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Making Italianness Case by Case: Pedagogical Bridges between Culture and Career

Enza Antenos and Ryan Calabretta-Sajder

Introduction

This contribution examines how case-based pedagogy can serve as a powerful bridge between Italian cultural-literary training and career-oriented language for the professions, using Made in Italy as its central organizing construct. Starting from Italy's often underestimated status as a major manufacturing and exporting power,[1] this article argues that Italian Studies should diversify to reflect both the country's economic prominence and its long-standing ethical–aesthetic traditions of *il bello e il bene* (the beautiful and the good).[2] It foregrounds Made in Italy not only as a legal certification and branding tool,[3] but also as a dense sociocultural formation that binds craftsmanship, territorial embeddedness, and corporate philosophies of *Incanto*, the enchantment produced by a product of such excellence that it captivates the customer,[4] to contemporary debates on quality, sustainability, and national identity.

Building on this expanded definition, the article outlines a curricular architecture that treats Made in Italy as a shared bridge between traditional Italian Studies and Italian for professions. It brings the values embedded in *il bello e benfatto* (the beautiful and the well-crafted) into dialogue with juridical codifications, sectoral frameworks such as Fortis's four As, and case-based explorations of firms, products, and supply chains.[5] Through a series of concrete modules—from units on artists and media figures to case studies on design and automotive companies, and student-generated corporate profiles—the essay illustrates how integrating business-oriented coursework and case-study methodologies within Made in Italy courses may deepen textual and cultural analysis while simultaneously fostering the National Association of Colleges and Employers

[1] The Italian Trade Agency (ITA) and thousands of Italian firms across the United States and Canada form a strong institutional and industrial network linking Italian enterprise to North American economic life. ITA offices and Italian companies offer sites for internships, cooperative education, and service learning that connect advanced language study with professional practice. Within this network, Italian for International Business and Made in Italy courses present Italian not as a cliché of "food, fashion, and Ferrari," but as a strategic language of commerce, innovation, and transnational collaboration. Marco Mutinelli, "L'impatto economico italiano negli stati uniti rapporto di ricerca," accessed November 25, 2025, https://ambwashingtondc.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Limpatto-economico-italiano-negli-Stati-Uniti_PER-SITO.pdf.

[2] For additional information about Italy's economic status, see GDP by Country, accessed November 25, 2025, https://countryeconomy.com/gdp/italy?year=2025, and "Italy," Italy (ITA) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners, accessed November 25, 2025, https://oec.world/en/profile/country/ita. For a more robust historical picture of the Italian economy, see Philip James Jones, *La storia economica: Dalla caduta dell'Impero romano al XIV* (Torino: Einaudi, 1974); Paolo Malanima, *L'economia italiana: Dalla crescita medievale alla crescita contemporanea* (Rome: Il Mulino, 2003); Mutinelli, "L'impatto economico italiano negli Stati Uniti."

[3] For additional information, see "Certificazione 100% Made in Italy Certificate: Qualità superiore e qualità originale italiana," 100% Made in Italy Certificate, accessed November 25, 2025, https://madeinitalycert.it/.

[4] Riccardo Illy, *The Art of Excellent Products: Enchanting Customers with Premium Brand Experiences* (New York: HarperCollins Leadership, 2022).

[5] For our working definition of Made in Italy, please see footnote 10.

(NACE) and the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACFTL)-aligned competencies in strategic thinking, intercultural communication, and career readiness.

In what follows, the article first theorizes Made in Italy as a sociocultural construct grounded in specific sectors and symbolic economies, then develops case-based pedagogies that actively engage language and culture classrooms, and finally outlines a curricular design that integrates such work, from elementary and Advanced Placement (AP) contexts, considering the high school curriculum, through advanced and specialized courses across the Italian curriculum.

Theoretical Background(s): From Italian Excellence to Made in Italy

For the scaffolded pedagogical model proposed in this article to be intellectually robust, it benefits from a concise genealogy that situates Made in Italy at the intersection of juridical codification, economic structures, and long-standing cultural imaginaries. Before turning to case-study activities and NACE-aligned competencies, it is helpful to sketch how ideals of excellence, beauty, and territorial embeddedness coalesce into a recognizable label and, later, into a formal certification regime. This framing equips students and instructors to read contemporary firms and products as sites where legal norms, artisanal traditions, and consumer desires converge, rather than as isolated examples of national marketing.

While the formal legal definition of Made in Italy derives from Art. 16 of Decreto-legge n. 135 (September 25, 2009), many scholars locate the roots of Italian "excellence" and "beauty" in medieval mercantile networks and Renaissance ideals of il bello e il bene. Belfanti shows how, by the late twelfth century, mercantile infrastructures in central-northern Italian cities were sustained not only by finance and East–West intermediation but increasingly by manufactured goods that could already be identified as Made in Italy.[6] Benini, in turn, insists that Italians are bearers of a tradition which, from Greek thought through the Renaissance, has regarded the bond between the beautiful and the good as decisive, such that Italian style must be observed not merely for its aesthetic pleasantness but for the ethical significance that beauty carries.[7] Together, these formulations foreground a tension between juridical codification and enduring cultural imaginaries that structure the meaning of Made in Italy and invite learners to see contemporary labels as anchored in deeper ethical–aesthetic histories.[8]

Marco Fortis's works add an explicitly economic dimension, defining Made in Italy as "la parte più vitale dell'economia italiana, imperniata sulle piccole e medie imprese e sui distretti industriali, capace di conquistare grandi posizioni di leadership sui mercati di tutto il mondo" (the most vital part of the Italian economy, centered on small and medium-sized enterprises and industrial districts, capable of capturing major leadership positions in markets around the world).[9] Fortis identifies the four As, *abbigliamento/moda* (fashion and accessories), *agroalimentare* (food and wine), *arredo/casa* (design), and *automazione/meccanica* (machinery), as the sectoral core sustaining Italy's manufacturing excellence and international competitiveness. By emphasizing industrial districts and small- and medium-sized enterprises, he demonstrates how the "country effect," and thereby the Made in Italy brand, is not merely a symbolic but also a structural

[6] Carlo Marco Belfanti, *Storia culturale del Made in Italy* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2019), 51.
[7] Romano Benini, *Lo stile italiano: Storia, economia e cultura del Made in Italy* (Rome: Donzelli editore, 2018), 6.
[8] For additional considerations on Made in Italy, see Ampelio Bucci, Vanni Codeluppi, and Mauro Ferraresi, *Il Made in Italy* (Rome: Carocci editore, 2011).
[9] Marco Fortis, *Il made in Italy* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1998), 15.

framework that later informs nation-branding campaigns.[10] Even as the Made in Italy brand retained its empirical grounding, Fortis presented this concept through a broader set of strategic sectors, highlighting how economic production, cultural visibility, and symbolic value intersect. This broader framing is particularly useful pedagogically since it provides a springboard for case-based, language activities that can be adapted across sectors without changing the underlying task-based structure. For curricular design, this framework provides a scaffold for organizing cases around recognizable sectors while preserving a theoretically informed view of Italy's economic foundations.

Benini's discussion of il bello e il benfatto further complicates this economic picture by insisting that Italian style derives its intelligibility from an older ideal that weds il bello to il bene, displacing any notion of beauty as neutral. He highlights how the deep connection between ethics and aesthetics has civic and spiritual value and underpins the affirmation of artisanal production and il bello e il benfatto within Italian manufacturing; Italy's presence on international markets, he argues, responds above all to a demand for quality that often finds no adequate counterpart in other economic models.[11] Reframed in this way, Made in Italy appears less as a purely competitive brand and more as a moral economy in which artisanal know-how, formal refinement, and responsible production converge to generate surplus value. For students, this ethical-aesthetic lens encourages reading corporate narratives and product design not only in terms of marketing but also as articulations of values and social responsibility.

This intertwining of ethics, aesthetics, and economic structure also emerges in Simona Ironico's survey of Made in Italy products, where interviews with professionals in food, fashion, and furniture design converge on "quality" and "excellence" as defining traits of the label.[12] The representative standard response describes Made in Italy as "una storia di talenti, di tradizioni di gusto, di cultura dell'eleganza, di maestria artigianale, di prontezza innovativa e di cura del dettaglio, creatività e intelligenza tecnica" (a history of talent, of traditions of taste, of a culture of elegance, of artisanal mastery, of innovative readiness, and of attention to detail, creativity, and technical ingenuity),[13] synthesizing material expertise, aesthetic cultivation, and innovative capacity into a narrative of national distinction. Mauro Ferraresi, Ariela Mortara, and Sabrina Pomodoro extend this perspective to consumers, foregrounding *il bello e il buono* (the beautiful and the good) and linking Italian style to quotidian pleasures, Renaissance heritage, and an ongoing pursuit of beauty and luxury; Italianness, in their reading, operates as a lived aesthetic-ethical

[10] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) in collaboration with ICE (Italian Trade Agency) have reframed the economic core of Fortis's scholarly framework of the 4As through sophisticated nation-branding strategies. Their 2015 *Italy, the Extraordinary Commonplace* video challenged Italy's outdated stereotypes by spotlighting Made in Italy's excellence. In 2021, the *beIT* campaign and the now-dismantled Made in Italy portal unified Italy's international image through a digital, value-based storytelling. See Massimiliano Carrà, "La campagna che racconta il made in Italy nel mondo e che ha l'obiettivo di portare a Roma Expo 2030," *Forbes Italia*, November 30, 2021, https://forbes.it/2021/11/30/beit-campagna-che-racconta-il-made-in-italy-nel-mondo-e-che-ha-lobiettivo-di-portare-a-roma-expo-2030; *OpportunItaly* (2025-) represents the latest phase, expanding Made in Italy into ten strategic sectors—Aerospace and Security; Agri-Food; Automotive; Culture & Entertainment; Design; Fashion & Luxury; Healthcare & Wellness; Machinery; Nautical; and Sustainability & Energy—explicitly foregrounding their economic export potential. These initiatives demonstrate how government agencies have framed Made in Italy as a rich ecosystem of stories, data, and voices that are pedagogically sound narratives to be adapted into classroom case studies.

