

Modern Italian Grammar

A practical guide

Third Edition

**Anna Proudfoot and
Francesco Cardo**



Modern Grammars

Modern ITALIAN Grammar

Modern Italian Grammar is an innovative reference guide to Italian, combining traditional and function-based grammar in a single volume.

The *Grammar* is divided into two parts. Part A covers traditional grammatical categories such as nouns, verbs and adjectives. Part B is carefully organised around language functions and contexts such as:

- giving personal information
- social interactions
- register and style
- oral communication and telephone skills
- formal and informal written communication, including SMS and email.

With a strong emphasis on contemporary usage, all grammar points and functions are richly illustrated with examples. Implementing feedback from users of the second edition, this text includes clearer explanations, as well as a greater emphasis on areas of particular difficulty for learners of Italian.

This is the ideal reference grammar for learners of Italian at all levels, from beginner to advanced. No prior knowledge of grammatical terminology is needed and a glossary of grammatical terms is provided.

This third edition of the *Grammar* continues to be complemented by the *Modern Italian Grammar Workbook, Second Edition*, which features related exercises and activities.

Anna Proudfoot is Head of Italian at the Open University, UK. **Francesco Cardo** taught at the Liceo Scientifico E. Majorana in Pozzuoli, Naples.

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Anna Proudfoot and Francesco Cardo

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In memory of Franco Cardo,
1951–2006

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Introduction

Modern Italian Grammar follows an entirely new approach to learning Italian. It looks at grammar not as the ultimate goal, but as the tool with which to construct a dialogue or a piece of writing.

Modern Italian Grammar is specifically designed to be accessible to the English reader not brought up in the Italian tradition of grammar and language analysis. It is unique both in its combination of formal grammar reference section and guide to usage organised along *functional* lines, and the fact that it was compiled by an English mother-tongue teacher of Italian and an Italian native speaker, working closely together.

It is the ideal reference text to use with newer language courses, for both beginners and advanced learners.

The course books and textbooks published over the last two decades are based on the principles of the *communicative* approach to language learning, which recognises that the objective of any language learner is to communicate, to get one's message across, and that there can be many different ways of doing this, rather than a 'right' way and a 'wrong' way.

The communicative approach emphasises language *functions* rather than structures. Traditional reference grammars present language by structure, making them inaccessible to learners who have no knowledge of grammatical terminology. *Modern Italian Grammar* presents language by *function*, with examples of usage and full explanations of how to express specific functions in Part B. At the same time it retains the traditional presentation of language by *structure* in Part A, which illustrates language forms and grammatical systems in a schematic way: word formation and morphology, verb conjugations, tenses, use of conjunctions and verb constructions.

The *language functions* included have been based on the communicative functions listed in Nora Galli de Paratesi's *Livello Soglia* (1981), itself based on J.A. van Ek's *The Threshold Level* (1975), the statement of key language functions supported by the Council of Europe. We have expanded them to provide a richer variety of examples more suited to our target readership. The division into functional areas also takes account of general linguistic *notions*, which can occur in more than one function; these include notions such as presence or absence, time and space, cause and effect. Notions and functions are integrated throughout Part B, while the structures illustrated in Part A are accessed through extensive cross-referencing.

In our choice of examples, we have included as many different contexts as possible. Some examples are typical of everyday dialogue or writing; some have been taken from the press or television, others from contemporary texts.

Our guides and inspiration in putting together this grammar have been some of the recognised authorities in the area of Italian grammar in the last few decades: to them go our thanks and our recognition of the great debt we owe them: Anna-Laura and Giulio Lepschy (*The Italian Language Today*, Routledge, 1991); Marcello Sensini (*Grammatica della lingua Italiana*, Mondadori, 1990); Maurizio Dardano and Pietro Trifone (*Grammatica Italiana*, 3rd edition, Zanichelli, 1995); Luca Serianni (*Grammatica italiana. Italiano comune e lingua letteraria*, 2nd edition, UTET, 1991); Giampaolo Salvi and Laura Vanelli (*Grammatica essenziale di riferimento della lingua italiana*, De Agostini/Le Monnier, 1992).

Introduction to the third edition

This third edition of *Modern Italian Grammar* incorporates suggestions from readers and reviewers and updates texts taken from the press, particularly those in the later chapters. It builds on the work done jointly with my colleague and close friend Franco Cardo on the first two editions.

Sadly, Franco died soon after the second edition of *Modern Italian Grammar* came out. As a result, this third edition was prepared by me as sole author. I am grateful therefore to Italian friends and colleagues who agreed to look at new material and made the writing process less lonely. I would like to thank students and tutors of Italian at the Open University, on both Andante (Beginners' Italian) and Vivace (Intermediate Italian), for their useful and positive suggestions, and I would like to thank the Open University for allowing me study leave in order to finish this edition. Lastly, thanks to my family for their patience during the writing process.

Finally I wish all our readers 'Buono Studio'.

Anna Proudfoot

How to use this book

Part A of the book (Chapters 1–7) is a reference guide to the grammatical structures or ‘building blocks’ of Italian: noun group, verbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, adverbs. Where possible, tables are used to illustrate forms and patterns.

Part B of the book (Chapters 8–42) shows how grammar structures are used to express communicative ‘functions’ such as giving personal information, asking someone to do something, describing something, etc. The chapters are divided into five broad sections: I Giving and seeking factual information; II Actions affecting ourselves and others; III Expressing emotions, feelings, attitudes and opinions; IV Putting in context; and finally V Expanding the horizons, which looks at special types of language, for example the formal register, bureaucratic language, and the language of telephone and letter.

The table of contents at the front of the book shows the content of each section and chapter, for Part A and Part B. It is not in alphabetical order but set out according to the layout of the book.

At the end of the book, there is a full index: grammar structures, communicative functions and keywords are all listed in alphabetical order, using both Italian and English terms.

If you want to know how to express a particular function, for example ‘Asking if something is available’ or ‘Introducing yourself’, simply look it up in the index or in the table of contents. In Part B, you will find all the different ways in which you can say what you want, with an indication of where you can find further information on the grammar structures used, and references to related functions found in other parts of the book.

If, on the other hand, you know the grammatical name for the structure you want to use, for example personal pronouns or impersonal **si**, you can look that up in the index instead. You will find each grammar structure explained in Part A. Part A is also useful as an easy-to-use quick reference section, where you can remind yourself of the correct form, or check on a verb ending, for example. A glossary, which immediately follows this short guide, gives definitions of the grammatical terms used in this book, with examples.

Note that throughout the book an asterisk is used to denote a form or wording that does not actually exist or is incorrect, shown only to demonstrate a point.

Lastly, Italian and English keywords are indexed to make it easier for the reader to look up a particular point. Grammar terminology as well as Italian examples are listed in the index (for example you will find both **lei** and ‘personal pronouns’).

We hope you enjoy learning Italian using this book as a guide. Remember that some spoken skills such as pronunciation, intonation and stress cannot simply be learned from a book. But grammar structures are the foundation of any language, and this book will teach you how to use these structures to express what you want to say.

Anna Proudfoot and Francesco Cardo, 2005

Glossary

Abstract noun

One which refers to a concept or quality rather than a person or object. Examples are **la felicità** ‘happiness’, **la miseria** ‘poverty’.

Active construction

An active construction is a sentence in which the subject of the sentence is the person carrying out the action, or the event taking place (as opposed to a *passive* construction where the subject is the person *affected* by the action): **mio marito fuma troppo** ‘my husband smokes too much’, **gli ospiti rimangono fino a sabato** ‘the guests are staying until Saturday’. A verb can therefore have an *active* form: (**chiudiamo la porta a mezzanotte** ‘we shut the door at midnight’) or a *passive* form (**la porta viene chiusa a mezzanotte** ‘the door is shut at midnight’).

Adjective

Adjectives describe or give information about a noun. They can be descriptive (such as **grande** ‘big’, **bianco** ‘white’, **vecchio** ‘old’, **italiano** ‘Italian’), demonstrative (**questo** ‘this’, **quel** ‘that’), indefinite (**qualche** ‘some’, **alcuni** ‘some, a few’, **certo** ‘certain’), interrogative (**quale** ‘which’, **quanto** ‘how much, many’) or possessive (**mio** ‘my’, **tuo** ‘your’ etc.): **alcuni nostri amici** ‘Some friends of ours’, **la vecchia casa in campagna** ‘the old house in the country’.

Adverb

Adverbs give information about a verb, saying how, for example, something is done: **bene** ‘well’, **male** ‘badly’, **subito** ‘immediately’, **cortesemente** ‘politely’. They can also add further information about an adjective or another adverb: **tanto stanco** ‘so tired’, **poco bene** ‘not very well’, **molto male** ‘very badly’.

Agreement

In Italian, adjectives, articles and, in some cases, past participles have to ‘agree with’ the noun or pronoun they accompany or refer to. This means that their form varies according to whether the noun/pronoun is masculine or feminine (gender), singular or plural (number): **la casa bianca** ‘the white house’, **i miei sandali sono rotti** ‘my sandals are broken’, **loro sono andati** ‘they went’.

Article

Italian has three types of article: the definite article **il, lo** (etc.) ‘the’, the indefinite article **un, una** (etc.) ‘a’, and the partitive **dei, delle, degli** (etc.) ‘some, any’: **il ragazzo** ‘the boy’, **una lezione** ‘a lesson’, **dei bambini** ‘some children’.

Auxiliary verb

Auxiliary verbs such as **avere, essere** are used in combination with the past participle to form compound tenses, both active, **Ho mangiato** ‘I have eaten’, **siamo andati** ‘we have gone’, and passive, **è stato licenziato** ‘he was sacked’. See also MODAL VERB.

Cardinal number

A number used in counting or to talk about quantities, for example **uno, due, tre**. See also ORDINAL.

Clause

A clause is a section or part of a sentence which contains a subject and a verb. Complex sentences are made up of a series of clauses. The main clause (or clauses) is the part of a sentence which makes sense on its own and does not depend on any other element in the sentence. A subordinate clause always depends on another clause, and is often introduced by a

GLOSSARY

conjunction such as **che**. There are different types of subordinate clause, for example relative clauses: **Ho visto il ragazzo che piace a mia sorella** 'I saw the boy that my sister likes'; or purpose clauses: **Ha portato la macchina dal meccanico perché controllasse i freni** 'I took the car to the mechanic so that he could check the brakes'.

Comparative

When one person, object or activity is compared with another, a comparative form is used. This can be a comparative adjective as in **la pasta napoletana è migliore di quella siciliana** 'Neapolitan pasta is better than Sicilian pasta', or a comparative adverb as in **mia figlia nuota meglio della sua** 'my daughter swims better than hers'.

Compound noun

A compound noun is a noun formed by joining together one or more words, either nouns or other parts of speech: **asciugamano** 'a towel' (verb **asciugare** 'to dry' + noun **mano** 'hand'), **capotreno** 'chief guard on train' (noun **capo** 'chief' + noun **treno** 'train').

Compound tenses

Compound tenses are tenses consisting of more than one element. In Italian, the compound tenses are formed by the auxiliary **avere** or **essere**, and the past participle: **ho mangiato troppo** 'I have eaten too much', **saremmo andati a casa** 'we would have gone home'. See also SIMPLE TENSES.

Conditional

The conditional is not strictly a tense, but a verb mood. It can be used on its own, particularly as a polite way of expressing a request: **Le dispiacerebbe aprire la finestra?** 'Would you mind opening the window?' It can also be used in conditional sentences, where the meaning of the main sentence is dependent on some condition being fulfilled: **Andrei in vacanza anch'io, se avessi tempo** 'I would go on holiday too if I had the money'.

Conjugation

The way in which verb forms change according to the person, tense or mood: **(io) vado** 'I go', **(noi) andremo** 'we will go', **le ragazze sono andate** 'the girls went', **voleva che io andassi a casa sua** 'he wanted me to go to his house', etc. The word conjugation is also used to mean the regular patterns of verbs ending in *-are*, *-ere*, *-ire*.

Conjunction

A linking or joining word, usually linking two words, phrases or clauses within a sentence: **Marco e Davide** 'Marco and Davide', **con amore ma con disciplina** 'with love but with discipline', **sono andata a letto perché ero stanca** 'I went to bed because I was tired', **i giudici dicono che bisogna cambiare la legge** 'the judges say that the law should be changed'. Conjunctions can either be coordinating, linking two phrases or clauses of equal weight, or subordinating, linking main clause and subordinate clause.

Countable

A noun is countable if it can normally be used in both singular and plural, and take the indefinite article **un**, **una** (etc.): **un bicchiere** 'a glass', **una pizza** 'a pizza'; whereas an uncountable noun is one which is not normally found in plural, for example **zucchero** 'sugar' and abstract nouns such as **tristezza** 'sadness'.

Declension

This means the way in which nouns and adjectives decline, in other words, change their endings according to whether they are singular or plural, masculine or feminine: **un ragazzo** 'a boy', **una ragazza** 'a girl', **due ragazzi** 'two boys', **due ragazze** 'two girls'. This pattern of endings is known as the declension.

Definite article: see ARTICLE.

Demonstrative

A demonstrative adjective or pronoun is one which demonstrates or indicates the person or object we are talking about: **questo carrello** 'this trolley', **quel professore** 'that teacher', **quelle case** 'those houses'.

Direct object

A direct object, whether noun or pronoun, is one which is directly affected by the action or event. A direct object can be living or inanimate. It is always used with a **transitive** verb: **I miei figli hanno mangiato tutti i cioccolatini** ‘my children ate all the chocolates’, **Li ho visto in città ieri sera** ‘I saw them in town yesterday evening’.

Feminine: see GENDER.

Finite verb

A verb which has a subject and is complete in itself, as opposed to **infinitives** or **participles** which have to depend on another verb: **Ieri siamo andati in piscina** ‘Yesterday we went to the swimming pool’, **Domani i ragazzi torneranno a scuola** ‘Tomorrow the kids will go back to school’.

Gender

All nouns in Italian have a gender: they are either masculine or feminine, even if they are inanimate objects. Even where living beings are concerned, grammatical gender is not always the same as natural gender: **una tigre** ‘a tiger’ (either sex unless specified), **un ippopotamo** ‘a hippopotamus’. Gender is important since it determines the form of noun, the article and adjective.

Gerund

A gerund is a verb form ending in **-ando** or **-endo**: **parlando** ‘speaking’, **sorridendo** ‘smiling’, **finendo** ‘finishing’. The gerund is most often used in Italian along with the verb **stare** to express a continuous action or event: **sto finendo** ‘I’m just finishing’, **stavano ancora mangiando** ‘they were still eating’. The nearest equivalent in English is the ‘-ing’ form but it is not used in exactly the same way.

Idiomatic

An idiomatic expression is one which cannot normally be translated literally, for example **ubriaco fradicio**, literally ‘soaking drunk’ but more idiomatically ‘dead drunk’.

Imperative

The imperative mood is the verb mood used to express orders, commands or instructions: **state fermi** ‘keep still’, **si accomodi** ‘sit down’, **andiamo** ‘let’s go’. (See also SUBJUNCTIVE.)

Impersonal (verbs, verb forms)

Impersonal verbs or verb forms do not refer to any one particular person. They can generally be translated by the English ‘it’ form and use the third person form: **Occorre pulire prima la casa** ‘It is necessary to clean the house first’, **Non serve protestare** ‘It’s no good protesting’. These verbs can be personalised by the addition of a personal pronoun, usually the indirect object: **Non mi occorre questo maglione** ‘I don’t need this thick sweater’.

Indefinite article: see ARTICLE.

Indefinites

An adjective or pronoun used to refer to a person or thing in a general way, rather than a *definite* person or thing. Examples are: **alcuni** ‘some’, **certi** ‘certain, some’, **qualche** ‘some’.

Indicative (verbs)

The verb mood we use most in speaking and writing is the indicative mood. Within this mood are a full range of tenses: present **mangio** ‘I eat’, past **ho mangiato** ‘I have eaten’, future **mangerò** ‘I will eat’, etc. The verb mood used to express uncertainty is the subjunctive, which also has a full range of tenses. See SUBJUNCTIVE.

Indirect object

An indirect object, whether noun or pronoun, is one which is indirectly affected by the action or event. An indirect object can be found with a **transitive** verb which already has one direct object: **ho mandato delle cartoline ai miei amici** ‘I sent some postcards to my friends’; or it can be used with an intransitive verb which does not take a direct object, in which case it may be found together with a preposition such as **a**, **da**: **Marco telefonava a sua madre ogni sera** ‘Marco used to phone his mother every evening’.

Infinitive

The infinitive of a verb is the form always given in a dictionary and is recognised by its endings **-are, -ere, -ire**: for example **chiacchierare** ‘to chat’, **sorridere** ‘to smile’ and **partire** ‘to leave’. It cannot be used on its own but depends on a finite verb form, often a modal verb: **vorrei ringraziare i telespettatori** ‘I would like to thank the TV audience’; or else is found linked with a preposition: **abbiamo fatto un salto in centro per comprare dei regali** ‘we took a quick trip into town to buy some presents’.

Interrogative

Interrogative words are used to ask questions or indirect questions. They include **chi** ‘who’, **come** ‘how’, **cosa** ‘what’, **dove** ‘where’, **quale** ‘which’, **quando** ‘when’, **perché** ‘why’.

Intransitive (verbs)

See also TRANSITIVE VERBS. Intransitive verbs are verbs which *cannot* be used with a direct object. Some intransitive verbs can be used with an indirect object: **Ho telefonato a Maria Teresa** ‘I telephoned (to) Maria Teresa’. Some can only be used without any object: **Siamo arrivati alla stazione con un’ora di ritardo** ‘we arrived at the station an hour late’. Many of these verbs take the auxiliary **essere**, but some take **avere**: **Abbiamo camminato molto** ‘We walked a lot’. Sometimes a verb which can be used transitively in English (‘to walk the dog’) cannot be used transitively in Italian (**camminare**). Some verbs can be used both transitively and intransitively (see TRANSITIVE VERBS).

Invariable

Invariable nouns are nouns that have the same form for both singular and plural: **un film, dei film** ‘a film, some films’; or for both masculine and feminine: **un artista, un’artista** ‘an artist’. An invariable adjective is one which does not change form to agree with the noun, whether masculine or feminine, singular or plural: **un vestito rosa, una giacca rosa** ‘a pink jacket’, **dei pantaloni rosa** ‘some pink trousers’, **delle calze rosa** ‘some pink stockings’.

Irregular (noun or verb)

A noun or verb which does not follow one of the standard patterns of forms or endings: **un uovo** ‘one egg’, **due uova** ‘two eggs’; **andare** ‘to go’, **vado** ‘I go’, **vai** ‘you go’, **va** ‘he/she goes’, **andiamo** ‘we go’, **andate** ‘you (pl) go’, **vanno** ‘they go’.

Masculine: see GENDER.

Modal verb

A verb which is used with a verb infinitive to **modify** what is being said: in Italian the modal verbs are **potere** ‘to be able to’, **dovere** ‘to have to’, **volere** ‘to want to’: **posso lavorare domani** ‘I can work tomorrow’, **devo lavorare domani** ‘I have to work tomorrow’, **voglio lavorare domani** ‘I want to work tomorrow’.

Mood

The seven main ways in which verbs can express actions or events are known as **mood**. The four finite moods – all of which, except the imperative, have a full range of tenses – are the **indicative** (for example **vado** ‘I go’), **subjunctive** (for example **che io vada** ‘that I may go’), **conditional** (for example **andrei** ‘I would go’) and **imperative** (**vada!** ‘go!’). The other three moods are: infinitive, gerund, participle.

Negative

A statement is negative when it specifies an action or event which has not taken place or will not take place. Negative words or phrases turn a positive statement or question into a negative one. Examples of negative words in Italian include: **nessun** ‘no’, **nessuno** ‘nobody’, **niente** ‘nothing’, **non . . . mai** ‘not . . . ever, never’, **non . . . ancora** ‘not yet’, **non . . . più** ‘no longer, no more’.

Noun

A noun indicates a person, place, thing, or event, for example **Italia** ‘Italy’, **assistente** ‘language assistant’, **la festa** ‘the party’. Nouns are inextricably linked to the articles (**il, un, etc.**) and any adjectives that accompany them. All nouns have a gender and this determines the form of the adjectives and articles that go with them.

Number

Number is the distinction between *singular* and *plural*. Verb forms alter according to the number of the subject: **il ragazzo nuota** ‘the boy swims’, **i ragazzi nuotano** ‘the boys swim’.

Object

In grammatical terms, an object is the person or thing affected by the action or event, as opposed to the subject, which is the person or thing responsible for it. See DIRECT OBJECT, INDIRECT OBJECT.

Ordinal number

A number which indicates position in a series or sequence, for example **primo, secondo, terzo**.

Participle (present, past)

Verbs normally have a present participle and a past participle. Unlike other (finite) verb forms, it cannot be used on its own but is found together with other verb forms. The *past* participle is used with the verb **avere** or **essere** to form the *passato prossimo* tense: **Non abbiamo mangiato gli hamburgers** ‘We didn’t eat hamburgers’. When used with **essere**, it agrees with the subject: **Nel 2004 siamo andati a Los Angeles** ‘In 2004 we went to Los Angeles’. The *present* participle, less frequently used, changes form when used as an adjective **i...cantanti**.

Partitive article: see ARTICLE.

Passato prossimo

The **passato prossimo** is a compound tense formed by participle and auxiliary **avere** or **essere**: **ho mangiato** ‘I ate’, **sono andato** ‘I went’. It is known in English as the ‘perfect tense’ because it refers to an action which is ‘perfect’ or complete. Its name in Italian suggests that it refers to a recent action or event. In the north of Italy, however, it is used to refer to actions or events further back in the past.

Passato remoto

The **passato remoto** is a past tense which is simple, not compound (**andai** rather than **sono andato**). It is known in English as ‘past definite’, ‘past historic’ or ‘past absolute’. Its name in Italian suggests that it refers to an event far back in the past, but this is not always accurate. In Tuscany and the south of Italy, it is used in spoken Italian to refer also to recent events, which in the north would be referred to using the **passato prossimo**.

Passive (verb forms)

A passive construction is a sentence in which the subject of the sentence is the person or thing *affected* by the action or event taking place (as opposed to an *active* construction where the subject is the person *carrying out* the action): **tutti gli studenti vengono promossi** ‘all the students get moved up a class’, **il concerto è stato anticipato** ‘the concert was put forward’.

Person

The verb subject can be a first person (**io** ‘I’), second person (**tu** ‘you’), third person (**lui, lei** ‘he, she’) and so on. Most verbs have three singular persons (English ‘I, you, he/she’), and three plural (English ‘we, you, they’).

Personal pronouns

See also PRONOUNS. Personal pronouns can be subject pronouns **io, tu, lui** ‘I, you, he’ etc.; direct object pronouns **mi, ti, lo, la** ‘me, you, him, her’ etc.; indirect object pronouns **mi, ti, gli, le** ‘to me, to you, to him, to her’ etc.; disjunctive pronouns, used as stressed direct object or after a preposition (**con**) **me, te, lui, lei** ‘(with) me, you, him, her’ etc.

Plural: see NUMBER.

Possessive

Possessive adjectives and/or pronouns denote ownership: **il mio orologio** ‘my watch’, **la nostra macchina** ‘our car’.

Preposition

A word that introduces further information about a person, action or event, for example information about time or place, value or purpose: **ci siamo sposati nel 1975** ‘we got married in 1975’, **sono nata a Milano** ‘I was born in Milan’, **una macchina da caffè** ‘a coffee machine’.

GLOSSARY

un francobollo da 2 euro ‘a two euro stamp’, **siamo venuti per imparare l’italiano** ‘we came to learn Italian’.

Pronoun

A word which stands in for and/or refers to a noun. There are various categories of pronoun: demonstrative, such as **Hai visto quello?** ‘Have you seen that man?’; indefinite, such as **alcuni** ‘a few people’; interrogative, such as **Chi?** ‘Who?’; personal, such as **io** ‘I’, **noi** ‘we, us’, **lo** ‘it’; possessive, such as **il mio** ‘my, mine’, **i suoi** ‘his, hers’ (masc pl form); reflexive, such as **mi, ti, si** ‘myself, yourself, himself/herself’; relative, such as **quello che** ‘the one who’.

Question

Direct questions sometimes begin with a question word: **Dove vai stasera?** ‘Where are you going this evening?’; but sometimes not: **Hai tempo di parlarmi?** ‘Do you have time to speak to me?’ Indirect questions are introduced by words such as **chiedere** ‘to ask’: **Mi ha chiesto se avevo tempo di parlargli** ‘He asked me if I had time to speak to him’.

Reflexive verb

A verb that can be used with a reflexive pronoun, equivalent of English ‘myself, himself’, indicating that the subject and the object are one and the same: **mi lavo** ‘I wash’, **si è fatto male** ‘he hurt himself’. Sometimes the verb can only be used reflexively, and no object is actually present: **Molte volte i drogati si vergognano di quello che fanno** ‘Often drug addicts are ashamed of what they do’.

Regular

A regular noun or verb is one which follows one of the main noun or verb patterns, in other words whose forms and endings can be predicted, for example **-are, parlare** ‘to speak’, **-ere, sorridere** ‘to smile’ **-ire, partire** ‘to leave’.

Relative

A relative pronoun introduces a relative clause, which gives more information about a person or thing mentioned specifically, or even an event referred to: **ho visto la studentessa che veniva sempre nel mio ufficio** ‘I saw the student who was always coming to my office’, **è andato alla discoteca senza chiedere il permesso, ciò che mi ha fatto arrabbiare** ‘he went to the disco without asking permission, which made me angry’.

Reported speech

Also known as indirect speech, this is a way of relating words spoken or written by someone else. Reported speech is usually introduced by verbs such as **dire** ‘to say, to tell’, **scrivere** ‘to write’, **annunciare** ‘to announce’, and the conjunction **che**: **i giornali annunciano che i soldati hanno massacrato migliaia di bambini** ‘the newspapers say that the soldiers have massacred thousands of children’.

Sentence

A sentence must have a verb and a subject. It can either be a simple sentence (one subject, one verb): **gli ospiti dormivano** ‘the guests were asleep’; or a complex sentence (main clause and one or more subordinate clauses): **mentre dormivano, i ladri hanno portato via tutto** ‘while they were asleep, the thieves took everything’.

Simple tenses

Verb tenses which are formed of one word only. See also COMPOUND TENSES.

Singular: see NUMBER.

Stem: see VERB STEM.

Subject

The subject is usually a noun, pronoun or proper name denoting the person or object performing the action or the event taking place: **mia madre ha comprato un tailleur** ‘my mother bought a suit’, **la festa si svolge a maggio** ‘the festival takes place in May’. In the case of a passive construction, the subject is the person or thing affected by the action: **gli studenti sono stati criticati dagli insegnanti** ‘the students were criticised by their teachers’. With Italian verbs, it

is not always essential to have a subject mentioned since it is understood from the verb form: **abbiamo mangiato a mezzogiorno** ‘we ate at midday’.

Subjunctive

The subjunctive mood is used to express doubt or uncertainty. It is almost always used in complex sentences where one clause depends on another: **Abbiamo comprato un cagnolino in modo che i bambini imparino a prendere cura degli animali** ‘We bought a puppy so that the children can learn how to look after animals’; or where the subordinate clause depends on a main verb expressing uncertainty: **Dubito che lui possa farcela** ‘I doubt if he can manage it’. However it can be found standing on its own, when used as an imperative form: **Vada via!** ‘Go away!’

Subordinate (clauses)

See CONJUNCTION. A subordinate clause is one which depends on another clause, usually the main clause in a sentence. It can be introduced by a conjunction such as **che** ‘what’, **perché** ‘because’, or a relative pronoun such as **che** ‘who, which’. (See CLAUSES.)

Superlative

(See also COMPARATIVE). When one or more persons, objects or activities are compared with others, or a comparison is implied, a superlative form is used to express the one which is superior to all the rest: **La casa della mia amica Matilde era la più grande del paese** ‘My friend Matilde’s house was the biggest in the village’, **Abbiamo fatto il meglio possibile** ‘We did as well as we could’.

Tense

A finite verb form which normally provides a clue as to the time setting (present, past, future) for an action or event: **andremo a New York** ‘we will go to New York’, **i miei amici ci sono stati** ‘my friends have been there’. Occasionally the grammatical verb tense does not correspond to the time setting, for example the future can be used for a present time setting: **Sono le 4.00. Mio marito sarà già a Palermo** ‘It’s 4 o’clock. My husband will be at Palermo by now’; and the imperfect can be used to express a polite request: **Volevo un francobollo da 2 euro** ‘I wanted a 2 euro stamp’.

Transitive verbs

Transitive verbs are verbs which *can* always be used transitively, in other words with a direct object: **ho fumato una sigaretta** ‘I smoked a cigarette’. Sometimes no object is used: **ho fumato** ‘I smoked’; but the verb is still a transitive verb since it can – and often does – take an object. Some verbs can be used both transitively and intransitively, for example **aumentare** ‘to increase’, **diminuire** ‘to decrease’, **cambiare** ‘to change’: **abbiamo aumentato il prezzo del biglietto** ‘we have increased the price of the ticket’, **il prezzo del biglietto è aumentato** ‘the price of the ticket has increased’.

Verb

A verb describes an action, event or state. It always has a subject and can also have an object. Its form varies according to mood and tense, and the person, gender and number of its subject.

Verb stem

The stem of a verb is its ‘base’, the part of the verb which is left when you take away **-are**, **-ere**, **-ire** from the infinitive form. In a regular verb the ending changes but the stem does not normally change. In an irregular verb, the stem may change too.

Voice

Verbs normally have two voices: *active* and *passive*.

Part A

Structures

1

The noun group

1.1 Introduction

Nouns are generally used together with definite or indefinite articles (in English *the, a*) and/or adjectives (describing physical or other characteristics), which provide information about the entity or concept. Together they form a group of words called the *noun group* as in the two examples shown below:

una (<i>article</i>)	grande (<i>adjective</i>)	casa (<i>noun</i>)	a big house
la (<i>article</i>)	ragazza (<i>noun</i>)	inglese (<i>adjective</i>)	the English girl

Although the noun group may contain other elements (for example, adverbs, prepositional phrases), in this chapter we will only look at the three basic elements of noun/article/adjective, analysing them one by one. In Italian the three components of the noun group also have to be considered as a ‘whole’, in which the three components ‘agree’, so we will also look at how the three elements are used together.

1.2 The noun

1.2.1 What is a noun?

The main function of nouns in any language is to denote an entity (person, object, etc.) or concept (situation, abstract idea, etc.). The noun is the focus of the noun group, so the article and adjectives always agree with the noun in gender (masculine or feminine) and number (singular or plural). The two grammatical features of *gender* and *number* determine the form of noun, article and adjective.

1.2.2 Gender

All Italian nouns have either a masculine or a feminine gender. Gender is a purely *grammatical* term. Nouns referring to human beings or animals sometimes have the same *grammatical* gender as their *natural* gender, but not always (see below). Italian native speakers rarely find this a problem. However speakers of other languages often find it difficult to remember the gender of nouns and this creates a problem when it comes to making the other components of the noun group ‘agree’ with the noun.

With non-animate objects, there is not always an obvious explanation for their gender. Why, for example, should **sera** ‘evening’ be feminine, while **giorno** ‘day’ is masculine? Learners of Italian either have to learn and memorise the genders of words or consult a dictionary. Italian dictionaries usually indicate the gender of nouns with abbreviations such as **s.m.** (**sostantivo maschile**) and **s.f.** (**sostantivo femminile**).

Grammatically speaking, Italian does not always have a male and a female of each animal species, for example:

una tigre (tiger) is always feminine.

un ippopotamo (hippopotamus) is always masculine.

In order to provide the other half of the species, you have to say:

una tigre maschio a male tiger

un ippopotamo femmina a female hippopotamus

Some animals – as in English – have two distinct names for the male and the female of the species:

un cane dog **una cagna** bitch

un gallo cock **una gallina** hen

Some, but not all, professional and other titles may have a distinct form for the feminine. Nouns whose masculine form ends in **-e** have a feminine form ending either in **-a** or in **-essa**:

cameriere **cameriera** waiter/waitress

infermiere **infermiera** nurse

padrone **padrona** master/mistress

barone **baronessa** baron/baroness

conte **contessa** count/countess

presidente **presidentessa** president

principe **principessa** prince/princess

studente **studentessa** student

Most nouns with masculine form ending in **-tore** have a feminine form ending in **-trice**:

ambasciatore **ambasciatrice** ambassador

attore **attrice** actor

autore **autrice** author

direttore **direttrice** director, manager

imperatore **imperatrice** emperor/empress

pittore **pittrice** painter

scultore **scultrice** sculptor

scrittore **scrittrice** writer

senatore **senatrice** senator

But note the following masculine nouns with a feminine equivalent ending in **-essa**:

dottore **dottoressa** doctor

professore **professoressa** teacher

The use of the masculine/feminine forms of professional titles is fully illustrated in **20.9**.

1.2.3

Number

Unlike gender, the grammatical concept of singular or plural ('number') causes no problem for speakers of English. Occasionally (as in English) a singular noun is used to refer to a collective entity that one might expect to be grammatically plural, for example, **la gente** 'people'. On the other hand, some objects that are singular in English may be plural in Italian, for example, **i capelli** 'hair' and most types of pasta: **i cannelloni**, **le lasagne**, **gli spaghetti**, **le tagliatelle**, **i tortellini**, which an English speaker would refer to in the singular ('This spaghetti is delicious').

1.2.4

Common noun patterns

The gender and number determine the ending of the noun. These patterns of endings are called *inflexions*. Italian nouns can be divided into several different groups, according to their patterns

of inflexion. The three most common patterns, also followed by most adjectives (see 1.4 below), are:

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
Masculine	-o	-i
Feminine	-a	-e
Masculine or feminine	-e	-i

NOTE Nouns ending in **-e** in the singular, **-i** in the plural, have the same ending whatever their gender.

Examples

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
Masculine ending in -o			
tavolo	table	tavoli	tables
albero	tree	alberi	trees
sbaglio	mistake	sbagli	mistakes
Feminine ending in -a			
donna	woman	donne	women
parola	word	parole	words
scuola	school	scuole	schools
Masculine ending in -e			
padre	father	padri	fathers
studente	student	studenti	students
bicchiere	glass	bicchieri	glasses
Feminine ending in -e			
madre	mother	madri	mothers
occasione	occasion	occasioni	occasions
chiave	key	chiavi	keys

Some nouns, while still following these patterns, present slight variations in their plural endings, as shown below.

Masculine nouns ending in -io

In the plural, nouns ending in **-io** sometimes double the final **i**. Here are some guidelines to help you.

When the **i** is stressed, the plural form has double **ii**:

zio	uncle	zii
rinvio	postponement	rinvii

When the **i** is unstressed, the final **i** does not double in the plural:

studio	study	studi
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In words where the **i** is not doubled, the final **i** may have a written accent on it, indicating where the stress lies, to distinguish it from a similar plural form with a different pronunciation:

principio	principle	principi or princìpi
(principe)	prince	prìncipi

Tempio (temple) also has an alternative plural ending which distinguishes it from the plural of **tempo** (time):

tempio	temple	tempî or templî
(tempo)	time	tempi

(In the following sets of examples, the written accent is only there to demonstrate where the stress falls.)

Masculine nouns ending in **-co**, **-go**

Masculine nouns ending in **-co** or **-go** in the singular normally form the plural as follows:

- in **-chi** and **-ghi**, with the hard **c**, **g** sound, if the stress falls on the penultimate syllable:

fuoco	fuochi	fire
ago	aghi	needle
buco	buchi	hole
albèrgo	albèrghi	hotel
sacco	sacchi	sack
sugo	sughi	sauce

This also applies to a few nouns where the stress does not fall on the penultimate syllable, for example:

catàlogo	catàloghi	catalogue
diàlogo	diàloghi	dialogue

- in **-ci** and **-gi**, with a soft **c**, **g** sound, if the stress falls on the third last syllable (the written accent is only there to demonstrate where the stress falls):

mèdico	mèdici	doctor
aspàrago	aspàragi	asparagus
mònaco	mònaci	monk
biòlogo	biòlogi	biologist

This also applies to a few nouns where the stress falls on the penultimate syllable, for example:

amico	amici	friend
nemico	nemici	enemy
greco	grecci	Greek
porco	porci	pig

Masculine and feminine nouns ending in **-ca**, **-ga**

Feminine nouns ending in **-ca**, **-ga** form their plural in **-che**, **-ghe**, with a hard **c**, **g** sound:

amica	amiche	friend
lega	leghe	league

In 1.2.5 below, we look at nouns ending in **-a**, which can refer to either men or women. If these nouns end in **-ca** or **-ga**, they normally form their plural in **-chi**, **-ghi** for male and **-che**, **-ghe** for female:

collega	colleague	colleggi (m.)	colleghe (f.)
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But note this variation:

belga	(a) Belgian	belgi (m.)	belghe (f.)
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Feminine nouns ending in **-cia**, **-gia**

Feminine nouns ending in **-cia**, **-gia** form their plural as follows:

- in **-cie**, **-gie** when the stress falls on the **i** (as indicated in the examples below), and when the last syllable is preceded by a vowel:

<i>farmacia</i>	<i>farmacie</i>	pharmacy
<i>bugia</i>	<i>bugie</i>	lie
<i>camicia</i>	<i>camicie</i>	shirt
<i>ciliègia</i>	<i>ciliègie</i>	cherry
<i>acàcia</i>	<i>acàcie</i>	acacia
<i>valìgia</i>	<i>valìgie</i>	suitcase

- in **-ce**, **-ge** when the ending is preceded by a consonant:

<i>arància</i>	<i>arànce</i>	orange
<i>spiàggia</i>	<i>spiàgge</i>	beach
<i>provincia</i>	<i>province</i>	province
<i>frangia</i>	<i>frange</i>	fringe
<i>faccia</i>	<i>facce</i>	face
<i>pioggia</i>	<i>piogge</i>	rain

Learners often pronounce the endings above incorrectly. The pronunciation of **-cia** is like the 'cha' in English 'charm', **-gia** is like the 'ja' in 'jacket', **-cie** like the 'chai' in 'chair', **-gie** like the 'jay' in 'jaywalker'. There is absolutely no difference in pronunciation between the **-cie** of **camicie** and the **-ce** of **arance**. The **i** is only pronounced and given its full value as a syllable when it is stressed as in **farmacie** and **bugie**.

