear that the students had a very limited knowledge of Italian culture, particularly in the realm of the political. I therefore integrated brief Internet search activities, such as the one shown in Figure 3, into each week’s programme, to assist them to extend their knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ricerca in Internet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi è Prodi?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Che cos’è la Confindustria?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qual è la struttura del Governo Italiano?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi sono il Primo Ministro e il Presidente della Repubblica?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Siti utili*

- Il Corriere della Sera: [www.corriere.it](http://www.corriere.it)
- Il Governo Italiano: [www.governo.it](http://www.governo.it)
- L’Unione Europea: [europa.eu.int/index-it.htm](http://europa.eu.int/index-it.htm)
- Ask.com: [www.ask.com](http://www.ask.com)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ricerca in Internet 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi è il premier italiano?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosa vuole dire l’espressione “sgravi fiscali”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qual è il significato del Palazzo Chigi?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Che cos’è il Quirinale e qual è il suo significato?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Che cos’è un bancomat?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 Internet search activity

The students found an interesting case of cultural and linguistic convergence in the use of the term *premier*. In Australia, each state has a premier, who is the leader of the state government, while the national government is led by the prime minister. The synonymy of the terms *primo ministro* and *premier* was thus not immediately evident to students and required explicit support in teaching and learning activities. This may appear a banal example but it illustrates the importance of approaching the *telegiornale* as a multi-structured linguistic and cultural artifact.

### 3.3 Using the *telegiornale* to develop all linguistic abilities

Our work with the *telegiornale* gave rise to a wealth of activities which supported not only the receptive abilities of aural/visual comprehension but also the productive oral and written abilities. This reflects an important underpinning aim of my approach to language teaching: that no task should focus in a limited way on a single linguistic ability.

The students’ oral proficiency and cultural awareness were assessed in the discussion after the *telegiornale* each week. To ensure that they all actively participated in these sessions, I used the extrinsic motivating force of surprise. That is, each week at the start of class, one student would be chosen at random to lead the discussion. This strategy was very successful in that it ensured participation in the early stages of the project, when motivation needed greatest support. As the semester progressed, the strategy became less effective (because the pool of possibilities was reduced) but by then it was
hardly necessary, due to a rise in the students’ own intrinsic motivation and interest as a result of their increased comprehension of and confidence with the _telegiornale_.

The assessment of the students’ contribution to discussion of the _telegiornale_ was organised around a set of specific criteria, listed in Figure 4 and distributed to the students before the first discussion session. This also assisted in terms of motivation, as the students knew what to expect.

### Oral work on Thursdays

I will be assessing your leading of the discussion relating to the _tg_ on Thursdays. The criteria against which you will be assessed fall into three categories:

- **Linguistic**
- **Communicative**
- **Cultural**

*The linguistic criteria are*

- Pronunciation and fluency
- Grammatical correctness

*The communicative criteria are*

- Ability to lead a discussion
- Comprehension of others and appropriate responses

*The cultural criteria relate to*

- Your awareness of figures, events, and other culturally significant content
- An ability to compare and contrast Italian and Australian culture

I suggest that when preparing for the _tg_ discussion, you focus on perhaps one or two stories and devise some questions or issues on which to base the discussion.

Figure 4 Criteria for assessment of contribution to discussion

In the two-hour workshop on language skills, we dealt with aspects of grammar that related to the content of the _telegiornale_. One topic we addressed, for example, was the nominal style found in much of the _telegiornale_ reporting. Taking examples of sentences from various news items, we were able to explore both the formal and communicative devices of this type of discourse.

I assessed proficiency in written language through the drafts of the students’ own _telegiornale_, which they submitted twice during the semester. The final videorecorded version of their _telegiornale_ afforded another example of their oral proficiency for assessment.

4 Student feedback

Another principle which underpins my approach to teaching and learning is a commitment to gathering and responding to student feedback. In an attempt to assess the success, or otherwise, of the integration of the _telegiornale_ into the third-year course, I administered two questionnaires related specifically to this work. The first of these was distributed in week 2 and the second at the close of the project in week 9. The text of the questionnaires and the collated responses can be found in Appendices 1-3.
the following discussion of issues arising from the students’ feedback, each section heading is a quotation from their responses.

4.1 “Watching the tg [used to be] a humiliating experience”

Students reported that, before they began this course, watching the telegiornale was a difficult, demotivating enterprise. The tg was seen as scary and humiliating. Aspects of the telegiornale that contributed to these feelings were:

- the speed at which presenters spoke:
  - “they were speaking so fast and I couldn’t understand anything!”
- a lack of any need to understand:
  - “I didn’t concentrate because there was no specific need to understand it.”
- a focus on minutiae which eclipsed general understanding:
  - “[I] really didn’t understand anything, even simple words, I was trying too hard to understand other things and I would miss everything.”