[11] Romano Benini, *Lo stile italiano: Storia, economia e cultura del Made in Italy* (Rome: Donzelli editore, 2018), 6.

[12] Simona Ironico, "Il punto di vista degli addetti ai lavori," in *Il Made in Italy*, ed. Bucci, Codeluppi, and Ferraresi (Rome: Carocci editore, 2011), 89.

[13] Ironico, 89.

habitus rather than a mere national label.[14] These testimonies underscore how Made in Italy functions not simply as an indicator of geographic origin but as a dense symbolic marker that aggregates craftsmanship, cultural memory, and forward-looking design into a promise of value for producers and consumers alike.

Riccardo Illy's concept of Incanto translates this cultural imaginary into contemporary corporate philosophy. In *The Art of Excellent Products*, Illy argues that successful Italian firms produce an "augmented quality" grounded in surprise and sustained by four interdependent elements: perceived perfection, a distinctive supply chain, superior materials, and social, environmental, and economic sustainability.[15] Incanto thus connects aesthetic distinction and consumer desire to territorial responsibility, presenting excellence not simply as a product attribute but as a relationship among firms, communities, and places.

The 100% Made in Italy certification similarly seeks to give institutional form to claims about provenance, craftsmanship, and quality, although it should remain distinct from the broader legal framework established by Art. 16. Read alongside Incanto, certification becomes more than protection against counterfeiting: it attempts to stabilize a particular account of Italian value by connecting territorial production with the cultural promise of il bello e il benfatto. The concept of certification, thus, deserves critical examination precisely because this guarantee of legitimacy presents economic, aesthetic, and ethical values as mutually reinforcing, so that the label's promise that a product is authentically made in Italy, crafted with care, and rooted in a specific place also certifies its beauty and moral worth. Its value becomes evidence of its integrity, and its integrity justifies its price.

This understanding of Made in Italy as an expression of beauty, quality, and ethical value has been critically reassessed by scholars in Italian Studies, cultural studies, fashion studies, and political economy. The scholarship shows that the connection between aesthetic excellence and ethical value is neither natural nor inherent but produced through specific cultural, economic, and politically constructed narratives. It also draws attention to what those narratives can obscure, including the conditions of labor and production, questions of gender and race, colonial histories, and the role of global capital. The association of beauty and craftsmanship with ethical value, therefore, must be examined in relation to the social, material, and transnational conditions through which products, identities, and claims of Italianness are produced.

Perrino and Kohler's[16] analysis of corporate narratives illustrates this tension particularly well. It shows that references to beauty, quality, and cultural inheritance can transform historically-produced forms of commercial and symbolic value into what appears to be an innate Italian disposition. In their discussion of the fashion marketing executive Moreno, for example, a "DNA di cultura rinascimentale" (DNA of the cultural Renaissance) is invoked to explain the *gusto del bello* (taste of beauty), the capacity to *vivere bene* (live well or to live a good life), and the ability to produce appealing objects. Such language helps explain the emotional and commercial power of these narratives, but it also raises questions about how Italianness is defined and who is included within it. References to a shared Italian "DNA" can make a particular version of national identity appear natural and culturally homogeneous. As Perrino and Kohler caution, this rhetoric reinforces

[14] Mauro Ferraresi, Ariela Mortara, and Sabrina Pomodoro, "Il punto di vista dei consumatori," in *Il Made in Italy*, ed. Bucci, Codeluppi, and Ferraresi (Rome: Carocci editore, 2011), 126.
[15] Illy, *The Art of Excellent Products*, 163–66.
[16] Sabrina Perrino and Gregory Koehler, "Chronotopic identities: Narrating Made in Italy across spatiotemporal scales," *Language & Communication* 70 (2020): 98.

circulating ideologies of Made in Italy and invokes a potentially exclusionary conception of Italianness rooted in the idea of shared biological inheritance.[17]

Other contributions to this critical conversation shift attention from inherited notions of national identity to plurality and transnational reconfiguration of Italian fashion. Carini and Mazzucotelli Salice's study of Afro-Italian fashion demonstrates how Afro-descendant creatives actively reshape the cultural and economic meanings of Italian fashion.[18] Their work challenges a conception of Italianness rooted exclusively in an artistic past and instead points to a more plural understanding of who produces and defines Italian cultural identity. Segre Reinach similarly demonstrates that Italian fashion can no longer be understood through a straightforward equation among national ownership, domestic production, creative identity, and brand value.[19] The acquisition of Italian brands by foreign groups, such as Loro Piana by LVMH, may be viewed either as a loss of Italian influence or as an infusion of capital that enables Italian expertise and production to operate more effectively on a global scale.[20] Italian fashion increasingly emerges through experimentation, collaboration, and transnational creativity rather than through a simple identification with territorially bound production.[21,]

These perspectives establish Made in Italy not as a fixed national essence but as a contested framework through which law, production, heritage, identity, and consumer desire are continually negotiated. Its pedagogical value lies precisely in these tensions. Examining particular firms, products, and supply chains enables students to assess how claims of beauty, quality, sustainability, and Italianness are constructed, as well as whose labor and identities those claims include or obscure. The case-based framework developed in the next section translates this critical inquiry into language-rich activities that connect Italian cultural analysis with NACE-aligned professional competencies.

Case-based Pedagogy and Career Readiness

Historically, this case method emerged in late nineteenth-century legal education, where studying past judicial decisions became the primary vehicle for teaching doctrinal reasoning and professional judgment. As Esteban and Cañado note in their study of Business English, business schools subsequently adapted the method in the 1920s to analyze complex managerial problems. It has since spread to medicine, social work, teacher education, and a range of professional fields precisely because it allows students to rehearse real-world decision-making in a controlled environment.[22] In this broader tradition, the Made in Italy cases invite learners to enter disciplinary

[17] Perrino and Koehler, 104.

[18] Ludovica Carini and Silvia Mazzucotelli Salice, "Made in Italy? Images and Narratives of Afro-Italian Fashion," in Nadzeya Sabatini et al., eds., *Fashion Communication in the Digital Age Proceedings of the FACTUM 23 Conference, Pisa, Italy, 2023* (Cham: Springer, 2023), 113–23.

[19] Simona Segre Reinach, "The meaning of 'Made in Italy' in fashion," *Craft + Design Enquiry*, issue 7 (2015): 135-50. See also Segre Reinach, "Italian Fashion: The Metamorphosis of a Cultural Industry," in *Made in Italy: Rethinking a Century of Italian Design*, ed. Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallen (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 239-54.

[20] Segre Reinach, "The meaning of 'Made in Italy' in fashion," 145.

[21] Segre Reinach, "The meaning of 'Made in Italy' in fashion," 147. For additional resources that challenge the concept of Made in Italy from economic, ethical, and ecocritical perspectives, see Tu Lan and Lin Zhang, "Made in Italy by Chinese: fashionability and transnational Chinese entrepreneurs," *Chinese Journal of Communication* 18, no. 3 (2015): 260-78.

[22] Ana Almagro Esteban and María Luisa Pérez Cañado, "Making the Case Method Work in Teaching Business English: A Case Study," *English for Specific Purposes* 23 (2004): 139.

communities of legal, managerial, and cultural practice through guided analysis, discussion, and decision-making.