1.2.5 Other noun patterns

A large number of Italian nouns do not follow the patterns shown above. Here are some other noun patterns.

Masculine or feminine nouns with singular ending in **-a**

<i>Singular -a (m. or f.)</i>		<i>Plural -i (m.)</i>	<i>Plural -e (f.)</i>
atleta	athlete	atleti	atlete
artista	artist	artisti	artiste
autista	driver	autisti	autiste
giornalista	journalist	giornalisti	giornaliste

The nouns in the above group refer to categories of people. The singular ending **-a** is used whether they are male or female, but the plural form is different according to the 'natural' gender. A very large number of these nouns end in **-ista** (English '-ist') indicating an ideology (**socialista**, **marxista**), profession (**dentista**, **giornalista**), musician (**chitarrista**, **pianista**, **violinista**) or sport (**ciclista**, **tennista**). See also nouns ending in **-ca**, **-ga** in 1.2.4 above.

Masculine nouns with singular ending in **-a**

<i>Singular -a (m.)</i>		<i>Plural -i (m.)</i>
monarca	monarch	monarchi
poeta	poet	poeti
problema	problem	problemi
programma	programme	programmi
sistema	system	sistemi
Papa	Pope	Papi

This pattern is similar to that of masculine and feminine nouns ending in **-a** shown above, but only has masculine forms in both singular and plural.

Feminine nouns with singular ending in **-o**, plural in **-i**

The two nouns shown below are both feminine in the singular, but have different genders in the plural: **mani** is feminine, while **echi** is masculine:

The noun

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
mano (<i>f.</i>)	hand	mani (<i>f.</i>)
eco (<i>f.</i>)	echo	echi (<i>m.</i>)

► See 1.2.6 for invariable feminine nouns ending in **-o**.

Nouns with masculine singular in -o, feminine plural in -a

A number of nouns which are masculine in the singular become feminine in the plural, with an irregular ending in **-a**:

<i>Singular (m.)</i>		<i>Plural (f.)</i>
uovo	egg	uova
miglio	mile	miglia
paio	pair	paia

Nouns with masculine singular in -o, masculine plural in -i and feminine plural in -a

Some nouns which are masculine in the singular have both regular masculine plural in **-i** and irregular feminine plural in **-a**. Many of these denote parts of the body.

<i>Singular (m.)</i>		<i>Plural in -i (m.)</i>	<i>Plural in -a (f.)</i>
dito	finger	diti	dita
braccio	arm	bracci	braccia
ginocchio	knee	ginocchi	ginocchia
labbro	lip	labbri	labbra
osso	bone	ossi	ossa
gesto	gesture	gesti	gesta
lenzuolo	sheet	lenzuoli	lenzuola
muro	wall	muri	mura
urlo	shout	urli	urla

There are differences in the meaning of the two different plurals: the **-a** plural generally emphasises the collective nature of the plural, while the **-i** ending tends to denote either a more figurative sense or the plural as a collection of separate and/or individual elements.

For example, **le dita** are the fingers of your hand, when talked about collectively (**ho le dita gelate** ‘my fingers are frozen’), while **i diti** are the fingers considered individually or separately (**ho due diti rotti** ‘I have two broken fingers’). **Le mura** are the walls of a city (**Lucca è una città circondata da mura romane** ‘Lucca is a city surrounded by Roman walls’), while **i muri** refer to all other kinds of walls. **Le ossa** is the plural form normally used when talking about the skeletal system (**mi fanno male le ossa** ‘my bones ache’), while the masculine plural **gli ossi** is used when talking about separate bones, for example broken bones or dog bones (**ho dato due ossi al cane** ‘I gave the dog two bones’).

1.2.6 Invariable nouns

Invariable nouns have the same form in the plural as in the singular. These include the following groups.

Nouns with stress falling on last syllable

With few exceptions, these are feminine in gender, coming from an older form of the word, of Latin origin, ending in **-tate** (**civitate**, **libertate**), now abbreviated and ending in **-à**:

	<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
Feminine	città	town	città
	università	university	università
	libertà	freedom	libertà
Masculine	caffè	coffee	caffè

Feminine nouns ending in -i

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
crisi	crisis	crisi
ipotesi	hypothesis	ipotesi
analisi	analysis	analisi

Feminine nouns ending in -ie

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
serie	series	serie
specie	species	specie

But note:

moglie	wife	mogli
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Feminine nouns with abbreviated singular

These end mainly in **-o** and are usually abbreviations, derived from longer or compound words (**automobile** > **auto**, **fotografia** > **foto**):

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
auto	car	auto
moto	motorbike	moto
radio	radio	radio
foto	photo	foto
bici	bike	bici

Nouns of one syllable

	<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
Masculine	re	king	re
	sci	ski	sci
Feminine	gru	crane	gru

Words borrowed from another language

	<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
Masculine	bar	bar, café	bar
	sport	sport	sport
	film	film	film
Feminine	computer	computer	computer
	reclame	advert	reclame
	gaffe	gaffe	gaffe
	brioche	brioche	brioche

Remember not to add **-s** in the plural (**il film** – **i film**).

1.2.7**Nouns with extremely irregular plurals**

Here are a few nouns whose plural forms are extremely irregular:

	<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
Masculine	uomo	man	uomini	men
	dio	god	dei	gods
	bue	ox	buoi	oxen
Feminine	ala	wing	ali	wings
	arma	arm	armi	arms

1.3 The article

1.3.1 What is an article?

There are two main types of article in Italian, as there are in English: the *indefinite* article (**articolo indeterminativo**) and the *definite* article (**articolo determinativo**). They distinguish the generic from the specific, the known from the unknown (see also 9.2):

In giardino c'è un cane.

There is **a** dog in the garden. (*unknown dog – indefinite article*)

In giardino c'è il cane.

There is **the** dog in the garden. (*your own dog or a dog you know about – definite article*)

In Italian the form of the article (whether definite or indefinite) has to agree with the gender and number of the noun it relates to, but also depends on the initial letter of the word immediately following it, *whether noun or adjective*. This rule applies also to a third type of article, the partitive article.

1.3.2 Indefinite article *un, uno, una, un'*

Indefinite articles only apply to singular nouns and therefore only have singular forms. The form of the indefinite article varies according to the gender of the noun it relates to, but also whether it comes immediately before a word beginning with a vowel, a consonant or a certain combination of consonants, as shown below.

Masculine nouns

The correct form of indefinite article before a vowel or most consonants is **un**:

un espresso	an espresso
un telefono	a telephone
un nuovo studente	a new student

The correct form of indefinite article before a word starting with **s** + a consonant, **gn, pn, ps, x, z** and the semivowel **i (j, y)** is **uno**:

uno studente	a student
uno stupido errore	a stupid mistake
uno gnomo	a gnome
uno pneumatico	a tyre
uno psichiatra	a psychiatrist
uno xenofobo	a xenophobe (someone who hates foreigners)
uno zoo	a zoo
uno yogurt	a yogurt

Feminine nouns

The correct form of indefinite article before a word starting with a consonant is **una**:

una bottiglia	a bottle
una spremuta	a fresh fruit juice
una grande aranciata	a large orangeade

Before a word starting with a vowel (**a, e, i, o, u**), the indefinite article **una** is elided to **un'**:

un'aranciata	an orangeade
un'ampia distesa di neve	a wide expanse of snow

Here are all the indefinite articles shown in table form:

Masculine	un	before a vowel or most consonants	un albergo
	uno	before s + consonant, gn, pn, ps, x, z and semivowel i (j, y)	un ragazzo uno sbaglio uno gnomo uno pneumatico uno psicologo uno xilofono uno zoo uno yogurt
Feminine	una	before a consonant	una ragazza
	un'	before a vowel	una brava insegnante un'automobile un'eccellente cena

1.3.3 Definite article *il, lo, la, l', i, gli, le*

The definite article has both singular and plural forms. The form of the definite article varies according to the number (singular/plural) and gender (masculine/feminine) of the noun it relates to, but also whether it comes directly before a word (*whether noun or adjective*) beginning with a vowel, a consonant or a particular combination of consonants, as shown below.

Masculine nouns (singular)

The correct form of definite article before a word beginning with a consonant is **il** (but there are exceptions – see below):

<i>il</i> cantante	the singer
<i>il</i> famoso albergo	the famous hotel

The correct form of definite article before a word starting with **s** + a consonant, **gn, pn, ps, x, z** and semivowel **i** (**j, y**) is **lo**:

<i>lo</i> strano inglese	the strange Englishman
<i>lo</i> Ionio	the Ionian (sea)
<i>lo</i> yogurt	the yogurt

The correct form of definite article before a word starting with a vowel is **l'**:

<i>l'</i> albergo	the hotel
<i>l'</i> insegnante	the teacher (<i>male</i>)
<i>l'</i> incauto atto	the incautious act

Masculine nouns (plural)

The correct form of definite article before most consonants is **i**:

<i>i</i> ragazzi italiani	the Italian boys
<i>i</i> fiori bianchi e rossi	the white and red flowers

The correct form of definite article before a word beginning with a vowel or with **s** + a consonant, **gn, pn, ps, x, z** and semivowel **i** (**j, y**) is **gli**:

<i>gli</i> alberghi a cinque stelle	the five star hotels
<i>gli</i> stranieri	the foreigners
<i>gli</i> zii americani	the American uncles
<i>gli</i> yacht	the yachts

Feminine nouns (singular)

The correct form of definite article before a word beginning with a consonant is **la**:

la cioccolata calda	the hot chocolate
la spremuta	the fresh fruit juice

The correct form of definite article before a word beginning with a vowel is **l'**:

l'aranciata	the orangeade
l'insegnante	the teacher (<i>female</i>)

Feminine nouns (plural)

The correct form of definite article before a word beginning with either vowel or consonant is **le**, which is *never* abbreviated:

le automobili bianche	the white cars
le studentesse	the students (<i>female</i>)

Here are all the definite articles shown in table form:

Masculine singular	il	before most consonants	il ragazzo
	lo	before s + consonant, gn, pn, ps, x, z and semivowel i (j, y)	lo sbaglio lo gnomo lo pneumatico lo psicologo lo xilofono lo zoo lo yogurt l'albergo
Masculine plural	l'	before a vowel	
	i	before most consonants	i ragazzi i fiori
	gli	before a vowel and before s + consonant, gn, pn, ps, x, z and semivowel i (j, y)	gli spaghetti gli gnocchi gli pneumatici gli psicologi gli xenofobi gli zoo gli yogurt
Feminine singular	la	before consonant	la ragazza
	l'	before vowel	la bella insegnante l'automobile l'eccellente cena
Feminine plural	le	before consonant or vowel	le ragazze le studentesse le automobili le belle automobili

1.3.4 Partitive article *dei, degli, delle*

The *partitive* article indicates some *part* (an unspecified number) of a group or category of things/people; it is formed by the preposition **di** combined with the *definite article* and, following a similar pattern, changes according to gender, number and the word that follows.

A partitive article can be used in the plural, indicating 'some':

Vorrei dei biscotti.	I'd like some biscuits.
Vorrei delle lasagne.	I'd like some lasagne.

A partitive article can also be used in the singular, indicating a quantity of something or else an abstract concept:

Vorrei <i>del</i> pane.	I'd like some bread.
Vorrei <i>dello</i> zucchero.	I'd like some sugar.
C'è ancora <i>della</i> speranza.	There is still some hope.

The forms of the partitive article have the same endings as those of the definite article, seen above.

Masculine singular	del	before most consonants	del burro
	dello	before s + consonant, gn, pn, ps, x, z and semivowel i (j, y)	dello zucchero
	dell'	before a vowel	dello yogurt dell'olio
Masculine plural	dei	before most consonants	dei fiori
	degli	before a vowel and before s + consonant, gn, pn, ps, x, z and semivowel i (j, y)	degli spaghetti degli gnocchi degli yogurt
Feminine singular	della	before consonant	della gente
	dell'	before vowel	dell'aranciata
Feminine plural	delle	before consonant or vowel	delle ragazze delle studentesse delle automobili

► See also 11.6.1 for more details on **del, della** as 'some'.

1.3.5 Use of definite, indefinite or partitive articles

The use of the definite, indefinite or partitive article depends on whether the person or object is known or unknown, or whether an individual or class/species is being referred to, as in the examples below.

- A particular, clearly identified thing or things, known or visible to the speaker and to the person(s) addressed (definite article):
Dammi *gli* stuzzicadenti.
Give me the toothpicks.
- Referring to any toothpicks, without reference to a particular or known set, using partitive article:
Dammi *degli* stuzzicadenti.
Give me some toothpicks.

Known or unknown, specified or unspecified

(a) The *definite* article is used to specify known people or things:

Flavia vuole portare *l'amico* alla festa.

Flavia wants to take her friend to the party. (= particular friend or boyfriend)

Vorrei *la camera* che abbiamo avuto *l'anno scorso*.

I would like the room we had last year. (= specific room)

(b) The *indefinite* article is used, as in English, for an unknown or unspecified individual or thing:

Flavia vuole portare *un amico* alla festa.

Flavia wants to take a friend to the party. (= an unspecified friend)

Vorrei *una camera* per stasera, per favore.

I would like a room for tonight. (= any old room, unspecified)

Individual or class/species

- (a) The *definite* article is used when you want to identify a whole class, category or species of things or creatures, distinct from other species or categories, for example an animal species or a category of films:

Il delfino è un mammifero.

The dolphin is a mammal. (= dolphins are mammals)

Mi piacciono i film americani.

I like American films.

Italian usage is different from English, which uses the definite article ‘the’ in the singular (‘the dolphin’) but not in the plural (‘dolphins’).

- (b) The *indefinite* article is used to talk about an individual dolphin or film (unless it is a particular dolphin or film known to us):

Guarda! C’è un delfino!

Look! There is *a* dolphin!

Ho visto un bel film americano alla televisione.

I’ve seen *a* nice American film on television.

These are only general guidelines. In many cases the use or omission of the article depends on different linguistic habits.

Some particular uses of the definite article

Towns, countries and geographical features

In Italian the definite article is always used with the proper names of geographical features such as mountains, rivers, etc.:

le Alpi, gli Appennini the Alps, the Appenines

il Tamigi, la Senna the Thames, the Seine

but *not* with the names of cities:

Firenze Florence

Londra London

except when qualified in some way:

la Firenze del Settecento
eighteenth-century Florence

The definite article is used with the names of countries or nations:

Amo l’Italia.

I love Italy.

Il Brasile è campione del mondo.

Brazil is world champion.

To talk about living in or going to a country, using the preposition **in**, the definite article is not normally used:

Vivo in Italia. I live in Italy.

Andiamo in Spagna. We go to Spain.

Vivo in Brasile I live in Brazil.

unless the country is qualified in some way, for example by an adjective:

Si vive meglio nell’Italia meridionale.

One lives better in southern Italy.

The combined form of preposition and definite article is usually used when the name of the country is plural:

Vivo negli Stati Uniti. I live in the USA.

For the combined forms of the definite article with the prepositions **in, a**, etc., see 4.2.

Professions

When speaking of somebody's profession, you should use the article with **fare**:

Faccio l'ingegnere. I am an engineer.

but omit it with **essere**:

Sono ingegnere. I am an engineer.

► See also 8.3.3 and 8.3.4 for further examples of these points.

We can summarise these patterns as follows:

<i>Noun</i>	<i>Article</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Class/group/species	Definite	Il cavallo è un animale docile The horse is a docile animal
Individual member of class	Indefinite	Ho comprato un cavallo I've bought a horse
Known	Definite	Il mio cavallo si chiama Max My horse's name is Max
Unknown	Indefinite	C'è un cavallo nel campo There is a horse in the field

1.4 The adjective

1.4.1 What is an adjective?

An adjective is a word that qualifies the meaning of a noun by adding some specification or description to it. There are many different categories of adjective including demonstrative (**questo, quello**), indefinite (**alcuni, qualche**) including adjectives of quantity (**molto, poco, tanto, troppo**), interrogative (**quale**), negative (**nessun**), and possessive (**mio, tuo**).

In this section however we only cover **aggettivi qualificativi**: *descriptive adjectives* that describe qualities (physical or otherwise) of a person or object, and *classifying adjectives*, such as nationality, which describe the category or classification that the person or thing belongs to (see also Chapter 10). The other types of adjectives will be shown in Chapter 3, together with the corresponding pronouns.

1.4.2 Common adjective patterns

Almost all descriptive adjectives follow the same basic patterns as the nouns (see 1.2.4 above), with their endings depending on gender (masculine/feminine) and number (singular/plural).

There are two main groups of adjectives:

<i>Adjectives</i>	<i>ending in -o / -a</i> <i>Singular</i>	<i>ending in -o / -a</i> <i>Plural</i>	<i>ending in -e</i> <i>Singular</i>	<i>ending in -e</i> <i>Plural</i>
<i>Masculine</i>	-o	-i	-e	-i
<i>Feminine</i>	-a	-e	-e	-i

Here are some examples:

<i>Adjectives</i>	<i>ending in -o / -a</i> <i>Singular</i>	<i>ending in -o / -a</i> <i>Plural</i>	<i>ending in -e</i> <i>Singular</i>	<i>ending in -e</i> <i>Plural</i>
<i>Masculine</i>	piccolo	piccoli	grande	grandi
<i>Feminine</i>	piccola	piccole	grande	grandi

The gender and number of the adjective must agree with the noun to which it refers (see 1.2.2 and 1.2.3). Here are some examples of how this looks in practice:

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<i>Masculine (-o)</i>	<i>libro piccolo</i>	<i>libri piccoli</i>	<i>libro grande</i>	<i>libri grandi</i>
<i>Masculine (-e)</i>	<i>balcone piccolo</i>	<i>balconi piccoli</i>	<i>balcone grande</i>	<i>balconi grandi</i>
<i>Feminine (-a)</i>	<i>penna piccola</i>	<i>penne piccole</i>	<i>penna grande</i>	<i>penne grandi</i>
<i>Feminine (-e)</i>	<i>stazione piccola</i>	<i>stazioni piccole</i>	<i>stazione grande</i>	<i>stazioni grandi</i>

1.4.3 Exceptions to these patterns

Only a few descriptive adjectives have a different pattern from those shown above. Adjectives with singular **-a** (for both masculine and feminine) have masculine plural in **-i** and feminine plural in **-e**. Many of these have endings such as **-ista**, **-asta**, **-ita**, **-ida**, **-ota** (for nouns with similar endings, see 1.2.5 above):

<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<i>Masculine/feminine</i>	<i>Masculine</i>	<i>Feminine</i>
socialista	socialisti	socialiste
entusiasta	entusiasti	entusiaste
ipocrita	ipocriti	ipocrite
suicida	suicidi	suicide
idiota	idioti	idiote
Il partito socialista	I paesi socialisti	
La bandiera socialista	Le idee socialiste	

1.4.4 Invariable adjectives

Invariable adjectives have the same ending, whatever their gender and number, and retain the same form whatever noun they are referring to. The most common invariable adjectives are:

- Certain colours: **beige**, **blu**, **lilla**, **marrone**, **rosa**, **viola**:

un pantalone blu	navy trousers
una gonna beige	a beige skirt
una giacca lilla	a lilac jacket
i sandali rosa	pink sandals
le scarpe marrone	brown shoes
- Colours indicated by two words: **verde bottiglia**, **giallo canarino**, **bianco latte**:

camicia verde bottiglia	bottle green shirt
pantaloni giallo canarino	canary yellow trousers
lampadine bianco latte	milk white light bulbs
- **Pari** 'even, equal', **dispari** 'odd' and **impari** 'uneven, unequal':

numero pari	even number
carte dispari	odd-numbered playing cards
pari condizioni	equal conditions
una lotta impari	an unequal struggle
- **Arrosto** (roast):

pollo arrosto	roast chicken
patate arrosto	roast potatoes
carne arrosto	roast meat

1.4.5 Position of adjectives

Unlike English, and many other languages, the most common position for the adjective in the Italian noun group is after the noun. This is the usual position occupied by the adjective, when it is not emphatic and simply expresses a basic, intrinsic characteristic of the noun:

Ho visto un film <i>interessante</i>	I saw an interesting film
Abbiamo visitato una città <i>storica</i>	We visited a historic city

Adjectives of shape, colour and nationality almost *always* come *after* the noun. Note that adjectives of nationality never have a capital letter in Italian:

una tavola <i>rotonda</i>	a round table
una maglia <i>bianca</i>	a white sweater
uno studente <i>francese</i>	a French student

There are a few exceptions, for idiomatic phrases:

un <i>bianco</i> Natale	a white Christmas
--------------------------------	-------------------

Adjectives qualified, for example by an adverb or a prepositional phrase, also come after:

una persona <i>enormemente simpatica</i>	a really nice person
un viaggio <i>pieno di problemi</i>	a journey full of problems

As do participles used as adjectives:

le mele <i>cotte</i>	cooked apples
le patate <i>fritte</i>	fried potatoes

However in Italian, unlike in English, where adjectives almost always come before the noun ('an interesting film'), the order of the noun group is flexible, and changing the position of the adjectives can change the emphasis of the sentence.

Although Italian descriptive adjectives, particularly the most common (for example, **nuovo**, **vecchio**, **giovane**, **piccolo**, **bello**, **brutto**), are placed *after* the noun when used to specify it or distinguish it from similar objects, they can be placed *before* the noun when you need to change the emphasis:

Dammi il cacciavite <i>piccolo</i>.	Give me the <i>small</i> screwdriver. (not the big one)
Sul tavolo c'era un <i>piccolo</i> cacciavite.	There was a <i>small</i> screwdriver on the table. (description of screwdriver)
Sandra è una ragazza <i>bella</i>.	Sandra is a <i>beautiful</i> girl. (not merely nice)
Sandra è una <i>bella</i> ragazza.	Sandra is a <i>really beautiful</i> girl.
Ho comprato una macchina <i>nuova</i>.	I bought a <i>new</i> car. (rather than a second-hand one)
Paola si è messa un <i>nuovo</i> vestito.	Paola put on a <i>new</i> dress. (another, a different one)

Some adjectives have a completely different meaning when their position is changed, expressing their *literal* meaning when used *after*, but a quite different, often *figurative*, meaning when used *before*. Here we look at **alto**, **bello**, **certo**, **grande** and **povero**:

un film <i>bello</i>	a <i>nice</i> film
un <i>bel</i> problema	a <i>pretty difficult</i> problem
un ufficiale <i>alto</i>	a <i>tall</i> officer
un <i>alto</i> ufficiale	a <i>high-ranking</i> officer
un uomo <i>grande</i>	a <i>big</i> man (for example, Pavarotti)
un <i>grande</i> uomo	a <i>great</i> man (for example, Napoleon)

Ci sono molti studenti *poveri*.
Poveri studenti! L'esame sarà duro!
 Preferisco avere regole *certe*.
 Non capisco *certe* regole.

There are many *poor* students.
Poor students! The exam will be hard!
 I prefer to have *reliable* rules.
 I don't understand *certain* (some) rules.

Bello, buono

The adjective **bello**, when positioned before the noun (see example above, **un *bel* problema**), changes its endings in the same way as the definite article **il, lo, l', la**, etc. (see 1.3.3), the partitive article **del, dello, dell', della** (see 1.3.4) and the demonstrative adjective **quel, quello, quell', quella**, etc. (see 3.8.1): **un *bel* libro, un *bello* specchio, un *bell'*uomo, una *bell'*esperienza, una *bella* ragazza**.

The adjective **buono**, on the other hand, follows the pattern of the indefinite article **un, uno, una, un'** (see 1.3.2): ***buon* esempio, *buon* film, *buono* studio, *buona* fortuna, *buon'*esperienza**, etc.

1.4.6

Comparative adjectives

Più, meno

In making a comparison between two elements (whether people, objects or other), you can use a *comparative adjective* to express the concept of 'more' or 'less'. The words **più** ('more') and **meno** ('less') make a descriptive adjective into a comparative adjective:

La mia macchina è *più* veloce della tua.

My car is faster than yours.

La mia macchina è *meno* veloce della tua.

My car is less fast than yours.

Quanto, come

The concept of 'same as' is expressed by using **quanto** or **come** to introduce the second element of the comparison:

La mia macchina è *veloce quanto* la tua.

My car is as fast as yours.

In Italia le melanzane non sono care *come* in Inghilterra.

In Italy aubergines are not *as* dear *as* in England.

As a reinforcement, you can also use the words **tanto**, **altrettanto** or **così** before the first element of the comparison:

La mia collega è *tanto* carina *quanto* efficiente.

My colleague is *as* pretty *as* she is efficient.

Di, che

Either **di** or **che** introduces the second element of the comparison, where English would use 'than':

Sandro è *più* bravo *di* Angelo a bridge.

Sandro is better than Angelo at bridge.

È stato *meno* facile *di* quanto pensassi.

It was less easy than I expected.

È *più* facile criticare *che* risolvere i problemi.

It's easier to criticise than to solve problems.

Sara è *più* carina *che* intelligente.

Sara is prettier than she is intelligent.

The choice of **di** or **che** depends on what part of speech the second element of the comparison is, and on its position in the sentence:

più/meno . . .	di (before noun, pronoun, adverb, numeral)
più/meno . . .	che (before adjective, verb, noun/pronoun preceded by preposition)

Further examples of usage are shown in 17.2 and 17.3.

Special forms of comparative

Four of the most common Italian adjectives have a special form of comparative:

buono	good	migliore (più buono)
cattivo/brutto	bad	peggiore (più cattivo)
grande	big	maggiore (più grande)
piccolo	small	minore (più piccolo)

The regular comparative form (shown in brackets) is also possible. While there is little difference between **più buono/migliore** and **più cattivo/peggiore**, there can be a difference in meaning between **maggiore** and **più grande**. **Maggiore** can mean 'bigger, older/elder' in a physical sense, but can also mean 'greater' in an abstract sense. Similarly, **minore** can mean 'smaller' or 'younger', but can also mean 'less, the lesser' when referring to an abstract quality:

Ho due sorelle. La maggiore si chiama Diana.

I have two sisters. The elder is called Diana.

Noi abbiamo una maggiore responsabilità di voi.

We have a greater responsibility than you.

Il mio fratello minore frequenta la scuola elementare.

My little (younger) brother goes to elementary school.

Lui lavora con minore impegno da quando si è sposato.

He works with less commitment since he got married.

1.4.7

Relative superlatives

To refer to something or somebody as having 'the most' of a certain quality, in relation to other objects or people, you use **il più** together with the relevant adjective. This is called the *relative superlative*:

Silvia è la più brava studentessa della nostra classe.

Silvia is the best student in our class.

Pavarotti era il tenore italiano più famoso del mondo.

Pavarotti was the most famous Italian tenor in the world.

Il Po è il più lungo fiume italiano.

The Po is the longest Italian river.

As with the comparative, the four most common Italian adjectives have a special form of relative superlative, as well as the regular one:

buono	good	il migliore (il più buono)	the best
cattivo	bad	il peggiore (il più cattivo)	the worst
grande	big	il maggiore (il più grande)	the biggest, oldest
piccolo	small	il minore (il più piccolo)	the smallest, youngest

As with the comparative, there can be a difference of meaning between the two forms **il maggiore/il più grande** and **il minore/il più piccolo**:

Secondo me, il problema maggiore dei giorni nostri è la droga.

In my opinion, the greatest problem in our time is that of drugs.

1.4.8

Absolute superlatives

Absolute superlatives indicate the greatest possible degree of a quality, but without any comparison being made. Superlative adjectives are formed in Italian by adding the suffix **-issimo** to the end of the adjective:

un uomo bellissimo	a very handsome man
un'organizzazione efficientissima	a very efficient organisation
degli importantissimi clienti	some very important clients

However it is also possible in Italian to use the adverb **molto** to modify the adjective, in a similar way to the English 'very':

un uomo molto bello	a very handsome man
un'organizzazione molto efficiente	a very efficient organisation
dei clienti molto importanti	some very important clients

As seen above, when modified by any adverb (**molto, poco, troppo, abbastanza, piuttosto**) the adjective generally follows the noun:

dei clienti piuttosto importanti	some rather important clients
---	-------------------------------

Notice how when modified by the superlative suffix **-issimo**, the endings of the adjectives always have the pattern of adjectives ending in **-o/-a/-i/-e** (see 1.4.2), even if they belong to the other group of adjectives ending in **-e, -i**. So we have:

Adjective in the first group	bello/i/a/e	bellissimo/i/a/e
Adjective in the second group	importante/i	importantissimo/i/a/e

The common adjectives **buono, cattivo, grande, piccolo**, mentioned above, also have two possible forms of absolute superlative:

buono	good	ottimo/buonissimo	best
cattivo	bad	pessimo/cattivissimo	worst
grande	big	massimo/grandissimo	biggest, greatest
piccolo	small	minimo/piccolissimo	smallest, least

For the comparative and superlative of adverbs, see 6.4.

1.5

Agreement of noun, article and adjective

Nearly all Italian descriptive adjectives have the same pattern of endings as the nouns (the two patterns are shown above); only a few are invariable (see 1.2.6). Nouns, adjectives and articles used together in a noun group must agree in number and gender.

For example, if you use a feminine singular noun such as **borsa** 'bag', you have to use a feminine singular *article* **la** and *adjective* **rossa**:

La borsa rossa The red bag

If you use a masculine plural noun such as **sandali** 'sandals', you have to use a masculine plural *article* **i** and *adjective* **rossi**:

I sandali rossi The red sandals

The English articles and adjectives are identical in both examples ('the red . . .') while in Italian they have very different forms depending on the gender and number of the noun to which they are attached:

Il vestito rosso	I sandali rossi
La borsa rossa	Le scarpe rosse

1.5.1 Noun and adjective of same pattern

When noun and adjective belong to the same pattern of endings, the agreement will be obvious:

Sul tavolo c'è un piatto rotondo.

On the table there is a round dish.

Ho conosciuto due ragazze italiane.

I met two Italian girls.

1.5.2 Noun and adjective of different patterns

It is more difficult to remember how to make the agreement when the noun and adjective belong to different patterns and therefore have different endings:

Sul tavolo c'è un piatto grande.

There is a large dish on the table.

Ho conosciuto due ragazze inglesi.

I met two English girls.

Il programma era noioso.

The programme was boring.

La radio era rotta.

The radio was broken.

1.5.3 More than one noun (same gender)

If an adjective refers to more than one noun of the same gender, it will be plural and have the same gender as the nouns:

Ho comprato un libro e un vocabolario tedeschi.

I bought a German book and German dictionary.

Ho comprato una grammatica e un'agenda tedesche.

I bought a German grammar and a German diary.

1.5.4 More than one noun (different genders)

If the two nouns are of different genders then the adjective is generally masculine plural:

Ho comprato un vocabolario e una grammatica tedeschi.

I bought a German dictionary and a German grammar.

However if the second of the two nouns – the one nearest to the adjective – is feminine plural, the adjective may sometimes agree with it:

Ho comprato un vocabolario e due grammatiche tedesche.

I bought a German dictionary and two German grammars.

2

Verbs

2.1 General features of verbs

2.1.1 Introduction

Actions, events and situations are expressed by the use of *verbs*. Italian has a complex system of verb forms. In the first section of this chapter (2.1), we introduce and explain the main features of Italian verbs: grammatical subject; persons; conjugations; regular and irregular verbs; auxiliary and modal verbs; moods and tenses; transitive and intransitive verbs; active, passive and reflexive voice; *si passivante* and impersonal *si*.

In the second section of the chapter (2.2), we look at each individual verb mood (indicative, conditional and subjunctive) and tense with brief explanations and illustrations of their use. The most common irregular verb forms are also explained and illustrated. Part B of the book illustrates usage more fully.

For easy reference, **Appendix II** illustrates all the forms of the regular verbs in table form (both active and passive) while **Appendix III** illustrates the most common irregular verb forms.

2.1.2 Grammatical subject

Usually the subject of a verb is the ‘agent’ or ‘doer’ of an action, or the ‘protagonist’ of an event:

Noi partiamo per l’America.

We leave for America.

Franco e Teresa partono per l’America.

Franco and Teresa leave for America.

Sometimes you want to talk about *facts* rather than *actions*. In this case, the ‘subject’ of the verb is not carrying out an action, but is the *theme* or main topic expressed by the verb:

Giulia è bionda.

Giulia is blonde.

Questo film dura due ore.

This film lasts two hours.

The *grammatical subject* of the verb may be different from the *real* subject or agent of the action. This is the case with passive constructions (see 2.1.10 and 19.2).

2.1.3 Persons of the verb

The different forms of the verb, determined by its grammatical subject, are called the *persons* (this is a purely grammatical term, not necessarily referring to human beings):

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------|
| 1 | Singular first person (the speaker) | I |
| 2 | Singular second person (the person addressed) | you |
| 3 | Singular third person (the third party) | he, she, it |

4	Plural first person (the speaker + other people)	we
5	Plural second person (the people addressed)	you
6	Plural third person (the third parties)	they

In each tense, Italian verbs have six different endings, depending on who or what is carrying out the action. The different endings immediately identify the ‘person’ – the subject of the action – unlike in English where only the third person singular has a distinctive ending (‘I eat’, ‘you eat’, ‘he eats’) and we have to rely on the subject pronouns (‘I, you, he’ etc.) to identify the *person*.

The first and second persons are usually evident in the context of communication (speaker/writer and person addressed):

Quanti anni hai?	Ho trent’anni.
How old are you?	I am thirty.

Using a subject pronoun to refer to the third person is often unnecessary too, for example where the person (or thing) has already been mentioned:

Quanti anni ha Maria?	Ha venticinque anni.
How old is Maria?	She is twenty-five.

In general, it is not necessary to use subject pronouns in Italian, unless you need to give particular emphasis to the subject (see also 8.4).

2.1.4 Conjugations

Italian verbs have a pattern of six distinct verb endings in each of the tenses which creates a large number of different forms for every verb (almost a hundred in total). Fortunately, most verbs follow one of three common patterns known as *conjugations*. Knowing which of the three conjugations a verb belongs to makes it easier to find and use the correct verb form. Each verb has an *invariable* part (*the stem*), which carries its meaning, and an *inflected* part (*the ending*), which identifies *the person, the tense, the mood* and other features. Traditionally we distinguish the three conjugations by the form that the verb takes in the *infinitive* (the form used in dictionary entries):

- 1st conjugation ending in **-are** as **parl-are** ‘to speak’
- 2nd conjugation ending in **-ere** as **cred-ere** ‘to believe’
- 3rd conjugation ending in **-ire** as **dorm-ire** ‘to sleep’

The verbs of the 3rd conjugation (ending in **-ire**) follow two distinct patterns, the second of which, with endings in **-isco**, as in **fin-ire / fin-isco** ‘to finish’, is the most common. Both patterns, despite their differences, belong to the same conjugation.

2.1.5 Regular verbs

We call the verb patterns described above *regular* because the *stems* of these verbs (the *invariable* part) remain constantly the same throughout the whole system of moods and tenses. Understanding the way the *endings* (the *variable* part) change will allow us to learn all the possible forms of most Italian verbs. The regular conjugation patterns (for both *active* verb forms and *passive* verb forms across the full range of moods and tenses) are shown in the verb tables in **Appendix II** for easy reference.

2.1.6 Irregular verbs

Irregular verbs are those that not only change their endings, but also change the stem in one or more of their tenses. Italian has a large number of irregular verbs, or verbs with some irregular forms, most of them in the 2nd conjugation, including many verbs used frequently in everyday language. Sometimes the irregular changes of the stem are unique to one verb (as in

the case of **essere**). Sometimes several verbs share a common pattern of irregularity, and this can help you to memorise the many deviations from the ‘norm’. In **2.2**, the most common irregular verb forms are shown for each individual tense. In **Appendix III** all the irregular forms of the most common verbs are shown in alphabetical order.

2.1.7 **Verbi ausiliari e verbi servili (avere, essere, dovere, potere, volere)**

The verbs **avere** ‘to have’ and **essere** ‘to be’ are often used as *auxiliary* verbs, combining with the *past participles* of other verbs to form compound tenses (see also **2.1.9**).

Avere is used with all transitive verbs (but see **2.1.10**) but also with many intransitive verbs:

Ho capito il messaggio. (*transitive*)

I’ve understood the message.

Ho viaggiato per tutto il paese. (*intransitive*)

I’ve travelled all over the country.

Essere is used with a large number of intransitive verbs, reflexive verbs and verbs used mainly impersonally or in the third person, such as *piacere*:

Sono arrivata alle 19.00. (*intransitive*)

I arrived at 7 pm.

Mi sono alzata presto. (*reflexive*)

I got up early.

Il film è piaciuto molto.

The film was much liked.

For further information on transitive/intransitive verbs, see **2.1.9**.

The verbs **dovere** ‘to have to’, **potere** ‘to be able to’ and **volere** ‘to wish to’ are very often used in combination with another verb in the *infinitive* form, to complement its meaning. When used in this way, they are called **verbi servili** ‘modal verbs’. Here are some examples:

Ieri ho dovuto chiudere io l’ufficio.

I had to lock the office, yesterday.

Quando potremo incontrare il Dott. Salvi?

When can we meet Dr Salvi?

Voglio tornare a casa presto stasera.

I want to go home early tonight.

For further examples of their use, see **22.1.5**, **23.3.5**, **34.6** (*dovere*), **22.1.1**, **22.3.1**, **22.4.1** (*potere*) and **21.2.1**, **23.2.1** (*volere*).

2.1.8 **Moods and tenses**

Moods (modi)

The different forms and uses of Italian verbs are traditionally grouped in seven *moods*. These convey the different ways in which the speaker or writer wants to communicate: with certainty or doubt, politeness or straightforwardness, in a request or a command form, etc.

