Assessing functional competence in writing: A corpus based approach
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CONTEXT
- Since 2007: Development of standardized writing tasks and analytic rating scales (B1 and B2) for national school-leaving exam (Matura)
- Each task contains 3 bullet points and 1 specific function for each bullet to target a range of communicative functions as described in the CEFR (p.125 ff)
- The CEFR does not include an extended list of functions
- The CEFR does not relate functional competence to levels in the illustrative scales

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
a) Does the inclusion of different functions in writing prompts lead to the use of different features of language?

b) Do test takers at B2 in English display a higher degree of functional competence in writing than test takers at B1 in Italian?

DATA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function 1</th>
<th>Function 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>explain</td>
<td>suggest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spiegare</td>
<td>proporre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performances</td>
<td>suggest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>words</td>
<td>proporre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>207</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14,479</td>
<td>7,533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>471</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19,640</td>
<td>4,421</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of bullet points from tasks:
- spiegare i vantaggi di passare un mese in Austria
- suggest a solution to the problem

RESULTS

CONCLUSIONS
a) Different functions in writing prompts are helpful to elicit different features of language.
- There is a significant resp. near significant link between functions and parts of speech produced: English: \(\chi^2 (5, N = 1063) = 33.19, p = .000\)
  Italian: \(\chi^2 (10, N = 1139) = 10.87, p = .054\)
- Test takers
  - use significantly more modal verbs when dealing with the functions "suggest" (Std. Res. 3.9) and "proporre" (Std. Res. 1.6).
  - tend to use more adjectives when dealing with the function "explain" (Std. Res. 1.2).
  - use conjunctions differently in relation to the different functions.

b) There are indicators that English B2 test takers display a higher degree of functional competence than Italian B1 test takers.
- When dealing with the function "suggest"/"proporre" test takers at B2 in English use more modal verbs than test takers at B1 in Italian (this confirms Banerjee et. al, 2007, p. 40).

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REFERENCES