Case-based pedagogy offers a coherent bridge between the sociocultural construct of Made in Italy and students' lived classroom experiences and career preparation, functioning as a specific realization of task-based learning (TBL). Task-based learning has emerged as a pivotal approach in language pedagogy, particularly well-suited to the nuanced, context-dependent nature of lexical and pragmatic meaning in language acquisition; it foregrounds communicative tasks as the core of curricular planning, teaching, and assessment. With an English as a foreign-language classroom, for instance, Christine Roell explicitly characterizes such case studies as a form of task-based learning, arguing that they promote a communicative approach by having students complete complex collaborative tasks rather than making controlled practice of specific forms the central focus of instruction.[23] Beyond functioning as task-based activities, case studies are valuable because they position students as analysts rather than passive readers. Gonglewski and Helm argue that effective case pedagogy encourages learners to interpret evidence, evaluate alternatives, and justify decisions rather than merely reproduce information. This cognitive orientation is particularly relevant where disciplinary content provides the meaningful context through which language is acquired. As one participant in their study observed, "being able to get the mind engaged in substance and not structure is really a critical pathway to fluency."[24]

In this framework, a Made in Italy narrative supplies the socio-economic and cultural content, while case-based work provides the procedural means through which learners enact that content in language, decision-making, and professional practice. This evokes Rod Ellis's definition of tasks as meaning-focused activities that are "input-providing" or "out-prompting," engaging the four skills in an integrative way.[25]

Tasks are conceived as goal-oriented activities that require learners to mobilize their existing linguistic resources to solve problems, make decisions, or produce concrete products, with success measured by the achievement of the communicative objective, where language can be either unfocused (general language use) or focused (highlighting specific linguistic features).[26]

In the Made in Italy curriculum, TBL can be operationalized through case-based designs that present rich narratives of real or plausible situations involving identifiable protagonists, incomplete information, and problems requiring interpretation and action. Drawing on Fortis's four As of Made in Italy (abbigliamento, agroalimentare, arredo, automazione), such cases might center on scenarios such as an Italian fashion brand navigating sustainability pressures, a family-run SME balancing heritage with innovation, or an Italian firm's internationalization strategy across sectoral specializations. These scenarios engage students in professionally credible tasks such as analyzing market entry strategies, preparing bilingual pitches for Made in Italy brands, or negotiating contracts for celebrity sponsorships. As Esteban and Cañado argue, integrating task-based approaches with business cases enhances pragmatic competence and real-world application.[27] Learners thus mobilize grammatical, lexical, and pragmatic knowledge to resolve communicative challenges, reinforcing linguistic accuracy while fostering communicative competence and intercultural awareness.

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[23] Christine Roell, "Using a Case Study in the EFL Classroom," *English Teaching Forum* 57, no. 4 (2019): 24.
[24] Margaret Gonglewski and Anna Helm, "An Examination of Business Case Methodology: Pedagogical Synergies from Two Disciplines," *Global Business Languages* 15, article 3 (2010): 29.
[25] Rod Ellis, "Task-based language teaching: sorting out the misunderstandings," *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 19, no. 3 (2009): 224.
[26] Ellis, "Position paper: Moving task-based language teaching forward," *Language Teaching* 50, no. 4 (2017): 510.
[27] Esteban and Cañado, 155.

Different case types allow the program to scaffold complexity while retaining a task-based orientation. Building on some distinctions summarized in Columbia's Case Method guidance,[28] directed cases offer a clearly bounded scenario and a set of focused guiding questions that help students consolidate core concepts and language by targeting comprehension, conceptual understanding, and structured explanation. Dilemma or decision cases present individuals, firms, or communities facing a consequential choice without a predetermined "right answer," honing problem-solving and decision-making skills. In Made in Italy, directed cases might be used early in the sequence to practice reading sectoral texts and mapping supply chains, while dilemma cases later invite students to take on roles, such as export managers or cultural mediators, and to argue for strategies regarding market entry or branding.

While case-based pedagogy excels in fostering real-world skills, it presents challenges such as student inexperience with the method and demanding instructor preparation time. These can be mitigated through initial directed cases to build familiarity and modular designs to streamline prep, preserving the method's strengths in task-based language learning. Faculty interviewed by Gonglewski and Helm consistently emphasize that successful case instruction depends on careful pedagogical design. Rather than simply assigning a case for discussion, instructors benefit from developing a "skeleton framework" that helps students identify the central problem and extract the "gems" of knowledge embedded within the narrative.[29]

Sequencing the case method immediately within the Made in Italy narrative makes pedagogy the hinge that links abstract sociocultural analysis to concrete classroom practice and career readiness. Case-based tasks require learners to "think in professional ways"—to work with ambiguity and apply disciplinary knowledge to real situations while honing their Italian language skills. This positioning underscores for students that language study is not ancillary but central to their ability to participate in global Italian industries, since success in tasks and cases depends on the same communicative, analytical, and interpersonal competencies that employers value.

With a focus on Made in Italy, case-based pedagogy offers a concrete approach, operationalizing global skills frameworks such as the World Economic Forum's Top 10 Skills,[30] NACE's Career Readiness Competencies,[31] and ACTFL's World-Readiness Standards (the five Cs).[32] Empirical studies on case-based learning, together with these standards and current workforce reports, underscore that case studies uniquely bridge descriptive cultural knowledge and applied decision-making by asking students to weigh evidence, consider stakeholders, and justify courses of action in the target language. In this sense, the sociocultural construct of Made in Italy supplies the disciplinary and cultural content, while case-based activities define how students rehearse globally recognized, transferable skills in a linguistically and culturally specific environment.

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[28] "Case Method Teaching and Learning," Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning, Columbia University, 2019, https://ctl.columbia.edu/resources-and-technology/resources/case-method/.

[29] Gonglewski and Helm, 27.

[30] Victoria Masterson, "Future of Jobs 2023: These are the most in-demand skills now – and beyond," World Economic Forum, November 24, 2025, https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/05/future-of-jobs-2023-skills/.

[31] "Career Readiness Resources," NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers), https://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/.

[32] The National Standards Collaborative Board, *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, 4th ed. (Alexandria, VA: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2015).

The World Economic Forum highlights analytical thinking, creative thinking, complex problem-solving, resilience, flexibility, and technological literacy among the most in-demand skills for the future of work. Students can directly engage these when they compare business models of Italian fashion and design houses, evaluate sustainability strategies in food and textile districts, or design value propositions for niche Italian brands, moving from cultural description ("what Made in Italy is") to consequential choices about strategy and positioning. NACE's critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and leadership competencies are similarly activated as learners synthesize sources "case by case," craft evidence-based recommendations, and pitch their analyses orally and in writing to different audiences. At the same time, ACTFL's Communication, Cultures, and Connections standards are fulfilled as students negotiate meaning and grapple with regional identities, products, practices, and perspectives (the 3 Ps) that shape the Made in Italy ecosystem; the nature of the case study automatically activates Connections.

Framing the curriculum in this way clarifies for students and stakeholders that each Made in Italy case is not an isolated teaching idea, but an instantiation of broader skills and proficiency pathways. Case-based activities and units provide students with a clearly articulated route from classroom narratives about Made in Italy to participation in complex global dialogues, as they analyze real Italian firms and sectors through multilingual, interdisciplinary projects that demand analytical and creative thinking, as well as resilience, flexibility, and agility. Through sustained engagement with authentic materials, digital tools, and collaborative simulations, learners develop motivation and self-awareness, curiosity and lifelong learning, and technological literacy. At the same time, close readings of branding strategies and supply chains reinforce dependability, attention to detail, and rigorous quality control as hallmarks of Made in Italy.

Although Made in Italy is a recurring theme in Italian business language textbooks, its pedagogical use has typically been limited to cultural capsules, thematic readings, or individual chapters introducing iconic products, regions, or industries.[33] Among Italian-for-business manuals, one notable exception is Giuseppe Tassone's *Un buon affare,* which concludes with a web-based research project centered on the Italian eyewear company Luxottica, in which students investigate the company's history, objectives, product portfolio, and marketing strategies through guided online research.[34] While this project moves beyond traditional content presentation by engaging students in authentic inquiry, it functions primarily as a culminating research activity rather than as a sustained case-study methodology. The present framework extends this approach by positioning case studies as the central pedagogical structure[35] through which students repeatedly analyze authentic business and cultural scenarios, engage in collaborative decision-making, and develop transferable linguistic and professional competencies across multiple sectors of the contemporary Made in Italy landscape.

This discussion underscores that integrating case-based pedagogy into the Made in Italy curriculum does more than add variety to classroom practice; it repositions Italian language study as a high-impact site for developing the same analytical and decision-making capacities that

[33] For examples of publications that extend beyond the core content of a conventionally conceived business language textbook by integrating Made in Italy to foster language proficiency and cultural understanding, we refer readers to Anna Costantino and Antonella Rivieccio, *Obiettivo Professione: Corso di italiano per scopi professionali* (Roma: Bonacci Editore, 2011), and Giovanna Pelizza and Marco Mezzadri, *Un vero affare* (Roma: Bonacci Editore, 2015).
[34] Giuseppe Tassone, *Un buon affare: Italian for Business* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2016).
[35] In the field of business languages education, Sacco and Senne identify case study books for English and French as a second language, with French cases focused on companies in both France and Quebec. See Steven J. Sacco and Dakota E. Senne, "The Global Case Studies Textbook Project: Faculty-Student Research Collaboration in the Business French Classroom," *Global Business Languages* 18, article 9 (2013): 108.

structure professional training in other fields. In the United States, over 350,000 students graduate each year with business degrees[36] and are systematically trained through the case method to cultivate critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective decision-making, whereas language majors rarely access comparable experiential rigor. Bringing case-based pedagogy into Italian courses directly addresses this disparity: students rehearse the same complex reasoning processes as their peers in business schools, but do so while negotiating meaning, interpreting evidence, and justifying decisions in Italian. In this way, case work becomes the hinge that joins linguistic proficiency, intercultural analysis, and career readiness, demonstrating to students and stakeholders that Italian for International Business and Made in Italy are not ancillary enrichment options but core venues for building globally transferable competencies. The following section turns to concrete curricular designs and sample case units to illustrate how this integrated model can be implemented at different proficiency levels and institutional contexts.