The seven moods are:

indicative	infinitive
conditional	participle
subjunctive	gerund
imperative	

Each individual verb mood and tense is described separately in section **2.2** below. Verb tables for regular verbs are given in **Appendix II** and for irregular verbs in **Appendix III**. The ways in which moods are used to express distinct *communicative functions* and meanings are illustrated in **Part B**.

Tenses (*tempi*)

The word *tense* denotes the different verb forms that indicate the relationship between the time of the action or event and the time of speaking or writing (or other reference point in time). There is a range of tenses for each mood of verbs (except the imperative).

In Italian different tenses are sometimes used to distinguish features other than time relationships. For example, perfect and imperfect tenses can express the *aspect* of the action (see 13.5.3), while different subjunctive and conditional tenses can express different degrees of doubt, possibility, politeness, etc. (see Sections III and IV).

Compound tenses (*tempi composti*)

Many Italian verb tenses are formed using the *past participle* of the main verb along with either **avere** or **essere** as the *auxiliary verb*. These are called compound tenses. All *passive* forms of verbs (see 2.1.10 below) are compound forms, commonly formed with the auxiliary **essere**. Students of Italian often find it difficult to know which verbs use **avere** in compound tenses, and which use **essere**. To know which one to use, it helps to understand the difference between *transitive* and *intransitive* verbs (see 2.1.9 below).

2.1.9**Transitive and intransitive verbs (*verbi transitivi e intransitivi*)****Transitive verbs**

The actions expressed by verbs can be ‘completed’ with an *object*. A transitive verb is one that takes a *direct object* as in the examples below:

Lucia scrive una lettera.

Lucia writes a letter.

Cerchiamo una casa.

We look for a house.

In these sentences, the action of the verb can be completed by answering the question **che cosa?** ‘what?’ The direct object of the verb is the noun that can answer this question directly (in this case **una lettera** and **una casa**):

Che cosa scrive Lucia?

What is Lucia writing?

Lucia scrive una lettera.

Lucia is writing a letter.

Che cosa cerchiamo?

What are we looking for?

Cerchiamo una casa.

We’re looking for a house.

Intransitive verbs

Some Italian verbs, however, cannot be completed by a direct object. If the question **che cosa?** cannot be answered, or does not make sense, the verb is *intransitive*:

Andiamo in ufficio alle 9.

We go to the office at 9.

Il treno per Napoli parte alle 6.

The train to Naples leaves at 6.

Compound tenses: auxiliary *avere* or *essere*

Because it determines the way they are used, it is important to know whether verbs are transitive or intransitive. It is particularly important in compound tenses such as *passato prossimo*, since it helps to determine whether to use the auxiliary **avere** or the auxiliary **essere**.

If the verb is *transitive*, it will always use the auxiliary **avere** in compound tenses:

Lucia ha scritto una lettera.

Lucia wrote a letter.

Abbiamo cercato una casa.

We looked for a house.

If the verb is *intransitive*, it will often – but not always – use the auxiliary **essere** in compound tenses:

Siamo andate in ufficio alle 9.

We went to the office at 9.

Il treno per Napoli è partito alle 6.

The train to Naples left at 6.

Check whether you can ask and answer the question **che cosa?** ‘what?’ You can also check in a dictionary. Verb entries in dictionaries usually carry the following indications:

v.t. or v.tr.	verbo transitivo
v.i. or v.intr.	verbo intransitivo

Speakers of English find it difficult to distinguish transitive from intransitive verbs, because English compound tenses only use the auxiliary 'to have' in the active forms and the auxiliary 'to be' in passive forms ('I *have* criticised my colleagues'; 'I *am* criticised by my colleagues'). Problems also arise from the fact that many English verbs used transitively and intransitively have an Italian equivalent which can only be used intransitively. Below we show examples of English phrases which cannot be translated directly into Italian, since the verbs **camminare** and **volare** are not used transitively; you cannot **camminare il cane** or **volare il mondo**.

- I'm going to walk the dog.
- Fly the world with Silverwings!

Intransitive verbs that use the auxiliary *avere*

Generally in Italian transitive verbs use the auxiliary **avere**, while many intransitive verbs use the auxiliary **essere** in the compound tenses. However, there are quite a few intransitive verbs that use the auxiliary **avere**. Here are a few of the most common:

camminare	to walk	piangere	to cry
dormire	to sleep	riposare	to rest
giocare	to play	volare	to fly
passeggiare	to walk		

Ho camminato per due ore.

I walked for two hours.

Come hai dormito?

How did you sleep?

Avete giocato a carte?

Did you play cards?

Verbs that can be used both transitively and intransitively

Some verbs can be used both transitively (with a direct object) and intransitively (without a direct object), for example, **aumentare**, **cambiare**, **cominciare**, **crescere**, **diminuire**, **finire**, **passare**.

In the first two examples that follow, the subjects of these actions – beginning and finishing – are people and both verbs have direct objects ('the lesson', 'the holidays'). So in these examples, they are used transitively.

Il professore comincia la lezione alle 11.00.

The teacher begins the lesson at 11.00.

Finiamo le vacanze in agosto.

We finish our holidays in August.

In the next two examples, the same verbs have 'the lesson' and 'the holidays' as their respective subjects and cannot have a direct object. So in these examples they are used intransitively.

La lezione comincia alle 11.00.

The lesson begins at 11.00.

Le vacanze finiscono in agosto.

The holidays finish in August.

In simple tenses, for example present, imperfect or future, the forms of the verbs are identical, whether they are transitive or intransitive. But in compound tenses such as the *passato prossimo*, their forms vary according to whether they are used transitively or intransitively, with verbs used transitively taking **avere** and verbs used intransitively taking **essere**:

Il professore ha cominciato la lezione. (transitive)

The teacher began the lesson.

La lezione è cominciata alle 11.00. (*intransitive*)

The lesson began at 11.00.

Abbiamo finito le vacanze in agosto. (*transitive*)

We finished the holidays in August.

Le vacanze sono finite in agosto. (*intransitive*)

The holidays finished in August.

Another verb with both transitive and intransitive functions is **mancare**, which has different meanings depending on whether it is used transitively or intransitively.

When used intransitively **mancare** means ‘to fail, to be lacking, to be missing’ and uses **essere**. It is used like **piacere**, so that the person or object missed or lacking is the subject of the sentence and the person missing them is expressed by an indirect pronoun (**mi**):

Volevo fare la pista nera ma mi è mancato il coraggio.

I wanted to do the black (ski) run but I lacked the courage.

Mi sei mancata tanto.

I missed you so much.

When used transitively (for example, in the phrase **mancare il bersaglio**) **mancare** means ‘to miss a target’ and uses **avere**:

Gli screening per il colesterolo hanno mancato il bersaglio.

The screening tests for cholesterol have missed their target.

For some other verbs, such as **correre** ‘to run’, **saltare** ‘to jump’, **vivere** ‘to live’, the rules are less rigid. When used *transitively*, they always take **avere**:

Hanno corso un grosso rischio. They ran a great risk.

Oggi ho saltato il pranzo. Today I skipped lunch.

Ho vissuto una vita d’inferno. I have lived a life of hell.

When used *intransitively*, however, the choice of **avere** or **essere** as auxiliary tends to be a question of personal choice and linguistic habit, with both options possible:

Ho vissuto / Sono vissuto a Londra per 10 anni.

I lived in London for 10 years.

Giuliana ha corso / è corsa a casa.

Giuliana ran home.

I bambini hanno saltato / sono saltati giù dal letto.

The children jumped down from the bed.

Verbs like these are marked in dictionaries as **v.tr. e intr.** (*verbi transitivi e intransitivi*).

Verbs describing the weather are intransitive and usually take **essere** but can also take **avere**:

È (ha) piovuto tanto. It rained a lot.

2.1.10 Voice: active, passive, reflexive

‘Voice’ describes the relationship of the verb action with its subject and object. These relationships are:

(a) Active voice

Normally the grammatical subject of the verb (see 2.1.2) is the agent or doer of the action or the main theme of the event, in which case the verb construction (‘voice’) is active:

Gianni guarda Luisa.

Gianni watches Luisa.

Il meccanico ripara la macchina.

The mechanic repairs the car.

(b) Passive voice

Sometimes the person or object on the *receiving* end of the action is the grammatical subject, and in this case the verb construction is *passive*:

Luisa è guardata da Gianni.

Luisa is watched by Gianni.

La macchina è riparata dal meccanico.

The car is repaired by the mechanic.

In the second example, the agent or doer of the action is clearly the mechanic (the one who repairs the car), but the grammatical subject of the verb is the car. The construction is passive.

(c) Reflexive and pronominal voice

A verb form is reflexive when its subject and object are the same:

Gianni si guarda allo specchio.

Gianni looks at himself in the mirror.

There are other verb forms that are not strictly speaking reflexive but are similar in form. These are called pronominal. The following paragraphs look at the *passive*, *reflexive* and *pronominal* verb forms in detail.

Passive constructions are used when you want to focus on the action itself or the object of an action, rather than on the agent or doer of an action. The passive of Italian verbs is formed by the past participle and the auxiliary **essere**, using the same tense as the corresponding active form. The participle agrees with the gender and number of the subject. The passive conjugation of verbs is shown in the verb tables in **Appendix II**. The passive can also be formed using **venire** or **andare** as auxiliary instead of **essere** (see 19.2) or by using the *si passivante* construction (see 2.1.11 and 19.4). Only *transitive* verbs (see 2.1.9) can have a passive form. For more examples of the passive, see 19.2.

Reflexive verb forms are active verb forms accompanied by a reflexive pronoun (see 3.4.3). Look at these two examples:

Il Sig. Franchi sta lavando la macchina.

Mr Franchi *is washing* the car.

Il Sig. Franchi si sta lavando.

Mr Franchi *is washing himself*.

In the first example, the direct object of the action of washing is the car. The person who is doing it is the subject of the action. In the second example, the subject and the object of the action are the same person (**Il Sig. Franchi**). This is the reflexive verb form; the reflexive pronoun **si** refers to the person carrying out the action (the subject), but is grammatically the object of the action. You probably already know one reflexive verb: **chiamarsi** ‘to call oneself’.

The position of the reflexive pronoun is the same as that of the other unstressed personal pronouns (see 3.4.7): it usually comes before the verb, but is sometimes attached to the end of it, for example with infinitives, gerunds and **tu, noi, voi** imperatives:

Prego si accomodi.

Please, have a seat (make *yourself* comfortable).

In genere i giovani italiani si vestono alla moda.

In general young people in Italy dress fashionably.

Sono le 9.00. Dovete prepararvi a uscire.

It's 9.00. You must get yourselves ready to go out.

Preparati ad uscire!

Get yourself ready to go out!

In the compound tenses, reflexive verbs are always conjugated with the verb **essere**, even though the verbs are *transitive* (cf. **lavare, alzare**) and normally take **avere** in their compound tenses. The past participle has to agree with the subject:

Stamattina i bambini si sono alzati alle 6.

This morning the children got (themselves) up at 6.

Mi sono vestita con calma.

I got dressed slowly.

Pronominal verb forms are verb forms which use the reflexive pronoun but are not true reflexives. In Italian they are used much more frequently than in English not only in a true reflexive pattern but also in many other ways. In true reflexives (see above), the subject and object of the verb are one and the same. This is not the case with pronominal verb forms, but they still embody the concept of 'reciprocal' or 'reflexive' action (an action relating or reflecting back to the subject).

The different uses of the *pronominal verb form* are illustrated in the examples below:

(a) *Indirect reflexive (action carried out on oneself)*

The reflexive always indicates an action which is related to the person carrying out the action (the subject). Note the use of the auxiliary **essere** in the compound tense in the last example:

Giulio si lava le mani.

Giulio washes *his* hands.

Mi metto la giacca.

I put on *my* jacket.

Stamattina non mi sono fatto la barba.

This morning I didn't shave (*myself*).

In the examples above, the actions are not truly reflexive, since the subjects and the objects of the actions are not exactly identical: **Giulio . . . le mani, io . . . la giacca, io . . . la barba**. However the reflexive pronoun is used to stress the fact that the object of the action is *closely related* to the person who does it, and indeed is either part of his/her body (**le mani, la barba**) or a personal belonging (**la giacca**) (see also 3.7.2).

In the last example, the participle can also agree with the object:

Stamattina non mi sono fatta la barba.

The reflexive pronoun can also be omitted, in which case the construction no longer takes **essere** in the compound tenses, as shown in the final example:

Giulio lava le mani.

Metto la giacca.

Non ho fatto la barba.

(b) *Reciprocal reflexive (action carried out on each other)*

A reciprocal action is when two people jointly carry out an action that affects each of them:

Arrivederci. Ci vediamo domani.

Bye. See you tomorrow.

Mario e Nicoletta si sposano domani.

Mario and Nicoletta are getting married tomorrow.

Dove vi siete conosciuti tu e Maria?

Where did you and Maria meet (each other)?

Io e il Dottor Rossi ci siamo incontrati in Spagna.

Dr Rossi and I met (each other) in Spain.

In the examples above the reflexive pronoun marks an event or action involving the same people; the two people are at the same time both subject and object of a reciprocal action. The same actions can also be expressed by the active form, where one person is the subject and the other is the object:

Domani Mario sposa Nicoletta.

Tomorrow Mario will marry Nicoletta.

Dove hai conosciuto Maria?

Where did you meet Maria?

Ho incontrato il Dottor Rossi in Spagna.

I met Dr Rossi in Spain.

(c) *Emotional involvement expressed with reflexive pronouns*

In Italian you can use the reflexive pronoun simply to stress the subjective side of an event, the importance of the event to the person involved or the emotional involvement of the person who is the (grammatical) subject:

Stasera ci vediamo un bel film.

Tonight we'll watch a nice film.

Ho fame! Voglio mangiarmi una pizza!

I'm hungry! I really want a pizza!

Mannaggia! Mi sono dimenticata le chiavi!

Damn! I forgot the keys!

In the examples above, the objects of the verbs are totally separate from, and not part of, the subjects, so the construction is not truly reflexive. However the reflexive pronoun shows the emotional involvement felt by the persons carrying out these actions. The same sentences can be expressed without using the reflexive pronouns, but then the statements will sound much less emotionally involved and more objective:

Stasera vediamo un bel film.

Voglio mangiare una pizza.

Ho dimenticato le chiavi.

There are a few Italian verbs that are always (or almost always) used with a reflexive pronoun, because of the 'psychological' and subjective meaning they convey, for example:

accorgersi to realize, to be aware

arrabbiarsi to get angry

divertirsi to have fun

innamorarsi to fall in love

pentirsi to regret, repent

vergognarsi to be ashamed

Sbrigati! Non ti accorgi che è tardi?

Hurry up! Don't you realize that it's late?

Non arrabbiarti!

Don't be angry!

Vi siete divertiti a Roma?

Did you have a good time in Rome?

Giulia si è pentita di aver accettato quel lavoro.

Giulia regretted having accepted that job.

Non vergognarti di questo errore, non è colpa tua.

Don't be ashamed of this mistake. It's not your fault.

2.1.11 *Si passivante*

The reflexive pronoun **si** can be used to give a passive meaning to the active form of the verb (see also 19.4):

Si parla italiano.

Italian is spoken.

Nella mia famiglia si parlano tre lingue.

In my family three languages are spoken.

Dal terrazzo si vedono i tetti della città.

From the terrace the roofs of the city can be seen (one can see the roofs).

In the first example, the *si passivante* form appears identical to the *si impersonale* form ('one' speaks Italian) mentioned in 2.1.12 below. However, when there is a plural subject, as in the second two examples, the verb is plural, making it clear that the construction is passive ('three languages are spoken', 'the roofs can be seen').

2.1.12 Impersonal *si*

The pronoun **si** is also used to express the *impersonal* form of verbs (see also 19.5), i.e. in cases where no subject is mentioned, or rather where the subject cannot be identified with a particular person or thing (English would use the indeterminate subject 'one' or perhaps 'everyone'):

Si lavora meglio con il fresco.

One works better in cool weather.

Stasera si va a ballare.

Tonight everybody is going dancing.

A tavola non si invecchia.

One doesn't get old at the dinner table.

(This last example is a popular saying, meant to discourage people from rushing their food.)

Unlike the *si passivante* (see 2.1.11), the impersonal form is always formed with **si** and the third person *singular* of the verb.

2.2 Individual verb moods and tenses

In this section, we look at each mood and tense of verbs individually, with a brief illustration of their use. We also mention the most common irregular verb forms in each tense. For a complete table of the regular verbs and the most common irregular verbs, see **Appendices II** and **III** respectively.

2.2.1 *Infinito* (infinitive mood)

The infinitive is the basic form of verbs and the form used as a dictionary entry (in other words, the 'name' of the verb). The infinitive form (**-are**, **-ere**, **-ire**) indicates which conjugation a verb belongs to. The infinitive has both present and past forms.

Forms of the *infinito* (present and past)

The forms of the *present infinitive* are:

1st conjugation	parlare	to speak
2nd conjugation	vendere	to sell
3rd conjugation	partire	to go
3rd conjugation (in -isc-)	finire	to finish

The *past infinitive* is formed by the past participle and the infinitive **avere** or **essere**. When formed with **essere**, the past infinitive changes form to agree with the verb subject (see examples below).

1st conjugation	parlare	to speak	avere parlato	to have spoken
1st conjugation	andare	to go	essere andato/a/i/e	to have gone
2nd conjugation	vendere	to sell	avere venduto	to have sold
2nd conjugation	vivere	to live	essere vissuto/a/i/e	to have lived
3rd conjugation	sentire	to hear	avere sentito	to have heard
3rd conjugation	partire	to leave	essere partito	to have left

Irregular forms of the *infinito*

There are three groups of 2nd conjugation verbs with an irregular infinitive (i.e. not with the usual **-ere** ending). In most cases the infinitive is a contracted form of the original infinitive and several of the tenses (for example, imperfect) are based on the original verb stem.

(a) *Verbs with infinitive in -urre*

Several verbs have an infinitive ending in **-urre**, which is a contracted form of the original infinitive ending in ***-ucere** (***producere**, etc.). In fact several of the tenses are based on the original stem in ***-duc-** (see 2.2.3 below for the present indicative forms). These verbs include:

condurre	to conduct, lead
dedurre	to deduct
indurre	to induce
introdurre	to introduce, insert
produrre	to produce
sedurre	to seduce
tradurre	to translate

(b) *Verbs with infinitive in -orre*

Several verbs have an infinitive ending in **-orre**. Their infinitive is a contracted form of the original ***ponere**. (Their irregular present indicative forms are also based on this older verb stem.) These verbs include:

comporre	to compose
deporre	to depose
imporre	to impose
porre	to place, put
opporre	to oppose
proporre	to propose
supporre	to suppose

(c) *Bere, dire, fare*

Bere is a contracted form of an older infinitive ***bevere** and many of the forms of this verb follow the original verb stem (see 2.2.3 below for the present indicative forms and 2.2.4 for the imperfect forms). **Dire** (originally ***dicere**) and **fare** (originally ***facere**) also come into this category.

Uses of the *infinito*

Infinitive depending on a verb

The infinitive can be linked to – and depend on – another verb:

Present infinitive:

Dobbiamo partire alle 7.00.

We must leave at 7.00.

Sai usare il computer?

Can you use the computer?

Non riesco a sentire la tua voce.

I can't hear your voice.

Past infinitive:

Penso di avere capito.

I think I have understood.

Si ricorda di aver visto il ragazzo vicino a casa sua.

He remembers having seen the boy near his house.

The infinitive is normally linked to the preceding verb by a preposition such as **di** or **a** as in the last three examples above (see list of verbs and prepositions in **Appendix IV**). With **dovere**, **potere**, **volere** and **amare**, **desiderare**, **osare**, **preferire**, **sapere**, however, no preposition is

needed, as in the first two examples above. For particular uses of the infinitive with a preposition, see 4.4. See also 33.2 (purpose), 34.3.2 (cause), 35.4 (result), 38.5.3 (condition).

In Italian the subject of the infinitive must be the same as that of the verb on which it depends. Otherwise two separate finite verbs must be used, usually linked by **che**. So sentences in English such as 'I want you to come soon' cannot be translated directly into Italian using the infinitive (***voglio tu venire presto**), but have to use **che**, as in **voglio che tu venga presto**, making clear that the two different verbs have different subjects (see also 21.5.3).

An exception to this is when the main verb of the clause is **fare** or **lasciare** (see also 21.7). These are followed directly by the infinitive:

Fammi passare.	Let me pass.
Lasciali parlare.	Let them speak.
Ho fatto entrare i signori.	I allowed the gentlemen to come in.

Infinitive used as imperative

The present infinitive form can be used to tell somebody *not to do* something, i.e. as a *negative* imperative, either second person singular, as in the first example below, or with an impersonal meaning, as in the second example (see 21.3):

Zitto, non parlare.	Be quiet, don't speak.
Non sporgersi dal finestrino.	Don't lean out of the window.

Note how a phrase that was originally the imperative of a reflexive verb **non ti scordare** 'do not forget' has now become the name of a flower:

Nontiscordardimé	Forget-me-not
-------------------------	---------------

Infinitive used as a noun

Infinitive verbs are often used as nouns, with or without the masculine singular definite article, as in the last example (**il sapere**):

Lavorare stanca.	Work is tiring.
Mangiare è necessario per vivere.	Eating is necessary for life.
Il sapere degli antichi si trasmette di generazione in generazione.	The wisdom of the ancients is handed down from generation to generation.

Infinitive used after a preposition

The infinitive can be found after **prima** 'before' and **dopo** 'after':

Prima di andare a casa, devo passare dal panettiere a prendere il pane.	Before going home, I have to pass by the baker's and get some bread.
Dopo aver cucinato, non ho voglia di mangiare.	After having cooked, I don't feel like eating.

For further uses of the infinitive and past infinitive, see also 30.6.1, 30.6.2 and 36.4.2.

2.2.2 Indicative mood: introduction

The indicative mood is used to express straightforward statements of facts, objective descriptions, real and definite situations, etc. We look here at each of the eight tenses of the indicative mood, both regular and irregular forms, with a brief reference to their use, covered in detail in Part B.

2.2.3 *Indicativo presente* (present indicative)

Forms of the *presente*

The forms of the present indicative of the three regular conjugations are shown below:

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parl-are	cred-ere	dorm-ire	fin-ire
1st person sing	parl-o	cred-o	dorm-o	fin-isco
2nd person sing	parl-i	cred-i	dorm-i	fin-isci
3rd person sing	parl-a	cred-e	dorm-e	fin-isce
1st person pl	parl-iamo	cred-iamo	dorm-iamo	fin-iamo
2nd person pl	parl-ate	cred-ete	dorm-ite	fin-ite
3rd person pl	parl-ano	cred-ono	dorm-ono	fin-iscono

Irregular forms of the *presente*

1st conjugation (-are)

Some verbs in the 1st conjugation, while not irregular, present potential difficulties with spelling and/or pronunciation.

First, verbs ending in **-care**, **-gare**, such as **cercare**, **pagare**: in those forms that have an **i** in them (**cerchi**, **cerchiamo**), the 'h' indicates that they are pronounced with hard **g**:

cercare 'to look for'	pagare 'to pay'
cerco	pago
cerchi	paghi
cerca	paga
cerchiamo	paghiamo
cercate	pagate
cercano	pagano

Second, verbs ending in **-ciare** and **-giare**, such as **cominciare**, **mangiare**: the **i** found before **o**, **a** indicates that the verb forms should be pronounced with a soft **c** or **g**; the **i** is not pronounced as a separate vowel. In the forms that already have **i** in them (2nd person singular **cominci**, **mangi** and 1st person plural **cominciamo**, **mangiamo**) there is no doubling of the **i**:

cominciare 'to begin'	mangiare 'to eat'
comincio	mangio
cominci	mangi
comincia	mangia
cominciamo	mangiamo
cominciate	mangiate
cominciano	mangiano

The only verbs of the 1st conjugation with a truly irregular present indicative are: **andare** ('to go'), **dare** ('to give'), **fare** ('to do') and **stare** ('to stay').

andare 'to go'	dare 'to give'	fare 'to do'	stare 'to stay'
vado	do	faccio	sto
vai	dai	fai	stai
va	dà	fa	sta
andiamo	diamo	facciamo	stiamo
andate	date	fate	state
vanno	danno	fanno	stanno

2nd conjugation (-ere)

There are more irregular verbs in the 2nd conjugation than in any other conjugation.

Some verbs in the 2nd conjugation, while not irregular, present potential difficulties with spelling and/or pronunciation. Verbs ending in **-cere**, **-gere**, **-scere** have a hard **c**, **g**, **sc** sound before the vowel **o** but a soft **c**, **g**, **sc** sound before the vowels **e**, **i**:

vincere ‘to win’	piangere ‘to cry’	conoscere ‘to know’
vinco	piango	conosco
vinci	piangi	conosci
vince	piange	conosce
vinciamo	piangiamo	conosciamo
vincete	piangete	conoscete
vincono	piangono	conoscono

Although some verbs appear irregular, their forms are in fact regular but based on an older form of the verb (see 2.2.1 above), for example the forms of **bere** are based on the older verb form ***bevere** (**bevo**, **bevi**, etc.) while the forms of **tradurre** are based on the older verb form ***traducere** (**traduce**, **traduci**, etc.).

Dire also originates from an older infinitive form ***dicere** so some of its tenses (e.g. present indicative shown below) follow the pattern of a second conjugation verb (ending in **-ere**):

dire ‘to say’
dico
dici
dice
diciamo
dite
dicono

The most common 2nd conjugation verbs with a truly irregular present indicative are the modal verbs (*verbi servili*) and also **sapere**:

avere ‘to have’	essere ‘to be’	dovere	potere	volere	sapere
ho	sono	devo	posso	voglio	so
hai	sei	devi	puoi	vuoi	sai
ha	è	deve	può	vuole	sa
abbiamo	siamo	dobbiamo	possiamo	vogliamo	sappiamo
avete	siete	dovete	potete	volete	sapete
hanno	sono	devono	possono	vogliono	sanno

There are several verbs which share a similar pattern of alternating forms in the present indicative, for example **cogliere** (**colgo/cogli**), **piacere** (**piaccio/piaci**), **porre** (**pongo/poni**), **rimanere** (**rimango/rimani**), **scegliere** (**scelgo/scegli**). Some verbs change not only their endings but the verb stem itself, for example **tenere** (**tengo/tieni**).

All these common irregular verb forms are fully illustrated in **Appendix III**.

3rd conjugation (-ire)

Three important irregular verbs of the 3rd conjugation are **salire** (‘to go up’), **uscire** (‘to go out’), **venire** (‘to come’). **Salire** has alternating forms (**salgo/sali**) and both **uscire** and **venire** also have stem changes. Other verbs which follow these patterns can be found in **Appendix III**.

salire ‘to go up’	uscire ‘to go out’	venire ‘to come’
salgo	esco	vengo
sali	esci	vieni
sale	esce	viene
saliamo	usciamo	veniamo
salite	uscite	venite
salgono	escono	vengono

Uses of the *presente*

Verbs in the present indicative express actions, facts and situations that happen or are going on *at the moment of speaking or writing*. This applies to:

- (a) Actions and facts happening at the precise moment of speech:

Mara, il telefono suona. Rispondi, per favore.

Mara, the phone is ringing. Please answer it!

- (b) Something that happens *regularly*, with continuity or which is always true (in the present as well as in the past and future):

Nel mio ufficio il telefono suona continuamente di mattina.

In my office the phone rings continuously in the mornings.

La domenica le campane della chiesa suonano alle 8 meno 10.

On Sundays the church bells ring at 10 to 8.

Gli italiani fumano più degli inglesi.

Italians smoke more than English people.

Le balene sono mammiferi.

Whales are mammals.

There are two situations in which the present indicative is used to refer to facts that are *not* in the present time:

- (c) Referring to the *future*, as happens frequently in conversational situations (see 14.3):

Domani arrivano gli ospiti spagnoli.

Tomorrow the Spanish guests are coming.

L'anno prossimo compriamo una macchina nuova.

Next year we'll buy a new car.

- (d) As a *historical present* in order to render the description of past events more vivid (see 13.7). This is done when the events are described in a narrative way and is very common in history books and news reports:

Nel 1870 Roma diventa capitale d'Italia.

Rome became the capital of Italy in 1870.

Al quinto rigore Baggio sbaglia e l'Italia perde il Campionato del Mondo.

At the fifth penalty Baggio missed the penalty kick and Italy lost the World Cup.

- (e) The present indicative of **stare** can be used in combination with the gerund to form a present progressive (see also 12.3):

Sto scrivendo I am writing

2.2.4 Indicativo imperfetto (imperfect indicative)**Forms of the *imperfetto***

The imperfect indicative is formed by adding the imperfect endings shown below in bold to the stem of the verb. It is the most regular of all the tenses of Italian verbs. In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern.

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parl-are	cred-ere	dorm-ire, fin-ire
1st person sing	parl-avo	cred-evo	dorm-ivo
2nd person sing	parl-avi	cred-evi	dorm-ivi
3rd person sing	parl-ava	cred-eva	dorm-iva
1st person pl	parl-avamo	cred-evamo	dorm-ivamo
2nd person pl	parl-avate	cred-evate	dorm-ivate
3rd person pl	parl-avano	cred-evano	dorm-ivano

Irregular forms of *imperfetto*

There are few irregular imperfect forms.

The imperfect of the 2nd conjugation verbs with contracted infinitive in **-urre** is regular, but follows the pattern of its original stem in **duc-**, giving **condurre** (***conducere**): **conducevo**, etc.

Similarly, the verbs with contracted infinitive in **-orre** have a regular imperfect based on the stem in **pon-**, giving **porre** (***ponere**): **ponevo**, etc.

The contracted infinitive **bere** has a regular imperfect **bevevo** based on the older verb stem (as in infinitive ***bevere**).

For other verbs that follow this pattern, see **Appendix III**.

Finally, **dire** and **fare** both have imperfect forms based on older stems and follow the pattern of 2nd conjugation verbs: **dicevo**, **facevo**.

The only truly irregular imperfect is that of **essere**: **ero**, **eri**.

Verb	essere 'to be'
1st person sing	ero
2nd person sing	eri
3rd person sing	era
1st person pl	eravamo
2nd person pl	eravate
3rd person pl	erano

Uses of the *imperfetto*

The imperfect indicative is mainly used to refer to the past (see **13.5**). In using past tenses, one should always consider the context or *aspect*. The question of aspect and the choice of *imperfect* or *perfect* is very important when referring to the past in Italian, particularly in situations where the two past forms are used in the same sentence (see **13.6**). Here is a summary of the most common cases when the imperfect indicative is used:

- (a) To describe a past action or fact in its duration (ongoing and not completed):

Guardavo la televisione quando c'è stato il terremoto.

I was watching TV when the earthquake struck.

- (b) To describe situations, compose a 'picture' with facts or events happening at the same time in the past (see also **13.5.1**):

Era mezzanotte, pioveva e la macchina correva silenziosa.

It was midnight, it was raining and the car ran silently.

- (c) For past actions repeated regularly as a habit (see also **13.5.2**):

Prendevamo sempre il caffè alle 11.00.

We used to have a coffee at 11.00.

- (d) To relate the background, cause or situation in which an event happened (see also **13.6.1–4** and **34.8**):

Non ho mangiato perché non avevo fame.

I didn't eat because I wasn't hungry.

Erano già le 5.00 quando hai telefonato.

It was already 5.00 when you phoned.

- (e) To refer to the 'future seen from the past', instead of using the compound conditional (see **14.8.3** and **30.5.2**):

La settimana scorsa mi hanno detto che tu venivi (saresti venuto) ieri.

Last week I was told that you would come yesterday.

- (f) To express a polite request or statement in place of the present conditional (see 23.3.1) or to express slight embarrassment:

Volevo (vorrei) delle rose.

I'd like some roses.

Buongiorno, cercavo un libro di Umberto Eco.

Good morning, I'm looking for a book by Umberto Eco.

Mi scusi, non volevo disturbare.

Excuse me, I don't want to disturb you.

- (g) In hypothetical clauses ('if' clauses) where the 'if' condition is unlikely to happen, or can no longer happen, as a replacement for the compound conditional and subjunctive (see 38.4). This is more common in *spoken* than in written Italian.

Se andavi più piano non facevi l'incidente.

If you had gone more slowly, you wouldn't have had the accident.

For the use of the imperfect of modal verbs **dovere, potere, volere**, see 13.6.8.

2.2.5 Passato prossimo (present perfect)

Forms of the *passato prossimo*

The *passato prossimo* is formed by the past participle and the present indicative of the auxiliary **avere** or **essere** (see also 2.1.7, 2.1.9). In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern. In the table below, only forms with **avere** are shown:

Conjugation	1st	2nd	3rd
<i>Verbs</i>	Parlare	Credere	Dormire
1st person sing	ho parlato	ho creduto	ho dormito
2nd person sing	hai parlato	hai creduto	hai dormito
3rd person sing	ha parlato	ha creduto	ha dormito
1st person pl	abbiamo parlato	abbiamo creduto	abbiamo dormito
2nd person pl	avete parlato	avete creduto	avete dormito
3rd person pl	hanno parlato	hanno creduto	hanno dormito

Uses of the *passato prossimo*

The *passato prossimo* is the tense most frequently used to talk about past events or actions, especially in spoken language. The uses of the *passato prossimo* and the other past tenses are more fully illustrated in Part B.

The *passato prossimo* refers to facts that are seen as completed, but have some relation to the present, generally in one of the following two contexts:

- (a) The past events are very close to the present time:

Ho appena preso un caffè.

I've just had a coffee.

Avete capito quello che ho detto?

Did you understand what I said?

- (b) The facts or events, even if they are in the distant past, still have some relationship with the present time or with the person who is speaking:

Siamo venuti in Inghilterra vent'anni fa.

We came to England twenty years ago (and we are still here).

La Basilica di S.Pietro è stata costruita nel '500.

St Peter's Basilica was built in the 16th century (and you can still see it now).

Because of these characteristics the *passato prossimo* is very frequently used in conversational Italian, allowing the speaker to relate the facts of the past to the present.

2.2.6 *Passato remoto* (past definite)

Forms of *passato remoto*

The forms of the *passato remoto* of the three regular conjugations are shown below, with the endings shown in italics. In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern.

Conjugation	1st	2nd	3rd
<i>Verbs</i>	-are	-ere	-ire
1st person sing	parl-ai	cred-etti (cred-ei)	dorm-ii
2nd person sing	parl-asti	cred-esti	dorm-isti
3rd person sing	parl-ò	cred-ette (cred-é)	dorm-i
1st person pl	parl-ammo	cred-emmo	dorm-immo
2nd person pl	parl-aste	cred-este	dorm-iste
3rd person pl	parl-arono	cred-ettero (cred-erono)	dorm-irono

Note that the *passato remoto* of certain 2nd conjugation verbs (for example, **credere**) has alternative forms for the first person singular and third person singular and plural:

credei/credetti	I believed
credé/credette	he/she believed
crederono/credettero	they believed

Irregular forms of *passato remoto*

Two of the most frequently used verbs in the Italian language (**avere**, **essere**) have irregular *passato remoto* forms:

<i>Verb</i>	avere	essere
1st person sing	ebbi	fui
2nd person sing	avesti	fosti
3rd person sing	ebbe	fu
1st person pl	avemmo	fummo
2nd person pl	aveste	foste
3rd person pl	ebbero	furono

The *passato remoto* is often irregular, particularly in 2nd conjugation verbs. The most common pattern of irregular verb forms is the short verb form ending in **-si** alternating with the longer verb form based on the stem of the infinitive as in the four examples shown below (**chiesi/chiedesti**, **dis/dicesti**, **presi/predesti**, **vissi/vivesti**):

chiedere	dire	prendere	vivere
'to ask'	'to say'	'to take'	'to live'
chie-si	dis-si	pre-si	vis-si
chied-esti	dic-esti	prend-esti	viv-esti
chie-se	dis-se	pre-se	vis-se
chied-emmo	dic-emmo	prend-emmo	viv-emmo
chied-este	dic-este	prend-este	viv-este
chie-sero	dis-sero	pre-sero	vis-sero

In some cases (for example, **mettere**, **muovere**, **sapere**, **vedere**) the stem has a vowel change as well:

mettere	muovere	piacere	sapere	vedere
'to put'	'to move'	'to please'	'to know'	'to see'
misì	mossi	piacqui	seppi	vidì
mettesti	muovesti	piacesti	sapesti	vedesti
mise	mosse	piacque	seppe	vide
mettemmo	muovemmo	piacemmo	sapemmo	vedemmo
metteste	muoveste	piaceste	sapeste	vedeste
misero	mossero	piacquero	seppero	videro

Dare, fare, venire show a similar alternating pattern with a stem change:

dare	fare	venire
diedi	feci	venni
desti	facesti	venisti
diede	fece	venne
demmo	facemmo	venimmo
deste	faceste	veniste
diedero	fecero	vennero

Dovere, potere, volere

In the verb forms below, the written accent on **vòll-i**, **vòll-e**, **vòll-ero** indicates where the stress is placed:

dovere	potere	volere
dov-ei (dovetti)	pot-ei	vòll-i
dov-esti	pot-esti	vol-esti
dov-é (dovette)	pot-é	vòll-e
dov-emmo	pot-emmo	vol-emmo
dov-este	pot-este	vol-este
dov-erono (dovettero)	pot-erono	vòll-ero

Because the *passato remoto* is not used in everyday spoken Italian in much of Italy, many speakers are not familiar with the correct forms, so it is always best to check in the list of irregular verb forms in **Appendix III** or in your dictionary.

Uses of *passato remoto*

The *passato remoto* is used whenever you want to express the distance of past events, not just in terms of time, but mainly in terms of their ‘separateness’ (remoteness) from the present situation (see 13.4.1):

Vissi male a Milano. Perciò sono tornato a Napoli.

I had a bad time living in Milan. That’s why I came back to Naples (and I am still here).

I dinosauri scomparvero 65 milioni d’anni fa.

Dinosaurs disappeared 65 million years ago.