After two weeks, students already reported a change in their reaction to the telegiornale. They observed that they were “taking more in”. Four factors were specifically identified in this change:

- a sense of the structure of the telegiornale:
  - “I am now completely familiar with the format”, “I understand a lot better how the programme is structured”
- the usefulness of class discussion:
- a growing understanding of the cultural context of the telegiornale:
  - “I’m more familiar with the topics”, “I am now slowly starting to understand more and have a greater interest in current events in Italy/Europe”
- routine:
  - “I watch every Thursday”

Students identified certain study strategies that assisted with improving comprehension of the telegiornale. These included note-taking (“now I take notes which probably makes me listen ‘harder’ or more effectively”) and “approaching the exercise differently”. Notably, the feedback confirms the importance of the loop-like nature of the exercise as “reinforcing my watching of the tg at home with exercises in class”.

The significance of the affective realm is clear in the student feedback. One student commented that “structuring the experience boosts the sense of ability to manage it which boosts interest” (emphasis added). The success of the approach described is clear in comments like “it was great motivation especially when each week you understood more and more”. Integrating the telegiornale into the course had a generally positive effect on the students’ views of themselves in relation to the Italian language: “It’s made me more confident, because I’m finding I can understand it, just as an Italian would, which means I have good comprehension skills”.

4.2 “The tg seems to sort of stick together in a block somewhat more than Aussie news”

Students’ reflections on the differences between Australian and Italian news broadcasts were quite revealing. In terms of structure, they noted that, whereas sports and weather are generally part of Australian television news, the *telegiornale* is dedicated to news alone. Students commented that “stories develop over days” and “tend to cover ongoing, broader issues”. From a pedagogical viewpoint this validates an approach that develops a routine of using the *telegiornale* over time and not as a simple one-off presentation in class. Students “apprehended” a number of culturally significant differences, including a particular characteristic of Italian newsreading identified by Losi (2001) as noted above:

- “The newsreaders also seem more animated and intent on the stories they introduce”, “the Italians are more likely to use body language, gestures, (i.e. hands and pens) in order to express themselves… Australians don’t move or use anything.”
- “People move differently, leaning and moving about”

4.3 “The political stage is fairly big”

Through the routine of watching the *telegiornale* students were able to grasp some important cultural themes in contemporary Italian society. This was evident in various comments:

- “issues … most at the heart of Italian society. The family played a strong part in many of the stories. Also immigration”
- “the contrast between clichéd images from TV, textbooks, etc. and the real, contemporary environment there” (emphasis in original)
- “national problems concerning Italians, i.e. prostitution, religious events, immigration problems, mafia … everyday crimes or political crisis”

4.4 “I sometimes report them like the news readers”

Students described a tendency they had developed of imitating Italian television presenters during their own recounting of the *telegiornale* in class: “one could find themselves impersonating certain mannerisms”. This imitation seemed to have a positive impact on their linguistic proficiency, and particularly their lexicon, as the nine weeks progressed. By the final weeks of the period they were able to discuss with ease and appropriate vocabulary many issues raised in the *telegiornali*.

4.5 “Learning a language often feels like an indulgence that isn’t that useful in the ‘real world’”

The integration of the *telegiornale* had the unexpected result that the students came to view language learning as having concrete applications outside the context of university study. Their comments referring to “the real world”, “the real Italy” and the contemporary environment illustrate that, through this project, they were able to relate and connect their learning to a wider context.
4.6 “I think I learnt a lot from it, and I will certainly (try to) watch more *telegiornali* in the future. It just never occurred to me before”

Students rated the experience of integrating the *telegiornale* as a great success. According to their self-assessments it had positive effects on:

- their understanding of Italian language
- their knowledge of contemporary Italian society and culture
- their motivation in studying Italian.

5 Implications of this project

This project has confirmed many of the issues raised earlier in the paper in relation to the use of television in language teaching. It has shown that, by assisting students to *attend to* issues of structure, language and culture inherent in a television broadcast such as the *telegiornale*, and by supporting this process through integrated learning tasks, we can help students arrive at a more personally satisfying and meaningful learning experience. The *telegiornale* broadcast by SBS is a free resource which students, once set on the right path, can exploit to improve their comprehension of Italian language and culture. More importantly, the supported process detailed in this paper had a positive effect on both students’ motivation towards the subject and their self-image as learners. Using the *telegiornale* also allowed students to conceptualise language study not as simply a recreational activity, but as something concrete to be applied to contemporary, real situations.