Case Method in Language and Cultural Studies

The case study emerges as a flexible, praxis-oriented methodology ideally suited to interrogating transnational phenomena such as Made in Italy from multiple disciplinary vantage points. Case studies, as mentioned earlier, are generally categorized into two types: directed and dilemma/decision-based. Directed case studies present a scenario or company followed by a series of direct questions in which learners are encouraged to apply the information learned from the course to respond. For example, a directed case-study activity well-suited to students of Italian language, culture, and business could center on the international expansion strategy of a Made in Italy firm, such as a mid-sized food, fashion, or design company. In groups, students receive a dossier in Italian containing a short company profile, excerpts from its mission statement and marketing materials, a simplified balance-sheet snapshot, and press articles about a prospective new foreign market; the instructor scaffolds comprehension with pre-taught lexical sets (e.g., *internazionalizzazione* [internationalization], *canali di distribuzione* [channels of distribution], *posizionamento del marchio* [brand positioning]) and targeted reading tasks. During the core case activity, each group adopts the role of a consulting team preparing recommendations, entirely in Italian, on whether and how the firm should enter the target market, addressing brand positioning, partners, and risks, and justifying their proposals with explicit references to both quantitative data and cultural factors tied to Made in Italy (heritage, quality, territorial branding). The activity culminates in short, formal presentations and a Q&A session in Italian, where classmates and the instructor pose questions from the perspective of the firm's leadership. Assessment focuses on clarity and persuasiveness of argumentation, accuracy and appropriateness of language use, and the extent to which learners integrate cultural and business insights. This case can be embedded in a mini-unit: preparatory lessons introduce key business Italian structures and sector-specific vocabulary, the case occupies one or two class meetings, and a reflective follow-up asks students, again in Italian, to connect what they learned about Made in Italy branding and international business to their own emerging professional identities. Within this didactic unit, the learning objectives coalesce around a robust understanding of the agency's key concepts and principles, as well as the foundational features of Made in Italy more broadly conceived.

[36] Enza Antenos, "Language, Business & Culture: Innovative Directions in Foreign Language Curricula," in *The Importance of Learning a Second Language: Essays on Re-envisioning Foreign Language Education*, ed. K. Stein-Smith (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press, 2023), 1766.

In dilemma- or decision-making case studies, both the configuration of the task and the corresponding learning outcomes are recalibrated. Students are presented with an institution or community confronting a concrete problem that demands resolution, and they are charged with reconstructing the relevant historical context and marshaling pertinent factual evidence in order to articulate and defend a proposed course of action. In this format, the learning objectives privilege the development of problem-solving capacity, effective collaboration in group settings, and clear, decisive leadership in decision-making processes.

A compelling dilemma/decision-based case study for Italian language, culture, and business students could center on whether a mid-sized Made in Italy fashion firm should relocate part of its production outside Italy to remain competitive while preserving its brand authenticity. In preparation, students receive a dossier in Italian with a brief company history emphasizing artisanal roots and territorial identity; extracts from the company's mission; sales data showing rising costs and shrinking margins; a market report on competitors who have offshored; and short media pieces on debates around delocalization and the protection of Made in Italy. In class, groups are told that the firm's board is split: some executives advocate opening a production line in Eastern Europe, others insist on keeping all manufacturing in Italy, even at the cost of higher prices and slower growth. Each group must reconstruct the historical and cultural significance of Made in Italy for this specific brand, identify the stakeholders (workers, local community, international consumers, and investors), and then develop two or three concrete strategic options (e.g., full offshoring, partial outsourcing with strict quality controls, investment in automation in Italy, or a certified "premium-only" Italian line).

Working in Italian, students analyze the trade-offs, cost structure, employment, brand equity, legal constraints on labeling, and ethical implications, using targeted prompts from the instructor, for example: "Quali rischi corre il marchio se sposta la produzione? Come reagiranno i consumatori?" (What risks does the brand face if it relocates production? How will consumers react?) Each group must reach a collective decision and prepare a short written report plus an oral presentation to the "board of directors" (the class), clearly justifying its recommended course of action and responding to questions from peers. The instructor evaluates not only linguistic accuracy and the use of specialized business vocabulary, but also the quality of problem framing, the coherence of argumentation, and evidence of collaborative decision-making. A reflective follow-up assignment asks students to comment in Italian on how the case reshaped their understanding of Made in Italy as a sociocultural construct and of the leadership skills required in contemporary Italian and international business contexts.

In the models presented, Made in Italy serves not only as a cultural brand but as a laboratory where students enact, contest, and reimagine both Italianness and transnationalism through case studies. Framing the curriculum in this way positions Italianness as a sociocultural construct circulating through supply chains and branding narratives, rather than as a static national essence. When students analyze and design cases about brands operating between Italy and global markets, they use Italian to navigate ethical dilemmas, stakeholder negotiations, and cross-cultural communication, making visible how Italian functions as a language of professional practice, not only aesthetic appreciation.

Given the breadth and flexibility of case studies, it is possible, and indeed pedagogically sound, to embed case-based work across all instructional levels, from elementary through advanced courses, as well as in language courses for specific purposes. From mini-cases in early courses to capstone projects in advanced classes, Made in Italy serves as a coherent curricular thread linking language development, cultural analysis, and career readiness. Although such

activities may at times present greater challenges at the high school level, case studies can and should be incorporated into the AP curriculum. As high school colleagues regularly remind us, AP Italian effectively begins on the first day of Italian 1, and curricular planning ought to reflect this continuity.

At the elementary level, Made in Italy is introduced through highly scaffolded, input-rich mini-cases that correspond to Ellis's view of tasks as meaning-focused input activities, rather than decontextualized grammar drills. Students can engage with factual and statistical information drawn from Italian and Made in Italy companies through infographics, promotional blurbs, short descriptive texts, or micro-dossiers on food, tourism, or iconic products. These materials require learners to extract who does what, where, and why, so that attention is primarily on comprehending messages and completing a communicative goal, with form addressed through pre-task support and focused feedback. This approach scaffolds both the methodological underpinnings of case studies and the amount of content that learners can reasonably process, aligning with ACTFL standards.

In this phase, the task cycle remains deliberately simple, yet still follows Ellis's pre-task, during-task, and post-task stages. Pre-task work introduces key vocabulary and formulaic expressions necessary for narrating and describing (for example, basic temporal markers, locative phrases, and sector-specific vocabulary). The main task asks students to interpret a small set of texts or visuals, make a low-stakes decision such as choosing a product to feature or an itinerary to recommend, and then briefly justify that choice orally or in writing to a peer audience. The post-task stage provides space for focused reflection and selective attention to form, such as recasting or highlighting useful language, without undermining the fundamentally communicative, outcome-oriented nature of the mini-case.

Intermediate courses can extend these practices through slightly longer passages and more sophisticated vocabulary. Made in Italy cases become structured analytic tasks that follow a full task-based learning cycle: a pre-task phase that raises consciousness, a central task cycle where students work with and use the target language, and a post-task phase focused on language and reflection. Dossiers on firms or districts in fashion, agri-food, design, or mechanical sectors are selected so that learners must mobilize existing resources to reconstruct company histories, map market positions, and identify challenges such as internationalization or sustainability with a communicative outcome and an agreed recommendation or brief report serving as the organizing goal rather than discrete grammar points.

In the pre-task phase, the instructor introduces the situation and task, activates topic-related words and phrases, and uses visuals such as logos, product images, or simple graphs to orient students to the Made in Italy context while maintaining an emphasis on meaning and upcoming decisions. During the task cycle, learners work in pairs or small groups to analyze the dossier, fill information gaps, and negotiate bounded recommendations in Italian, such as choosing a target market, prioritizing among strategic options, or outlining a basic sustainability plan, followed by planning and delivering a concise oral or written report. The post-task stage then shifts attention to language focus and evaluation: the class compares reports, the instructor helps select and practice keywords, phrases, and discourse moves that emerged in the task, and students briefly reflect on how the case deepened their understanding of Made in Italy sectors and of the communicative skills needed to participate in those professional worlds.

In advanced-level or Business Italian courses, as well as dedicated Made in Italy courses, case studies become increasingly productive. Students can not only interpret diverse types of cases through reading comprehension, project-based learning, and research activities, but also begin to

construct their own. Such student-generated cases might include regional historical profiles, tourist-oriented surveys of specific cities, neighborhoods, *piazze*, or *sagre*, as well as introductory dilemma-based cases addressing complex issues such as the environment, urban mobility, or social questions on migration.