In spoken Italian, the *passato remoto* tends to be used very rarely in the north of Italy, where the *passato prossimo* is preferred. Northern Italian speakers tend to consider use of the *passato remoto* in spoken Italian as incorrect, but it is used quite often both in Tuscany and in central and southern Italy, where it would not be considered incorrect.

In written Italian, the *passato remoto* is far more common, especially in narrative and historical language, because of the precise way in which it defines the past (see 13.4.2). Typically it is the tense of fairy tales, when events are placed in a far and abstract past, in a different dimension, separate from the reality of the present:

Come andò che maestro Ciliegia, falegname, trovò un pezzo di legna che piangeva e rideva come un bambino.

Appena maestro Ciliegia ebbe visto quel pezzo di legno, si rallegrò tutto e, dandosi una fregatina di mani per la contentezza, borbottò a mezza voce:

– Questo legno è capitato a tempo: voglio servirmene per fare una gamba di tavolino.

Detto fatto, prese subito l’ascia arrotata per cominciare a levargli la scorza e a digrossarlo; ma quando fu lì per lasciare andare la prima asciata, rimase col braccio sospeso in aria, perché sentì una vocina sottile che disse raccomandandosi:

– Non mi picchiar tanto forte!

(Collodi, *Pinocchio, I Libri di Gulliver*, 1983)

2.2.7 *Trapassato prossimo* (pluperfect)

Forms of *trapassato prossimo*

The *trapassato prossimo* is formed by the past participle and the imperfect of **avere** or **essere**. In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern.

Conjugation	1st	2nd	3rd
<i>Verb</i>	parlare	credere	dormire
1st person sing	avevo parlato	avevo creduto	avevo dormito
2nd person sing	avevi parlato	avevi creduto	avevi dormito
3rd person sing	aveva parlato	aveva creduto	aveva dormito
1st person pl	avevamo parlato	avevamo creduto	avevamo dormito
2nd person pl	avevate parlato	avevate creduto	avevate dormito
3rd person pl	avevano parlato	avevano creduto	avevano dormito

Uses of *trapassato prossimo*

This tense – a past within the past – is used to refer to an event previous to an event in the past. See also 30.5.2 (sequence of tenses), 31.3.1 (indirect or reported speech), 34.3.1 (expressing reason), 36.4.2 (time clause).

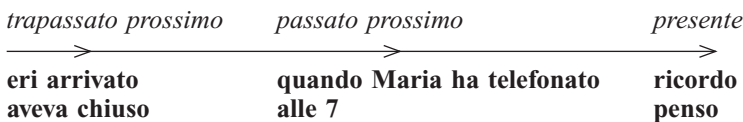
Ricordo che tu eri arrivato da poco quando Maria ha telefonato.

I remember that you had just arrived when Maria called.

Penso che alle 7.00 Franco aveva già chiuso il negozio.

I think Franco had already closed the shop at 7.00.

If we place the two examples on a ‘time line’ it is easy to see where the *trapassato prossimo* stands in the sequence of events:



2.2.8 *Trapassato remoto* (past anterior)

Forms of *trapassato remoto*

The *trapassato remoto* is formed by the past participle and the *passato remoto* of the auxiliary **avere** or **essere**. In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern.

Conjugation	1st	2nd	3rd
<i>Verb</i>	parlare	credere	dormire
1st person sing	ebbi parlato	ebbi creduto	ebbi dormito
2nd person sing	avesti parlato	avesti creduto	avesti dormito
3rd person sing	ebbe parlato	ebbe creduto	ebbe dormito
1st person pl	avemmo parlato	avemmo creduto	avemmo dormito
2nd person pl	aveste parlato	aveste creduto	aveste dormito
3rd person pl	ebbero parlato	ebbero creduto	ebbero dormito

Uses of *trapassato remoto*

The *trapassato remoto* is a pluperfect tense used *only* when the main event or action is expressed by a verb in the *passato remoto*. Its use is rare and generally limited to the literary and more formal registers of the written language. It is always introduced by a conjunction such as (**non**) **appena**, **dopo** (see also 36.4.2–3), **finché**, **quando** (see also 36.5.2, 36.2.1):

Dopo che ebbe salutato, uscì in fretta.

After he had said goodbye, he went out in a hurry.

Appena fu uscita, tutti si misero a ridere.

As soon as she had gone out, everybody started laughing.

2.2.9 Indicativo futuro (future indicative)

Forms of futuro

The forms of the future indicative of the three regular conjugations are shown below, with the endings shown in italics. In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern.

Conjugation	1st	2nd	3rd
<i>Verb</i>	parlare	credere	dormire
1st person sing	parl-erò	cred-erò	dorm-irò
2nd person sing	parl-erai	cred-erai	dorm-irai
3rd person sing	parl-erà	cred-erà	dorm-irà
1st person pl	parl-eremo	cred-eremo	dorm-iremo
2nd person pl	parl-erete	cred-erete	dorm-irete
3rd person pl	parl-eranno	cred-eranno	dorm-iranno

Irregular forms of futuro

Several verbs have an irregular future indicative. In most cases, the irregularity consists in the *contraction* of the stem (***anderò** to **andrò**, etc.). In some cases there is not only a contraction but an assimilation of the consonant groups **nr**, **lr** etc. to **rr** as in **berrò**, **rimarrò**, **verrà**, **vorrò**. In the case of **essere**, there is a stem change (**sarò**). The verb forms then follow the regular pattern of the future tense.

andare	andrò
avere	avrò
bere	berrò
cadere	cadrò
dovere	dovrò
essere	sarò
potere	potrò
rimanere	rimarrò
sapere	saprò
tenere	terrò
vedere	vedrò
venire	verrà
volere	vorrò

A similar *contracted* pattern can be seen in the present conditional of these verbs (see 2.2.11 below).

Uses of futuro

The future indicative tense is naturally mainly used to refer to facts that will happen in the future in relation to the time when you are speaking or writing. However Italians use this verb tense sparingly, often preferring to use the present tense instead (see 14.3). The future tense is also used in Italian to express probability, as in English 'it will be . . .', with no relation to the future time (see 26.4.2):

Che ore sono? Saranno le tre meno dieci.
 What time is it? It must be (about) ten to three.

Suona il telefono. Chi sarà? Sarà Davide.
 The phone is ringing. Who could it possibly be? It will be Davide.

2.2.10 Futuro anteriore (future perfect)

Forms of futuro anteriore

The future perfect is a *compound* tense formed of the future tense of the auxiliary **avere** or **essere** together with the past participle of the verb. In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern.

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verb</i>	parlare	credere	dormire
1st person sing	avrò parlato	avrò creduto	avrò dormito
2nd person sing	avrà parlato	avrà creduto	avrà dormito
3rd person sing	avrà parlato	avrà creduto	avrà dormito
1st person pl	avremo parlato	avremo creduto	avremo dormito
2nd person pl	avrete parlato	avrete creduto	avrete dormito
3rd person pl	avranno parlato	avranno creduto	avranno dormito

Uses of futuro anteriore

The *futuro anteriore* is used to indicate facts or actions that will take place in the future (in relation to the moment when you are speaking or writing), but *before* facts or actions that will happen even later; it is a sort of ‘past projected into the future’:

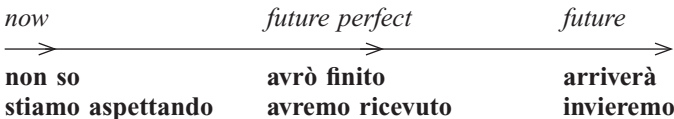
Non so se avrò finito il lavoro quando arriverà il cliente.

I don't know whether I will have finished the job by the time the customer comes.

Stiamo aspettando la fattura. Quando avremo ricevuto la fattura, Le invieremo i soldi.

We are waiting for the invoice. When we've received the invoice, we'll send you the money.

Each of the three verbs in each sentence could be illustrated by a time sequence:



The examples show the position in time of the actions expressed by the future perfect (**avrò finito/avremo ricevuto**): they are in the *future* with reference to the moment of speaking, but are in the *past* in relation to a second reference point placed in the future (**arriverà, invieremo**). More examples of the use of the future perfect can be found in **14.7** and **26.4.2**.

2.2.11 Condizionale (conditional): introduction

The *condizionale* is used to express a fact, action or event which can/will only take place subject to some *condition* being met. There are two tenses of the conditional mood: the present and the past.

2.2.12 Condizionale presente (present conditional)

Forms of condizionale presente

For the regular verbs, the *condizionale presente* is formed by adding the conditional endings, shown in italics, to the stem of the verb. In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern.

Conjugation	1st	2nd	3rd
<i>Verb</i>	parlare	credere	dormire
1st person sing	parl-erei	cred-erei	dorm-irei
2nd person sing	parl-eresti	cred-eresti	dorm-iresti
3rd person sing	parl-erebbe	cred-erebbe	dorm-irebbe
1st person pl	parl-eremmo	cred-eremmo	dorm-iremmo
2nd person pl	parl-ereste	cred-ereste	dorm-ireste
3rd person pl	parl-erebbero	cred-erebbero	dorm-irebbero

Irregular forms of *condizionale presente*

The verbs with an irregular present conditional show the same pattern already seen in the future indicative (see 2.2.9 above). In most cases, the irregularity consists in the *contraction* of the stem (***anderei** to **andrei**, etc). In some cases there is not only a contraction but an assimilation of the consonant groups **nr**, **lr**, etc. to **rr** as in **berrei**, **rimarrei**, **verrei**, **vorrei**. In the case of **essere**, there is also a stem change (**sarei**).

andare	andrei, andresti, etc.
avere	avrei
bere	berrei
cadere	cadrei
dovere	dovrei
essere	sarei
potere	potrei
rimanere	rimarrei
sapere	saprei
vedere	vedrei
venire	verrei
volere	vorrei

Uses of *condizionale presente*

- (a) The *condizionale presente* is used in conditional sentences. The condition may be explicitly mentioned, usually by using a clause beginning with **se** 'if'. In Italian this is called *periodo ipotetico* (see 38.2–4). This type of sentence is made up of two parts: the condition and the consequence. The *condition* is introduced by **se** ('if such and such were to happen') and expressed by a verb in the indicative or, more often, the subjunctive mood. The *consequence*, if the condition were to be met, is expressed by a verb in the indicative or, more often, *conditional* mood ('this would be the result').

Se fossi ricco, non lavorerei.

If I were rich, I wouldn't work.

Se Lei mi stimasse davvero, mi darebbe più responsabilità.

If you really valued me, you would give me more responsibility.

- (b) The present conditional is often used to express politeness, when making a request. The politeness of these requests lies in their being subject to some implicit condition: 'I'd like a coffee (if it is available)', 'Could you open the window (if it isn't too much trouble)'. For further examples, see 22.1.1, 22.4.1, 22.4.3 and 23.2.1.

Vorrei un caffè.

I would like a coffee.

Potrebbe aprire la finestra?

Could you open the window?

- (c) The present conditional is also used in many other contexts to ‘soften’ a statement, for example to express an opinion less forcefully:

Secondo me *dovresti* riposarti.

I think you should rest.

Io *sarei* per la soluzione più facile.

I would be for the easier option.

- (d) It is also used to express hearsay or an unconfirmed report where English would use the word ‘apparently’ (see 31.4):

La ragazza *sarebbe* la figlia di Beckham.

Apparently, the girl is the daughter of Beckham.

2.2.13 Condizionale passato (past conditional)

Forms of *condizionale passato*

The *condizionale passato* is formed by the past participle of the verb and the present conditional of **avere** (as in the examples shown here) or **essere**. In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern.

	parlare	credere	dormire
1st person sing	avrei parlato	avrei creduto	avrei dormito
2nd person sing	avresti parlato	avresti creduto	avresti dormito
3rd person sing	avrebbe parlato	avrebbe creduto	avrebbe dormito
1st person pl	avremmo parlato	avremmo creduto	avremmo dormito
2nd person pl	avreste parlato	avreste creduto	avreste dormito
3rd person pl	avrebbero parlato	avrebbero creduto	avrebbero dormito

Uses of *condizionale passato*

The *condizionale passato* is used in a similar way to the present conditional shown above, but mainly referring to past time:

- (a) It is used to express a consequence in a conditional sentence (see also 38.4):

Ieri non *sarei* arrivato in ritardo se avessi preso il treno.

I wouldn’t have been late yesterday if I had taken the train.

- (b) It is used to convey a statement or request more politely:

***Avrei preferito* un caffè.**

I would have preferred a coffee.

- (c) It is used to ‘soften’ a statement, for example to express an opinion less forcefully:

Penso che la Sig.ra Prati *avrebbe dovuto* pagare in contanti.

I think signora Prati should have paid in cash.

- (d) It is used to express hearsay or an unconfirmed report, particularly in the press (see 31.4):

Secondo *La Repubblica*, *sarebbero arrivati* duecento clandestini sull’isola.

According to *La Repubblica*, two hundred illegal immigrants arrived on the island.

- (e) This tense is also used to express an action which took place or was to take place after a point referred to in the past, the so-called ‘future in the past’ (see 30.5.2, 31.1.2, 31.3.1):

La mia segretaria mi ha detto che *avrebbe prenotato* l’albergo subito.

My secretary told me that she would reserve the hotel immediately.

Dieci anni fa non immaginavo che tu *avresti fatto* una carriera così brillante.

Ten years ago I didn’t imagine that you would have such a brilliant career.

2.2.14 Congiuntivo (subjunctive mood): introduction

The *congiuntivo* is mainly used to express something which is subjective rather than objective, uncertain rather than definite, a concept rather than a reality. Verbs in the subjunctive mood always *depend* directly or indirectly on another verb, to which they are linked by **che**, or by a conjunction, thereby forming a complex sentence of at least two verbs. Only in a few cases is the subjunctive used by itself, without depending on another verb.

The 'indefinite' or 'subjective' nature of the verb phrase may be suggested by something that comes before. This could be any of the following.

The *main verb* on which the subjunctive depends, for example:

Mi pare che tu abbia esagerato.

I think you've gone a bit over the top.

The *conjunction* that links the two verbs, for example:

Ti scrivo affinché tu sappia la verità.

I write to let you know the truth.

The *pronoun* or *adjective* that introduces the verb phrase, for example:

Qualsiasi canzone lei canti è sempre un piacere ascoltarla.

Whatever song she sings, it is always a pleasure to listen to her.

The choice of indicative or subjunctive to convey the same facts can determine whether a sentence is objective or subjective.

Look at the two statements below. The first refers to a known, existing, person (as shown also by the use of the definite article '*l'assistente*') and the statement sounds objective, referring to a concrete need that can be met. The second refers to a person needed, who may or may not exist, and therefore the need is presented as 'subjective', a wish that cannot necessarily be met.

Ho bisogno dell'assistente che parla italiano.

I need the assistant who speaks Italian.

(that particular assistant who is known to speak Italian)

Ho bisogno di un assistente che parli italiano.

I need an assistant who can speak Italian.

(any assistant who might be able to speak Italian, not a particular one)

In the first of the two sentences below, the news is presented as almost certain, while the second sentence, by using the subjunctive, implies a higher degree of doubt or uncertainty about the reliability of the news:

Sembra che Apple *sta* per lanciare un nuovo computer.

It seems that Apple is about to launch a new computer.

Sembra che Apple *stia* per lanciare un nuovo computer.

It seems that Apple is about to launch a new computer.

These and other uses of the subjunctive in different contexts are illustrated fully in Sections III and IV. It is often said that the subjunctive mood is becoming less common in modern Italian. It is true that Italians tend to associate the frequent use of subjunctive with the more formal, sophisticated registers of language, in particular the written register, to express nuances of meaning. However using the indicative instead of the subjunctive does not only convey a more informal style; it also conveys a different meaning, and may well change substantially the message that you want to communicate.

2.2.15 Uses of the subjunctive

In some cases, it is almost compulsory to use the subjunctive, even in the most familiar context of communication. This is particularly true of the following contexts:

- (a) After a range of verbs and other expressions expressing hope, doubt, expectation, desire, fear, emotion, including:

desiderare	to wish
dubitare	to doubt
illudersi	to delude oneself
pensare	to think
sospettare	to suspect
sperare	to hope
temere	to fear

Spero che abbiate capito.
I hope you understood.

Temo che sia troppo tardi.
I'm afraid it is too late.

Non illuderti che il Napoli possa vincere il campionato.
Don't delude yourself that 'Napoli' can win the championship.

Non avrei mai sospettato che tu fossi capace di mentire.
I would never have suspected you of being able to lie.

► See also Sections III and IV in Part B of the book.

(b) With a range of conjunctions, including:

come se	as if
malgrado, benché, sebbene	although
nonostante	despite
prima che	before
se	if
tranne che, a meno che	unless

Prima che sia troppo tardi, dobbiamo pagare il telefono.
We must pay the phone bill, before it is too late.

Parlava come se avesse il raffreddore.
He was speaking as if he had a cold.

Dovete sbrigarvi, a meno che non vogliate fare tardi.
You must hurry up, unless you want to be late.

Malgrado fossero in tre non sono riusciti a sollevare l'armadio.
Although there were three of them, they couldn't lift the cupboard.

Sebbene siano stanchi, i ragazzi vogliono uscire stasera.
The kids want to go out tonight, although they're tired.

Se fossi in te, non le parlerei.
If I were you I wouldn't speak to her.

See also Part B, Sections III and IV. **Se** is the conjunction most often used to introduce the subjunctive, usually in the context of a conditional sentence. However, even here, whether to use the subjunctive or not is a matter of personal choice (see 38.2).

(c) After impersonal phrases such as **bisogna che, (mi) pare che, (mi) sembra che**:

Bisogna che riparino la casa appena possibile.
They need to repair the house as soon as possible.

Mi sembra che il telefono non funzioni.
I think the telephone must be out of order.

Mi pareva che ieri il telefono non funzionasse.
It seemed to me that the phone must have been out of order yesterday.

- (d) After an indefinite pronoun or adjective (see 3.9.1) such as **chiunque, qualunque, qualsiasi**:

Chiunque bussì alla porta, non aprire.

Whoever knocks at the door, don't open up.

Sono pronta a fare qualsiasi cosa tu mi chiedi.

I'm ready to do whatever you ask me.

- (e) After a superlative in a dependent clause:

Venezia è la più bella città che io abbia mai visto.

Venice is the most beautiful city I have ever seen.

- (f) After a relative clause which restricts the category of person or object you are looking for, with a main verb such as **aver bisogno di, cercare, chiedere, volere**:

Cerco un assistente che sappia guidare la macchina.

I am looking for an assistant who knows how to drive.

Even in some of the examples shown above, many Italians, speaking informally, might use the indicative instead of the subjunctive. However it is useful to get into the habit of using the subjunctive where it is essential and it is especially important for those who need to communicate formally in Italian. There are four tenses of the subjunctive: *present, perfect, imperfect, pluperfect*. In 2.2.16–19 we look at each tense individually, both its forms and its uses. The most common irregular subjunctive forms are also shown.

2.2.16 Congiuntivo presente (present subjunctive)

Forms of congiuntivo presente

The regular conjugations of the present subjunctive have the same ending for all three singular persons. Note the variation between verbs of the **dormire** pattern and those of the **finire** pattern:

Conjugations	1st	2nd	3rd	3rd (-isc-)
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire	finire
1st person sing	parli	creda	dorma	finisca
2nd person sing	parli	creda	dorma	finisca
3rd person sing	parli	creda	dorma	finisca
1st person pl	parliamo	crediamo	dormiamo	finiamo
2nd person pl	parliate	crediate	dormiate	finiate
3rd person pl	parlino	credano	dormano	finiscano

Irregular forms of congiuntivo presente

As is often the case, the verbs most frequently used have irregular forms:

avere	essere	dare	dire	fare	stare	andare
abbia	sia	dia	dica	faccia	stia	vada
abbia	sia	dia	dica	faccia	stia	vada
abbia	sia	dia	dica	faccia	stia	vada
abbiamo	siamo	diamo	diciamo	facciamo	stiamo	andiamo
abbiate	siate	diate	diciate	facciate	stiate	andiate
abbiano	siano	diano	dicano	facciano	stiano	vadano

Uses of congiuntivo presente

The present subjunctive is used when you want to mention something that is in the same time context or the future (there is no future tense in the subjunctive). It is almost always linked to a main verb in the *present* tense (see also 30.5.1):

Spero che tu capisca.

I hope you understand.

Credo che l'agenzia di viaggio ci prenoti l'aereo oggi stesso.

I think the travel agency is booking our flight today.

2.2.17 **Congiuntivo passato (perfect subjunctive)**

Forms of congiuntivo passato

The perfect subjunctive is formed by past participle and the present subjunctive of the auxiliary **avere** or **essere**. In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern.

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire
1st person sing	abbia parlato	abbia creduto	abbia dormito
2nd person sing	abbia parlato	abbia creduto	abbia dormito
3rd person sing	abbia parlato	abbia creduto	abbia dormito
1st person pl	abbiamo parlato	abbiamo creduto	abbiamo dormito
2nd person pl	abbiate parlato	abbiate creduto	abbiate dormito
3rd person pl	abbiano parlato	abbiano creduto	abbiano dormito

Uses of congiuntivo passato

The perfect subjunctive is used to refer to a past fact linked to a main verb, usually but not always in the present tense:

Credo che l'agenzia di viaggio ci abbia prenotato l'aereo ieri.

The travel agency should have reserved our flight yesterday, I think.

Marco penserà che tu sia uscito.

Marco will think you have gone out.

2.2.18 **Congiuntivo imperfetto (imperfect subjunctive)**

Forms of congiuntivo imperfetto

Here are the endings of the imperfect subjunctive. In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern. Note how 1st and 2nd persons have the same ending (**-assi, -essi, -issi**).

<i>Conjugation</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire
1st person sing	parl-<i>assi</i>	cred-<i>essi</i>	dorm-<i>issi</i>
2nd person sing	parl-<i>assi</i>	cred-<i>essi</i>	dorm-<i>issi</i>
3rd person sing	parl-<i>asse</i>	cred-<i>esse</i>	dorm-<i>isse</i>
1st person pl	parl-<i>assimo</i>	cred-<i>essimo</i>	dorm-<i>issimo</i>
2nd person pl	parl-<i>aste</i>	cred-<i>este</i>	dorm-<i>iste</i>
3rd person pl	parl-<i>assero</i>	cred-<i>essero</i>	dorm-<i>issero</i>

Irregular forms of congiuntivo imperfetto

The following verbs have either stem changes (as in the case of **dare**, **essere**, **stare**) or forms that relate to an older infinitive (as in the case of **bere**, **dire**, **fare**). Their endings then follow the regular pattern of imperfect subjunctive endings.

<i>Verb</i>	<i>Imperfect subjunctive</i>
bere (*bevere)	bevessi
dare	dessi
dire (*dicere)	dicessi
essere	fossi
fare (*facere)	facessi
stare	stessi

Uses of *congiuntivo imperfetto*

The imperfect subjunctive is used for events or actions taking place in the same time context as the action of the main verb in the past:

Credevo che l'agenzia di viaggio prenotasse l'aereo il giorno stesso.

I assumed that the travel agency was booking our flight that same day.

The imperfect subjunctive is also used to express a present or future action, which depends on a main verb in the present conditional:

Sarebbe bene che domani arrivasse in orario.

It would be better if he arrived on time tomorrow.

Compreresti una Rolls Royce, se avessi i soldi?

Would you buy a Rolls Royce, if you had the money?

2.2.19 *Congiuntivo trapassato* (pluperfect subjunctive)

Forms of *congiuntivo trapassato*

The pluperfect subjunctive is formed by the past participle and the imperfect subjunctive of **avere** or **essere**. In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern.

<i>Conjugation</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verb</i>	parlare	credere	dormire
1st person sing	avessi parlato	avessi creduto	avessi dormito
2nd person sing	avessi parlato	avessi creduto	avessi dormito
3rd person sing	avessi parlato	avessi creduto	avessi dormito
1st person pl	avessimo parlato	avessimo creduto	avessimo dormito
2nd person pl	aveste parlato	aveste creduto	aveste dormito
3rd person pl	avessero parlato	avessero creduto	avessero dormito

Uses of *congiuntivo trapassato*

The pluperfect subjunctive is used to refer to an earlier event referred to by a main verb in the past tense:

Speravo che avessi capito.

I hoped you had understood.

Credevo che l'agenzia di viaggi ci avesse prenotato l'aereo già da un mese.

I assumed the travel agency had already reserved our flight a month ago.

2.2.20 The subjunctive used as a main verb

In a few cases the subjunctive is used by itself as a main verb without depending on another verb.

- (a) To give an order or invite somebody to do something, when using the polite **Lei/Loro** form. In this function the present subjunctive serves as the 3rd person form of the imperative, both singular and plural (see below):

Prego, dica!

Can I help you? (literally: Please, tell me)

Prego, si accomodi.

Please, have a seat.

Esca immediatamente!

Get out immediately!

Prego signori, vengano di qua.

Please come over this side, gentlemen.

- (b) In exclamations, to express a wish or a threat:

Dio salvi la Regina.

God save the Queen.

Viva l'Italia!

Long live Italy!

Dio ti benedica.

God bless you.

Ti venga un accidente.

Drop dead.

When expressing a wish, the imperfect subjunctive can be introduced by **magari** 'if only' or **se** 'if':

Magari potessi andare in vacanza . . .

If only I could go on holiday . . .

Se avessi vent'anni!

If I were twenty years old!

In these examples, the subjunctive, although used alone, still depends on a main verb, although it is implicit rather than actually stated:

(Spero che) ti venga un accidente!

(I hope that) something horrible happens to you!

(Mi auguro che) Dio ti benedica.

(I wish that) God would bless you.

Se avessi vent'anni (farei tante cose) . . .

If I were young (I would do lots of things) . . .

2.2.21 Imperativo (imperative)

Introduction

The imperative is the mood you use when you want to give orders or to ask somebody to do something, so it has no 1st person singular form. The 2nd person singular (**tu**) and 2nd person plural (**voi**) are used to address someone informally, while the 3rd person form (**Lei**) is used to address someone formally. The 1st person plural form (**noi**) is more of an exhortation than a command. The 3rd person plural form (**loro**) is used only to address more than one person formally (for example, a hotel receptionist addressing clients) and is now almost always replaced by the **voi** form.

Forms of the *imperativo*

The polite 'you' forms of the imperative (singular **Lei** and plural **Loro**) are actually present subjunctive forms (see 2.2.16). Note too the variation between verbs of the **dormire** pattern and those of the **finire** pattern:

Conjugation	1st	2nd	3rd	3rd
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire	finire
tu	parl-a	cred-i	dorm-i	fin-isci
Lei	parl-i	cred-a	dorm-a	fin-isca
noi	parl-iamo	cred-iamo	dorm-iamo	fin-iamo
voi	parl-ate	cred-ete	dorm-ite	fin-ite
loro	parl-ino	cred-ano	dorm-ano	fin-iscano

Irregular forms of the *imperativo*

A few verbs have an irregular imperative with stem change. Here we show only the main forms of imperative (**tu**, **Lei**, **voi**):

<i>Person</i>	avere	essere	sapere
tu	abbi	sii	sappi
Lei	abbia	sia	sappia
voi	abbiate	siate	sappiate

For the five verbs **andare**, **dare**, **dire**, **fare**, **stare**, the shortened **tu** imperative forms are normally marked with an apostrophe (**va'**, **da'**, **di'**, **fa'**, **sta'**), to distinguish them from the prepositions **di**, **da** or the third person singular of the present indicative **da**, **fa**, **sta**.

<i>Person</i>	andare	dare	dire	fare	stare
tu	va'	da'	di'	fa'	sta'
Lei	vada	dia	dica	faccia	stia
voi	andate	date	dite	fate	state

Abbi pazienza!

Be patient!

Sii prudente!

Be prudent (drive carefully)!

Dammi la penna, per favore!

Please give me the pen.

Fammi un piacere.

Do me a favour.

Vallo a trovare.

Go to see him.

The last example is very colloquial use; normally the direct object pronoun would be attached to the end of the infinitive, rather than the first verb (**Va' a trovarlo**).

Uses of the *imperativo*

Ama il prossimo tuo come te stesso.

Love your neighbour like yourself.

Prendimi l'ombrello, per favore.

Please, get my umbrella for me.

Dott. Bianchi, finisca quella lettera e poi venga da me.

Dr Bianchi, could you please finish that letter and then come to see me.

Mi dia il telefono, per favore.

Give me the telephone, please.

Aiuto, datemi una mano.

Help, give me a hand.

Credetemi, sono sincero.

Believe me, I am sincere.

Note how in the examples above the **tu** or **voi** imperative is combined with any pronoun used, whether direct or indirect object or reflexive (see also 3.4.7), while with the **Lei** imperative, the pronoun comes before.

The imperative form of the verbs **dare**, **fare**, **stare**, **andare** is sometimes replaced by a request, using the second person indicative forms **dai**, **fai**, **stai**, **vai**, since these sound less abrupt.

For more illustrations of the use of the imperative, see 21.2.

2.2.22 Negative imperative

To ask somebody *not* to do something, addressing someone with the **tu** form, use **non** + verb infinitive. For all other persons of the imperative, simply add **non**.

Tu:

Teresa, non giocare in casa con la palla.

Teresa, don't play indoors with the ball.

Franco, non preoccuparti.

Don't worry, Franco

Lei:

Non si preoccupi, signora Rossi.

Don't worry, signora Rossi.

Voi:

Bambini, non andate lontano.

Children, don't go far away.

2.2.23 Gerundio (gerund): introduction

The gerund (whether present or past) is always used in connection with another verb on which it is closely dependent. The subject of the gerund must be the same as that of the main verb (unless explicitly stated). The gerund is invariable: it does not change form whether its subject is masculine or feminine, singular or plural. It has two forms: present and perfect.

2.2.24 Gerundio presente (present gerund)

Forms of gerundio (presente)

The *gerundio* is formed by adding the endings **-ando** for the 1st conjugation and **-endo** for the 2nd and 3rd conjugations, to the verb stem. In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern.

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Gerundio</i>
parlare	parlando
credere	credendo
dormire	dormendo
finire	finendo

Irregular forms of the gerundio (presente)

The gerund forms of verbs such as **bere**, **dire**, **fare** are based on the older long verb stem:

bere – bevendo

dire – dicendo

fare – facendo

When the gerund has an unstressed pronoun as direct or indirect object, the pronoun is attached to the end of the verb (see 3.4.7):

Guardandoli bene ho capito che quei francobolli erano falsi.

Looking at them carefully I realized that those stamps were false.

Dandole più fiducia otterrai migliori risultati da lei.

By putting more trust in her, you will get better results from her.

Uses of gerundio (presente)

The gerund is used as follows:

- (a) To indicate an action happening at the same time as that of the main verb, be it past, present or future:

Il Prof. Neri parla *leggendo* gli appunti.

Prof. Neri speaks reading from notes.

Il Prof. Neri ha parlato *leggendo* gli appunti.

Prof. Neri spoke reading from notes.

Il Prof. Neri parlerà *leggendo* gli appunti.

Prof. Neri will speak reading from notes.

- (b) With **stare** (in present or imperfect tense) to describe an action in progress:

Sto preparando il caffè.

I'm making coffee.

Non ho risposto al telefono perché stavo facendo la doccia.

I didn't answer the phone because I was having a shower.

- (c) The *gerundio* cannot be used to translate the English -ing form. In Italian you would use a relative clause with **che**:

C'è un uomo che bussa alla porta.

There is a man knocking at the door.

Ho visto uno studente che leggeva 'Panorama'.

I saw a student reading 'Panorama'.

2.2.25 Gerundio passato (past gerund)**Forms of gerundio al passato**

The past gerund is formed by the gerund of the auxiliary **avere** or **essere** (as in the case of **partire**) and the past participle. In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern.

parlare	avendo parlato
vedere	avendo visto
dormire	avendo dormito
partire	essendo partito

Uses of gerundio al passato

The past gerund indicates an action that took place before that of the main verb, whatever the tense:

Avendo distribuito gli appunti in inglese, il Prof. Neri parla in italiano.

Having distributed notes in English, Prof. Neri speaks in Italian.

Avendo distribuito gli appunti in inglese, il Prof. Neri ha parlato in italiano.

Having distributed notes in English, Prof. Neri spoke in Italian.

Avendo distribuito gli appunti in inglese, il Prof. Neri parlerà in italiano.

Having distributed notes in English, Prof. Neri will speak in Italian.

2.2.26 Participio presente (present participle)**Forms of participio presente**

The present participle is formed by the endings **-ante/i** in the 1st conjugation and **-ente/i** in the 2nd and 3rd conjugations. In modern Italian this form is very rarely used as a verb, and has taken on the function of adjective or noun:

Adjective:	affascinante	fascinating
	bollente	boiling hot
	ignorante	ignorant
	imbarazzante	embarrassing
	importante	important
	potente	powerful
	rilevante	relevant
	soddisfacente	satisfactory
	splendente	splendid
	urgente	urgent
Noun:	amante	lover
	agente	agent
	cantante	singer
	comandante	commander, commandant
	dipendente	dependant
	dirigente	manager, director
	insegnante	teacher
	stampante	printer
	studente	student

and many more . . .

Uses of *participio presente*

As a verb it is sometimes used in very formal and bureaucratic language:

Gli impiegati perdenti il posto riceveranno una pensione.

The employees losing their jobs will receive a pension.

Vivente il padre, i figli non ricevono l'eredità.

The father being alive, the children shall not receive the inheritance.

But in general it is preferable to use a gerund, a relative clause (**che . . .**) or a time clause (**quando . . .** or **mentre . . .**):

Gli impiegati che perdono il posto riceveranno una pensione.

Mentre il padre è in vita, i figli non ricevono l'eredità.

2.2.27 *Participio passato* (past participle)

Unlike the present participle, the past participle is one of the most frequently used forms of Italian verbs. It is found in all *compound tenses* of verbs, together with the auxiliary **avere** or **essere**.

Forms of *participio passato*

The regular past participle is formed by the endings **-ato** for the 1st, **-uto** for the 2nd, and **-ito** for the 3rd conjugation. In this tense, there is no difference between verbs of the **dormire** and verbs of the **finire** pattern.

guardare	guardato
credere	creduto
dormire	dormito

Its endings have to agree with the subject (in the case of verbs taking the auxiliary **essere**) or sometimes the object of the verb (see below), following the pattern of adjectives in **o/a/i/e** (see 1.5).

Irregular forms of *participio passato*

There are many verbs with an irregular past participle. All verbs with irregular past participles are listed in **Appendix III**. But some basic groups can be identified:

Individual verb moods and tenses

- (a) Verbs (mainly 2nd conjugation) with past participle ending in
- so**
- such as:

accendere	acceso
apparire	apparso
chiudere	chiuso
correre	corso
decidere	deciso
mettere	messo
perdere	perso
prendere	preso
scendere	sceso

- (b) Verbs of the 2nd and 3rd conjugation with past participle ending in
- to**
- or
- tto**
- such as:

aprire	aperto
chiedere	chiesto
dire	detto
essere	stato
leggere	letto
morire	morto
nascere	nato
offrire	offerto
porre	posto
produrre	prodotto
rispondere	risposto
rompere	rotto
scegliere	scelto
scrivere	scritto
vedere	visto
tradurre	tradotto
venire	venuto
vivere	vissuto

Uses of *participio passato*

The past participle is used in two ways:

- (a) In compound tenses

Compound tenses are formed with auxiliary **avere** or **essere**. When the auxiliary is **avere**, the participle ends in **-o** (masculine singular), and does not change to agree with the subject of the verb:

L'Avv. Serpe non aveva capito il suo problema e la Sig.ra Brandi gli ha scritto un pro-memoria.

Dr Serpe didn't understand her problem so Mrs Brandi wrote a memorandum for him.

Sandro e Lucia hanno lavorato bene.

Sandro and Lucia did a good job.

But if the verb is preceded by a *direct object pronoun* the participle changes to agree with the gender and number of this pronoun (see also 3.4.9):

Avete visto quelle pratiche? Sì, le abbiamo viste.
Did you see those files? Yes, we've seen them.

Hai visto Elisa? Sì, l'ho vista.
Did you see Elisa? Yes, I saw her.

When the auxiliary is **essere** the past participle always agrees with the gender and number of the *subject*:

È arrivato il mio stipendio?

Has my salary arrived?

È arrivata la posta?

Has the mail arrived?

Ci siamo accorti troppo tardi del nostro errore.

We realised our mistake too late.

Le fatture non sono state ancora ricevute dal cliente.

The invoices haven't yet been received by the customer.

(b) As a verb form on its own

As a verb form on its own it can have the same function as an adjective (i.e. qualifying a noun) and its ending is in agreement with the gender and number of the noun it qualifies:

Oggi non c'era posta indirizzata a Lei, Sig. Sini.

There was no mail addressed to you today, Mr Sini.

Oggi non c'erano lettere indirizzate a Lei, Sig. Sini.

There were no letters addressed to you today, Mr Sini.

Dove sono i pacchi arrivati oggi?

Where are the parcels that arrived today?

It can also have the function of a verb in its own right, expressing an action *completed* before the action expressed in the main clause; the subject can be the same as that of the main verb or a different one:

Appena arrivati, abbiamo preso un caffè.

As soon as we arrived, we had a coffee.

Appena arrivato Franco, prendiamo un caffè.

As soon as Franco has arrived, we'll have a coffee.

Sconfitto l'esercito borbonico a Calatafimi, Garibaldi avanzò verso Palermo.

After defeating the Bourbon army at Calatafimi, Garibaldi advanced towards Palermo.

The past participle can also take an unstressed pronoun (direct or indirect) as its object, in which case the pronoun is attached to the end of the participle (see also 3.4.7).

Vistala arrivare, ho chiamato Sara dal balcone.

As I saw her arriving, I called Sara from the balcony.

Consegnatigli i documenti, sono tornato in ufficio.

After delivering the documents to him, I came back to the office.

3

Pronouns

3.1 What is a pronoun?

A pronoun (*pro* + noun) is literally a word that takes the place of, or fulfils the function of, a noun in certain specific circumstances.

There are several types of *pronouns* in Italian (as in English): *demonstrative*, *indefinite*, *interrogative*, *personal*, *possessive*, *relative*. Each type of pronoun is covered separately in this section.