This project was carried out with a small group of intermediate students with whom I had been working for almost three years. Clearly, I was in a very fortunate position for trialling the integration of the *telegiornale*. Not everyone will enjoy such favourable conditions. However, I believe that a number of aspects of this study would transfer readily to most situations. Firstly, the examination of the *telegiornale* in terms of its structure and its linguistic and cultural features is a useful approach which could be applied regardless of context. Similarly, the principles of orienting learners towards attending to these aspects and supporting learning through small grounded exercises, such as Internet searches, can be transferred to other situations. An aspect that could become problematic for large groups or groups with more than one teacher is the coordination of discussions of the *telegiornale*. Another issue relates to the amount of support required. This will decrease in inverse proportion to the proficiency level of the students: the more advanced they are, the less preparation should be required. Nonetheless, it is my view that the *telegiornale* is a priceless resource of authentic Italian language and culture which should be more systematically exploited in the teaching and learning of Italian in Australian universities.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to three anonymous reviewers and Claire Kennedy for helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper. Naturally, all the usual disclaimers hold.
References


Rubin, J. and Thompson I. 1994, *How to be a more successful language learner*.  
Boston: Heinle and Heinle.
Appendix 1: Telegiornale questionnaire 1

Before this unit

Before beginning this unit, did you know that SBS shows the telegiornale every day?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how did you know about this?

In the past, did you watch the telegiornale?

☐ Never ☐ Occasionally ☐ Regularly

Why did you/didn’t you watch it?

Describe your experiences of watching the telegiornale before this course

During this unit

When you watch the telegiornale now is it different from times you watched it in the past?

What do you attribute these changes to?

Has approaching the telegiornale in a structured way made a difference?

Do you think this is a useful exercise?

How has watching the telegiornale affected your attitude towards your Italian?

Will you continue to watch the telegiornale after this unit finishes? Why/Why not?

What do you like best and least about our use of the telegiornale in this unit?

Do you have any other comments?
Appendix 2: Telegiornale questionnaire 2

What aspects of the *tg* stand out as being different from a comparable Australian news service?

Did watching the *tg* help you understand Italian culture? In what way? What are some of the characteristics of Italian culture that you can identify from this experience?

How did the experience of watching the *tg* affect your view of your Italian and your interest/motivation in the subject?

Was this a worthwhile exercise? Why?

Please add any other comments
Appendix 3: Collated responses to the two questionnaires

Telegiornale questionnaire 1 (week 2)

Describe your experience of watching the telegiornale before this course.

• I think I actually might have seen it once or twice before, and it just scared me because it seemed like they were speaking so fast and I couldn’t understand anything!
• I didn’t get much out of it as it is so fast and I didn’t concentrate because there was no specific need to understand it - I just ‘got’ what I could - usually from the images more than the language.
• Really didn’t understand anything, even simple words, I was trying too hard to understand other things and I would miss everything
• I remember it’s hard to understand exactly what they are saying, it was interesting anyway, learning the structure of Italian news and see how is Italy.
• Watching the tg was a humiliating experience - i.e. lack of comprehension of language and the current European events.

When you watch the telegiornale now is it different from times you watched it in the past?

• Yes, I take more in.
• A little bit - it is getting easier because now I am completely familiar with the format.
• Yes, I understand a lot more how the programme is structured, how the presenters speak, and the stories seem to run more coherently.
• I can say ‘yes’, because we discuss it in class, and I’m more familiar with the topics, since I watch every Thursday anyway.
• In the beginning, I felt the same sense of complete stupidity but I am now slowly starting to understand more and have a greater interest in current events in Europe/Italy.

What do you attribute these changes to?

• Probably because I take a few notes because I know we’ll be discussing it, and also my knowledge of Italian is better.
• Repetition, regularity and the discussion held in class. Also now I take notes which probably makes me listen ‘harder’ or more effectively.
• Having a greater understanding of the language (vocab and Grammar) also a greater understanding of the culture and the programme itself.
• The discussion part and I watch it now more regularly.
• Watching the tg on a regular basis, approaching the exercise differently, reinforcing my watching the tg at home with exercises in class.

How has watching the telegiornale affected your attitude towards your Italian?

• It’s made me more confident, because I’m finding I can understand it, just as an Italian would, which means I have good comprehension skills.
• I find it reassuring that more fluent members of the class find it difficult.
• In a small way, for instance when saying the leading stories or discussing topics I sometimes report them like the news readers. I suppose it makes you more aware of the problems facing Italians directly.
• I have a positive attitude towards Italian, and I can say tg affected in a more positive way by expanding our knowledge more.
• I feel less detached from the language contemporary culture as I see its function in a contemporary, more immediate context - if that makes any sense!! Learning a language often feels like an indulgence that isn’t that useful in the ‘real world’.