Working with case studies can be conceived as complex, convergent tasks in Ellis's sense[37]: meaning-focused activities that require learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoires to achieve outcomes such as viable business proposals or persuasive narratives of corporate strategy. Rather than merely consuming cases, students become designers of professional artifacts that approximate real-world genres, using Italian as the medium through which problems are framed, options evaluated, and decisions justified for specific audiences. Here, learners design case studies for specific Made in Italy products and analyze the evolution of their marketing strategies by, for instance, examining major brands in the food or fashion sectors and completing a formal *profilo aziendale* (company profile). Many of these activities can be adapted for use in an AP Italian high school context, especially now that the College Board has recently announced a revision to the examination. As the AP Central website states, the language examination will include a course project consisting of a three-minute cultural presentation focusing on a specific theme and/or prompt. The case study curriculum could easily be adopted to offer high school students the appropriate practice and background information to prepare for this assessment type on the examination.[38]

Building on earlier experiences with descriptive and analytic cases, learners now select companies or phenomena themselves, assemble multi-document dossiers, and plan outputs such as two-sided trade-show case sheets or full company profiles that narrate a challenge and its solution for both expert and non-expert stakeholders. Within the TBL framework, the pre-task phase involves analysis and topic selection, during which students negotiate case focus, identify information gaps, and set outcome criteria. The main task cycle is devoted to researching in Italian, interpreting complex financial and discursive data, and collaboratively designing strategic responses. The teacher's role is to monitor, support planning, and delay intensive form-focused intervention until after the outcome is achieved.

In the post-task phase, attention shifts to language focus and metacognitive reflection, with selected excerpts from students' written and oral products becoming the basis for examining key lexical, grammatical, and discourse features characteristic of business Italian, followed by targeted practice and revision. Short reflective commentaries ask learners to articulate how their case design and presentation engaged competencies such as critical thinking, teamwork, leadership, and ethical reasoning, making explicit the connection between advanced Italian proficiency, Made in Italy as a transnational economic-cultural construct, and widely recognized career-readiness frameworks.

While the examples discussed most readily align with an Italian for International Business course or an advanced Made in Italy course, the broader objective is to reorient the pedagogical paradigm of Italian Studies. Elements of case study work can be meaningfully introduced much earlier in the sequence, creating a coherent developmental arc that spans from elementary infographics to advanced and special-purpose courses.

[37] Rod Ellis, "Task-based language teaching: sorting out the misunderstandings."

[38] See the AP World Language and Culture Courses Framework and Exam Overview, November 25, 2025, https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-world-languages-revisions.

Beyond the Methodology: Putting the Case Study into Practice

This section turns to a concrete illustration of task-based learning and case-study pedagogy in the Italian curriculum. Drawing on the preceding theoretical discussion, the aim is to demonstrate how case studies can be effectively implemented at multiple proficiency levels and across distinct course types. Building on the preceding discussion of Made in Italy as an evolving ecosystem of economic, creative, and cultural sectors, the following examples demonstrate how case studies can provide authentic contexts for developing linguistic proficiency, professional literacy, and career-readiness competencies across different course levels and content areas. Case studies function not simply as texts for comprehension, but as vehicles through which students analyze professional challenges, interpret authentic discourse, and engage in meaningful communication. The examples presented below illustrate three complementary applications of case-based learning: analyzing an existing business case, creating student-generated cases, and using instructor-generated case studies. Through exploring these three examples, we argue that case-study pedagogy functions as a powerful vehicle for cultivating the career-readiness competencies articulated by NACE, even when the thematic focus is not explicitly business-oriented.

Corporate Case Studies: The Case of Piaggio



1 2

Fig. 1. Piaggio/LinkedIn case study. LinkedIn Talent Solutions and Marina Maggi. Case Study Piaggio. Accessed January 14, 2025. https://business.linkedin.com/content/dam/business/talent-solutions/regional/it-it/site/pdf/cs/linkedin-case-study-piaggio-it-it.pdf.

Case-study methodology need not begin at the advanced level; it can be introduced in Intermediate I or II. The intermediate project, "Un prodotto Made in Italy nel mondo: mini-caso

di studio" (A Made in Italy Product in the World: A Mini-Case Study), is conceived as a shorter, linguistically accessible assignment that prepares students for more demanding work in advanced courses. Designed for B1–B2 learners in a general language class or bridge course, it unfolds over two to three weeks and combines in-class tasks with homework.

Before moving to the creative activity, students work with the Piaggio case study (fig. 1). The text is particularly suitable at this level because it is written largely in the present tense, with few and relatively recognizable verbs in the *passato prossimo* (present perfect); its clear organization, use of English cognates, and short paragraphs further support comprehension, and its visual layout often approximates an infographic. At the same time, the Piaggio–LinkedIn case foregrounds a historic Made in Italy brand navigating contemporary challenges of global recruitment and digital networking, allowing B1–B2 learners to see how a firm constructs its identity—*tradizione, qualità, innovazione* (tradition, quality, innovation)—while articulating concrete problems and solutions in human resources and international expansion.

Students are invited to read the case as a structured narrative in which the title and section headings guide interpretation. The sequence begins with a brief pair activity focused on the title—*Case Study Piaggio – Talent Solutions LinkedIn*—through which learners hypothesize, in Italian, the likely actors, the relationship between them, and the central problem, thereby recognizing that the title anticipates the problem–solution trajectory. The instructor then directs attention to headings such as *Highlights, Company Profile, Challenge, Risparmio ed efficienza, Recruitment più veloce, Aspettative superate* (Savings and Efficiency, Faster Recruitment, Exceeded Expectations): in small groups, students skim the case study, match each heading to its corresponding paragraph, and produce a one-sentence Italian summary of the function of each section, linking layout to argumentative moves.

Finally, groups create a visual "map" of the case by placing the title at the center and arranging the headings around it, adding two or three keywords under each (for example, *tradizione, innovazione*; *talenti, canali tradizionali*; *costi, 80% risparmio*; *bacino illimitato, risposta 55–60%*; *isseki nicho, aspettative* [tradition, innovation; talent, traditional channels; costs, 80% savings; unlimited pool, 55-60% response rate; 'two birds with one stone', expectations]). Comparing maps, the class discusses which sections are most central and how the headings together produce a coherent narrative that explains the title. Through this sequence—predicting from the title, matching and summarizing headings, and mapping the structure—students learn to recognize the macro-organization of the case-study genre and mobilize it as a scaffold for intermediate-level comprehension and production.

Building on this interpretive work, the subsequent communicative phase asks students to transfer their understanding of the Piaggio case's structure and discourse into their own production. Having practiced reading the text through its title, headings, and keywords, learners now draw on the same macro-organization—*profilo, sfida, soluzione* (profile, challenges, solutions)—to design a mini case of their own. Working in pairs or small groups, they select a single Italian product, rather than an entire company, that is sold abroad and construct a short case study showing how this product embodies Made in Italy and is positioned for international consumers. The overarching goals are to have students use intermediate-level Italian to describe and compare Italian products, connect basic economic and cultural information (sector, target market, branding) to the idea of Made in Italy, and produce a structured case with simple data and narrative that culminates in a concise group presentation.

The unit opens with a pre-task phase that activates students' background knowledge and introduces the case genre in a simplified form. In class, the instructor first prompts a brief

discussion in Italian and English—"Che cosa significa per voi 'Made in Italy'? Quali prodotti vi vengono in mente?" (What does 'Made in Italy' mean to you? What products do you think of?)—while showing images of varied Italian products to elicit basic descriptions. Learners then read a short sample mini case (about 1–1.5 pages in simplified Italian) created by the instructor on a familiar product, such as a Moka coffee pot or a Ferrero chocolate. This model text is organized into sections with clear headings (*Prodotto*, *Storia breve*, *Identità Made in Italy*, *Mercato estero*, *Sfida principale* [Product, Brief History, Made in Italy Identity, Foreign Market, Main Challenge]), and students work through true/false items, matching headings to paragraphs, and identifying key data, such as the year of creation, countries, and target consumers, as well as noting the vocabulary for descriptions and opinions. A focused language component follows: the instructor highlights the present tense for description, passato prossimo for simple history, connectors like *prima*, *poi*, *inoltre*, *tuttavia* (first, then, moreover, nevertheless), and sector-related lexis such as *materiale, colore, prezzo approssimativo, mercato interno/estero, clienti, negozio online* (material, color, estimated price, domestic/foreign market, clients, online store), and evaluative adjectives such as *elegante, pratico, tradizionale, moderno,* and *di lusso* (elegant, practical, traditional, modern, luxurious). This phase ensures that learners have a clear sense of what a mini case looks like and possess the grammatical and lexical tools necessary to attempt one of their own.