In order to complete the picture, for the demonstrative, indefinite, interrogative and possessive pronouns, we also look at the corresponding adjectives at the same time.

3.2 Personal pronouns: introduction

Personal pronouns are the main thread of any spoken or written discourse. Their function is to refer to somebody or something known to both speaker and listener, either when they are present or when they have already been mentioned in the conversation or in the text. In Italian personal pronouns have the same gender and number as the noun to which they refer.

3.3 Stressed personal pronouns

Stressed pronouns are only used when you want to identify clearly the person to whom you are referring, usually to distinguish him/her from somebody else (see 8.3 and 8.4). Stressed pronouns almost always refer to people, rather than to things or animals.

Stressed pronouns are normally quite separate from other words, and in particular from the verb. For this reason they are sometimes called *disjunctive* (*non-joined*) pronouns. This separateness gives them a more emphatic position in the sentence. They are distinguished from the more common unstressed pronouns by three main characteristics: (a) their *form*; (b) their *position*; (c) the *stress* that falls on them.

3.3.1 Subject pronouns

Subject pronouns are used to emphasise the person or thing responsible for the action (see 8.3 and 8.4). The forms of the subject pronouns are as follows:

io	I	noi	we
tu	you	voi	you (<i>plural</i>)
lui	he	loro	they
lei	she	Loro	you (<i>formal, plural</i>)
Lei	you (<i>formal</i>)		

Other subject pronouns, sometimes found in formal written language and older texts, are:

egli, esso	he	essi	them (<i>masculine</i>)
ella, essa	she	esse	them (<i>feminine</i>)

In Italian it is not essential to use subject pronouns with verbs, unlike in English (see 2.1.3), since the endings of Italian verbs always show who the subject (or person) is, without the need for a pronoun. So the use of pronouns is limited to situations where you need to give special emphasis to the subject (see also 8.4, 18.3):

Chi te l'ha detto?

Who told you that?

Me l'ha detto lui.

He told me.

Io sono scozzese, lei è gallese.

I am Scottish, she is Welsh.

3.3.2 Object pronouns

Object pronouns are used to refer to the person or thing that is the target of an action, and *stressed* object pronouns place particular emphasis on it. For this reason they are generally much less used than the corresponding *unstressed* forms (see 3.4).

The forms of the stressed object pronouns are as follows:

me	me	noi	us
te	you	voi	you (<i>plural</i>)
lui	him	loro	them
lei	her	Loro	you (<i>formal, plural</i>)
Lei	you (<i>formal</i>)		

These pronouns can be used as the *direct object* of a verb, for example:

Vorrei vedere te al posto mio!

I'd like to see *you* in my place!

or, preceded by a preposition, as the *indirect object* or other complement of a verb:

Dai a me quei soldi.

Give that money *to me*.

Devi parlare più forte con lui, perché è duro d'orecchi.

You have to speak louder *to him*, because he's hard of hearing.

For more on the uses of stressed object pronouns, see 18.4.1 and 24.2.1.

Indirect object pronouns (indicating the person or thing *at which* the action of the verb is directed) also have an unstressed form, used without the preposition **a** (see 3.4.2). With a preposition, only stressed pronouns can be used.

3.3.3 Reflexive pronouns (stressed)

Reflexive pronouns refer to the object or other complement of a verb, when it is the same person as the subject. This is expressed in English by the use of '-self' ('himself, ourselves', etc.).

Here are the stressed (emphatic) forms (for the unstressed forms, see 3.4.3):

me (stesso/a)	myself	noi (stessi/e)	ourselves
te (stesso/a)	yourself	voi (stessi/e)	yourselves
sé (stesso/a)	him/herself	sé (stessi/e)	themselves

The use of **stesso**, to increase the emphasis given to the pronoun, is optional. It is not necessary to omit the accent on **sé** when it is followed by **stesso**, although many writers do.

Dovrebbe criticare sé stesso invece di dare la colpa agli altri.

He ought to be more critical of himself instead of putting the blame on others.

Ama il prossimo tuo come te stesso.

Love thy neighbour as thyself.

Sei arrabbiata con te stessa, perché hai fatto un errore.

You are angry with yourself, because you made a mistake.

3.4 Unstressed personal pronouns

The most common way to refer to somebody or something, without mentioning them explicitly, is to use *unstressed* pronouns (see 18.4.2–3). Because they are always used in conjunction with a verb, they are also called *conjunctive* pronouns. The unstressed pronouns can be *direct object*, *indirect object* or *reflexive*, depending on their relationship with the verb. The unstressed pronouns are always used without a preposition. (With a preposition, for example **a**, **da**, **di**, **con**, **per**, only the stressed forms can be used.) The unstressed pronouns normally come *before* the verb with some exceptions: they come *after* and are attached to the infinitive, the gerund, the participle and the **tu**, **noi**, **voi** imperative forms (see 3.4.7 below).

3.4.1 Direct object pronouns

Direct object pronouns are those used with *transitive* verbs such as **amare**, **comprare**, **leggere**, **mangiare**, **odiare**, **sentire**, **vedere**, to name just a few (see 2.1.6). They indicate the thing, person or entity that the action of the verb directly affects, in other words, its ‘object’, and are much more frequently used than the stressed object pronouns seen above (see also 18.4.1 and 18.4.2).

mi	me	ci	us
ti	you	vi	you (<i>plural</i>)
lo	him, it	li	them
la	her, it	le	them
La	you (<i>formal</i>)		

Oggi ho fatto una discussione con il capo. Lui *mi* odia.

Today I had an argument with my boss. He hates me.

Ti amo più di ogni altra cosa al mondo.

I love you more than anything else in the world.

I ragazzi non vogliono la pizza, non *la* mangiano mai.

The kids don't want pizza, they never eat it.

Scendiamo dalla macchina, così Giancarla *ci* vede.

Let's get out of the car, that way Giancarla will see us.

3.4.2 Indirect object pronouns

The *indirect object* pronouns are used to indicate that the action of a verb is aimed *at* or *to* something or somebody (see 18.4.1–3, 24.1–2, 25.3.2). They are used, therefore, with verbs which take an indirect object, such as **dare**, **mandare**, **telefonare**. When used alongside a direct object, they produce combined pronoun forms (see 3.4.6). One of their most common uses is with the verb **piacere** to express likes and dislikes.

The *indirect object* forms are as follows:

mi	to me	le	to her	vi	to you (<i>plural</i>)
ti	to you	Le	to you (<i>formal</i>)	gli (loro)[†]	to them
gli	to him	ci	to us		

NOTE

[†] In written Italian, and occasionally in formal spoken Italian, the pronoun **loro** (coming after the verb) can be used instead of **gli**.

Ti telefono domani mattina.

I'll call you tomorrow morning.

Le do la chiave della stanza, signora.

I'll give you the room key, *signora*.

Il caffè *mi* piace dolce.

I like my coffee sweet.

I bambini sono contenti. *Gli* piace il cioccolato!

The children are happy. They like chocolate.

3.4.3 Reflexive pronouns

Reflexive pronouns refer to the object or other complement of a verb, when it is the same person as the subject. This is expressed in English by the use of ‘-self’ (‘himself, ourselves’, etc.). We have already looked at the stressed form of the reflexive pronouns (see 3.3.3 above). The unstressed reflexive pronouns are as follows:

mi	myself	si	himself/herself	vi	yourselves
ti	yourself	ci	ourselves	si	themselves

The reflexive pronouns have the same function as the direct object pronouns seen above, but are used when the *object* and the *subject* of the verb are the *same person*.

Io mi lavo tutte le mattine alle 7.

I wash (myself) every morning at 7.

Guardati allo specchio!

Look at yourself in the mirror!

I miei figli si stanno preparando per gli esami.

My children are getting (themselves) ready for the exams.

In addition to this genuinely reflexive use, these pronouns are also used with the various *pronominal* forms of verbs (see 2.1.10).

Although it might seem as if there are a lot of different pronoun forms to learn, in the first and second person the unstressed pronouns (**mi, ti, ci, vi**) are all the same, whether indirect object, direct object or reflexive. The indirect object, direct object and reflexive pronouns differ from each other only in the third person singular and plural, as shown below:

	<i>Indirect</i>	<i>Direct</i>	<i>Reflexive</i>
Masculine sing	gli	lo	si
Feminine sing	le	la	si
Masculine pl	gli	li	si
Feminine pl	gli	le	si

3.4.4 Ne

Ne used as partitive

The pronoun **ne** is called *partitive* when it refers to a part or quantity of something or somebody. **Ne** is almost always used with an indication of *quantity*. It may be a number, a specification of weight or length, or an indefinite pronoun, for example **molto, poco (un po', un pochino), troppo, abbastanza** (see also 11.6.5, 11.7):

Desidera del pane?

Would you like some bread?

Si, ne vorrei un chilo.

Yes, I would like one kilo (of it).

È squisito questo gelato.

This ice cream is delicious.

Vuoi assaggiarne un po'?

Would you like to taste a little bit (of it)?

Ne is *invariable* (does not change form) and can refer to any noun (masculine, feminine, singular or plural). It occupies the same position in the sentence as the other unstressed pronouns: either *before* the verb or *after* and attached to the infinitive, the gerund, the participle and the **tu, noi, voi** imperative forms (see 3.4.7).

Although invariable, **ne** reflects the number and gender of the noun to which it refers. In the compound tenses, therefore, the past participle generally agrees with the noun that **ne** represents, as in the two examples below (see also 3.4.8):

Oggi sono arrivate molte telefonate. Solo Carmen ne ha ricevute dieci.

Today there have been a lot of telephone calls. Carmen alone has had ten (of them).

Oggi sono arrivati molti clienti. Solo il capo ne ha ricevuti cinque.

Today there have been a lot of customers. The boss alone has dealt with five (of them).

Other uses of *ne*

There are a few cases in which **ne** is used without a ‘partitive’ meaning, in other words, without any reference to quantity:

- (a) With a verb which takes **di** (for example, **pentirsi di**, **lamentarsi di**), expressing ‘of it, about it’:

Non ho comprato quella macchina e me *ne* pento.

I didn’t buy that car and I regret it.

Franco lavora troppo, ma non se *ne* lamenta.

Franco works too much, but he doesn’t complain about it.

- (b) Expressing ‘from, out of’:

I miei affari vanno bene. *Ne* ricavo un buon profitto.

My business is going well. I’m making a good profit (out of it).

Questo ufficio è male organizzato e *ne* deriva molta confusione.

This office is badly organized and a great deal of confusion arises (from this fact).

- (c) With **andarsene**, **starsene** and other idiomatic verb phrases:

Vattene!

Go away!

Andatevene!

Go away! (*plural*)

Non ce la faccio più. Me *ne* vado!

I can’t stand it any more. I’m going away!

Oggi ho la febbre. È meglio che me *ne* stia a casa.

Today I’ve got a high temperature. I’d better stay at home.

Chi se *ne* frega!

Who cares! (**fregarsene** is rather coarse)

Non me *ne* importa niente!

I don’t care at all! (colloquial but not vulgar or coarse)

Non *ne* posso più!

I can’t bear it any more!

Non *ne* vale la pena!

It is not worth the effort!

For examples of **ne** used as adverb of place, see 6.2.5.

3.4.5 Particle *ci*

Like **ne**, **ci** can be used as a pronoun, as an adverb of place, or idiomatically in several expressions. Like the other conjunctive pronouns, it is normally positioned before the verb, but comes after and is attached to an infinitive, gerund, participle, or the **tu**, **noi**, **voi** form of the imperative:

- (a) As an adverb of place, either static or implying movement, with verbs such as **abitare**, **andare**, **mettere**, **venire** and of course **essere**:

C’è . . .

There is . . .

Ci sono . . .

There are . . .

C’era una volta (una principessa) . . .

Once upon a time there was (a princess) . . .

Ci vado quest’estate.

I’m going there this summer.

Napoli mi piace molto. Ci abito da dieci anni.

I like Naples a lot. I’ve been living here for ten years.

When used as an adverb of place, along with an unstressed direct object pronoun or **ne**, **ci** occupies a different position according to the pronoun it is found with:

- It comes *after* the direct object pronouns **mi**, **ti**, **vi** to form combinations **mi ci**, **ti ci**, **vi ci**. The combination **ci ci** is not used; **vi ci** is used in its place, with **vi** as an adverb of place coming *before* the direct object pronoun **ci**.

Chi mi porta all'aeroporto? Ti ci porto io.
Who's taking me to the airport? I'll take you there.

Chi ci porta alla stazione? Vi ci porto io.
Who's taking us to the station? I'll take you there.

- It comes *before* the direct object pronouns **lo**, **la**, **li**, **le** and before **ne** and changes its form to **ce** to form the combinations **ce lo**, **ce la**, **ce li**, **ce le**, **ce ne**.

Voglio portare il gatto in aereo, ma come ce lo porto?
I want to take my cat on the plane, but how do I carry him on there?

For further examples of **ci** used as an adverb of place, see 6.2.5.

- (b) As a pronoun, used with a verb taking **a**, to replace either **a** + noun or **a** + verb infinitive:

Fumi ancora? Perché non ci rinunci veramente? (ci = a fumare)
Are you still smoking? Why don't you really give it up?

L'Italia mi manca molto. Ci penso spesso. (ci = all'Italia)
I miss Italy a lot. I often think *about it*.

- (c) Used idiomatically with certain verbs (see also 11.5.1):

Non ci vedo. I can't see.

Non ci sto. I'm not up for it.

- (d) With the verb **avere** when accompanied by a direct object pronoun such as **lo**, **la**, **li**, **le**, changing its form to **ce**:

Ce l'hai?
Have you got it?

Ce le ho.
I have them.

- (e) With a reflexive verb, to replace impersonal **si** (see 2.1.12):

In campagna ci si alza presto.
In the countryside one gets up early (people get up early).

If the impersonal **si** were used with the third person of a reflexive verb **si alza**, this would produce ***In campagna si si alza presto**. To avoid repetition and confusion, the first **si** changes to **ci**, as shown in the example above.

3.4.6 Combined pronouns (indirect + direct)

Unstressed pronouns are often used in combination with each other and with **ne**. When the indirect pronouns **mi**, **ti**, **gli**, **le**, **ci**, **vi** and the reflexive pronoun **si** are combined with the third person direct object pronouns **lo**, **la**, **li**, **le**, the indirect object pronoun always comes first. In the case of **mi**, **ti**, **ci**, **vi**, **si**, the **-i** ending changes to **-e**. Both **gli** and **le** combine with the direct object pronoun to form a single word. For combinations with **ci** used as adverb of place, see 3.4.5.

The table below shows the possible combinations of indirect pronouns (the column on the left), direct pronouns and **ne**.

	lo	la	li	le	ne
mi:	me lo	me la	me li	me le	me ne
ti:	te lo	te la	te li	te le	te ne
gli, le:	glielo	gliela	glieli	gliele	gliene
si:	se lo	se la	se li	se le	se ne
ci:	ce lo	ce la	ce li	ce le	ce ne
vi:	ve lo	ve la	ve li	ve le	ve ne
gli:	glielo	gliela	glieli	gliele	gliene

These combined pronouns, like all the other unstressed pronouns, are normally placed before the verb (**me la dai, gliel'ho detto**), but they come after and are attached to the infinitive, participle, gerund and **tu, noi** and **voi** imperative forms, combining in a single word (**dartela, dammelo**):

Che bella rosa! Me la dai?

What a beautiful rose! Will you give it to me?

Gliel'ho detto io.

I told her (it).

No non voglio dartela!

No, I don't want to give it to you!

Per favore, diglielo tu.

Please tell her it.

3.4.7 Position before and after verb

The normal position of the unstressed pronouns (whether direct, indirect or combined) is *before* the verb:

Mi passi lo zucchero?

Me lo passi?

With the infinitive, gerund, participle or **tu, noi, voi** imperatives, however, the pronouns are attached to the *end* of the verb form, as in the examples below:

Vengo a trovarvi a Natale.

I'll come and see you at Christmas.

Conoscendoti bene, direi che ti troverai bene in Sicilia.

Knowing you well, I'd say that you will like Sicily.

Alzati!

Get up!

Chiamiamolo!

Let's call him.

Chiamatemi!

Call me!

In the case of the imperative forms **da', di', fa', sta'**, the first letter of the object pronouns **mi, ti, lo, la, ci, vi, li, le** is doubled:

Dacci cinque minuti di tempo.

Give us five minutes.

Datti da fare.

Get a move on, get working

Dimmi cosa vuoi.

Tell me what you want.

Fammi un piacere.

Do me a favour.

Hai chiuso la porta? Fallo prima di andare a letto.

Did you close the door? Do it before going to bed.

Stammi a sentire. (colloquial)

Listen to me.

Although the pronouns before the verb are written as separate words, in speech they virtually combine with the verb, which comes immediately after, so that they sound like a single utterance [*misènti, tisènto*]:

Pronto! Mi senti?

Hello! Can you hear me?

Sì, ti sento bene!

Yes, I can hear you well!

Gliele dirò io.

I'll tell her (it).

When the pronouns follow the verb, they are truly attached to it, not only in speech but in the written form (**dammi, dirglielo**). This shows how closely pronoun and verb are linked.

Dammi lo zucchero. Give me the sugar.

Non dirglielo. Don't tell her (it). I'll tell her (it).

3.4.8 Dislocation: noun and pronoun used together

Although the object pronoun normally replaces a noun, it is quite common in spoken Italian to hear speakers use the pronoun (particularly the direct object pronoun) but keep the noun as well. This is known as 'dislocation'. The reason for doing this is to put the emphasis on a particular element of the sentence, whether subject, object or other element (see also 19.6).

Left dislocation (noun comes first) is a way of emphasising what is being discussed but is not very common in Italian. The element that comes first becomes the theme of the sentence but keeps the same grammatical status.

La macchina, io non la prendo.

I'm not taking the car.

Il viaggio lo fa in treno.

He's doing the journey by train.

L'intelligenza ce l'hai, devi solo studiare.

You've got the intelligence, you just need to study.

Right dislocation (noun comes last) is fairly common in spoken Italian. The speaker repeats the object already expressed by a pronoun (for example, **li . . . i biglietti**):

Ce li hai, i biglietti?

Do you have the tickets?

Lo vuoi, il caffè?

Do you want coffee?

Ce le hai, le chiavi?

Do you have the keys?

3.4.9 Agreement with past participle

When using compound tenses of the verbs, such as the **passato prossimo**, the past participle must agree with the gender and number of the direct object pronouns, including **ne**, which in turn agree with the gender and number of the noun they are replacing:

Hai visto la mia macchina nuova? Sì, l'ho vista. (= la)

Did you see my new car? Yes, I saw *it*.

Hai visto l'ultimo film di Moretti? No, non l'ho visto. (= lo)

Did you see the last Moretti film? No, I didn't see *it*.

Hai visto i bambini? Sì, li ho visti.

Did you see the children? Yes, I saw *them*.

Hai visto le Olimpiadi? No, non le ho viste.

Did you see the Olympics? No, I didn't see *them*.

Hai comprato le bibite? Sì, ne ho comprate due.

Have you bought the drinks? Yes, I bought *two*.

Hai comprato le pesche? Sì, ne ho comprate un chilo.

Have you bought peaches? Yes, I bought *a kilo of them*.

3.5 Relative pronouns

Relative pronouns have a double function: (a) like the personal pronouns, they refer to a previously mentioned person or thing; (b) they act as a link between two sentences or clauses. The sentence introduced by a relative pronoun (**che**, **cui**) is called the relative clause (see 9.3).

Puoi restituirmi la valigia *che* ti ho prestato?

Can you give me back the suitcase that I lent you?

3.5.1 Che

Che is by far the most common of all relative pronouns in Italian, and indeed one of the most frequently used words in the Italian language. It is used to refer to people, animals or things, and it is *invariable* (does not change form). In the relative clause it can be either the subject or the direct object of the verb.

Subject:

L'albero *che* cresce davanti alla mia finestra è una quercia.

The tree that grows in front of my window is an oak.

Ricordi lo scrittore *che* ha vinto il Premio Strega?

Do you remember the writer who won the Strega Prize?

Object:

L'albero *che* ho tagliato stamattina era una quercia.

The tree that I cut down this morning was an oak.

Ricordi lo scrittore *che* l'Università ha invitato a fare una conferenza?

Do you remember the writer whom the University invited to give a talk?

When used as a relative pronoun **che** is never preceded by a preposition.

3.5.2 Cui

Cui is the relative pronoun used with the function of indirect object or other complement of the verb. It is usually preceded by a preposition (for example, **a**, **con**, **da**, **di**, **in**, **per**). Like **che**, **cui** is invariable and can refer to any noun (masculine, feminine, singular or plural) without changing form.

Questo è l'ufficio *in cui* dobbiamo trasferirci l'anno prossimo.

This is the office which we have to move into next year.

Sto lavorando sulla pratica *di cui* ti ho parlato ieri.

I am working on the file which I spoke to you about yesterday.

Oggi quella signora *a cui* abbiamo mandato la fattura è venuta a pagare.

Today the lady to whom we sent the invoice came to pay.

Per cui often expresses a reason:

Il motivo *per cui* non andiamo in vacanza è che mancano i soldi.

The reason we are not going on holiday is that we are short of money.

When **cui** is used as an *indirect object* indicating the person or thing *at whom/which* the action of the verb is directed, as in the last example above, the preposition **a** can be omitted:

Vorrei gli indirizzi di tutte le ditte *cui* abbiamo inviato il nostro catalogo.

I would like to have the addresses of all the companies to whom we sent our catalogue.

Il problema *cui* ti riferisci è stato già affrontato.

The problem to which you are referring has already been dealt with.

Cui is also used as a *possessive adjective* (English 'whose'), placed between the definite article and the noun it refers to:

Bisogna trovare la persona *le cui* chiavi sono rimaste sul mio tavolo.

We have to find the person *whose* keys have been left on my table.

Verrà assunto il candidato *il cui curriculum risulterà più adatto*.

The candidate *whose* CV turns out to be the most suitable will be employed.

3.5.3 Il quale, la quale, i quali, le quali

These are used in place of **che** and **cui**, when you need to specify more clearly which noun the relative pronoun is referring to. Unlike **che** and **cui**, these pronouns vary in gender and number, as too does the definite article used with them, making it clearer which noun is being referred to.

Il quale is often used to replace **cui** when there is a need for more clarity in the reference. In this context, it is always used with a preposition combined with definite article (for example, **del quale, alla quale**). Compare the examples below with the parallel examples above, in which **cui** was used:

Sto lavorando sulla pratica della quale ti ho parlato ieri.

I am working on the file which I spoke to you about yesterday.

Vorrei gli indirizzi di tutte le ditte alle quali abbiamo inviato il catalogo.

I would like to have the addresses of the companies to which we sent the catalogue.

Verrà assunto il candidato, il curriculum del quale risulterà più adatto.

The candidate whose CV turns out to be most suitable will be employed.

Il quale is used far less frequently, without a preposition, as a replacement for **che**, and then only in a formal context, for example in legal or bureaucratic language as in the example below:

Tutta la corrispondenza deve essere firmata dal direttore, il quale ne assume la responsabilità legale.

All correspondence must be signed by the manager, who assumes legal responsibility for it.

3.5.4 Chi

The most common use of **chi** is as an interrogative pronoun in questions or indirect questions (see 3.6.1 below). It is also used, however, as a relative pronoun, referring to people, never to things. In this context, although it always takes a singular verb, it has a plural meaning ('people who, those who'):

Le Pagine Gialle online sono utili soprattutto a chi lavora nel commercio.

The online Yellow Pages are useful especially for those who are in business.

I nostri prodotti sono disegnati per chi apprezza la funzionalità.

Our products are designed for people who appreciate the functional approach.

Because of this generic meaning, it is frequently used in sayings and proverbs. Here are five sayings of popular wisdom, in which **chi** is used (see if you can find the equivalent proverb in English):

Chi cerca trova.

Chi va piano va sano e va lontano.

Chi di spada ferisce di spada perisce.

Chi tace acconsente.

Chi troppo vuole nulla stringe.

3.6 Interrogative pronouns and adjectives

Interrogatives are used to ask questions (see also Chapter 15). Some interrogatives can be used as both pronouns (standing on their own) and adjectives (attached to a noun), while others can be used only as pronouns. One interrogative (**quanto**) can also be used as an adverb. Two of these interrogatives (**che, quanto**) are commonly used in exclamations and we have given examples.

3.6.1 Chi

Chi (who?) is used only as pronoun. It is used in direct and indirect questions, is invariable and can refer to masculine or feminine, singular or plural. It can be the subject of the verb, as in the first example, or the object, as in the second example:

Chi viene con me?

Who's coming with me?

Chi hai invitato?

Whom did you invite?

Non mi ricordo chi ha telefonato.

I don't remember who phoned.

Chi crede di essere?

Who does she think she is?

Chi can also be used in an exclamation:

Ma guarda chi c'è!

Look who's here!

3.6.2 Che cosa/cosa?

Che cosa (what?) is used only as pronoun. **Che cosa** is invariable in both number and gender and can be either subject of the verb (as in the first example) or object (as in the second example):

Che cosa succede domani?

What is happening tomorrow?

Che cosa volete fare oggi?

What do you want to do today?

Che cosa can be replaced by **cosa** in spoken Italian. **Cosa** is also invariable:

Cosa prendi da bere?

What do you want to drink?

Che cosa can also be replaced by **che** (see also 3.6.5), which is also invariable and is used more frequently in the south of Italy:

Che vuoi?

What do you want?

Che è successo?

What's happened?

3.6.3 Quanto

Quanto (how much, how many?) can be used both as pronoun (standing on its own) and as adjective (accompanying a noun). Whether pronoun or adjective, it changes form (**quanto**, **quanta**, **quanti**, **quante**) according to the number (singular/plural) and gender (masculine/feminine) of the noun it refers to:

In quanti siete? (*pronoun*)

How many of you are there?

Quanto zucchero prendi? (*adjective*)

How much sugar do you take?

Quante paia di scarpe hai? (*adjective*)

How many pairs of shoes do you have?

Quanto can also be used in an exclamation:

Ma quanta roba hai portato!

What a lot of stuff you've brought!

Quante storie! (*colloquial expression*)

What a song and dance!

Quanto can also be used as an adverb (see 6.3.3).

3.6.4 **Quale**

Quale (which?) can be used both as pronoun (standing on its own) and as adjective (accompanying a noun). Whether as pronoun or adjective, it has both singular form (**quale**) and plural form (**quali**). **Quale** can be translated into English as either ‘which’ or simply ‘what’. Note that **quale** can be shortened to **qual** as in the example below, but should never be followed by an apostrophe.

Quale vestito metto stasera? (*adjective*)

Which dress shall I put on tonight?

Quali scarpe metto per la festa?

Which (what) shoes shall I put on for the party?

(*adjective*)

Qual è il Suo indirizzo? (*pronoun*)

What is your address?

Mi piacciono le scarpe nere ma anche quelle viola. Tu quali preferisci?

I like the black shoes but also the purple ones. Which ones do you prefer?

(*pronoun*)

3.6.5 **Che**

Che (what, which?) can be used both as pronoun, standing on its own (see 3.6.2 above), and as adjective (accompanying a noun). It is invariable:

Che camera volete? La camera matrimoniale? (*adjective*)

What (which) room do you want?
The double room?

Che giornali leggi? (*adjective*)

What newspapers do you read?

Che as an adjective can also be used in an exclamation:

Domani andiamo in Italia! Che bello!

Tomorrow we're going to Italy! Brilliant!

Che bella notizia!

What great news!

Che brutto uomo!

What an ugly man!

An additional **che** is inserted before the verb in this colloquial exclamative expression:

Che brutto che sei!

How ugly you are!

Here are a few more examples comparing the two different functions – pronoun or adjective – of **quanto**, **quale** and **che** (for more examples see Chapter 15):

Pronoun

Quant'è?

How much is it?

Quante ne vedi?

How many do you see?

Qual è il tuo?

Which one is yours?

Quali preferisci?

Which ones do you prefer?

Che vuoi?

What do you want?

Adjective

Quanto pane hai comprato?

How much bread did you buy?

Quante macchine vedi?

How many cars do you see?

Quale bicchiere hai usato?

Which glass have you used?

Quali canzoni preferisci?

Which songs do you prefer?

Che dolce vuoi?

Which cake do you want?

3.7 **Possessive pronouns and adjectives**

Possessives indicate the person to whom something or somebody belongs. Like personal pronouns they have six grammatical ‘persons’ (‘my, your, his’, etc.). In Italian each of the six

persons has *four* different endings which agree with the noun which they specify (except **loro** which is invariable), for example, **il mio ragazzo**, **la mia macchina**, **i miei amici**, **le mie scarpe**.

Possessive *pronouns* and *adjectives* are identical in form (whereas English has the variation ‘my/mine’, ‘your/yours’, etc.). The pronouns are used on their own to refer to something that has already been mentioned or that is actually present. The adjectives are always attached to a noun.

Adjective: **Questa è la mia scrivania.** This is my desk.
Pronoun: **E questa è la tua.** And this is yours.

The following table shows all the forms of the possessives:

Person	Masc sing	Fem sing	Masc pl	Fem pl
1st	mio	mia	miei	mie
2nd	tuo	tua	tuoi	tue
3rd	suo	sua	suoi	sue
4th	nostro	nostra	nostri	nostre
5th	vostro	vostra	vostr	vostre
6th	loro	loro	loro	loro

3.7.1 Use of article with possessives

While in English possessives are *never* accompanied by articles, in Italian the opposite applies: possessives are *always* preceded by an article, except in a few cases. Both article and possessive must agree in gender and number with the noun to which they are attached, not with the person who owns the object:

il suo computer his/her computer
la sua macchina his/her car
i suoi soldi his/her money
le sue colleghe his/her colleagues (female)

The only exception to this rule is with relatives, which do not take the definite article when they are used in the *singular*:

mia madre **mio padre** **mia sorella** **mio fratello** **mia cugina**
my mother my father my sister my brother my cousin (female)

Note the use of the article when there is more than one relative:

i miei genitori **le mie cugine**
my parents my cousins (female)

With **loro** ‘their’, the article is *always* used:

la loro madre **il loro zio**
their mother their uncle

Again, the article is always used when the noun is qualified in some way by a suffix (for example, as a term of affection) or an adjective:

la sua sorellina **il mio amato zio**
his/her little sister my beloved uncle

The article can also be used – although this is not a rule – with **nonno** ‘grandfather’, **nonna** ‘grandmother’, and with the affectionate terms **babbo** or **papà** ‘daddy’ and **mamma** ‘mummy’:

(il) mio nonno **(la) mia nonna Giuseppina**
my grandfather my grandmother Giuseppina
(la) mia mamma **(il) mio babbo / (il) mio papà**
my mummy my daddy

Finally, when used as possessive *pronouns* (i.e. not attached to a noun) the article is often omitted:

Di chi sono questi occhiali? Sono miei!

Whose spectacles are these? They are mine!

3.7.2 Position and omission of the possessive

The possessive adjective is usually placed before the noun. When it follows the noun, it carries a strongly emphatic or emotional meaning:

Mamma mia! Dio mio! Signora mia! Figlio mio!

Qui siamo in casa nostra!

Here we are in our own place!

Questo dev'essere opera tua!

This must be your work! (ironical)

In English the possessive is commonly used to indicate personal belongings, or relationships, and parts of the body. In Italian, when the relationship or ownership is obvious, as in the examples shown, you don't use the possessive. In particular the possessive is rarely used to refer to parts of the body:

Porterò la macchina.

I'll bring my car.

Aveva una giacca sulle spalle.

She had a jacket over her shoulders.

Lavati le mani!

Wash your hands!

Mettiti il cappotto!

Put on your coat!

3.7.3 Possessives as nouns

In a few cases possessives are used on their own, as nouns rather than as pronouns:

i miei / i tuoi

my parents / your parents

La Sua / La Vostra del 20.6.12

Your (letter) of 20.6.12 (*in business correspondence*)

Alla tua! / Alla nostra!

To your health! / To our health! (*making a toast*)

3.7.4 Proprio

Proprio is used as a possessive in three particular contexts:

- (a) To reinforce a normal possessive (as English 'own'):

L'ho visto con i miei propri occhi!

I saw it with my very own eyes!

- (b) In the third person to replace **suo, loro**, to avoid ambiguity (but only when it refers to the subject of the sentence):

Anna disse a Clara che aveva bisogno dei propri soldi.

Anna told Clara that she needed her (Anna's) money.

Quando scrive le mail, Luciana preferisce usare il proprio computer.

When she writes emails, Luciana prefers to use her own computer.

- (c) When the subject is an *indefinite* pronoun such as **tutti, ognuno, nessuno** (see 3.9.1) or impersonal **si** (see 19.5):

Tutti fanno i propri interessi.

Everybody looks after their own interests.

Nessuno ammette facilmente i propri errori.

Nobody easily admits to their mistakes.

In tempo di guerra si faceva il proprio dovere senza esitazione.

In times of war, one did one's duty, without hesitation.

3.8 Demonstrative pronouns and adjectives

Demonstratives are used to *indicate* something or somebody actually present when you speak, as in the examples below:

Dammi questo libro.

Give me this book.

Metti quella bottiglia in frigorifero.

Put that bottle in the fridge.

They can also refer to something or somebody not physically present, but previously mentioned in the discourse. In this function they are useful in connecting two different statements:

Ho comprato una macchina familiare, perché questa mi sembrava più adatta per la nostra famiglia.

I bought an estate car, because I thought this was more suitable for our family's needs.

3.8.1 Questo, quello

These demonstratives can be used as adjectives (qualifying a noun as in the first two examples above), or on their own as pronouns (as in the last example).

Questo and **quello** correspond exactly to the English 'this' and 'that', indicating respectively something or somebody near to or far away from the speaker/writer (in terms of space, time or position in the discourse).

Questo – whether adjective or pronoun – has four different endings that agree with the gender and number of the noun to which it refers:

Adjective:

questo vestito this dress

questa cravatta this tie

questi pantaloni these trousers

queste scarpe these shoes

Pronoun:

Volevo un paio di scarpe e ho comprato queste.

I wanted a pair of shoes and I bought these.

Cambiate i pantaloni. Questi sono più comodi.

Change your trousers. These are more comfortable.

Quello behaves differently according to whether it is a pronoun or an adjective:

(a) As a *pronoun* it has four possible endings **-o/-a/-i/-e**, according to the noun to which it refers:

Questo vestito è mio. Quello è tuo.

This dress is mine. That one is yours.

Questa cravatta è mia. Quella è tua.

This tie is mine. That one is yours.

Questi pantaloni sono miei. Quelli sono tuoi.

These trousers are mine. Those are yours.

Queste scarpe sono mie. Quelle sono tue.

These shoes are mine. Those are yours.

- (b) As an *adjective* it changes its ending, depending on number, gender and the initial letter of the word that follows, following the same pattern as the definite article (see 1.3.4):

<i>Definite article</i>	<i>Demonstrative</i>	<i>Definite article</i>	<i>Demonstrative</i>
<i>Masc sing</i>		<i>Fem sing</i>	
Il vestito	Quel vestito	La scarpa	Quella scarpa
L'ombrello	Quell'ombrello	L'amica	Quell'amica
Lo scialle	Quello scialle		
<i>Masc pl</i>		<i>Fem pl</i>	
I vestiti	Quei vestiti	Le scarpe	Quelle scarpe
Gli ombrelli	Quegli ombrelli	Le amiche	Quelle amiche
Gli scialli	Quegli scialli		

Note The pattern of the demonstrative **quello**, and of the definite article, is also followed by **bello** (see 1.4.5).

There is a third demonstrative adjective in Italian: **codesto**, used to refer to something far away from the speaker, but near to the person addressed. This is not commonly used except in Tuscany.

Dammi codesto libro.

Give me that book (the one you have).

In most of Italy, the use of **codesto** is restricted to written bureaucratic language, for example when you want to address an office, company or firm:

Informiamo codesta spettabile ditta che i nostri prezzi subiranno una variazione dal 30/6 p.v.

We would like to inform your company that our prices will change as from 30/6.

3.8.2

Other demonstrative pronouns: **ciò, costui, costei, costoro, colui, colei, coloro**

These demonstratives are used *only* as pronouns. They are used instead of **questo/quello** but mainly in written language.

- (a) **Ciò** refers only to events or ideas, in particular to something that has just been mentioned, usually in the form of a whole phrase, clause or sentence such as:

Il treno è arrivato con un'ora di ritardo, e ciò ci ha fatto perdere l'appuntamento.

The train arrived one hour late, and this caused us to miss the appointment.

Sapete benissimo perché abbiamo preso questa decisione. Di ciò abbiamo già parlato nella riunione di ieri.

You know very well why we took this decision. We already talked about it at yesterday's meeting.

Ciò che, ciò . . . cui is used when referring to something explained subsequently in a *relative* clause:

Non ho capito ciò che hai detto.

I didn't understand *what* you said.

Vorrei spiegarvi ciò di cui ha parlato ieri il direttore.

I'd like to explain to you *what* the manager talked about yesterday.

- (b) A more formal way to refer to people is to use **costui/costei/costoro** instead of **questo/questa/questi** and **colui/colei/coloro** instead of **quello/quella/quelli**:

Chi è costui?

Who is this gentleman?

Abbiamo inviato una lettera a tutti *coloro che* parteciperanno al congresso.

We sent a letter to all those who will take part in the congress.

3.9 Indefinite pronouns and adjectives

Indefinite pronouns and indefinite adjectives designate somebody or something without a definite specification. In Italian they take various forms.

Here we look at indefinites according to their different grammatical functions: (a) as pronouns only; (b) as adjectives only; (c) as pronouns and adjectives. Here we illustrate the indefinites most commonly used. In 3.10 we look specifically at those indefinite adjectives and pronouns used to specify quantity.

3.9.1 Pronouns: *uno, qualcuno, chiunque, ognuno, qualcosa, niente, nulla*

The indefinites listed above are used *only* as pronouns, on their own and not attached to a noun. All of them have *singular* forms only.

