



Medical Writing in

**ITALIAN**

# Seeing the world through a different lens

**L**anguage influences the way we think, see and describe the world around us. Writing is a learned skill and education systems around the world emphasise different approaches to effective communication. As a native English medical writer living in Italy, my role is to assist clients in a change of perception and thought processes to an English-based model, asking non-native speakers to see the world through a different lens

It dawned on me one day whilst consulting with an Italian surgeon/attempted author of a rejected manuscript for a peer review journal, how difficult it is to express complex concepts in one's mother tongue, let alone in an acquired language. The text he had written didn't follow a logical flow, it was spoiled with numerous superlatives, facts were inconsistent, and the manuscript itself was unstructured. I struggled to get my head around the key messages and the surgical technique he was attempting to describe. In desperation, I turned to him and simply pleaded, "Tell me what you want to say in Italian."

I am an Australian and have lived in Italy for over 20 years. On the whole, Italians are gregarious, passionate, joyful, and enthusiastic orators. They can begin to tell stories from any point on a time continuum, jumping back and forth among events. The Italian education system encourages verbosity and creativity in style in all forms of texts; a stark contrast to the Anglo-Saxon education system, where succinct, logical essays are a must.

What the Italian surgeon went on to explain to me face-to-face, was far from what he had written on the page. Writing is a learned skill. Barriers to scientific publications among medical professionals are identified as (a) writing in general; (b) writing in English; (c) dealing with content structure and presentation; and (d) navigating in the author group.<sup>1</sup>

The Italian surgeon had noteworthy research to share with the international medical community, having led the first team in the world to treat ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysms with an endovascular approach. Together, we worked through the manuscript to respect the English scientific language structural guidelines and to ensure effective communication

of the key messages. Today, this surgical approach is commonly adopted and saves lives, and the manuscript is still celebrated as a core reference. However, in rewriting the manuscript, the cultural nuances, some "colour", and a lot of passion were inevitably dulled in favour of clarity.

Language and culture are intrinsically linked. The renowned Danish linguist Otto Jespersen suggested that English is a "methodological, energetic, business-like and sober language, that does not care much for finery or elegance, but does care for logical consistency". He concluded: "As the language is, so also is the nation".<sup>2</sup> Language, therefore, inevitably influences the way we think and perceive the world around us.<sup>2</sup>

My role is to assist in that change of perception, to encourage a different thought process. The advent of large language models can help level that playing field, making English more accessible to all.<sup>3</sup> For researchers with a mother tongue other than English, effective communication requires them to see the world through a different lens.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this article to my patient and intelligent clients, for having shared with me their experiences of changing perception.

## References

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