The task-planning phase then invites groups to choose their product and frame the case through guided questions. Each group selects one Italian product—for example, a pasta shape or sauce, a designer chair, a coffee maker, a sneaker model, a cosmetic product, a bicycle, or a chocolate brand—that is sold abroad or clearly marketed to international consumers. They fill out a planning sheet in Italian that anchors the project and keeps complexity in check, responding to prompts such as: "Come si chiama il prodotto? Qual è l'azienda?" (What is the product? What is the company?); "A che settore appartiene (e.g. moda, agroalimentare, design, ecc.)?" (To which sector does it belong [e.g. fashion, food, design, etc.]?); "Chi sono i clienti principali? In quali paesi si vende?" (Who are the target clients? In what countries is it sold?); "Quali caratteristiche sono tipicamente 'italiane'?" (Which characteristics are typically "Italian"?); and "Quale sfida o problema possiamo identificare (e.g., concorrenza, prezzo alto, sostenibilità, visibilità online)?" (Which challenge or problem can we identify [e.g. competition, steep price, sustainability, online visibility]?) These questions give the mini case a clear orientation—product, context, problem, and potential response—while avoiding the more demanding strategic analysis expected at the advanced level.

During the core task phase, students engage in guided research and collaborative writing. The instructor curates or vets one or two short sources per group: a product page from the company's website (ideally in Italian), a brief article, review, or advertisement (in Italian or English), and optionally a short video clip such as a commercial or product review. Learners use a worksheet in Italian to structure their reading and viewing: they are asked, for example, to "individuare almeno 5 informazioni importanti sul prodotto (materiale, design, prezzo indicativo, anno di lancio, designer), trovare 3 parole o espressioni che collegano il prodotto al "Made in Italy" (qualità, artigianale, tradizione, ecc.) (identify at least 5 important things about the product [material, design, approximate price, year released, designer], find 3 words or expressions that connect the product to "Made in Italy" [quality, craftsmanship, tradition, etc.])," and "annotare 2 dati sul mercato estero (paesi principali, canale di vendita, tipo di cliente)" (note 2 foreign market data points [main countries, sales channel, type of customer]). Based on these notes, each group produces a written mini case of about 600-800 words, organized into four short sections.

The first section, “Prodotto e azienda” (Product and Company), offers a clear description of the product—what it is, what it is used for, and for whom—along with essential information about the company (name, sector, and location in Italy). The second, “Storia breve e identità Made in Italy” (Brief History and “Made in Italy” Identity), requires five to six sentences in passato prossimo narrating when and how the product was created, followed by a brief paragraph explaining why it can be considered “Made in Italy,” referencing design, materials, tradition, or imagery. The third section, “Presenza sul mercato estero” (Presence in the Foreign Market), outlines main export countries, sales channels (negozi and e-commerce), and customer profiles, and asks students to construct a simple graph or table—such as an “Italia vs Estero” (Italy vs. International) comparison with approximate percentages or categories—to visualize basic data. The final section, “Piccola sfida e proposta” (Small Challenge and Proposal), calls for a short description of one manageable challenge (competition, price, sustainability, and social-media visibility) and three to four sentences with a modest proposal for improvement, using modals and conditional language like “potrebbe” (could), “sarebbe utile” (would be useful), and “si potrebbe” (one could). The assessment emphasis remains on clarity, organization, and appropriate use of intermediate Italian, not on sophisticated business analysis.

In the post-task phase, the project culminates in group presentations and individual reflection. Each group prepares one or two slides or a small poster featuring an image of the product, three key data points (year of launch, main export countries, and price range), and three keywords linking the product to Made in Italy (such as *qualità*, *design*, *artigianalità*, *tradizione*—quality, design, craftsmanship, tradition). In a five-minute oral presentation, students describe the product, narrate its brief history and Made in Italy identity, and present the identified challenge along with their proposed solution. Classmates use a simple listening grid to note for each group “che cosa è tipicamente italiano” (what is typically Italian) and “quale sfida hanno identificato” (the challenges identified), thereby reinforcing comprehension and peer learning. As a final step, each student writes a short reflective piece of 150–200 words in Italian, responding to prompts such as “che cosa hai imparato sul Made in Italy grazie a questo mini caso di studio?” (what did you learn about Made in Italy thanks to this mini case study?), “quali espressioni nuove di italiano ti sono state più utili?” (which new Italian expressions were most useful?), and “come ti ha aiutato il lavoro di gruppo a capire meglio il prodotto e la sua strategia?” (how did the group work help you better understand the product and its strategy?).

Assessment is handled through a streamlined rubric out of 100 points. *Contenuto e organizzazione del mini caso* (Content and organization of the mini case study) (30 points) evaluates completeness of the four sections, pertinence of information, and clarity of structure; *lingua* (*accuratezza e lessico settoriale*) (language structure [accuracy and sector-specific vocabulary]) (25) focuses on intermediate-level correctness and appropriate use of sector vocabulary; *presentazione orale* (oral presentation) (20) assesses clarity, Italian usage, and the ability to explain and respond to at least one question; *elementi visivi e uso di dati* (visual elements and data use) (15) considers the meaningful integration of images and simple graphs or tables; and *creatività e riflessione* (creativity and reflection) (10) recognizes originality in the choice of product or challenge and the quality of the reflective writing. This more basic unit offers a coherent, manageable project that preserves the logic of case-study pedagogy—problem, context, evidence, proposal—while remaining firmly within the linguistic and cognitive reach of intermediate learners and sustaining the centrality of Made in Italy as both sociocultural and business-relevant construct.

Student-Generated Case Studies: Alessi within the Classroom and Beyond[39]

Building on this intermediate foundation, the curriculum in an Italian for International Business or dedicated Made in Italy course rearticulates the same case-study framework at a higher level of linguistic and analytical complexity through student-generated case studies on Alessi. By turning to Alessi, it demonstrates how the task-based, multi-level approach can be mobilized around a manufacturing firm, inviting students to trace how Made in Italy circulates through objects, supply chains, and corporate narratives as well as through artists, literary texts, and public discourse. In this way, the Alessi module extends the earlier emphasis on symbolic economies and cultural representation into the sphere of concrete goods and market positioning, showing students that the ethical-aesthetic construct of Made in Italy is legible both in cultural production and in branded commodities.

For each of the five As,[40] students engage with formal case studies published in various journals, enabling them to construct more sophisticated case studies and thereby learn to read firms and sectors through the interpretive lenses of both business analysis and cultural critique. Whether the class is taught in English or Italian, instructors can easily find well-structured case studies to utilize, adapting them to various proficiency levels and disciplinary backgrounds. Since case studies differ culturally, we encourage instructors to provide both case studies written in English and Italian, even in courses taught completely in Italian. Case studies concerning Italian products and companies are readily available from *Harvard Business Review* to *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice.* While finding published case studies in Italian may require targeted research, they are available through multiple channels, including the websites of multinational corporations, educational publishers, and business consulting organizations. These resources provide instructors with a variety of ready-made materials that can extend beyond the traditional textbook.[41]

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[39] For information relevant to Alessi for the creation of materials and discussions, see Elena Dalpiaz et al., "Succession Narratives in Family Business: The Case of Alessi," *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 38, issue 6 (2014): 1375-94; Dalpiaz et al., "Combining Logics to Transform Organizational Agency: Blending Industry and Art at Alessi." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 61, issue 3 (2016): 347-92; Youngme E. Moon et al., "Alessi: Evolution of an Italian Design Factory (A)," *Harvard Business School Case* (revised January 2004): 504-18.

[40] When teaching Made in Italy, Calabretta-Sajder always adds a 5th "A," "artiginale" (craftsmanship) to arredamento, agroalimentare, automazione, and abbigliamento.

[41] Our research has allowed us to curate a selection of publicly available resources as potential sources for case-based learning. Corporate-generated case studies can be found on the websites of the companies themselves or through their business partners, as illustrated by the Piaggio/LinkedIn case. Large multinational companies like LinkedIn, Salesforce, IBM, Microsoft, and others regularly publish customer success stories. Publisher resources should also not be overlooked. For example, Pearson Italia has professionally developed materials, comparable to Harvard Business Case Studies. Consulting agencies also produce case studies examining company strategies and brand development. While these analyses may not always be commissioned or endorsed by the companies discussed, they represent valuable resources for classroom exploration. For instance, Join Group Business Advisory has published studies on Italian brands, such as Versace and Gucci. Finally, for creating instructor-generated materials, the Master Universitario Marketing Management website lists Italian journals and web magazines that focus on business themes. See "Storie di Customer Success," Salesforce, accessed July 31, 2026, https://www.salesforce.com/it/customer-stories/; "Management & Marketing Cases," Pearson, accessed July 29, 2026, https://it.pearson.com/docenti/universita/partnership/casi-studio-he.html; "Global vs local: Il caso Versace," November 4, 2021, https://joingroup.it/global-vs-local-caso-studio-versace/; "Rivoluzione Gucci," March 25, 2021, https://joingroup.it/rivoluzione-gucci/; and "Riviste & Web Magazine," Master Universitario Marketing Management, accessed November 25, 2025. https://www.mumm.it/risorse-marketing/letture/riviste-specializzate-e-web-magazine/.

In class, this phase is operationalized as a sequence of directed tasks: students skim the structure of a published case, identify its core sections (history, problem, stakeholders, options, outcome), and annotate where and how Made in Italy is invoked—as heritage, as certification, as brand, or as moral economy. Short, guided activities ask learners to compare two cases from different sectors (for instance, *agroalimentare* [food] versus *arredamento* [furniture]), noting convergences in the language of quality and excellence, and divergences in how territorial embeddedness or sustainability are framed. This work not only demystifies the case genre but also prepares students to see Alessi as one instantiation within a broader ecosystem of Italian firms.