Uno/a ‘one’, ‘somebody’ can be masculine or feminine and refers to a single person or thing:

C'è *uno* che ti cerca.

There is a man looking for you.

Non ho mai conosciuto *una* come te.

I've never met anybody like you.

Che belle prugne. Me ne dai *una*?

What nice plums! Will you give me one?

Qualcuno/a ‘somebody’ can be masculine or feminine and refers to an undefined person (‘someone’):

C'è *qualcuno* alla porta.

There is somebody at the door.

It can also be used for objects, when it has the meaning ‘few’:

Ho fatto molte fotografie. Vuoi vederne *qualcuna*?

I took a lot of photographs. Do you want to see a few of them?

Ognuno/a ‘each one’ can be masculine or feminine and can refer to either people or objects:

Ho comprato un regalo ad *ognuno*.

I bought a present for each one.

Ci sono tre linee telefoniche, *ognuna* con un numero diverso.

There are three telephone lines, each with a different number.

The corresponding adjective is **ogni** (see 3.9.2 below).

Ciascuno has a similar meaning and can be used as both pronoun and adjective (see 3.9.3 below).

Chiunque ‘anyone’, ‘whoever’ is invariable and refers only to people. When introducing a relative sentence it is often followed by a verb in the subjunctive (see 2.2.15).

***Chiunque* può rivolgersi al direttore.**

Anyone can speak to the manager.

***Chiunque* sia, non voglio rispondergli.**

Whoever it may be, I don't want to answer.

Non aprire mai la porta a *chiunque* chieda di entrare.

Never open the door to anyone who asks to come in.

Qualcosa ‘something’ is invariable and refers only to things. It is usually treated as masculine (although **cosa** itself is feminine):

Qualcosa è stato fatto, nonostante le difficoltà.

Something has been done, in spite of all the difficulties.

Qualcosa can also be used with **da** followed by a verb infinitive (**qualcosa da fare**) or with **di** followed by an adjective (**qualcosa di buono**):

C'è sempre qualcosa da fare.

There is always something to be done.

Vorrei qualcosa di buono da mangiare.

I'd like something good to eat.

Niente, nulla 'nothing' are also invariable. They are normally used as a double negative, in other words with **non** before the verb and **niente** or **nulla** after it. When **niente** or **nulla** come at the beginning of the sentence, they do not require **non**. Like **qualcosa**, **niente** can be followed by **da** and infinitive (**niente da fare**) or by **di** and an adjective (**niente di particolare**). (See also 16.3.)

Non c'è niente da fare.

There is nothing to do.

La cena? Niente di particolare!

The dinner? Nothing special!

Non fa niente!

It doesn't matter!

Non succede niente.

Nothing happens.

Niente succede. (*far less common than the version above*)

Nothing happens.

Nulla è più bello di una giornata di sole.

Nothing is more beautiful than a sunny day.

3.9.2 Adjectives: *ogni, qualche, qualunque, qualsiasi*

The indefinites listed above are used *only* as adjectives, modifying a noun. They are all *invariable* and used only in the *singular*.

Ogni 'every, each':

Faccio la doccia ogni giorno.

I have a shower every day.

Ogni volta che entro in ufficio c'è sempre una telefonata per me.

Each time I come into my office, there is always a telephone call for me.

Dobbiamo fare la manutenzione della macchina ogni sei mesi.

We have to service the car once every six months.

Ogni with singular noun can usually be replaced by **tutti** and plural noun (see also 3.9.3).

Qualche 'some' is unique in always taking a singular noun, with a plural meaning:

Qualche volta anche tu sbagli.

Sometimes even you make mistakes.

Dammi qualche francobollo.

Give me a few stamps.

I soldi arriveranno fra qualche giorno.

The money will arrive in a few days.

Qualunque, qualsiasi 'any, whatever'. The corresponding pronoun (referring to people) is **chiunque** (see 3.9.1).

Può venire a trovarmi in qualunque momento.

You may come to see me at any time.

Bisogna essere preparati a qualsiasi eventualità.

One should be ready for any eventuality.

Both **qualunque** and **qualsiasi** can be followed by a verb in the subjunctive, as in the examples below:

Qualunque cosa dica, ha sempre ragione.

Whatever she says, she is always right.

Dobbiamo essere capaci di risolvere qualsiasi problema si presenti.

We should be able to solve any problem that might arise.

Note the different meaning of **qualunque** when used *after* the noun:

Oggi non è un giorno qualunque. È il mio compleanno.

Today is not just any old day. It's my birthday.

3.9.3

Pronouns and adjectives: *alcuni, altri, certi, ciascuno, nessuno, tale, tutto*

The indefinites listed above can be used both as pronouns and as adjectives.

Alcuni/e as a pronoun is only used in the plural with the meaning 'some people, a few people'. It can be masculine or feminine, depending on who it refers to:

Non tutte le donne vogliono lavorare fuori casa. Alcune preferiscono stare a casa e badare ai figli.

Not all women want to work outside the home. Some prefer to stay at home and look after their children.

Alcuni is often used in a pair with **altri** contrasting two groups of people:

Alcuni stavano seduti, altri erano in piedi.

Some people were sitting, others were standing.

Alcuno/a/i/e 'some, a few' is sometimes used as an adjective, with *plural* nouns, instead of the more common **qualche**, which is always singular (see above 3.9.2):

Sul mio tavolo ci sono alcune pratiche importanti.

There are a few important files on my desk.

The singular forms **alcun/o/a** are used only in *negative* sentences, either with **non**, as an alternative to the more common **nessun/o/a**, or after **senza**:

Non ho alcuna paura.

I have no fear.

Mia madre soffre di ansia ma senza alcun motivo.

My mother suffers from anxiety but without any reason for it.

Ha sbagliato, senza alcun dubbio.

He made a mistake, without any doubt.

Altro/a/i/e can be singular or plural, masculine or feminine. Used as an adjective it means 'other, another'. Used as a pronoun, it means 'the other, something else, someone else'. It can refer to people or things:

Desidera un altro caffè?

Would you like another coffee?

Sì, grazie, ne vorrei un altro.

Yes, please, I'd like another one.

Non mi interessa quello che dicono gli altri.

I am not interested in what others say.

Desidera qualcos'altro?

Would you like anything else?

As mentioned above, **altro** can be used along with **alcuni**, to contrast two groups of people:

Nel tempo libero, alcuni vanno al cinema, altri preferiscono andare al ristorante.

In their free time, some people go to the cinema, others prefer to go to the restaurant.

Used as a pronoun, **altro** can be used in idiomatic expressions, as in these two examples:

Senz'altro! Certainly!

Altro ché! No wonder!

Certo/a/i/e ‘a certain person’ can be singular or plural, masculine or feminine. As a pronoun, however, it is normally only found in plural form (**certi, certe**):

Adjective:

Una certa persona mi ha snobbato.

A certain person cut me dead.

Certi studenti non meritano di essere promossi.

Certain students don’t deserve to pass.

Pronoun:

Certi non sanno come accendere il computer.

Certain people don’t even know how to turn the computer on.

Le donne sono state invitate alla partita ma certe hanno preferito rimanere a casa.

The women were invited to the match but certain of them preferred to stay at home.

Ciascuno/a ‘each (one)’ – whether as pronoun or adjective – is only used in the *singular*. It can be used instead of the more common **ognuno** (pronoun, see 3.9.1 above) and **ogni** (adjective, see 3.9.2 above).

Adjective:

Nel mio giardino ciascuna pianta ha un’etichetta.

In my garden each plant has got a label.

Pronoun:

Ho tre figli e devo sempre comprare un regalo a ciascuno.

I have three children and I must always buy a present for each (one).

Nessuno/o/a ‘no, no one, nobody’ can only be *singular*. As an adjective, it follows the pattern of the indefinite article **un/uno/una/un**. As a pronoun, it normally uses the masculine singular form **nessuno** but can use the feminine **nessuna** if the reference is clearly to a female person. Like **niente** and **nulla** (see 3.9.1 above), its normal position is after the verb, with **non** coming before. If positioned before the verb, it does not need **non**.

Adjective:

Non c’è nessun dubbio.

There is no doubt.

Non ho visto nessuna macchina per la strada.

I didn’t see any cars on the road.

Pronoun:

Non c’è nessuno.

There is nobody there.

Le donne protestano. Nessuna vuole essere pagata meno dei colleghi maschi.

The women are protesting. Nobody wants to be paid less than their male colleagues.

Tale/i ‘such’, ‘a certain’ can be singular or plural. When used as a pronoun it refers to an unidentified person (English ‘chap, bloke, fellow’), and is usually preceded by **un** or **quel**. When used as an adjective, it is preceded by the indefinite article (**un** etc.):

Pronoun:

Di là c’è un tale che ti cerca.

There is a bloke asking for you, next door.

Dica a quel tale di aspettarmi.

Tell that chap to wait for me.

Adjective:

Ho avuto una tale paura, che sono rimasto paralizzato.

I was so scared that I froze.

Tutto/a/i/e ‘all’ can be singular or plural, masculine or feminine. Whether pronoun or adjective, it has to agree with the noun to which it refers. **Tutto** can also be used as an adverb (see 6.3.5), in which case its form is invariable.

Pronoun:

Le mie amiche sono tutte in vacanza.

My friends are all on holiday.

Tutti sapevano tutto.

Everyone knew everything.

Adjective:

Abbiamo mangiato tutta la pizza.

We ate all the pizza.

Faccio la doccia tutti i giorni.

I have a shower every day.

3.10 Pronouns and adjectives of quantity

This group of pronouns and adjectives is often considered together with indefinite pronouns and adjectives (see 3.9). They include **molto** ('much'), **parecchio** ('a lot'), **poco** ('a small amount'), **tanto** ('much, so much'), **troppo** ('too much'). Both as pronoun and adjective, they vary their form according to the noun they refer to – masculine/feminine, singular/plural – though the masculine singular form is often used when no specific noun has been mentioned. All the pronouns in this group can also be used as adverbs, in which case they are invariable (see 6.3.5).

Pronoun:

La bambina ha solo sette mesi. Non mangia molto ancora.

The baby is only seven months old. She doesn't eat a lot yet.

C'era parecchio da mangiare.

There was a lot to eat.

Non mi bastano le maglie. Sono poche.

I haven't got enough sweaters. There are so few of them.

Il treno era pieno. Eravamo in tanti.

The train was full. There were so many of us.

Vuoi un po' di fichi? Io ne ho troppi.

Do you want a few figs? I've got too many.

Adjective:

Ho molti amici.

I have many (boy)friends.

Era nella stessa casa da dieci anni e aveva parecchia roba.

She'd been in the same house for ten years and she had a lot of stuff.

Non legge molto, infatti ha pochi libri.

She doesn't read very much, in fact she has few books.

Ho tante amiche.

I have many (girl)friends.

Hai messo troppa salsa.

You've put too much sauce on.

4

Prepositions

4.1 What is a preposition?

In Italian there are eight common prepositions which are used more than any others (see also 4.3 and 4.4 below):

a, con, da, di, in, per, su, tra (or **fra**)

The basic function of a *preposition* is to introduce some additional information to a verb or a noun, in the form of a '*complement*' (something which *completes* the verb):

Abbiamo parlato di Anna.

We talked about Anna.

Qual è il numero di Teresa?

What is Teresa's phone number?

The complement can be either a noun:

Vado a Roma.

I go to Rome.

or a verb:

Vado a lavorare.

I go to work.

When prepositions introduce a verb, as in the last example above, their function is similar to that of *conjunctions* (see Chapter 5) except for the differences shown below.

Prepositions (for example, **di**) always introduce verbs in the *infinitive* (**parlare**):

Spero di parlare con Carlo domani.

I hope I'll talk to Carlo tomorrow.

Conjunctions (such as **che**) introduce verbs in the *indicative, conditional* or *subjunctive* mood (**parli**):

Spero che tu parli con Carlo domani.

I hope you'll talk to Carlo tomorrow.

4.2 Combined prepositions and articles

Five of the eight common prepositions listed above always combine with the *definite article* (see 1.3.3) to give the forms shown:

	il	lo	l'	i	gli	la	le
a	al	allo	all'	ai	agli	alla	alle
con*	col	collo	coll'	coi	cogli	colla	colle
da	dal	dallo	dall'	dai	dagli	dalla	dalle
di	del	dello	dell'	dei	degli	della	delle
in	nel	nello	nell'	nei	negli	nella	nelle
su	sul	sullo	sull'	sui	sugli	sulla	sulle

Note how **in** + the definite article changes into **nel, nella**, etc.

The combination of **con** with the definite article (shown in italics above) is no longer used except for the forms **col** and **coi** which survive in idiomatic expressions such as **col cavolo** ('the hell . . .'), **coi fiocchi** ('pulling out all the stops'). The other forms may be seen in older literary texts.

Col cavolo che è morto il talk-show politico!

Is the political talk-show dead? The hell it is!

Ha organizzato una cena coi fiocchi!

She organised an amazing dinner!

4.3

Common prepositions used with nouns

We now give a few detailed examples showing the basic uses of the most common prepositions. Some examples have been chosen to stress the difference between Italian and English usage. Note especially those cases in which *no* preposition is needed in English but a preposition is needed in Italian: for example, 'I sent Maria a card', '**Ho mandato un biglietto a Maria**'. A good dictionary can provide even more examples. For use of prepositions introducing dependent verbs, see 4.4.

4.3.1

A

The basic relationship expressed by the preposition **a** is that of an action directed towards some person, place or time (the *indirect object* of the action expressed by a verb). However, this preposition has many and varied uses, beyond its basic meaning of 'to, at':

As indirect object:

dire qualcosa a qualcuno to say something to somebody

ho scritto a mia sorella I wrote to my sister

To place:

andiamo a Parigi we're going to Paris

vado a casa I'm going home

In/at place:

vivo a Parma I live in Parma

lavoro all'Università I work at the University

Time:

alle tre at three o'clock

a mezzanotte at midnight

Means:

andiamo a piedi let's walk

lavorato a mano hand-made

Manner:

spaghetti alle vongole spaghetti with clams

ragù alla bolognese Bolognese meat sauce

Characteristics:

televisione a colori colour TV

pentola a pressione pressure cooker

Movement *to* a place can also be expressed by other prepositions, such as **in** and **da**:

vado a scuola I'm going to school

vado in ufficio I'm going to the office

vado da Roberta I'm going to Roberta's

Note that you always need to use **a** to express the *indirect object* even when the preposition can be omitted in English, unless using *unstressed* pronouns (see last example below):

Ho dato il libro a Paolo	I gave Paolo the book
Ho dato il libro a lui	I gave <i>him</i> the book
Gli ho dato il libro	I gave him the book

When followed by a word beginning with a vowel, **a** can change to **ad** to help pronunciation:

Ho dato il libro ad Anna
I gave the book to Anna

For further examples of **a**, see **18.4.1** (followed by stressed pronouns), **37.3** (expressing place) and **37.4.2** (expressing manner). For the use of **a** introducing a dependent verb, see **4.4** below.

4.3.2 Con

Con corresponds to English *with*.

It can express ‘together with’ (a person):

Stasera ceno con Gigi.
I’ll have dinner with Gigi tonight.

Con chi stai parlando?
Who are you talking to? (<i>Literally</i> : ‘with whom’)

Vieni con me al cinema?
Will you come with me to the cinema?

It can also express the means by which you do something:

Ho fatto la foto con il telefonino.
I took a photo with my mobile phone.

Si accende con il telecomando.
It’s switched on by remote control.

For further examples of **con** see **37.4.2**.

4.3.3 Da

The basic meaning of **da** is direction *from* some point in space or in time, and in fact it is often used with **venire**, as shown below. However **da** has many other functions; it can indicate movement *to* somewhere, when used with **andare** (but only when the destination is an individual or his workplace, as in the second set of examples), or can refer to an action taking place *at* someone’s house or place of work, as in the third set of examples.

From a place:

veniamo da Genova	we come from Genoa
veniamo dall’Inghilterra	we come from England

To a place:

andiamo da Giorgio	we go to Giorgio’s (home)
andiamo dal dentista	we go to the dentist’s (surgery)
Compriamolo dal salumiere.	Let’s buy it at the deli.

At a place:

stasera dormi da me	tonight you’re staying at my place
Lucia è dal direttore	Lucia is in the manager’s office

Through a place:

il treno passa da Pisa	the train passes through Pisa
è uscito dalla finestra	he went out through the window

Agent:

fu colpito da una palla	he was hit by a ball
è amata da tutti	she’s loved by everyone

<i>Since:</i> lavoro da tre anni viaggiamo dalle sette	I've been working for three years we've been travelling since 7 o'clock
<i>Function:</i> spazzolino da denti crema da barba	toothbrush shaving cream
<i>Cause:</i> morte da infarto stress da lavoro	death from heart attack work-related stress
<i>Manner:</i> vita da cani giochi da bambini	dog's life child's play
<i>Value:</i> una moneta da un euro	a one euro coin

NOTE

† For this use of **da** expressing time, see **13.7** and **36.5.1**.

For further examples of **da**, see also **34.5** (expressing cause), **37.3** (expressing place) and **37.4.6** (expressing manner).

4.3.4 Di

Di is the most frequently used of all Italian prepositions. Although it is often translated by the English 'of', it has many more functions, some of which are shown below:

<i>Specification:</i> la difficoltà del lavoro frutta di stagione	the difficulty of the job fresh fruit
<i>Belonging:</i> la macchina di Giulia la casa di mio padre Di chi è la giacca?	Giulia's car my father's house Whose jacket is this?
<i>Origin:</i> Franco è di Napoli. Anna è di Ayr	Franco is from Naples. Anna is from Ayr
<i>Comparison:</i> sono più alto di te	I'm taller than you
<i>Material:</i> tavolo di legno cavo d'acciaio	wooden table steel cable
<i>Author:</i> la 'Divina Commedia' di Dante 'Amarcord' di F. Fellini	the 'Divine Comedy' by Dante 'Amarcord' by F. Fellini
<i>Topic:</i> parliamo di affari una lezione di storia	let's talk about business a lecture on history
<i>Time:</i> di giorno, di notte d'inverno, d'estate	by day, by night in winter, in summer
<i>Place/movement:</i> di qui, di là di sopra, di sotto	over here, over there upstairs, downstairs

Before a word beginning with a vowel, **di** is elided to **d'**, as shown above.

For further examples of **di**, see 10.2.4 (referring to materials), 17.3 (used in comparisons), 18.4.1 (followed by stressed pronouns) and 37.3.3 (expressing place). For **di** + article (**del, dello . . .**) as partitive article, see 1.3.4 and 11.6.1. For **di** with dependent verbs, see 4.4 below.

4.3.5 In

The basic meaning of **in** is similar to that of English 'in', but it indicates position in time as well as in physical space, as well as movement *into* somewhere:

Place ('in'):

i bicchieri sono in cucina the glasses are in the kitchen
abito in Francia I live in France

Place ('to'):

vado in Francia I'm going to France
domani vengo in ufficio I'll come to the office tomorrow

Time ('in'):

mi sono laureato nel '76 I graduated in 1976
mi preparo in 5 minuti I'll get ready in 5 minutes

Means:

devo andare in macchina I must go by car
pagheremo in dollari we'll pay in dollars

Material:

rifiniture in pelle trimmings in leather
camicia in seta grezza raw silk shirt

Mood/style:

in buona fede in good faith
voglio vivere in pace I want to live in peace

For further examples of **in**, see 37.3.2, 37.3.4 (place) and 37.4.2 (manner).

4.3.6 Per

In addition to its basic meaning of English 'for', **per** is used in several other contexts. Here are a few examples:

Through, along, by:

Siamo passati per Londra.
We passed through London.

Di solito andiamo per l'autostrada.
We usually go by the motorway.

Parliamo per telefono.
Let's talk on the phone.

Destination:

Parto per il Giappone.
I'm leaving for Japan.

C'è posta per me?
Is there any mail for me?

Limitation:

Per me è sbagliato.
In my opinion it is wrong.

Per ora aspettiamo.
We'll wait, for the moment.

Distribution:

catalogo per autore
catalogue by author

divisi per età
divided by age group

5 per 5 fa 25
5 times 5 equals 25

► See also 34.3.2, 34.4 (cause).

For the use of **per** with dependent verbs, see 4.4.

4.3.7 Su

Su means ‘on, upon, above, about’:

Position or location:

I piatti sono sul tavolo.
The dishes are on the table.

Di solito andiamo a sciare sulle Dolomiti. (*Literally: ‘on the Dolomites’*)
We usually go skiing in the Dolomites.

‘On, about’ referring to a topic:

notizie sul mercato
market report

un articolo su Pirandello
an article on Pirandello

Approximation, when used with a number:

un uomo sui trent’anni
a man of around thirty

Costa sui due milioni.
It costs about two million.

When indicating a position (‘upon some place’), the preposition **sopra** is also commonly used (see 4.5):

I piatti sono sopra il tavolo.
The dishes are on the table.

4.3.8 Tra, fra

These two prepositions have exactly the same meaning of ‘between’ or ‘among’, both physically and otherwise:

Tra gli italiani, ci sono molti che non si fidano del governo.
Amongst Italians, there are many who don’t trust the government.

Fra me e te, l’unica differenza è la carriera.
Between you and me, the only difference is our careers.

However both **tra** and **fra** also have the meaning ‘in’, expressing the length of time or distance within which something will take place (see also 14.4 and 37.3.5):

tra un anno	in a year’s time
fra tre chilometri	in three kilometres

4.4 Common prepositions used with verbs

Prepositions often introduce a dependent clause with a verb infinitive as shown in the examples below with **a**, **di**, **per**:

Vieni a vedere.	Come to see.
Cerca di capire.	Try to understand.
Lavoro per guadagnare.	I work in order to earn money.

In this function the role of the preposition is similar to that of a conjunction, although with some important differences (see below).

A, **da**, **di** and **per** are the prepositions most commonly used in this function. Use a dictionary to find out which different constructions are possible with each verb (or noun, in the case of **da**), or refer to the list of verbs and prepositions in **Appendix IV**. Meanwhile here are a few guidelines and examples.

4.4.1 A

A is mainly used to indicate the *aim*, *end* or *intention* of the main verb. It is also often used with a verb expressing ‘beginning’ or ‘starting’:

Vado a sciare.	I’m going skiing.
Pensa solo a studiare.	He only thinks about studying.
Cominciate a lavorare!	Start working!

For further examples of **a**, see **21.8.1–2**, **25.3.3** (after **fare bene**, **fare male**) and **33.2** (expressing purpose). The full list of verbs followed by **a** can be found in **Appendix IV**.

4.4.2 Da

Da follows a *noun* and indicates that ‘something must be done’ – a *passive* sense – rather than ‘someone has to do something’:

Ho molto da fare.	I’ve got a lot to do (<i>i.e.</i> a lot to be done).
Ci sono due lettere da scrivere.	There are two letters to write (<i>i.e.</i> to be written).
Cosa prende da bere?	What would you like to drink?

For further examples of **da**, see **33.4.2** (expressing purpose), **35.5** (expressing result).

4.4.3 Di

Di is used after certain verbs introducing a dependent verb. Verbs that are followed by **di** (introducing a dependent verb) include verbs of completion or finishing (**finire di**), thinking or believing (**credere**, **pensare**, **sperare**, **sembrare**), hoping, fearing, doubting (**sperare**, **temere**, **dubitare**), remembering and forgetting (**ricordare**, **dimenticare**), as well as verbs involving another person, such as advising, suggesting, allowing, forbidding (**consigliare**, **suggerire**, **permettere**, **vietare**).

Penso di partire presto.	I’m thinking of leaving early.
Ho finito di scrivere.	I’ve finished writing.
Mi pare di impazzire.	I feel as if I am going mad. (<i>Literally</i> : It seems to me to be going mad.)
Sforzati di mangiare.	Make an effort to eat.

The full list of verbs followed by **di** can be found in **Appendix IV**.

There are also several phrases which use **di** to introduce a dependent verb infinitive. They include prepositional phrases (such as **al fine di**, **allo scopo di**), phrases combining **essere** and adjectives (for example, **essere contento**) and phrases combining verbs and nouns (**avere bisogno**, **c’è bisogno**). The verb phrases are also listed in **Appendix IV**.

4.4.4 Per

Per is used to state explicitly the *aim* of an action (English ‘in order to’):

Sono venuto *per* parlarti.

I came in order to speak to you.

Ho bisogno di tempo *per* finire il lavoro.

I need time in order to complete the job.

For further examples of **per**, see 33.4 (expressing purpose), 34.3.2 (expressing cause).

Note how in Italian a verb infinitive introduced by a preposition must always have the same subject as the main verb. If the subject is different, a *conjunction* (for example, **che**) must be used, and the dependent verb has to be a *finite* verb in the indicative or subjunctive:

Credo *di* avere ragione. (*verb infinitive*)

I think I am right.

Dice *che* tu hai ragione. (*indicative*)

He says you are right.

Credo *che* tu abbia ragione. (*subjunctive*)

I think you are right.

4.4.5 Verbs where no preposition is needed

Some very frequently used verbs introduce dependent verbs in the infinitive without the use of a preposition. The most important are: **dovere**, **potere**, **volere** (see 2.2.4), **amare**, **fare**, **osare**, **preferire**, **sapere**:

Vorrei dormire.

I'd like to sleep.

Non so nuotare.

I don't know how to swim.

Preferisco vivere da solo.

I prefer to live alone.

4.5 Other prepositions

In addition to the eight simple prepositions shown above, Italian has many other prepositions. We have grouped the most common ones according to their normal function in the sentence.

4.5.1 Indicating physical position, location

The following prepositions or prepositional phrases can also be used as adverbs expressing location (see also 6.2.7 and 6.3.2). For examples of how these prepositions are used to express location, see 37.3.

accanto (a)	next to
attraverso	across
davanti a	before, in front of
dentro (di)	inside
dietro (a, di)	behind
di fronte (a)	opposite (<i>see also</i> 4.5.5)
fuori (di)	outside
in mezzo (a)	in the middle of
lontano (da)	far from
oltre	beyond
sopra (di)	on, above

sotto (di)	under
verso	towards
vicino (a)	near
un albergo di lusso <i>in mezzo al</i> deserto	
a luxury hotel in the middle of the desert	

4.5.2 Indicating position in time

The following prepositions or prepositional phrases indicate position in time. Both **dopo** and **prima** can also be used as adverbs expressing time (see 36.4.1, 36.3.1 and 14.4). For examples of how all these prepositions are used in a time context, see Chapter 36 as well as Chapter 14 (the future) and Chapter 13 (the past).

dopo	after
durante	during
entro	by
fino a	until, up to
prima	before
verso	towards

Durante le vacanze estive, ho imparato a cucinare!

During the summer holidays, I learnt to cook!

Devo finire il libro entro la fine del mese.

I have to finish the book by the end of the month.

4.5.3 Expressing other functions

The following prepositions have functions other than those of expressing time or place. Other examples of their use can be found by searching the Index.

come	as
contro	against
insieme (a)	together with
malgrado	despite
mediante	by means of
nonostante	despite
salvo	except
secondo	according to
senza	without
tramite	by

Sono andata al cinema insieme a mio fratello e ai suoi amici.

I went to the cinema with my brother and his friends.

4.5.4 Examples of use

The prepositions above have several distinguishing features:

- Unlike the common prepositions **a**, **da**, etc., they all have more than one syllable.
- They are often found together with another preposition, for example, **davanti a**, **insieme a**, **prima di**.
- Some can be used both as preposition and as *adverb* (see Chapter 6) to modify a verb, as in the pairs of examples below:

Arriverò dopo le cinque. (*preposition*)

I shall arrive after five o'clock.

Arriverò dopo. (*adverb*)

I shall arrive afterwards.

Prego, si sieda davanti al banco. (*preposition*)

Please, have a seat at the counter.

Prego, si sieda davanti. (*adverb*)

Please, have a seat in front.

- Some can be followed by either a noun (*cena*) or a verb (*cenare*):

Partirò *prima di cena*. (*preposition*)

I'll leave before dinner.

Partirò *prima di cenare*. (*preposition*)

I'll leave before having dinner.

Partirò *prima*. (*adverb*)

I'll leave earlier.

4.5.5

Prepositional phrases which express other functions

There are several more phrases which have the same role as prepositions and which express many different functions. Since the functions are so varied, examples of their use can best be found by searching the Index.

a causa di	because of
dalla parte di	on behalf of
di fronte a	faced with (<i>both literally and not</i>)
grazie a	thanks to
in base a	on the basis of
in mezzo a	in the middle of (<i>both literally and not</i>)
in vista di	considering
per via di	because of

Di fronte ai problemi non si risponde con gli insulti.

When faced with problems, one shouldn't respond with insults.

I posti in autobus verranno scelti dai partecipanti in base alla disponibilità.

The seats on the bus will be chosen by participants on the basis of availability.

5

Conjunctions

5.1 What is a conjunction?

The role of conjunctions ('joining words') is to link two or more sentences or parts of a sentence, whether clauses, phrases or simply groups of words. The conjunctions, together with other elements such as prepositions, pronouns and discourse markers, help to connect the thread of logic that runs through any discourse or text. The links formed by conjunctions can be of two different types: coordinating or subordinating.

5.2 Coordinating conjunctions

Two clauses, or groups of words, are called *coordinated* when they have the *same syntactical status*, for example:

- When they are both subjects of the same verb:
Luciano e Gianni sono italiani.
Luciano and Gianni are Italian.
- Or when they are clauses of equal weight or value:
Il cane dorme e il gatto mangia.
The dog is sleeping and the cat is eating.

The different types of coordinating conjunctions fulfil different functions, depending on the relationship between the two clauses or parts of the sentence (see also 30.2).

5.2.1 Simple coordinating conjunctions

E 'and' is the most common of the coordinating conjunctions. When followed by a word beginning with a vowel, it may change into **ed** to aid pronunciation (**tu ed io**). Other simple coordinating conjunctions are:

anche, pure	also
neanche, neppure	neither, nor
o, oppure	or, or else

Flavia parla italiano e spagnolo.
Flavia speaks Italian and Spanish.

Flavia parla italiano ed anche spagnolo.
Flavia speaks Italian and also Spanish.

Marina si iscriverà all'università di Siena oppure al Politecnico di Torino.
Marina will enrol at Siena University or else at the Politecnico in Turin.

5.2.2 Double conjunctions

Sometimes two or more conjunctions link two or more corresponding elements of a clause or sentence:

e . . . e	both . . . and
né . . . né	neither . . . nor
o . . . o	either . . . or
sia . . . sia	both . . . and
non solo . . . ma anche	not only but also
<i>Né io né mio marito abbiamo il tempo di pulire la casa.</i>	Neither I nor my husband have time to clean the house.
<i>Vediamo le stesse persone sia in città sia al mare.</i>	We see the same people both in town and at the seaside.

(*Sia . . . sia* is often substituted by the pair *sia . . . che*.)

Napoli è una città interessante non solo dal punto di vista archeologico, ma anche dal punto di vista culturale.

Naples is an interesting city, not only from an archaeological point of view, but also from a cultural one.

5.2.3 Explanatory conjunctions

These conjunctions connect one clause, phrase or sentence with a second one which *explains* the meaning of the first more fully:

cioè, infatti	‘indeed’, ‘really’
<i>Arriveremo domani, cioè sabato.</i>	We will arrive tomorrow, in other words Saturday.
Non è andata bene l’ispezione.	The inspection didn’t go well. In fact it
<i>Infatti è andata malissimo.</i>	went very badly.

Cioè can also be used to *correct* a previous statement, particularly in spoken language:

Vado io a prendere il pane, cioè no, vai tu, perché sai dove andare.

I’ll go and get the bread, no, *you* go, because you know where to go.

► See also 30.2.5 (*cioè* as discourse marker in written language) and 41.4.5 (*cioè* as discourse marker in spoken language).

5.2.4 Contrasting conjunctions

These introduce a clause or sentence, whose content is in *contrast* with the preceding one (see also 30.2.4):

ma, però	but
tuttavia	yet
anzi, piuttosto	on the contrary, rather
<i>Diana non è stupida, anzi è molto intelligente.</i>	Diana is not stupid, on the contrary she’s very intelligent.
Se c’è traffico, non fate l’autostrada, piuttosto prendete le strade di campagna.	If there’s traffic, don’t go on the motorway, rather take the country roads.

For a different meaning of *piuttosto* (adverb), see 6.3.5.

5.2.5 Conjunctions of sequence or consequence

These introduce a clause or sentence whose content follows naturally from, or is a *consequence* of, the preceding one (see also 35.2):

dunque, quindi, perciò, allora
Laura ha capelli biondi, quindi si
capisce subito che è straniera.
Il bambino è nato prematuro,
perciò è a rischio.
Il treno è arrivato in ritardo e
allora Marco ha preso il taxi
per arrivare prima.

therefore, so, then
 Laura has blonde hair, so people realise
 immediately that she's a foreigner.
 The baby was born premature so he's at risk.
 The train arrived late, so Marco took a taxi to
 get there quicker.

Each of the conjunctions shown above links a sequence of sentences or clauses that are connected, but still independent of each other, and which could just as well stand alone. These are called *coordinated* sentences.

5.3 Subordinating conjunctions

A sentence is *subordinate* to another one when it has the function of completing it. This relationship of dependence, with a *main* clause or sentence and one or more *dependent* clauses or sentences, is much more common in Italian than in English. Dependent clauses cannot stand alone, but exist only in relation to the main clause. Certain specific conjunctions are used to indicate this relationship. Their role is similar to that of prepositions (see 4.1) but with two key differences:

- The dependent verb introduced by a *preposition* (or following the verb directly) is always an infinitive and its subject must be the *same* as that of the main verb:

Spero di vincere.

I hope to win.

Preferisco andare a casa.

I'd prefer to go home.

- The dependent verb introduced by a *subordinating conjunction*, on the other hand, can be in the indicative, conditional or subjunctive mood (see 2.2.2, 2.2.11 and 2.2.14–15), and its subject may be a *different* one from that of the main verb:

Indicative:

So che loro hanno vinto.

I know they have won.

Conditional:

Capisco che voi vorreste vincere.

I understand that you would like to win.

Subjunctive:

Spero che la nostra squadra vinca.

I hope our team wins.

The mood and tense of the dependent verbs, introduced by the conjunction **che**, or by other conjunctions, depend on the nature of the main verb (**so**, **capisco**, **spero**) and on the time relationship between the two verbs.

Some of the most common subordinating conjunctions are shown here, with a few examples.

5.3.1 Che

Che 'that' is the most frequently used of all subordinating conjunctions. This function of **che** differs from its function as a *relative pronoun* (see 3.5).

The different kinds of clauses introduced by **che** can be identified by their relationship with the main verb on which they depend. Here are just a few examples showing the different functions that dependent clauses introduced by **che** can have.

As object of a verb (see also 31.3):

Ho detto *che* sono stanco.

I said that I am tired.

As subject of a verb (see also 32.4):

È probabile *che* l'albergo sia pieno.

It's likely that the hotel is full.

Expressing purpose (see also 33.3.2):

Chiamo un meccanico *che* ci ripari la macchina.

I'll call a mechanic who can repair the car.

Expressing a consequence (see also 35.4):

Sono così stanco *che* andrei a letto subito.

I'm so tired that I'd go to bed immediately.

Expressing a comparison (see also 17.3.4):

È più facile dirlo *che* farlo.

It's easier to say it than to do it.

5.3.2

Se

Se can mean 'if' or 'whether'. Here are the two main uses of **se**:

(a) Introducing an indirect question (see also 29.2, 31.3.2, 38.8.2):

Dimmi *se* capisci.

Tell me whether you understand or not.

(b) Introducing a condition in a conditional sentence, followed by either indicative or subjunctive, depending on the degree of probability (see also 38.2, 38.3):

***Se* piove non esco.**

If it rains I won't go out.

Se is followed by the subjunctive when the event is unlikely to take place (see also 38.2, 38.3):

***Se* avessi i soldi farei un viaggio negli USA.**

If I had the money I'd go on a trip to the USA.

Conditional clauses are illustrated in more detail in Chapter 38.

For an idiomatic use of **se**, see also 26.4.6 (**chissà se**).

5.3.3

Perché

Perché can mean 'because', 'why' or 'in order to'. There are three main types of clauses introduced by **perché**. Two of these have a verb in the indicative, while the third (purpose) requires a verb in the subjunctive. Here are examples of all three types of clause.

Expressing reason (see also 5.3.4 and 34.3.1):

Mio figlio piange *perché* ha fame.

My son is crying because he is hungry.

Introducing an indirect question (see also 31.1.2 and 31.3):

Dimmi *perché* vuoi andare via.

Tell me why you want to go away.

Expressing purpose (see also 5.3.5):

Ti parlo chiaro *perché* tu possa capirmi.

I am speaking to you clearly so that you can understand me.

5.3.4 Conjunctions introducing cause or reason clauses

Apart from **perché**, several other conjunctions and phrases introduce a clause of cause or reason and are also followed by the indicative. These include:

considerato che	considering that
dal momento che	since
dato che	given that
giacché	since
in quanto	inasmuch as
poiché	since
siccome	since
visto che	since
<i>Visto che mi vuoi lasciare . . .</i>	Since you want to leave me . . . (title of a song by Rino Gaetano)

► See also 34.3.1.

5.3.5 Conjunctions introducing a purpose clause

Apart from **perché**, other conjunctions introducing a purpose clause include:

affinché	so that, in order that
in modo che	so that
Ho dato il nuovo computer al mio collega affinché lavorasse meglio.	I gave the new computer to my colleague so that he could work better.
Facciamo in modo che tutti possano contribuire.	Let's do it in such a way that everyone can contribute.

► See also 33.3.1.

5.3.6 Conjunctions introducing a time clause: *quando, mentre, appena*

The three conjunctions most commonly used to introduce a time clause in the indicative (see also 36.2, 36.4) are:

quando	when
mentre	while
appena	as soon as
Scrivimi appena arrivi.	Write to me as soon as you arrive.
Quando l'ho visto l'ho salutato.	When I saw him I said hello.
Sono arrivato mentre telefonavi.	I got here while you were on the phone.