Telegiornale questionnaire 2 (week 9)

What aspects of the tg stand out as being different from a comparable Australian news service?
• Stories develop over days
• People move differently, leaning and moving about
• The tg seems to sort of stick together in a block somewhat more than Aussie news, because it doesn’t have the sports and weather splitting it up. It also seems a bit more simply structured.
• More presentable. More based on issues affecting Italy than world events. Very serious presenters.
• The stories tend to cover ongoing, broader issues rather than specific events e.g. immigration, prostitution. The newsreaders also seem much more animated and intent on the stories they introduce.
• The context, between international and national topics.
• The presentation of the background; in Italian news there is only the news reader, in the Australian news there is a background formed by a ‘picture’ and ‘headings’.
• The behaviour of the ‘news reader’, the Italians are more likely to use body language, gestures, (i.e. hands and pens) in order to express themselves while presenting the news. Australians don’t move or use anything.

Did watching the tg help you understand Italian culture? In what way? What are some of the characteristics of Italian culture that you can identify from this experience?
• I don’t know. The political stage is fairly big. Celebrities are important, and the book report. (Concern for immigration)
• It helps me know how Italians are in the way that they speak, their mannerisms, the way they see the world, relate to each other, etc.
• Yes, it portrayed what issues are most at the heart of Italian society. The family played a strong part in many of the stories. Also immigration sparked many topics in the news.
• It definitely reinforced the shock you get upon first going to Italy - the contrast between clichéd images from TV, textbooks, etc. and the real, contemporary environment there.
• You don’t learn the total number of aspects of Italian culture, but you can learn the main events happening in Italy, or the more national problems concerning Italians, i.e. prostitution, religious events, immigration problems, mafia, ‘movies’, ‘music’, everyday crimes or political crisis.
How did the experience of watching the *tg* affect your view of your Italian and your interest/motivation in the subject?

- Motivation is an inside job
- Structuring the experience, boosts the sense of ability to manage it which boosts interest
- It pretty much just set in concrete what I already knew about Italian and my perception of the language. So of course it just makes me more enthusiastic than ever about extending my knowledge of Italian.
- It was great motivation especially when each week you understood more and more. In fact in discussing certain issues on *tg* one could find themselves impersonating certain mannerisms.
- It refreshed the memories I have of ‘the real’ Italy - and every week, reminded me why I have to get back there as soon as possible! In this respect, above all, it certainly increased my motivation - as well as showing me many aspects of contemporary Italy I’d previously known nothing about.
- I personally have a great interest in Italian, (language) and I strongly believe that this exercise help me challenge my knowledge and how far my abilities go, in listening and understanding Italian or familiarize myself with the Italian language/news and the whole process.

Was this a worthwhile exercise? Why?

- Yes, any Italian is good. To let the Italian style and language wash over my awareness, fairly early in the day, was helpful.
- Yes, of course. Any exposure to anything genuinely Italian is very worthwhile.
- Yes. It gave me a greater understanding on Italian society and culture that previously I had no idea about. For example, Italian politics, its structure and function in Society. I can honestly say that it raised my overall interest and Italian language culture. By examining the differences between Australian and Italian news you can tell a lot.
- Yes, very - I think I learnt a lot from it, and I will certainly (try to) watch more *telegiornali* in the future. It just never occurred to me before.

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1 Special Broadcasting Service: Australia’s national multicultural radio and television broadcaster. According to the SBS web-site it broadcasts more than fifty hours of international news bulletins per week, featuring twenty-two different news services from eighteen countries in seventeen languages.

2 Throughout this paper I provide my own free translations of quotations originally in Italian.

3 The RAI *telegiornale* screens on SBS from 6.55 to 7.30am, Monday to Saturday. Describe the structure of the *telegiornale*. Is there an order to the topics? Use one word to group the various reports. For example, at the beginning of the *telegiornale* there is always a *sommario*.

A little bit of vocabulary:

- economy, domestic/international politics, news, sport
- let’s hear from our reporter
- and now for the report
- our corrispondent

4 **Internet search**

Who is Prodi?
What is the *Confindustria*?
How is the Italian government structured?
Who are the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic?

Useful sites
Il Corriere della Sera: www.corriere.it
Il Governo Italiano: www.governo.it
L’Unione Europea: europa.eu.int/index-it.htm
Ask.com: www.ask.com

Internet search 2
Who is the premier?
What does the expression sgravi fiscali mean?
Why is Palazzo Chigi significant?
What is the Quirinale and why is it important?
What is a bancomat?