During the unit on arredamento/design, Alessi serves as the central focus because its product lines explicitly stage questions of form, function, and Italianness. Each didactic unit begins with targeted lexical exploration: students build a sector-specific glossary that includes terms for materials, production processes, design features, user experience, and key business concepts (e.g., *catena di fornitura*, *posizionamento di mercato*, *marchio*, and *target* [supply chain, market position, brand, target]). To consolidate this lexis, learners engage with readings, infographics, product catalogs, and short video clips (interviews, product presentations, commercials, and more), as well as with visual prompts such as iconic Alessi objects that invite description, comparison, and speculation about intended consumers.

Students then continue with a multimodal reading on the company's history that integrates infographics, timelines, and narrative prose. Product-based learning activities reinforce this vocabulary through creative tasks. Accompanying activities—true/false items, multiple-choice questions, short-answer prompts, or alternatively a partially redacted worksheet completed through close reading—are carefully scaffolded to develop interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational communication as well as cultural understanding. Working in small groups, students create memes or micro-infographics that juxtapose Alessi designs with everyday Italian cultural references, thereby rehearsing the language of description and evaluation while articulating implied narratives of Italianness. Low-stakes quizzes and peer feedback circles allow the instructor to monitor lexical uptake and to differentiate support, ensuring that students have sufficient linguistic resources before moving into more complex interpretive work on the company's history and strategy.

Learners are guided to recognize explicit meaning, manipulate a range of structures appropriate to communicative purpose and context, and establish cross-cultural connections, thereby rehearsing assessment skills that parallel the objectives of the AP Italian Language and Culture Examination and advanced university coursework. Because this unit appears early in the advanced sequence, it also serves as a strategic moment to revisit key grammatical structures, particularly the contrast between passato prossimo and *imperfetto* (imperfect tense) in narrative discourse. Focused tasks ask students to reconstruct segments of Alessi's history by choosing the appropriate tense and aspect, thereby linking grammatical form to genre conventions of corporate storytelling. Brief comparative exercises invite learners to recast historical sentences in different registers (such as corporate brochure versus critical article), reinforcing the relationship between syntax, voice, and audience.

Once students have acquired foundational knowledge of the company and its products, they extend the task by conducting independent research on Alessi's mission and vision statements, philanthropic initiatives, and current economic position, with special attention to import-export patterns and market diversification. Working in pairs or small groups, learners compile mini-dossiers that combine textual excerpts (from corporate websites, annual reports, press releases) with quantitative data (sales figures, regional distribution, sustainability metrics), and then

interpret how these elements collectively construct Alessi's place within the Made in Italy ecosystem.

This dual focus on discourse and data prepares the ground for student-generated case studies. Classroom activities include role-plays in which students assume the positions of design directors, export managers, or marketing consultants, debating strategic options such as entering a new market or repositioning a product line. These simulations foreground NACE competencies such as teamwork, problem-solving, and professional communication while keeping Italian language use at the center of decision-making.

Once students have thoroughly studied Alessi and at least one additional firm within the five As, they are asked to author their own case study as a midterm project. The assignment prompt, articulated in formal academic Italian, requires learners working in pairs to select an Italian company with a clear international orientation and to produce a written case that addresses history, mission and values, corporate social responsibility, recent financial trends, import-export dynamics, and an overall economic outlook, all framed through the lens of Made in Italy. The emphasis falls not only on accurate description but on critical analysis of how identity, production, branding, and global positioning intersect.

Process-oriented options allow instructors to tailor the workload: students may complete one section at a time, receiving targeted feedback on linguistic accuracy and analytical depth, or they may draft the entire case and then workshop specific sections in class. Pair work underscores the importance of collaboration, a skill highly valued in business contexts and explicitly highlighted in NACE frameworks. Throughout, the Alessi unit serves as a model, offering concrete examples of how ethical-aesthetic narratives, sectoral lexis, and economic data can be woven into a coherent case.

This advanced, student-generated case study asks pairs to design an original, four-page analysis of an Italian company with a clear international profile, written entirely in formal Italian and supported by up-to-date sources. Drawing on the Piaggio model, students move beyond description to critically examine the firm as a significant instance of Made in Italy in global commerce, relating its history, identity, strategies, financial data, and international positioning to broader questions of cultural identity, branding, and market dynamics.

Students receive a detailed rubric when the project is assigned, outlining four principal evaluative dimensions: "Organization and Structure," "Content," "Clarity and Coherence," and "Creativity and Originality," supplemented by additional categories such as "Linguistic Accuracy and Register," "Use of Sources and Evidence," and "Visual and Digital Design." These criteria apply to both the written case study and the oral presentation, thereby foregrounding not only the logical architecture of the project and the depth of analysis but also the quality of language, the integration of data and documentation, and the effectiveness of multimodal communication. Once they have finalized the written case study, students present it formally to the class, demonstrating advanced written and oral communicative competencies, including the ability to synthesize information, narrate complex processes, and respond to questions in real time.

The written and oral components are then uploaded to each student's ePortfolio, accompanied by a brief self-reflection in which learners assess their own performance, articulate specific strengths, and identify targeted areas for further growth, such as lexical expansion, argumentative precision, or professional demeanor. In addition, students compose a structured reflective essay on a classmate's case study, following a provided template that directs attention to both analytic rigor and collegial feedback; this document is submitted to the instructor for evaluation under rubric dimensions such as "Critical Reading," "Constructive Peer Response," and "Metacognitive

Awareness." Through this sequence, the project advances many of the competencies articulated by NACE and ACTFL, affords students a meaningful and positive learning experience, and generates tangible products that evidence their linguistic development, intercultural sophistication, and emerging professional agency.

Instructor-Generated Case Studies: "Ghali a Sanremo" as Made in Italy

The preceding section focused on student-generated case studies, and now we apply the same pedagogical principles to instructor-developed materials. The following example, inspired by the 2024 Sanremo Music Festival, demonstrates how an authentic media event can be transformed into an interdisciplinary learning experience within the broader context of Made in Italy through a directed case study. The performance by rapper Ghali[42] during the evening dedicated to covers serves as the catalyst for engaging, problem-based activities for students at different proficiency levels. In the broader Made in Italy framework,[43] the Sanremo module functions as a case in the culture and entertainment sector: it invites students to analyze how Italian identity, multilingual performance, media circulation, and audience engagement interact within one of Italy's most visible national cultural institutions, *Il festival della canzone italiana* (the annual Italian song festival).

The unit begins with a brief warm-up in which students learn high-frequency vocabulary connected to Sanremo, such as artists, musical genres, rankings, winners, juries, and voting systems, and compare the festival with talent shows or song contests they already know from their own cultural contexts. Through simple prompts and pair-work activities, they explore who participates in the festival, how the rules work, and why the event matters in Italian popular culture. To support elementary learners, the instructor provides sentence frames such as "Il Festival è simile a ___ perché…" (The Festival is similar to ___ because…) and pre-teaches key verbs like *partecipare, votare,* and *vincere* (to participate, to vote, to win), using cognate-rich explanations that leverage students' existing linguistic knowledge.

Once students are familiar with the basic context, the instructor introduces the case study that explains why Ghali's presence on the Sanremo stage attracted attention and how his medley performance prompted public discussion of Italian identity and belonging. Ghali, a second-generation artist whose life and work are territorially Made in Italy, claims his Italian identity on the Ariston stage when he declares "Sono un italiano, un italiano vero" (I'm Italian, a true Italian).[44] The information shared in the case invites learners to grapple with this tension. They ask and reflect upon who is seen, who is heard, and who is counted as part of the Made in Italy story.

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[42] Ghali, born in Milan in 1983, is of Tunisian descent. His music contains lyrics in Arabic and Italian, as evidenced by his cover performance of the "Italiano vero" medley, which includes "Bayna" (Arabic for "seeing clearly"), "Cara Italia" (his 2018 hit that broke YouTube records, with over 4.2 million views the day it dropped) and "L'italiano" (Toto Cutugno's 1983 hit).

[43] See footnote 10.