Quando can also be used to introduce an indirect question (see also 31.1.2 and 31.3):

Non so quando mi pagheranno.
I don't know when they'll pay me.

Similar to conjunctions, phrases expressing frequency (**ogni volta che** 'every time that', **tutte le volte che** 'all the times that') can also be used to introduce a time clause (see 3.9.2–3).

Some conjunctions introducing a time clause require the subjunctive, generally when the action or event has still to take place:

prima che	before
finché	until
Salviamo il paese prima che sia tardi.	Let's save the country before it is too late.
Rimanete seduti finché vi dico di alzarvi.	Stay sitting until I tell you to get up.

► See also 36.3.2 (*prima che*), 36.4.2 (*finché*).

5.3.7 Conjunctions introducing a result clause

When introducing a result clause, the following conjunctions use the indicative:

così che	with the result that
di modo che	with the result that

They are also written **cosicché** and **dimodoché**. They are always separated from the main clause by a comma.

Ho comprato cinque paia di scarpe, *cosicché* non avevo i soldi per comprare il vestito.
I bought five pairs of shoes, so that I didn't have any money to buy the dress.

► See also 35.3.

For **in modo che** expressing purpose, see 5.3.5 above.

5.3.8 Conjunctions introducing a concessive clause

When introducing a concessive clause, the following conjunctions use the subjunctive, although **anche se** can be followed either by the indicative or by the subjunctive, depending on how likely the event is (see also 39.3.2):

anche se	even if
benché	although
neanche se	not even if
nonostante	although, despite
sebbene	even though
Sono venuto in ufficio, <i>nonostante</i> avessi la febbre.	I came to the office, although I had a fever.
Non vorrei una motocicletta <i>neanche se</i> me la regalassero.	I wouldn't want a motorbike not even if I was given one for free.
<i>Anche se</i> ci conosciamo da tanto tempo, non sono mai stata a casa sua.	Even though we have known each other a long time, I have never been to his house.
Non andrei alla festa <i>neanche se</i> tu mi pagassi.	I wouldn't go to the party even if you paid me.

► See also 39.3.2.

5.3.9 Conjunctions introducing a restrictive or exception clause

a meno che	unless
nel caso (che)	just in case
purché	provided that
salvo che	unless, except for
senza che	without, unless
tranne che	except that
Possiamo andare, <i>a meno che</i> tu non abbia ancora da fare.	We can go now, unless you still have something to do.
Ti lascio le chiavi della macchina <i>nel caso</i> tu ne avessi bisogno.	I'll leave you my car keys, just in case you might need them.

5.3.10 Conjunctions introducing a clause expressing manner

Come **se** is normally followed by the subjunctive:

Come se	as if, as though
E poi <i>come se</i> non bastasse, ha cominciato a piovere.	And then, as if that was not enough, it started raining.

► See also 37.4.7.

6

Adverbs

6.1 What is an adverb?

The main function of adverbs is to modify the meaning of a verb, in the same way that adjectives qualify a noun. Adverbs are invariable in form.

Viviamo una vita tranquilla. (*adjective*) We live a quiet life.
Viviamo tranquillamente. (*adverb*) We live quietly.

Certain adverbs such as **molto**, **poco** (see 6.3.5), however, can also be used to modify words other than verbs, for example adjectives or other adverbs:

La mia vita è molto tranquilla.
My life is very quiet.
Viviamo molto tranquillamente.
We live very quietly.

6.2 Formation of adverbs

Adverbs can be formed in different ways. Here we look at each in turn.

6.2.1 Adverbs formed with *-mente*

A large number of Italian adverbs are formed from an adjective, with the addition of the suffix **-mente**. This is similar to the way English adverbs are formed with the suffix **-ly** ('quiet/quietly', 'slow/slowly').

- (a) For adjectives in the first group (**-o/-a/-i/-e** endings, see 1.4.2) the suffix **-mente** is added to the feminine singular form (ending in **-a**):

lento	lentamente
attento	attentamente

- (b) For adjectives in the second group (**-e/-i** endings, see 1.4.2) **-mente** is simply added to the singular form:

semplice	semplicemente
veloce	velocemente

With adjectives ending in **-le** and **-re**, however, the 'e' is dropped before adding **-mente**:

facile	facilmente
particolare	particolarmente

6.2.2 Adverbs formed with *-oni*

This group of adverbs which refer to movements or positions of the body are formed by adding **-oni** to the base of a verb form, for example **ciondolare** ‘to dangle’ (see also 37.4.5). Here are just a few:

(a) carponi	on all fours, crawling
ciondoloni	with arms dangling, like an ape
dondoloni	lolling about
gattoni	cat-like
penzoloni	dangling
tastoni	feeling your way, groping (for example, in the dark)
tentoni	proceeding tentatively, groping

La bambina aveva otto mesi e andava (a) carponi.

The toddler was eight months old and was crawling.

6.2.3 Adverbs not formed with *-mente* or *-oni*

Some adverbs are not derived from any adjective or noun. They are words used exclusively as adverbs, for example **dappertutto** (adverb of place), **allora** (adverb of time), **certo** (reinforcing adverb), **nemmeno** (adverb of negation), **quando** (interrogative adverb), **quanto** (adverb of quantity).

6.2.4 Adjectives used as adverbs

Adjectives which can be used as adverbs without any change in their form (keeping the masculine singular form) include:

certo	certain(ly)
chiaro	clear(ly)
diritto	straight ahead
duro	hard
forte	strong
giusto	just
lontano	far
piano	slow(ly)
proprio	precisely
solo	only
veloce	quick(ly)
vicino	near

Non ti capisco quando parli veloce. (instead of **velocemente**)

I don't understand you when you speak fast.

Capisco benissimo quando parli chiaro. (instead of **chiaramente**)

I understand very well when you speak clearly.

Use of adjectives as adverbs is frequent in advertising slogans:

Mangia sano, mangia Yoppo.

Eat healthily, eat Yoppo.

6.2.5 Adverbial phrases

An alternative to the simple adverb is a phrase consisting of *noun and preposition*, for example **con** or **senza**:

Ha guidato con molta attenzione.

He drove with great care.

Ha lavorato *senza impegno*.

He worked without any commitment.

Other common adverbial phrases are based on **modo** or **maniera**:

Gli studenti devono imparare a lavorare *in modo autonomo*.

The students have to learn to work independently.

Utilizziamo il nostro tempo *nel migliore dei modi*.

Let's use our time in the best possible way.

Sfruttiamo il soggiorno in Italia *nella maniera migliore*.

Let's make the most of our stay in Italy in the best possible way.

Giancarlo si è sempre comportato *in maniera esemplare*.

Giancarlo has always behaved in an exemplary way.

► See also 37.4.2.

6.2.6 Adverbs with suffix

A few of the most common adverbs can have a suffix (**-ino**, **-uccio**, etc.) added to them, which can convey a more limited intensity of meaning or a particular tone, such as affection. This usage is mainly limited to spoken Italian:

Ha solo due anni, ma parla *benino*.

She's only two years old, but she speaks quite well.

Come ti senti adesso? *Maluccio*.

How do you feel now? Not too bad.

6.2.7 Adverbs used also as prepositions

Some adverbs of time and place can also be used as prepositions, before a noun or a verb infinitive (see also 4.5, 37.2). When used as a preposition, they sometimes need to be followed by a simple preposition (**a**, **da**, **di**):

Time:

dopo di

prima di

Place:

davanti a

dentro a

dietro a/di

fuori a/da

oltre a

sopra a

sotto a

Siamo arrivati *dopo di voi*.

We arrived after you.

Mi piace sedermi *davanti al caminetto*.

I like to sit in front of the fireplace.

Mettetevi la giacca *prima di uscire*.

Put your jacket on before you go out.

6.3 Functions of adverbs

Adverbs have different functions in the sentence. To help you understand what these are, we have grouped adverbs and adverbial phrases into various categories, according to their function in the sentence, as shown below.

6.3.1 Adverbs of time

These adverbs or adverbial phrases help to indicate the time when an action or event took place or the frequency with which it takes/took place:

adesso	now	prima	before
allora	then	subito	immediately
ancora	still	tardi	late
dopo	after, afterwards	oggi	today
già	already	ieri	yesterday
poi	then, after, afterwards	domani	tomorrow
presto	soon, early	l'altro ieri	day before yesterday

Referring to frequency:

di solito	usually	qualche volta	sometimes
generalmente	generally	raramente	rarely
mai	never	spesso	often
normalmente	normally	sempre	always
ogni tanto	every so often		

6.3.2 Adverbs of place

Adverbs of place include the following:

altrove	elsewhere	lì, là	there
davanti	in front	oltre	further
dappertutto	everywhere	qui, qua	here
dentro	inside	quaggiù	down here
dietro	behind	quassù	up here
fuori	outside	sopra	above
laggiù	down there	sotto	beneath
lassù	up there		

Unstressed adverbs of place: *ci, vi, ne*

One very common adverb of place is the unstressed particle **ci** (see also 3.4.5) or less commonly the form **vi** used with the meaning of 'here'/'there' in expressions such as:

c'è, ci sono	there is, there are
ci vado, ci vengo	I go there, I come here

Ne as an adverb of place has the meaning of 'from here, from there' (see also 3.4.4):

Me ne vado	I'm going away
Andatevene	Go away

Ci and **ne** are similar to the corresponding unstressed personal pronouns (see 3.4), in form and behaviour; they can also be combined with conjunctive pronouns, as in the examples above (see also 3.4.6), but their meaning and function are clearly those of an adverb.

6.3.3 Interrogative adverbs

The interrogative adverbs below are used in a question or indirect question (see also 15.3.2–15.3.3). **Quanto** is also used as an interrogative adjective and pronoun, in which case it has varying forms.

come?	how?
come mai?	how come?
dove?	where?
perché?	why?

quando?

quanto?

Come stai, Marco?

Dove vai in vacanza?

Perché vuoi sapere quest'informazione?

Dimmi quando vieni a Firenze.

Quanto resti in Italia?

when?

how much?

How are you, Marco?

Where are you going on holiday?

Why do you want to know this information?

Tell me when you are coming to Florence.

How long are you staying in Italy?

Come and **quanto** can also be used in an exclamation, in which case they are known as 'avverbi esclamativi' (exclamative adverbs):

Ma come sei bella!

Ragazzi, quanto siete stupidi!

How lovely you look!

Kids, how stupid you are!

6.3.4 Negative adverbs

Normally the three adverbs below are found in combination with **non** to form the double negative required in Italian (see also 16.2):

mai

neanche

neppure

(non)

Non vado *mai* al cinema.

I never go to the cinema.

Non mi ha telefonato *neppure* sabato sera.

He didn't even call me on Saturday evening.

6.3.5 Adverbs of quantity

The common adverbs expressing quantity are: **molto**, **parecchio**, **poco**, **tanto**, **troppo**, **tutto** (see also 10.4.1, 17.5.2). All of these are also used as adjectives and pronouns (see 3.10). When used as adjectives or pronouns, they agree in gender and number with the noun that they qualify or refer to. When used as adverbs, however, they are invariable and remain identical to the masculine singular form. Other adverbs of quantity include **abbastanza**, **piuttosto**.

Giorgio lavora *poco*.

Sua moglie studia *tanto*.

Carla è *molto* stanca.

Sono *troppo* stanca per uscire.

Mi pagavano *troppo* poco.

Giorgio doesn't work much.

His wife studies a lot.

Carla is very tired.

I'm too tired to go out.

They paid me too little.

In un recente sondaggio il 19% degli italiani si dice "molto felice", il 65% "abbastanza".

In a recent survey, 19% of Italians say they are 'very happy', 65% say 'quite (happy)'.

La situazione è *piuttosto* complicata.

The situation is rather complicated.

6.3.6 Adverbs of manner

This is the biggest group of adverbs. It includes all the adverbs ending in **-mente** (see 6.2.1), all the adverbs ending in **-oni** (see 6.2.2) and all the adverbs that use the masculine singular adjective form (see 6.2.4). All of these indicate how something is or was done. The group also includes adverbial phrases (see 6.2.5). As well as these groups, there are a few other adverbs of manner:

bene

male

volentieri

well

badly

willingly

6.3.7 Adverbs affirming or denying

Known as **avverbi di giudizio** in Italian, these can have different purposes:

Affirming or backing up a statement:

appunto	exactly	senza dubbio	without doubt
certo	certainly	sicuro	surely, certainly
certamente	certainly	sicuramente	surely, certainly
proprio	exactly, precisely, really		

Adding doubt to a statement:

eventualmente	if it were to happen	probabilmente	probably
forse	perhaps	quasi	almost
possibilmente	possibly		

6.4 Comparative and superlative adverbs

6.4.1 Forms of comparative and superlative

Comparative: *più, meno*

Adverbs have a comparative and superlative form, formed with **più** ('more') and **meno** ('less'), in the same way that adjectives do (see 1.4.6–8). In making a comparison between two elements and the way they act (whether people, objects or other), you can use a *comparative adverb* to express the concept of 'more' or 'less':

sicuramente	più/meno sicuramente
velocemente	più/meno velocemente

The comparative form normally applies to adverbs of manner:

Mario guidava molto *più velocemente* di me.
Mario drove much faster than me.

Gli inglesi cucinano *meno bene* degli italiani.
The English cook less well than the Italians.

But it can also apply to adverbs of time or frequency such as **presto, spesso, tardi**:

Io mi alzo molto *più presto* di te.
I get up much earlier than you.

Noi arriveremo *più tardi* di voi.
We will arrive later than you.

The same as, as much as: *quanto, come*

The concept of 'same as, as much as' is expressed by using **quanto** or **come** to introduce the second element of the comparison. The use of **tanto** or **così** before the adverb is optional:

Mario guida (*tanto*) *velocemente* quanto suo fratello.
Mario drives just as fast as his brother.

A casa vostra mangiamo (*così*) bene *come* al ristorante.
At your house we eat as well as we do at the restaurant.

Superlative: *piu velocemente di tutti*

The superlative form of adverbs in Italian (e.g. 'the most elegantly') is similar to the comparative form, but with the addition of a phrase such as **di tutti**:

Mario guidava *piu velocemente di tutti*.
Mario drove faster than everyone.

When no comparison is being made, the concept of ‘extremely’ can be expressed by the **-issimo** form, but this is more acceptable for the short simple adverbs, and less commonly used for the forms ending in **-mente**:

presto	prestissimo	very early
tardi	tardissimo	very late
forte	fortissimamente	very strongly
sicuramente	sicurissimamente	very surely

6.4.2 Irregular comparative and superlative forms

Some adverbs with ‘special’ comparative/superlative forms are:

bene	meglio	benissimo (molto bene)
male	peggio	malissimo (molto male)
molto	più	moltissimo
poco	meno	pochissimo

Here are some examples of comparative and superlative adverbs in use (see also 17.2, 17.5.6):

Si scrive *più velocemente* con il computer che a mano.

One can write faster with a computer than by hand.

Ieri sera siamo andati a letto *tardissimo*.

Yesterday evening we went to bed very late.

È *meglio* lavorare in gruppo che lavorare da soli.

To work in a team is better than to work alone.

Oggi mi sento *benissimo*.

Today I feel very well.

Teresa suona il piano *peggio* di Giovanni.

Teresa plays the piano worse than Giovanni.

Per favore guida *un po' più piano*.

Please drive a bit slower (a bit more slowly).

Partiamo *il più presto possibile*.

Let us leave as early as possible.

Controlli il contratto *il più attentamente possibile*.

Check the contract as carefully as possible.

The superlative adverbs **il meglio** ‘best’, **il peggio** ‘worst’ can also have the function of nouns, as in the expressions below:

Do *il meglio* di me stesso quando posso lavorare in modo autonomo.

I give the best of myself when I can work independently.

***Il peggio* deve ancora venire.**

The worst is still to come.

Meglio is also used in an idiomatic expression:

Ci sistemiamo *alla meglio*.

We’ll settle down as best we can.

7

Numbers

7.1 What is a number?

Grammatically, numbers can be considered as belonging to several categories, depending on their different functions.

A number can be used as:

(a) A noun:

Il cinque è un numero dispari.

Five is an odd number.

Ci vediamo alle nove.

See you at nine o'clock.

(b) An adjective (used with a noun):

Mi servono tre fogli di carta.

I need three sheets of paper.

(c) A pronoun (used on its own):

Quanti fogli di carta ti servono? Me ne servono tre.

How many sheets do you need? I need three.

7.2 Cardinal numbers

Cardinals are the basic numbers. A list of cardinal numbers is shown at the end of this chapter. Note in particular the elision of the vowel in **ventuno**, **trentotto**, and the acute accent in **trentatrè**.

All cardinal numbers are invariable except **uno/una**, which is used also as indefinite article, and whose forms vary according to the word that follows (see **1.3.2**). With numbers ending in **-uno**, the final vowel is often dropped:

trentun giorni

thirty-one days

Ha compiuto ventun anni.

She's turned twenty-one.

Numbers with more than one element are joined together, for example:

4.944 4,944

quattromilanovecentoquarantaquattro

When the first element is **cento** or **mille**, these can remain separate, but joined by **e**:

1.002 1,002

mille e due

4.560 4,560

quattromilacinquecentosessanta

Un milione ‘one million’ and plural form **milioni** ‘millions’ can also remain separate from the figure which follows, and *not* joined by **e**:

1.250.000	1,250,000
un milione duecentocinquantamila	
2.350.000	2,350,000
due milioni trecentocinquantamila	

Note how **mille** ‘one thousand’ becomes **-mila** in the plural, creating compound forms: **duemila** ‘two thousand’, **tremila** ‘three thousand’, **centomila** ‘one hundred thousand’.

In Italian usage, the decimal point is actually a comma (**virgola**), while the full stop (**punto**) is used to separate figures above a thousand:

<i>Italian</i>	<i>English</i>
2,5	2.5
due virgola cinque	two point five
1.500	1,500
millecinquecento	

When describing how people or objects are arranged or distributed, use the prepositions **a** (**a due a due**) or **per**, as shown below:

Ragazzi, mettetevi in fila due per due.

Kids, get in line (line up) two by two.

Signori, entrate uno per volta, per favore.

Ladies and gentlemen, come in one at a time, please.

7.3

Ordinal numbers

Ordinal numbers (except the first ten, whose special forms can be seen in 7.11) are formed by adding the suffix **-esimo**. The final vowel of the cardinal number is dropped before the suffix: **undic-esimo**, **dodic-esimo**, **quarant-esimo**, **cent-esimo**.

These numbers are basically used as adjectives and can be masculine or feminine, singular or plural, changing their ending (with the pattern **-o/-a/-i/-e**) to agree with the noun to which they are attached:

Sto scrivendo il sesto capitolo.

I am writing the sixth chapter.

la dodicesima notte

the twelfth night

They come *after* the noun when used with the names of rulers, always written as a Roman number:

Enrico VIII (Enrico ottavo)

Henry the eighth

In some cases, however, they are used on their own, for example referring to something which is understood from the context, shown in brackets in the examples below:

- The gears of a car:

la prima, la quarta (marcia)

first, fourth gear

- The classes, grades or years in a school:

Mio figlio frequenta la prima (classe) media, e mia figlia la terza.

My son is in the first year of middle school, and my daughter is in the third.

- Units of time:

(minuti) primi, secondi

minutes, seconds

Ci vogliono due ore, quattro primi e trenta secondi.

It takes two hours, four minutes and thirty seconds.

decimi, centesimi (di secondo)

tenths, hundredths of a second

- Fractions:

1/10 un decimo

a tenth

2/3 due terzi

two-thirds

5/12 cinque dodicesimi

five-twelfths

► See also **17.5.5** (numbers and ranking).

Note also:

la metà, il mezzo

half (as a noun)

mezzo, mezza

half (as an adjective)

La metà degli studenti è stata bocciata.

Half the students failed.

una mezza porzione di pasta al pomodoro

a half portion of pasta with tomato sauce

un mezzo litro di vino rosso

half a litre of red wine

7.4

Calculations

Here is what the basic arithmetic symbols are called in Italian:

+	più	plus	$5 + 6 = 11$	cinque più sei uguale undici
-	meno	less	$9 - 3 = 6$	nove meno tre uguale sei
÷	diviso	divided by	$8 \div 2 = 4$	otto diviso due uguale quattro
×	per	multiplied by	$3 \times 8 = 24$	tre per otto uguale ventiquattro
=	uguale	equals		

In informal speech, **fa** 'makes' is also used in place of **uguale**:

$2 + 2 = 4$ **due più due fa quattro**

7.5

Percentages

Percentages are always preceded by an article:

Il 15% del nostro fatturato consiste in prodotti alimentari.

15% of our turnover is in foodstuffs.

L'euro si è svalutato del 20% (venti percento).

The euro has been devalued by 20%.

Il mio reddito si è ridotto del 50%.

My income has been reduced by 50%.

The article **l'** is used with an initial vowel sound:

l'ottanta percento (80%)

eighty per cent

► See also **42.6** for use of percentages in written reports.

7.6

Collective and approximate numbers

Note the use of suffixes in the following:

una decina

about ten

una dozzina

about a dozen

un'oretta

just under an hour

The suffix **-ina** is used with numbers to express approximation:

C'era una ventina di spettatori.

There were about twenty spectators.

Passo una quindicina di giorni in montagna.

I'm spending a fortnight in the mountains.

The suffix **-aio** also expresses approximation:

un centinaio di persone

about a hundred people

un migliaio

about a thousand

These nouns are masculine in the singular but have an irregular feminine plural form:

Ho visto centinaia di incidenti stradali.

I have seen hundreds of road accidents.

La ditta ha varie migliaia di clienti.

The company has several thousand customers.

An approximate age is usually expressed in one of two ways:

Era una donna sui quaranta.

She was a woman of around forty.

Aveva una quarantina di anni.

She was around forty.

Other collective numbers are:

un paio a pair (irregular feminine plural **le paia**)

una coppia a couple

7.7

Dates

The dates of the month are referred to with cardinal numbers, except the first:

il primo gennaio

the first of January

il due aprile

the second of April

Partiamo il dieci marzo.

We'll leave on the tenth of March.

Note how the article **l'** is used before an initial vowel:

l'uno settembre

the first of September

l'otto giugno

the eighth of June

L'undici agosto

the eleventh of August

Years are usually written in figures but spoken in full:

Sono nato *nel 1951 (millenovecentocinquantuno).*

I was born in 1951.

Mia figlia è nata il 29 luglio 1987 (millenovecentottantasette).

My daughter was born on the 29th of July 1987.

Viviamo in Gran Bretagna dall'89 (ottantanove).

We have lived in Britain since '89.

All dates expressed in numbers are *always* preceded by the *definite article*, as in the examples above.

Note the two different ways in which to describe centuries:

il ventesimo secolo / il Novecento

the twentieth century (the 1900s)

il quindicesimo secolo / il Quattrocento

the fifteenth century (the 1400s)

il quinto secolo

the fifth century (the 400s)

And note the following phrases:

i primi anni trenta

in the early Thirties

agli inizi degli anni '80

at the beginning of the '80s

7.8

Time

Time is expressed using the definite article, normally in the feminine plural form since it refers to **le ore**:**Sono *le otto di sera.***

It's eight o'clock in the evening.

Sono *le otto di mattina.*

It's eight o'clock in the morning.

But in the case of midday, midnight or one o'clock, the singular is used:

È *mezzogiorno.*

It's midday.

È *mezzanotte.*

It's midnight.

È *l'una.*

It's one o'clock.

Time 'at which' is expressed using **a** or more frequently the combined preposition and article forms:**Sono andata *a letto a mezzanotte.***

I went to bed at midnight.

Ci vediamo *all'una.*

We'll see each other at one o'clock.

Passo *a prenderti alle sette.*

I'll come by and get you at seven o'clock.

7.9 Weights and measures

Units of weight include:

un etto	100 grams
un chilo	a kilo
un quintale	100 kilos
una tonnellata	a metric ton

Units of distance/length include:

un centimetro	a centimetre
un decimetro	10 cms
un metro	a metre
un chilometro	a kilometre

Cost per unit and speed per hour are expressed as follows:

I DVD costano €15 (quindici euro) l'uno.

The DVDs cost €15 (fifteen euros) each.

Le pere costano €4 (quattro euro) al chilo.

Pears cost €4 (four euros) per kilo.

Il limite di velocità su autostrada è di 130 chilometri all'ora.

The speed limit on motorways is 130 kilometres per hour.

7.10 Currency

Like other countries of the European Union, Italy currently uses the euro as the unit of currency. Previously the unit of currency was the Italian **lira** and you may very occasionally still hear prices quoted in **lire**.

Here is an article about '**il caro-spiaggia**' – the increased cost of going to the private beach establishments that are popular all over Italy:

Il bel tempo è ormai arrivato e le famiglie si preparano a godersi qualche giorno di vacanza. Ma per trascorrere una giornata al mare sulle spiagge italiane, una famiglia di quattro persone spende in media 97 euro tra ingresso allo stabilimento, ombrellone, lettini o sedie a sdraio, parcheggio, cibi e bevande. A Portofino (Liguria) un ingresso singolo giornaliero può costare da un minimo di 5 euro a un massimo di 9 euro, il costo di un ombrellone e due sdraio per due persone varia tra 25 e 50 euro mentre per una cabina, con ombrellone e due sdraio si possono arrivare a spendere, al mese, ben 950 euro. A Varazze, invece, il costo varia da 22 a 30 euro per due persone con un ombrellone e due sdraio.

(Adapted from La Repubblica online, www.repubblica.it, retrieved 18 February 2012)

The fine weather has arrived and families are getting ready to enjoy a few days of holiday. But to spend a day at the seaside on an Italian beach, a family of four people spends on average 97 euros, between entrance to the beach establishment, umbrella, sun loungers or deckchairs, parking, food and drinks. In Portofino (Liguria), the daily entrance fee for one person can cost from a minimum of 5 euros to a maximum of 9 euros, the cost of an umbrella and two deckchairs for two people varies between 25 and 50 euros, while for a cabin, with umbrella and two deckchairs, you can spend as much as 950 euros a month. In Varazze, on the other hand, the cost varies from 22 to 30 euros for two people, with an umbrella and two deckchairs.

7.11 Table of numbers

Note that we have only shown all the possible endings (-o/-a/-i/-e) for the first two ordinal numbers, but all the others follow this pattern:

<i>No.</i>	<i>Cardinal</i>	<i>Ordinal</i>
1	uno/una	primo/a/i/e
2	due	secondo/a/i/e
3	tre	terzo
4	quattro	quarto
5	cinque	quinto
6	sei	sesto
7	sette	settimo
8	otto	ottavo
9	nove	nono
10	dieci	decimo
11	undici	undicesimo
12	dodici	dodicesimo
13	treddici	treddicesimo
14	quattordici	quattordicesimo
15	quindici	quindicesimo
16	sedici	sedicesimo
17	diciassette	diciassettesimo
18	diciotto	diciottesimo
19	diciannove	diciannovesimo
20	venti	ventesimo
21	ventuno	ventunesimo
22	ventidue	ventiduesimo
23	ventitré	ventitreesimo
30	trenta	trentesimo
31	trentuno	trentunesimo
32	trentadue	trentaduesimo
33	trentatré	trentatreesimo
40	quaranta	quarantesimo
41	quarantuno	quarantunesimo
42	quarantadue	quarantaduesimo
43	quarantatré	
50	cinquanta	cinquantesimo
60	sessanta	sessantesimo
70	settanta	settantesimo
80	ottanta	ottantesimo
90	novanta	novantesimo
100	cento	centesimo
200	duecento	duecentesimo
300	trecento	trecentesimo
1.000	mille	millesimo
2.000	duemila	duemillesimo
10.000	diecimila	diecimillesimo
100.000	centomila	centomillesimo
1.000.000	un milione	milionesimo
1.000.000.000	un miliardo	miliardesimo

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Part B

Functions



Giving and seeking factual information

8

Identification: giving personal information

8.1 Introduction

In Italian, as in other languages, one of the simplest ways of giving or eliciting information about yourself or others is by using the verb **essere** ‘to be’ (see 2.2.3), as shown in this simple dialogue:

- A **Buongiorno, io sono Monica. Sono la nuova assistente di marketing. E voi?**
B **Io sono Carlo, sono il direttore tecnico. E questo è il mio collega, Gerardo. Siamo colleghi da più di dieci anni!**
C **Piacere, Monica.**
A **Piacere, Gerardo. Di dove sei?**
C **Sono napoletano. E tu?**
A **Io sono di Milano.**
- A Good morning. I’m Monica. I’m the new marketing assistant. What about you?
B I’m Carlo. I’m the technical director. And this is my colleague Gerardo. We’ve been colleagues for more than ten years!
C Pleased to meet you, Monica.
A Pleased to meet you, Gerardo. Where are you from?
C I’m from Naples. And you?
A I’m from Milan.

8.2 Tu or Lei?

There are two forms of address in Italian: the **Lei** (formal) form and the **tu** (informal) form. The **Lei** form is used when addressing someone you don’t know well, or don’t know at all, although young people meeting each other often use the **tu** form straightaway, as in the conversation above. You may at some point be invited to use the **tu** form with the words: **Diamoci del tu.**

When using **Lei** to address someone, the verb form used is the third person form (**Lei**) **parla inglese?** rather than the second person form (**Tu**) **parli inglese?** which you would normally use to address someone. In our examples, we have shown both ‘you’ forms.

8.3 Giving different kinds of personal information

The verb **essere** ‘to be’ is used in most of the functions illustrated below to supply the kind of personal information you might want to exchange when meeting someone for the first time. (For introductions, see also 20.2.)

In Italian the verb endings indicate which person is being referred to (see 2.1.3–4); this means you don’t need to use the *subject pronouns* **io, tu, lui**, etc. to indicate the person, so in our examples they are shown in brackets. The pronouns are also used in grammar books or textbooks to refer to the verb forms, for example the **tu** form, the **Lei** form, the **noi** form, the **loro** form.

8.3.1 Giving one's name

(Io) sono Anna.	I am Anna.
(Lui) è Franco.	He is Franco.
(Loro) sono Monica e Gerardo.	They're Monica and Gerardo.

To introduce yourself, you can also use the verb **chiamarsi** (see 2.1.10) 'to be called':

(Io) mi chiamo Anna.	My name is Anna.
(Lui) si chiama Franco.	His name is Franco.
(Loro) si chiamano Monica e Gerardo.	They are called Monica and Gerardo.
Come si chiama?	What's his name?

8.3.2 Indicating relationship to speaker

Introducing friends or colleagues

Lei è Giancarla. È una collega.	This is Giancarla. She is a colleague.
Lui è Franco. È un amico.	This is Franco. He is a friend.

You can also use the possessives **mio, tuo, suo**, etc.:

È un mio amico.	He's a friend of mine.
Sono i miei colleghi.	They are colleagues of mine/my colleagues.

Introducing family

When you talk about your family, you will often need to use the possessives **mio, tuo**, etc. (see 3.7). With relatives, you don't use the definite article **il, la**, etc. with the possessive, except with the plural forms (see 3.7.1):

È mio fratello.	He is my brother.
È suo marito.	It's her husband.
Sono i suoi figli.	They're her children.

Here is a list of close relations, with English translations:

il padre	father	la madre	mother
il fratello	brother	la sorella	sister
il cugino	cousin	la cugina	cousin (<i>f.</i>)
il marito	husband	la moglie	wife
il figlio	son	la figlia	daughter
lo zio	uncle	la zia	aunt
il suocero	father-in-law	la suocera	mother-in-law
il genero	son-in-law	la nuora	daughter-in-law
il cognato	brother-in-law	la cognata	sister-in-law
il nonno	grandfather	la nonna	grandmother
il nipote	grandson, nephew	la nipote	granddaughter, niece

Note that certain words *do* need the definite article:

la mia famiglia	my family
il mio / la mia parente	my relative (<i>m./f.</i>)
il mio fidanzato / la mia fidanzata	my fiancé (<i>m./f.</i>)

Avoid confusing the following:

i miei parenti	my relatives
i miei genitori	my parents

8.3.3 Indicating profession

In Italian, when using **essere** to talk about one's profession, the indefinite article **un, una** (see 1.3.2, 1.3.5) is not needed:

(Io) sono insegnante.	I am a teacher.
(Lui) è ingegnere.	He is an engineer.
(Loro) sono medici.	They're doctors.

When, on the other hand, you use the verb **fare**, you do need to use the definite article **il, la** (see 1.3.3, 1.3.5), etc.:

Faccio l'insegnante.	I'm a teacher.
-----------------------------	----------------

We have listed below some trades and professions you may come into contact with in Italy.

Professionals:

il medico	doctor
il/la dentista	dentist
il ragioniere	accountant
il/la pediatra	paediatrician
l'ingegnere	engineer
l'architetto	architect
l'insegnante	teacher (masculine or feminine)
il professore/la professoressa	lecturer, secondary school teacher
il maestro/la maestra	teacher (elementary school)

Builders and workmen:

il muratore	builder
l'operaio	workman
l'idraulico	plumber
l'elettricista	electrician

Shops, trades:

il pescivendolo	fish seller
il macellaio	butcher
il fruttivendolo	greengrocer
il droghiere	grocer
il salumiere	delicatessen shopkeeper
il fotografo	photographer
il bagnino/la bagnina	beach attendant

General:

l'impiegato/a	office employee
il/la dipendente statale[†]	state employee
il/la giornalista	journalist
il commesso/la commessa	shop assistant

NOTE [†] **Lo statale** can also be used but only in the masculine form; **la statale** means a state highway. For more on the masculine/feminine forms of professions, see 1.2.2 and 20.9.

8.3.4 Indicating role or position

Where a specific individual post is referred to, the definite article **il**, **la** (see 1.3.3) is normally used, but see the last example:

Sono il direttore commerciale dell'agenzia di viaggio.

I'm the commercial director of the travel agency.

È la nuova insegnante d'italiano.

She's the new Italian teacher.

Sono capo della sezione di Risorse Umane.

I'm head of Human Resources.

8.3.5 Indicating nationality

Generally, nationality is indicated by using **essere** with the appropriate adjective (see 1.4.2, 1.4.5):

(Io) sono scozzese. I am Scottish.

Mia madre è italiana. My mother is Italian.

(Loro) sono francesi. They're French.

Here are some common nationalities:

africano	African	irlandese	Irish
albanese	Albanian	italiano	Italian
americano	American	libanese	Lebanese
australiano	Australian	libico	Libyan
austriaco	Austrian	lussemburghese	Luxembourgish
belga	Belgian	neozelandese	New Zealander
britannico	British	norvegese	Norwegian
canadese	Canadian	olandese	Dutch
ceco	Czech	polacco	Polish
cinese	Chinese	portoghese	Portuguese
croato	Croatian	russo	Russian
danese	Danish	slovacco	Slovak
finlandese	Finnish	sloveno	Slovenian
francese	French	spagnolo	Spanish
gallese	Welsh	sudafricano	South African
giapponese	Japanese	svedese	Swedish
greco	Greek	svizzero	Swiss
indiano	Indian	tedesco	German
inglese	English	turco	Turkish
iracheno	Iraqi	ucraino	Ukrainian

Notes:

- (a) In Italian, capital letters are generally not used either for adjectives denoting nationality or for people of that nationality:

un collega italiano an Italian colleague

un francese a French man

gli inglesi the English

- (b) The singular form of the adjective **belga** 'Belgian' is the same for masculine and feminine, but the plural form has different endings for masculine and feminine:

degli amici belgi Belgian friends (*m.*)

delle amiche belghe Belgian friends (*f.*)

- (c) **Inglese** ('English') is often incorrectly used by Italians to denote 'British'.

8.3.6 Indicating marital status

Essere is used with an adjective to indicate marital status (see also 10.2). As past participles with the function of an adjective, **sposato** and **divorziato** have to agree with the person they refer to (masculine/feminine, singular/plural):

(Io) sono sposato/a.

I am married.

(Lui) è divorziato.

He's divorced.

(Noi) siamo sposati da venti anni.

We've been married for twenty years.

'Single' is usually expressed informally as **non sposato**. In the media, the English term 'single' (invariable) is often used. In more formal written contexts, such as CVs, passports, police documents, **celibe** 'an unmarried man' and **nubile** 'an unmarried woman' are used.

Ma i single sono felici?

But are singles happy?

(http://www.lastampa.it/_web/CMSTP/tmplrubriche/giornalisti/grubrica.asp?ID_blog=124&ID_articolo=105&ID_sezione=412, retrieved 23 February 2012)

I single italiani sono giovani e con le idee chiare.

Italian singles are young and have clear ideas.

(<http://www.retailwatch.it/Consumatore/Scenari/Settembre-2011/I-single-italiani-sono-giovani-e-con-le-idee-chiar.aspx?feed=blogs>)

Giorgio non è sposato.

Giorgio is single/not married.

I miei fratelli non sono sposati; mia sorella invece è sposata e ha due figli.

My brothers are not married; my sister however is married and has two children.

8.3.7 Indicating religion

cattolico	Catholic	protestante	Protestant
buddista	Buddhist	musulmano	Muslim
anglicano	Anglican	ortodosso	Orthodox
ebreo	Jewish		

La mia amica Fatima è musulmana.

My friend Fatima is Muslim.

Religione: cattolica (on a form)

Religion: Catholic

Details of other adjectives, for example those that describe physical appearance (age, shape, size, etc.), are found in 10.2.

8.3.8 Indicating place of origin

Note that while English uses 'from', Italian uses **di** (see 4.3.4) when referring to the city or town of origin:

(Io) sono di Napoli.

I'm from Naples.

(Lui) è di Firenze.

He's from Florence.

I miei colleghi sono di Londra.

My colleagues are from London.

To talk about the place where you come from, rather than the place where you were born, use the verb **venire**, along with the preposition **da** (see 4.3.3):

Vengo da Londra.

I come from London.

Gli attori vengono dalla Sicilia.

The actors come from Sicily.

8.4 Emphasising the person referred to

8.4.1 Stressed subject pronouns

In Italian, the verb endings change or inflect; this means it is not necessary to use the *subject pronouns* **io, tu, lui**, etc. (see 3.3.1) to indicate *who* you are referring to. But the subject pronouns are sometimes used to *contrast* or *emphasise* the person or persons spoken about:

Io sono inglese.