[44] Toto Cutugno's "L'italiano" has long found its place in the Italian curriculum, for both its musical qualities (melody and structure) and for its pedagogical value (clear pronunciation, high-frequency vocabulary, and cultural symbolism). Reintroducing this song to the curriculum through the Ghali case gives it renewed significance. The song, first performed on the Sanremo stage in 1983, was inspired after a performance in Toronto, Canada, where Cutugno recognized in his audience "le facce da italiano" (Italian-looking faces), underscoring a notion of national belonging validated by recognizable facial features. Four decades later, when Ghali stands on the same stage and declares "sono un italiano vero" (I am a true Italian), he confronts and reworks Cutugno's model of Italianness, by claiming full belonging. For an extensive analysis of "l'italiano vero" in the music industry, see Laura Neddu, "'Da 'L'italiano' a 'Cara Italia': vecchie e nuove rappresentazioni del Belpaese nella canzone italiana. L'Italia in tutte le salse," *Diacritica*



Fig. 2. Instructor-generated case study based on media coverage.[45]

Learners work in small groups to identify the decision points facing Ghali and other stakeholders (e.g., festival organizers, audiences, media outlets, policy makers) and to map possible consequences of different responses to the lyrics "Sono un italiano, un italiano vero," aware that it is not a neutral statement of fact. This lyric-anchored yet critical framing is the catalyst for differentiated tasks that challenge students at every level, from elementary to advanced levels, including AP. The three tasks outlined below ask students to make meaningful, consequential choices about how to represent Italian identity in Italian music, without a single predetermined "correct" answer. In doing so, they put into practice the career-readiness competencies outlined earlier: students engage in analytical and creative thinking as they weigh evidence about Italian identity and cultural representation, exercise critical thinking and communication as they synthesize sources and craft evidence-based arguments and develop teamwork and leadership through collaborative decision-making.

- Novice level: Student groups contribute to the design of a short podcast series comprising several episodes that introduce artists who, in different ways, challenge stereotypes about Italian identity. Each episode features student groups highlighting one artist and formulating a guiding question that begins from Ghali's "Sono un italiano, un italiano

10, no. 52, vol. 2 (June 3, 2024), 36-55, https://diacritica.it/letture-critiche/da-litaliano-a-cara-italia-vecchie-e-nuove-rappresentazioni-del-belpaese-nella-canzone-italiana-litalia-in-tutte-le-salse.html.

[45] The case study was created by Antenos, based on articles from Italian news sites, industry web sites, and various social media sites, including Ghali's Instagram account.

vero." They prepare a simple outline using accessible language, including a brief description, a quotation, an image, and a song title associated with the artist, noting in basic terms who their audience is and how the artist reaches that audience through music and media.

- Intermediate level: Students in intermediate language courses are tasked to create a coffee-table book to support a charity or awareness campaign. They select a small set of artists, define clear inclusion criteria, organize artist profiles, and write short argumentative texts explaining how each profile contributes to redefining prevailing ideas of Italian identity. In their texts, they link artistic choices, audiences, and media attention, encouraging students to see artists both as cultural figures and as actors in a broader creative economy.
- Advanced level: At the advanced level, students design a simulated benefit concert[46] focused on immigration and citizenship debates, using Ghali and other artists as symbolic case figures. Groups define the initiative's objectives, target audience, partners, key message, and artist line-up, and produce a written dossier along with an oral presentation that pitches the project to potential sponsors or stakeholders, mirroring a real-world professional activity. The benefit concert format serves as a realistic but manageable simulation of how cultural and business partnerships can mobilize public attention around social and policy issues, emphasizing strategic communication, audience analysis, and evidence-based messaging in Italian.

The Ghali case demonstrates how a single cultural moment can be transformed into a flexible pedagogical framework that operates across proficiency levels while maintaining rigor and authenticity, and how the culture and entertainment sector of Made in Italy can be brought into the language classroom in a structured, case-based way. The model is readily transferable: any Italian cultural event that generates public debate can be structured using the same scaffolding principles. Instructors need not invest extensive preparation time; a brief but engaging case study can be developed from accessible materials, such as news clips, social-media responses, or short articles, and then adapted through a modular design that functions as a turnkey model. What remains constant is the commitment to placing students in decision-making roles where they must weigh competing perspectives, justify their choices, and communicate their reasoning in Italian to specific audiences for specific purposes.

The case-study projects demonstrate the range and adaptability of this student-centered pedagogy. Alessi introduces students to Made in Italy through product design, corporate identity, manufacturing, and the pursuit of Incanto, while Ghali shifts attention toward media, migration, cultural hybridity, and contested forms of Italianness. The projects therefore approach Made in Italy from complementary perspectives: one examines how established narratives of excellence are produced and sustained, whereas the other asks how those narratives are challenged and reconfigured within contemporary Italy. Both require students to evaluate evidence, negotiate competing interpretations, and communicate decisions to specific audiences. These shared practices provide the foundation for the article's concluding claim that professionally oriented

[46] This task draws conceptually on the successful Pavarotti & Friends charity concerts organized by famous tenor Luciano Pavarotti from 1992–2003 in his hometown of Modena in Emilia Romagna. The annual events combined the musical excellence of Italian and international artists with humanitarian outreach. They were subsequently released as compilation CDs and DVDs.

pedagogy can expand, rather than diminish, the critical and humanistic ambitions of Italian Studies.

Conclusion

Building on this commitment to ethically framed, professionally relevant case-study work, Italian Studies can still be further refined to incorporate activities that more intentionally connect linguistic development with career-readiness competencies. We are reminded of "l'insieme dei prodotti di un complesso di settori che, nell'immaginario collettivo del mondo, sono strettamente associati all'immagine del nostro paese, consacrata e ribadita ossessivamente dai media" (the totality of products across a range of sectors that, in the global collective imagination, are closely associated with the image of our country, an image that is enshrined and obsessively reiterated by the media).[47] This citation underscores that Made in Italy is not limited to individual products but to a multisector environment that, in the global collective imagination, is repeatedly associated with Italy's national image through media discourse. By foregrounding this mediated imaginary, the quotation reinforces the article's argument that Italian for International Business and Made in Italy courses must move beyond static cultural content to engage students in critically analyzing how such representations are constructed and how they intersect with contemporary career-readiness demands.

While case studies are currently integrated throughout our programs and our students can identify and reproduce many of their structural and rhetorical features in individual projects, ongoing assessment has revealed further room for growth. In subsequent iterations of these courses, the plan is therefore to develop pedagogical materials centered around best practices for the teaching and writing of professional case studies in Italian.[48] To strengthen scaffolding and cultivate more robust collaborative capacities, this sequence will also include materials for a structured peer-review phase, since research indicates that well-orchestrated peer feedback fosters critical engagement that benefits both writer and respondent by enhancing analytical acuity, teamwork, communication, and career- and self-development skills. By engaging critically with a peer's project, students are prompted to interrogate and recalibrate their own work, rendering the entire learning experience more authentic, consequential, and pedagogically meaningful.

While considering Made in Italy, we would also suggest the concept of a "Post" Made in Italy as Riccardo Giumelli has proposed in his book *Post-Made in Italy: Nuovi significanti, nuove sfide nella società globale* (Post-Made in Italy: New Meanings, New Challenges in Global Society).[49] In this provocative work, Giumelli challenges the definitions and structures of the traditional Made in Italy format through a sociological lens. He highlights how new global value chains, migrant labor, and hybrid production sites unsettle static notions of national origin, asking scholars and practitioners to rethink authenticity, territoriality, and branding in light of transnational flows. For courses on Made in Italy and Italian for International Business, this "Post" Made in Italy framework invites students to interrogate both the promises and contradictions of the label, examining how firms negotiate reputational capital, ethical claims, and market expectations in an era of globalized production. By doing this, students engage with more challenging linguistic and cultural structures as well as nuances that are immediately important for the business world. Rather

[47] Marco Fortis, *Le due sfide del Made in Italy: Globalizzazione e innovazione* (Bologna, il Mulino, 2005), 39.
[48] See footnote thirty-five for an example in French/English.
[49] Riccardo Giumelli, *Post-Made in Italy: Nuovi significanti, nuove sfide nella società globale* (Broni, PV: Edizioni Altravista, 2019). This work has not been translated into English. The translation is that of the authors.

than treating Giumelli's "Post" Made in Italy and Illy's Incanto as mutually exclusive philosophies, the courses place them in productive tension and ask students to evaluate their explanatory power through concrete cases. Piaggio serves as an introduction to the various aspects of Made in Italy and prepares students for a more intense application of the methodology. Alessi foregrounds augmented quality, design, and territorial expertise, while Ghali demonstrates how Italian cultural value is also produced through migration, hybridity, and transnational media circulation.

Adopting case studies in Italian curricula should no longer be an optional enrichment but something recognized as an asset intended to prepare students for the demands of the twenty-first century, whether they pursue careers in business, cultural institutions, education, or the non-profit sector. When learners design a multilevel Ghali project or build an Alessi-based unit around product design and branding, they move beyond rehearsing decontextualized grammar to mobilizing lexicon, discourse strategies, and pragmatic competence in order to interpret complex texts, negotiate meaning with peers, and address specific audiences. This methodology simultaneously deepens cultural literacy, asking students to grapple with Italian identities, migration, aesthetics, sustainability, and manufacturing traditions, to highlight only a few, and cultivates NACE-aligned competencies such as critical thinking, communication, teamwork, leadership, and professionalism as they weigh evidence, manage ambiguity, and justify decisions in Italian. Because case studies are anchored in real firms, media events, and socio-economic debates, they keep Italian Studies in direct conversation with a globalized world in which cross-cultural analysis, ethical reflection, and multilingual communication are indispensable. Italian faculty are thus invited to view case-based pedagogy not as a departure from humanistic inquiry, but as its contemporary continuation: a way of training students to read the world critically and act within it responsibly, in Italian.