I am English.

Lui è italiano.

He is Italian.

They are also used, particularly when using the polite **Lei** form of address (see 8.2 above), to make a question sound less abrupt:

Lei è inglese?

Are you English?

Lei è di Londra?

Are you from London?

8.4.2 With *questo*

You can use the demonstrative pronoun **questo** ‘this’ (see 3.8) to introduce someone, although it is preferable to use the subject pronouns and sounds more polite:

Questi sono i miei studenti. These are my students.

Queste sono le mie amiche. These are my friends.

Lui è Franco. He (This) is Franco.

Lei è una mia collega. She is a colleague of mine.

8.5 Eliciting personal information

Essere is also used to elicit information, sometimes with a question word, as shown below (see also 3.6 and 15.3):

Chi è lui? Who is he?

Di dove sei / è? Where are you from?

Di dov'è Franco? Where is Franco from?

Di dove sono gli studenti? Where are the students from?

Normally the form of the sentence and the word order are exactly the same, whether statement or question. In spoken Italian, to turn a statement into a question, you need only alter the intonation of the sentence, usually by raising your voice towards the end of the sentence (see 15.2):

Lei è sposata? Are you married?

Tu sei insegnante? Are you a teacher?

È un collega? Is he a colleague?

The following examples use **quale** (see 3.6.4) where English would use the question word 'what'. **Quale** can be abbreviated to **qual** but must never be followed by an apostrophe:

- Qual è il Suo cognome?* What is your surname?
Qual è il Suo indirizzo? What is your address?

8.6

Dialoghi

Informal:

Un incontro con amici

- A** Ciao, Mariella!
B Ciao, Gianna. Che sorpresa!
A Questo è mio cugino, Aurelio. È siciliano. Aurelio, questa è la mia amica, Sara.
B Ciao, Aurelio. Benvenuto a Pisa. Di dove sei?
C Sono di Catania, ma mia madre è di Pisa.
B Ah, anche il mio fidanzato è di Catania. Si chiama Carmelo. È ragioniere. I suoi sono di Messina, ma sono a Catania da molto tempo.

Meeting friends

- A** Hi Mariella!
B Hi, Gianna. What a surprise!
A This is my cousin, Aurelio. He's Sicilian. Aurelio, this is my friend Sara.
B Hi, Aurelio. Welcome to Pisa. Where are you from?
C I'm from Catania, but my mother is from Pisa.
B Ah, my boyfriend's from Catania too. He's called Carmelo. He's an accountant. His parents are from Messina, but they've been in Catania for some time.

In the following dialogue several legal/bureaucratic terms are used: **residenza** 'residence' or 'home address', **domicilio** 'the place where you are presently living', **stato civile** 'married status'. Note too how the polite form **Suo** ('yours') is generally written with a capital letter.

Formal:

All'ufficio di Polizia

- A** Prego si accomodi. Dobbiamo compilare questo modulo con le Sue generalità. Le farò alcune domande. Il Suo cognome?
B Smith
A Mi scusi. Come si scrive?
B Esse-emme-i-ti-acca (Savona, Mantova, Imola, Taranto, Hotel)
A E il nome?
B Richard
A La nazionalità?
B Australiana
A Residenza?
B 56 Ramsay Street, Sydney, Australia
A Qual è il Suo domicilio in Italia?
B Hotel Miramare, Napoli
A Numero di telefono?
B 081-271638
A E il Suo stato civile?
B Coniugato
A Qual è il numero del Suo passaporto?
B 0044998245
A Che professione fa?
B Commerciante

A Va bene, grazie. Per ora basta. Le telefoneremo non appena avremo notizie della Sua pratica di permesso di soggiorno.

At the Police station

A Please sit down. We have to fill in this form with your particulars. I have to ask you some questions. Your surname?

B Smith

A Sorry, how is that written?

B S for Savona, M for Mantova, I for Imola, T for Taranto, H for Hotel

A And your name?

B Richard

A Nationality?

B Australian

A Home address?

B 56 Ramsay Street, Sydney, Australia

A What is your address in Italy?

B Hotel Miramare, Naples

A And the telephone number?

B 081-271638

A And your marital status?

B Married

A What's the number of your passport?

B 0044998245

A What is your profession?

B Businessman/salesman

A That's fine, thanks. That's enough for now. We'll call you as soon as we have some news of your application for a residence permit.

9

Specifying people or objects

9.1 Introduction

This dialogue shows how even at the simplest level, speakers can *indicate* their specific needs:

Al Bar

- A **Buongiorno.**
B **Buongiorno, un caffè per favore.**
A **Va bene. E . . . per la signora?**
C **Una birra piccola e un whisky.**
A **Certamente. Una birra italiana, va bene?**
C **Sì, va bene. Ma . . . un whisky scozzese.**
A **Naturalmente, signora.**

At the café

- A Good morning.
B Good morning. A coffee, please.
A All right. And . . . for madam?
C A small beer and a whisky.
A Certainly. An Italian beer, is that all right?
C Yes, OK. But . . . a Scotch whisky.
A Of course, madam.

As shown in the dialogue above, you can identify what you want by using a simple noun **una birra** or a combination of noun, indefinite article and adjective **una birra piccola** (see 1.1). In other situations, you can also identify what you want by using a verb such as **aver bisogno di** (see 23.3.2), **volere** (see 23.2.1) or **cercare**.

9.2 Specifying a known or particular person or object

9.2.1 Using the definite article *il, la*

When you have a particular person or thing in mind, you can express this by using the definite article **il, la**, etc. (see 1.3.3). As the examples show, we are generally referring to a known person or thing, for example ‘the speciality we’ve had before’ or ‘the English girl someone told us about’:

Prendo *la* specialità della casa.

I’ll have the speciality of the house.

Mi presenti *la* ragazza inglese?

Will you introduce me to the English girl?

Alternatively, you may want to refer to something or someone that is the only one possible, in this set of circumstances ‘the manager’, ‘the bill’:

Il direttore, per favore.

The manager, please.

Il conto, per piacere.

The bill, please.

9.2.2 Using *questo*, *quello*

Questo ‘this’ or **quello** ‘that’ (see 3.8) are demonstratives used to refer to *this* or *that* person or object. While **questo** refers to a person or object near the speaker, **quello** refers to a person or object near the person addressed or not near either the speaker or the person addressed.

Questo and **quello** can be used either as pronouns or as adjectives (see 3.8.1).

***Questo, quello* as adjectives**

***Questo* scontrino non è per la valigia che è andata smarrita.**

This baggage tag is not for the case that’s gone missing. (= this one in my hand)

***Questi* pantaloni non mi stanno bene.**

These trousers don’t look good on me. (= the ones I have on)

***Vorrei* assaggiare *quel* caffè speciale.**

I’d like to try that special coffee. (= the one you were just talking about)

***Conosci* *quelle* ragazze inglesi?**

Do you know those English girls? (= the ones standing over there)

***Questo, quello* as pronouns**

As pronouns, **questo** and **quello** are often accompanied by the verb **essere**:

***Questi* sono i miei appunti. Sono abbastanza precisi.**

These are my notes. They’re quite accurate.

***Queste* sono le due mie amiche che sono arrivate ieri sera.**

These are my two friends who arrived yesterday evening.

***Quello* è il computer portatile che abbiamo comprato negli Stati Uniti.**

That is the laptop that we bought in the USA.

***Quelli* sono i biscotti che ti ho portato da Siena.**

Those are the biscuits I brought you from Siena.

The question words **cosa** or **che cosa** ‘what?’ can be used to elicit specific information:

***Cosa* sono (questi)?**

What are they/these?

***Sono* funghi secchi.**

They’re dried mushrooms.

***Che cosa* sono *quelle* foglie secche?**

What are those dry leaves?

***Sono* foglie di basilico.**

They’re basil leaves.

9.3 Specifying a category or type

Sometimes you want to indicate a specific *type* or *category of person or thing*.

9.3.1 Using an adjective

You can do this by using an *adjective* (see 1.4) or a combination of adjectives:

***Cerco* un interprete *italiano*.**

I’m looking for an Italian interpreter.

***Gli* studenti hanno bisogno di un libro *semplice e chiaro*.**

The students need a clear simple book.

9.3.2 Using a *che* clause

You can also indicate a specific type or category by using a *relative clause* beginning with **che** (see 3.5.1) to give more details.

The **che** clause can refer to an object or category that definitely exists and that you know about, in which case the *indicative* verb form is used:

In genere gli inglesi preferiscono bere le birre *che* conoscono.

On the whole the English prefer to drink the beers that they know.

Questa è la bicicletta *che* ho comprato l'anno scorso.

This is the bike I bought last year.

Il regista ha assunto l'attrice *che* aveva girato dei film con Pasolini.

The director employed the actress who had been in some of Pasolini's films.

If the **che** clause refers to something which may or may not exist or be available, the *subjunctive* (see 2.2.14) should be used, particularly in more formal language; the examples here therefore show the subjunctive, with the indicative shown in brackets:

Vorrei una birra *che non sia (è)* troppo forte.

I would like a beer that is not too strong.

Cerco un interprete *che sappia (sa)* parlare inglese.

I'm looking for an interpreter who can speak English.

9.4 Specifying ownership

One of the most important aspects of identification is *belonging*. In Italian, you indicate the person to whom things belong by using **di** with the person involved; there is no equivalent of the English possessive form 'Franco's car', 'Anna's motorbike':

Metti il maglione verde *di* Alessandro.

Put Alessandro's green sweater on.

Prendiamo la macchina *di* mio cugino.

Let's take my cousin's car.

Le ciabatte sono *dei* bambini.

The flip-flops are the children's.

You can also use possessives such as **mio, tuo, suo** (see 3.7). Note that in Italian, the definite article **il, la** (etc.) is normally used with the possessive adjectives (see 3.7.1):

Questo è *il* mio lavoro.

This is my work.

Questa è *la* tua giacca?

Is this your jacket?

To *ask* who something belongs to, use:

Di chi è . . . ? Whose is it? (*Literally*: Of who is it?)

When **mio, tuo, suo**, etc. are used as a pronoun ('mine', 'yours', etc.), the definite article **il, la**, etc. is optional:

Di chi è questa maglia? È *mia*.

Whose is this sweater? It's mine.

Di chi è questo biglietto? È (*il*) *suo*.

Whose is this ticket? It's his.

Quel libro è *mio*.

That book is mine.

Le carte da gioco erano *sue*.

The playing cards were hers.

10

Describing people or things

10.1 Introduction

The most common way of describing the characteristics of someone or something is to use an adjective or adjectives (see 1.4). This chapter illustrates some of the most frequently used categories of adjectives, some relating to people, some to things and some to both. We give just a few examples in each category. For the forms of adjectives, including those that are invariable, see 1.4.2–4.

10.2 Physical characteristics

Physical characteristics may be temporary or permanent, as seen in the examples below.

10.2.1 Size

Of the common adjectives describing *size*, some refer mainly to people (or animals), some to inanimate objects and some to both. Like all adjectives, they have to agree with the noun they describe in number and gender. Adjectives of size include the following.

Used *mainly* for people:

grasso	fat
magro	thin

Used *mainly* for inanimate objects:

corto	short
largo	wide
lungo	long
stretto	narrow

Used for either animate or inanimate:

alto	tall, high
basso	low, short or small in stature
grande	large, great
piccolo	small

Le case delle Isole Eolie sono *piccole e basse*.

The houses on the Aeolian islands are small and low.

La sua futura suocera era *bassa e grassa*.

His future mother-in-law was short and fat.

I ragazzi sono *alti, con capelli lunghi*.

The boys are tall, with long hair.

10.2.2 Shape

Common adjectives describing *shape*, referring mainly to inanimate objects, include:

ovale	oval
piatto	flat
quadrato	square
rettangolare	rectangular
rotondo	round

La tavola è *rotonda* ma va bene anche una tovaglia *quadrata*.
The table is round but a square tablecloth will do as well.

La Piazza del Campo a Siena è di forma *ovale*.
The Piazza del Campo in Siena is oval shaped.

Il soggiorno non è *quadrato*, è *rettangolare*.
The living room isn't square, it's rectangular.

10.2.3 Colour

Common adjectives describing colour include:

bianco	white	nero	black
grigio	grey	marrone	brown
blu	navy	azzurro	sky blue
verde	green	rosso	red
giallo	yellow	rosa	pink

The intensity of colour can be modified by **chiaro** 'light' or **scuro** 'dark', which come after the adjective or colour and are invariable in form:

verde chiaro	light green
rosso scuro	dark red

Ho comprato un cappotto di lana *grigia scuro*.
I bought a dark grey wool coat.

La mia collana è composta di pietre *verdi scuro* e *rosse chiaro*.
My necklace is made up of dark green and light red stones.

Note that many adjectives of colour are *invariable*: they do not change form, regardless of whether they are masculine or feminine, singular or plural (see 1.4.4). These include **beige**, **blu**, **marrone**, **rosa**, **viola**:

Non vanno bene le scarpe *beige* con le calze *rosa*!
The beige shoes don't go with the pink stockings!

When referring to skin colouring and hair colour, you normally use the adjectives **biondo** (fair, blonde, fair-haired), **bruno** (dark, dark-haired), while **castano** is used only for hair colour:

È *bionda*, sui quaranta anni.
She's blonde, around forty.

Alice è una ragazza *alta* e *bruna*.
Alice is a tall dark-haired girl.

I miei figli hanno occhi *azzurri* ma capelli *castani*.
My children have blue eyes but chestnut brown hair.

10.2.4 Composition and materials

Rather than use an adjective (English 'metallic', 'wooden'), Italian often uses a prepositional phrase to describe what an object is made of (see 4.3.4): for example, the preposition **di** 'of' or **in** 'in' with a noun such as **metallo**, **legno**, **cotone**, etc.

*Textiles***di cotone****di cuoio****di lana****di lino****di pelle****di poliestere****di seta****di (materiale) sintetico****di viscosa**

cotton

leather

wool

linen

leather

polyester

silk

synthetic material

viscose

*Metals***di acciaio****di alluminio****di argento****di bronzo****di ferro****di metallo****di oro, d'oro****di ottone**

steel

aluminium

silver

bronze

iron

metal

gold

brass

*Other materials***di ceramica****di gomma****di legno****di plastica**

china

rubber

wood

plastic

Per il battesimo della nipotina, le abbiamo regalato una catenina di oro.

For the baptism of our little granddaughter, we gave her a little gold chain.

La cucina è tutta in legno.

The kitchen is all in wood.

Per la stagione estiva la moda sarà tutta di cotone.

For the summer season, the fashion will be all cotton.

In montagna conviene mettere la maglia di lana.

In the mountains it's best to put on a woollen sweater.

You can describe the object using **fatto di** 'made of' or another participle of similar meaning, such as:

foderato di**ricoperto di****ripieno di****rivestito di**

lined with

covered with

filled with

covered with

L'ascensore aveva le porte fatte di metallo.

The lift had metal doors.

Ha preparato un dolce ricoperto di cioccolato.

She prepared a cake covered in chocolate.

La camicia era foderata di seta.

The blouse was lined with silk.

The *authenticity* of the material is expressed by:

autentico**(al) cento per cento****finto****genuino****puro****vero**

authentic

hundred per cent

fake

genuine

pure

real

Ho comprato una maglia di pura lana.

I bought a sweater in pure wool.

Questa giacca non è vera pelle, è finta.

This jacket is not real leather, it's fake.

La sciarpa è in lana vergine al cento per cento.

The scarf is a hundred per cent virgin wool.

Characteristics of the material include:

duro
elastico
forte
liscio
morbido
resistente
ruvido
soffice

Il cashmere è molto morbido.
Questo tegame è resistente in lavastoviglie.
Un bel piumone soffice in vera piuma d'oca.

hard
 elastic, stretchy
 strong
 smooth
 soft
 tough, long-lasting
 rough
 soft

Cashmere is very soft.
 This frying pan can be washed in the dishwasher.
 A nice soft duvet made of real goose feathers.

10.2.5 Condition, state or appearance

Other adjectives which describe a physical condition, state or appearance, whether permanent or temporary, and that can apply to a person, an object or both, include:

acceso
asciutto
bagnato
bello
bollente
brutto
caldo
calmo
carino
denso
elegante
fresco
freddo
ghiacciato
gelato
gonfio
macchiato
malato
pulito
sciupato
secco
sottile
spento
spesso
sporco
squallido
stanco
tranquillo

I bambini erano bagnati.
Non mettete gli asciugamani bagnati sul letto.
La professoressa era stanca.
La città è sporca e squallida.
Prendo un caffè macchiato.
Dopo la lunga passeggiata, avevo i piedi gonfi.
La luce era spenta.

(Literally: switched on)
 dry
 wet
 pretty, nice, handsome
 boiling
 ugly, horrible
 hot
 calm
 pretty
 thick
 elegant
 fresh, cool
 cold
 iced
 ice-cold
 swollen
 stained (also used in **un caffè macchiato**)
 ill
 clean
 worn-out
 dry
 thin
 switched off
 thick
 dirty
 squalid
 tired
 quiet

The children were soaking wet.
 Don't put the wet towels on the bed.
 The teacher was tired.
 The town is dirty and squalid.
 I'll have a coffee with a little milk.
 After the long walk, I had swollen feet.
 The light was off.

10.2.6 Taste and smell

Adjectives describing taste or smell include:

amaro	bitter
buono	good
cattivo	bad
dolce	sweet
insipido	tasteless
salato	salty
saaporito	tasty

10.2.7 Weather

Adjectives describing weather conditions include:

afoso	stuffy, humid
mosso	rough
nuvoloso	cloudy
piovoso	rainy
sereno	calm, clear
umido	damp, wet
ventoso	windy

Il mare era *mosso*.

The sea was rough.

Il cielo era *sereno*.

The sky was clear.

A Milano c'era un tempo *afoso*.

In Milan the weather was humid.

10.3 Non-physical characteristics**10.3.1 Nationality**

Adjectives of nationality are illustrated fully in 8.3.5.

Teresa parla bene il cinese, perché ha la mamma *cinese*.

Teresa speaks Chinese well, because she has a Chinese mother.

La Buick è una macchina *americana*.

The Buick is an American car.

Le scarpe che ho comprato al mercato sono *italiane*.

The shoes I bought at the market are Italian.

10.3.2 Marital status

Adjectives describing marital status (see also 8.3.6) have to agree with the person they refer to, apart from **single** which is invariable. They include:

divorziato	divorced
fidanzato	engaged
separato	separated
single	single
sposato	married

Mio cugino Antonio è *single*. My cousin Antonio is single.

Walter e Gloria sono *sposati*. Walter and Gloria are married.

Gemma è *separata*. Gemma is separated.

10.3.3 Age

Here are some common adjectives denoting age, referring to people or inanimate objects.

Describing a person:

anziano	old
giovane	young
vecchio	old (<i>but see below</i>)
un ragazzo giovane	a young boy
una signora anziana	an elderly lady
una vecchia signora	an old lady

Note that **anziano** is less likely to cause offence than **vecchio**.

More informally, you can also use:

grande	big, old
piccolo	small, young

These two adjectives are used mainly when comparing ages, for example with a sibling or friend:

Mio fratello è più grande di me.

My brother is older than me.

Io sono più piccolo di mio fratello.

I am younger than my brother.

For an inanimate object – but not a person – you can use:

antico	old, antique
---------------	--------------

For both object and person, you can also use:

vecchio	old
----------------	-----

Remember that **vecchio** is a less positive quality than **antico** which can also mean ‘antique’. The two examples below may help you understand the difference:

Le case vecchie sono difficili da pulire.

Old houses are hard to clean.

La mia casa è piena di mobile antichi.

My house is full of antique furniture.

10.3.4 Character, temperament or qualities

Other adjectives which describe character, temperament (person or animal) or other qualities (person or thing) are shown below. Some of these you have seen earlier with a literal, more concrete meaning (**bello**, **brutto**), while here they have a more abstract meaning or even an ironic meaning.

aggressivo	aggressive
allegro	happy, cheerful
antipatico	unpleasant
bello	nice
brutto	horrible
crudele	cruel
disponibile	available, helpful
dolce	gentle
estroverso	extrovert
fastidioso	annoying
furbo	crafty
gentile	kind
gradevole	pleasant

intelligente	intelligent
introverso	introvert
piacevole	pleasant
pignolo	fussy
prepotente	domineering
sfacciato	cheeky, bold
sgradevole	unpleasant
simpatico	nice
spiacevole	regrettable
stupido	stupid
timido	shy
tranquillo	calm
vivace	lively
È un <i>bel</i> problema. (<i>ironic</i>)	It's a fine problem.
È una <i>brutta</i> situazione.	It's a nasty situation.
Simonetta è <i>antipatica</i> .	Simonetta is unpleasant.
È una ragazza <i>simpatica</i> , <i>bella</i> e <i>intelligente</i> .	She's a nice, pretty and intelligent girl.

10.3.5 Talents and skills

Adjectives referring specifically to talents or skills include:

abile	skilled, talented
dotato	gifted
negato	with no talent for
portato	naturally talented (in . . .)
Insisteva che Sara facesse lezioni di pianoforte, però la bambina era proprio <i>negata</i>.	She insisted on Sara doing piano lessons, but the child was hopeless.
Per parlare bene una lingua, forse bisogna essere proprio <i>portati</i>.	To speak a language well, maybe you need to have a gift for it.

Abile and **dotato** can be used without any specific talent being mentioned. **Dotato** implies naturally gifted while **abile** suggests acquired skills:

Il direttore era una persona molto <i>abile</i>.
The director was a very skilled person.
Il figlio della mia amica era un bambino molto <i>dotato</i>.
My friend's son was a very gifted child.

And when you are getting everything wrong, or dropping things:

Oggi sono proprio <i>imbranata</i>.
Today I am all fingers and thumbs.

10.3.6 Emotional condition or state

Adjectives describing an emotional or psychological state include:

agitato	agitated, jumpy
annoiato	bored
arrabbiato	angry
calmo	calm
contento	happy
felice	happy
imbarazzato	embarrassed
irritato	irritated
nervoso	edgy

rilassato	relaxed
scandalizzato	shocked
scioccato	shocked
seccato	bored
sorpreso	surprised
stressato	stressed
triste	sad
Mio marito sarà <i>arrabbiato</i>.	My husband will be angry.
Il capo era proprio <i>seccato</i>.	The boss was really fed-up.

10.4 Position of adjectives

Adjectives can form part of a close group with the noun and the article:

Mio nipote è *un bel bambino*.
My grandchild is a lovely little boy.

Taranto è *una città interessante*.
Taranto is an interesting city.

Or they can be used with the verb **essere** to complete the sentence:

Il falegname era molto *abile*.
The carpenter was very skilled.

Oggi il mare è *mosso*.
Today the sea is rough.

In English, in the noun group (article + adjective + noun), adjectives almost always come *before* the noun ('an interesting film', 'a historic city', 'an elegant Italian woman'). In Italian, when found in the noun group, the most common position for descriptive adjectives – including adjectives of shape, colour and nationality – is *after* the noun:

un film interessante
una tavola rotonda
una maglia rossa
una ragazza italiana

This is also true for adjectives qualified by an adverb:

una casa veramente originale

In Italian, the order of the noun group is flexible, and changing the position of the adjectives can change the emphasis of the sentence. This is particularly true for the common descriptive adjectives, for example **nuovo**, **vecchio**, **giovane**, **piccolo**, **bello**, **brutto** (see examples in 1.4.5).

Some adjectives actually change meaning depending on their position in the noun group. These include **alto**, **bello**, **certo**, **grande** and **povero** (see examples in 1.4.5).

10.5 Intensifying the meaning of the adjective

There are various ways in which the meaning of the adjective can be intensified or strengthened (see also 17.5).

10.5.1 Using an adverb

The adverbs most commonly used for this purpose in Italian are:

molto	much
tanto	much, so much
troppo	too much

These are used before the adjective in the same way as ‘very, greatly, extremely’ in English. You can also use:

abbastanza	enough, a bit, quite
alquanto	rather
assai	very
ben(e)	well, quite, much, pretty
estremamente	extremely
parecchio	greatly, much
piuttosto	rather
veramente	really

Alcuni leghisti erano *molto* preoccupati dal patto con Forza Italia.

Some members of the Lega were very worried by the agreement with Forza Italia.

È una situazione *estremamente* instabile.

It’s an extremely unstable situation.

Il cane era *ben* contento di vederci.

The dog was really happy to see us.

10.5.2 Using the suffix *-issimo*

The suffix *-issimo* (see 1.4.8) is normally used only for shorter or more common adjectives:

I ragazzi sono *contentissimi* di andare in vacanza senza la mamma.

The kids are really happy to be going on holiday without their mother.

Ha un marito *simpaticissimo*.

She has a really nice husband.

10.5.3 Using a prefix

There are several prefixes which can be added to the beginning of an adjective, and although these are not very common, they are found more and more in the press and in the spoken language. Always check with a dictionary before using one of these. The form you want may not exist, or else it may mean something different. The hyper forms in particular (**arci-**, **ultra-**) are used for effect, for example in journalistic writing:

arci-	È <i>arcicontento</i>	he’s over-the-moon
extra-	l’olio <i>extravergine</i>	extra-virgin (olive) oil
iper-	una madre <i>iperprotettiva</i>	an overprotective mother
sovra-	un camion <i>sovraccarico</i>	an overloaded lorry
stra-	un whisky <i>stravecchio</i>	an aged/vintage whisky
su- (sur-)	il pesce <i>surgelato</i>	frozen fish
super-	<i>superbianco</i>	whiter than white
ultra-	l’ <i>ultrasinistra</i>	the far left

10.5.4 Using a second adjective

There are several fixed phrases in which a second adjective is used to intensify the meaning of the first adjective. In general, the second adjective also has to agree with the noun it refers to. Here are some examples:

bianco pallido	white as a sheet
freddo gelato	icy cold
caldo bollente	boiling hot
ricco sfondato	filthy rich
stanco morto	dead tired
ubriaco fradicio	dead drunk

Sono stanca morta. I'm dead tired.
Gli studenti erano ubriachi fradici. The students were extremely drunk.

10.5.5 Doubling the adjective

Sometimes the adjective can be doubled or repeated to intensify its meaning:

brutto brutto really ugly
caldo caldo very hot
stretti stretti very tightly packed
Attenta! Il caffè è caldo caldo. Be careful! The coffee is really hot.

10.5.6 Using a phrase indicating the extent or effect

You can use certain idiomatic phrases to indicate the extent of a quality:

bello da impazzire beautiful (enough) to drive you mad
brutto da morire ugly (enough) to kill you

10.5.7 Using an exclamation

Along with the adjectives and **essere**, you can use the interrogative adverbs **come**, **quanto** as exclamatives, as in the following examples (see also 6.3.3):

Come sei bello!
How nice you look!
Quanto sei stupido!
How stupid you are!

10.6 Diminishing the intensity of the adjective

10.6.1 Using an adverb

In the same way that certain adverbs can be used to intensify or strengthen the meaning of the adjective, a few adverbs can be used to produce the opposite effect. The adverb most commonly used for this purpose is **poco** 'a little':

Gli studenti sono poco motivati.
The students are not very motivated.

Other adverbs which can be used include:

appena barely, hardly
leggermente slightly
scarsamente barely

10.6.2 Using a suffix

Suffixes which can be used to diminish the strength of the adjective include **-etto**, **-ino**:

bellino pretty (rather than beautiful)
magrolino skinny (rather than thin)
piccolino little, small
poveretto poor little . . .

They can only be used for the shorter more common adjectives, and, as for the suffixes used to intensify meaning, you should avoid using them unless you are certain of the meaning conveyed. For example, although they sound similar, there is a difference between **poverino** and **poveretto**. If you want to express sympathy, use only the first one.

10.6.3 Using a prefix

Prefixes which can be used to imply the opposite of any adjective include:

a-, an-		in-	
anormale	abnormal	incapace	incapable
analcolico	non-alcoholic	inutile	useless
dis-		s-	
disabile	disabled	scomodo	uncomfortable
disadatto	unsuited	scontento	unhappy
		sgradevole	unpleasant

For other ways of expressing different degrees of intensity and comparison, see Chapter 17.

10.7 Essere, stare

To ask or describe how someone is (state of health), use **stare** (see **15.3.3** and **20.1**):

Come sta la tua amica?	How's your friend?
Sta molto meglio adesso.	She's a lot better now.

To ask what someone (or something) looks like, use **essere** (see **15.3.3**):

Com'è la tua amica?	What is your friend like?
È bionda, con capelli lunghi.	She's blonde, with long hair.

10.8 Dialogo**Incontro con gli amici**

- A** Ciao Sergio, come stai?
B Bene grazie e tu?
A E Lucia come sta?
B Non sta bene, è stanca e nervosa. Il suo lavoro è faticoso, ma per fortuna Lucia è una ragazza forte e sana e non sono preoccupato per lei.
A Senti, oggi è una bella giornata. Usciamo insieme?
B È una buona idea, Lucia sarà contenta.
A Allora va bene. La mia macchina è comoda e grande. Guido io. Tu e Lucia potete stare rilassati e riposare.

Meeting with friends

- A** Hi Sergio, how are you?
B I'm fine and you?
A How is Lucia doing?
B She's not well, she's tired and edgy. Her job is hard, but luckily Lucia is a strong and healthy girl and I'm not worried about her.
A Listen, it's a beautiful day today. Shall we go out together?
B It's a good idea. Lucia will be pleased.
A That's fine then. My car is big and comfortable. I'll drive. You and Lucia can relax and have a rest.

11

Talking about existence, occurrence and availability

11.1 Introduction

There are various ways of saying in Italian whether something or someone exists, takes place or is available. One of the simplest ways is to use **ci** 'there' and **essere** 'to be', while another way, often used in shops or restaurants, is to use the verb **avere** 'to have'; both are shown in this simple dialogue:

All'ufficio turistico

T = Turista 'tourist', **I = Impiegato** 'employee'

T Buongiorno, avete una piantina della città?

I Sì, c'è questa, che costa quattro euro; è compreso anche l'elenco dei monumenti. Oppure questa qua, che è gratuita.

T Prendo questa, grazie. Dunque, noi vorremmo vedere l'*Aida* all'Arena. Ci sono dei biglietti per stasera?

I Per stasera, no, purtroppo . . . *non ce ne sono*. Ma se per voi va bene, *ce ne sono due* nella platea per domani sera.

T Sì, per noi va bene. Quanto costano?

I Trenta euro ciascuno.

T Va bene, li prendo. Senta, c'è una trattoria vicino al teatro?

I Sì, *ce n'è una* molto buona proprio a due passi dal teatro. Si chiama 'Da Alfredo'. Se vuole, posso chiamare e prenotare un tavolo.

T No, grazie, non fa niente.

I Prego, signore. Arrivederci.

At the tourist information office

T = Tourist, E = Employee

T Hello, do you have a map of the town?

E Yes, there's this one, which is four euros; the list of monuments is included too. Or else this one, which is free.

T I'll take this one, thanks. Now, we'd like to see *Aida* at the Arena. Are there any tickets for this evening?

E Not for this evening, no, unfortunately. But if it's all right for you, there are two tickets in the stalls for tomorrow evening.

T Yes, that's fine for us. How much are they?

E Thirty euros each.

T OK, I'll take them. Listen, is there a restaurant near the theatre?

E Yes, there's a very good one very near the theatre. It's called 'Da Alfredo'. If you want, I can call and book a table.

T No, thank you, it doesn't matter.

E All right, sir. Goodbye.

11.2 Talking about existence and/or presence

Depending on the circumstances, you can use one or other of the following verbs or verb phrases:

esistere	to exist
essere + ci	to be there
essere presenti	to be present
trovarsi	to be there (<i>position</i>)

11.2.1 Essere + ci

The most common way of saying something is there (or not) is to use **essere** and **ci**. The present tense forms are **c'è** 'there is', **ci sono** 'there are' (see 2.2.3 and 6.2.5). Note how in the singular form, the **ci** before **è** is elided to **c'è**.

C'è	There is
C'è?	Is there?

The plural form is:

Ci sono	There are
Ci sono?	Are there?

You can ask about a specific person or thing, or one known to you, using the definite article **il/la** (see 1.3.3):

C'è il medico oggi?	Sì, c'è.
Is the doctor here today?	Yes, he's here.
Ci sono i nostri amici?	Sì, ci sono. Sono arrivati mezz'ora fa.
Are our friends here?	Yes, they're here. They arrived half an hour ago.

You can ask about an unknown or unspecified person or thing using the indefinite article **un/una** (see 1.3.2) in the singular and **dei/delle** (see 1.3.4) in the plural (optional):

Scusi, c'è un gabinetto? Sì, c'è un gabinetto lì in fondo.
Excuse me, is there a toilet? Yes, there's a toilet over there.
Ci sono ospiti? Sì, ci sono degli ospiti appena arrivati.
Are there any guests? Yes, there are some guests just arrived.

Of course, **ci** can be used with all the other tenses of **essere**, for example:

Future

Ci sarà qualcuno in ufficio?
Will there be anyone in the office?

Imperfect

Il pomeriggio, non c'era mai nessuno in ufficio.
In the afternoon, there was never anyone in the office.

Passato prossimo

Ci sono stati problemi?
Have there been any problems?

11.2.2 Esistere

Esistere 'to exist' can be used in certain contexts:

Per quanto riguarda l'alloggio, esistono varie sistemazioni.
As for accommodation, there are various arrangements.

Ma sono esistiti i dinosauri o no?
But did the dinosaurs exist or not?

11.2.3 Essere presente/i

The phrase **essere presente/i** is often used for resources found naturally, as well as for other more general contexts:

I giacimenti di metano sono presenti in grandi quantità nella valle padana.

Deposits of methane are present in large quantity in the Po Valley.

Mio marito non era presente quel giorno.

My husband was not present that day.

11.2.4 Trovarsi

Trovarsi is used mainly when referring to geographical position:

La mia casa si trovava vicino al mare.

My house was near the sea.

Oggi ci troviamo in un piccolo paese della Basilicata.

Today we are in a small village in Basilicata.

11.3 Talking about occurrence

The following verbs and verb phrases describe events occurring, regularly or on a one-off basis:

accadere	to happen	succedere	to happen
aver luogo	to take place	svolgersi	to take place
capitare	to happen	tenersi	to take place, to be held
fare	to hold	verificarsi	to take place
ricorrere	to recur, take place		

11.3.1 Accadere, capitare, succedere

Three verbs in particular are used to talk about things happening. All three verbs take **essere** when used in compound tenses: **è accaduto, è capitato, è successo.**

Molti incidenti stradali accadono nel momento del rientro dalle vacanze.

Many road accidents take place when people come back from their holidays.

Il paese è molto tranquillo. Non succede mai niente.

The village is very quiet. Nothing ever happens.

È mai capitato un incidente del genere?

Has an accident like that ever happened?

Both **succedere** and **capitare** can be followed by a dependent clause introduced by **che** or by **di** and a dependent infinitive. In the final example, the subjunctive is used, in order to emphasise the improbability of such an event:

Ti è mai successo di amare e odiare allo stesso tempo qualcuno?

(Literally) Has it ever happened to you to love and hate someone at the same time?

(Have you ever loved and hated someone at the same time?)

Può succedere che si dimentica di spegnere il gas.

(Literally) It can happen that one forgets to turn off the gas.

(One sometimes forgets to turn off the gas.)

Ti è mai capitato di vedere un fantasma?

(Literally) Has it ever happened to you to see a ghost?

(Have you ever seen a ghost?)

Ti è mai capitato che il parrucchiere ti abbia rovinato i capelli?

(Literally) Did it ever happen to you that the hairdresser ruined your hair?

(Have you ever had the hairdresser ruin your hair?)

11.3.2 Aver luogo, svolgersi, tenersi

When talking about an event which is taking place or has taken place, you can use the verbs **aver luogo, svolgersi, tenersi**:

I funerali avranno luogo giovedì alle 17.00.

The funeral will take place on Thursday at 5pm.

Il Palio di Siena si svolge due volte all'anno nella Piazza del Campo.

The Palio of Siena takes place twice a year in the Piazza del Campo.

La settimana scorsa si è svolto il congresso dei giovani democratici.

Last week the congress of young democrats took place.

La Fiera di Milano si tiene nel quartiere di San Siro.

The Milan Trade Fair takes place in the San Siro district.

11.3.3 Fare

Fare in the 3rd person plural form is often used specifically to refer to films, TV programmes, etc. which are being shown or broadcast:

Che fanno stasera alla televisione?

What's on TV tonight?

Cosa facevano al cinema Ariston?

What were they showing at the Ariston cinema?

You can also use the verb **fare** with the *si passivante* to make a passive construction meaning 'to be held':

Le gare si facevano ogni anno nello stesso periodo.

The competitions were held every year at the same time.

11.3.4 Verificarsi/ricorrere

The verb **ricorrere** ('to recur') is used when an event occurs regularly, for example every year:

La festa dell'Assunzione ricorre il 15 agosto.

The feast day of the Assumption is on the 15th of August every year.

When talking about either a single occurrence or a regular event, you can use **verificarsi**:

A Napoli il miracolo di San Gennaro si è verificato anche quest'anno davanti a migliaia di fedeli.

In Naples the miracle of San Gennaro took place again this year in front of thousands of the faithful.

11.4 Talking about presence, attendance and participation at an event

In addition to **essere (ci)**, or **trovarsi** (see above), you can use the verbs listed below. Although intransitive, both **assistere** and **partecipare** take **avere** in compound tenses: **ho assistito, ho partecipato**.

assistere to be at, to take part in

frequentare to go to, to attend (e.g. *school*)

partecipare to be at, to take part in

11.4.1 Assistere

This verb can have the same meaning as the English 'assist' but here it is used meaning 'to watch' or 'to be present'.

All'ultimo concerto di Pavarotti, hanno assistito 30.000 spettatori.
30,000 spectators were at Pavarotti's final concert.

11.4.2 Partecipare

This verb implies a more active role:

Il Capo di Stato ha partecipato al Vertice del G7 a Napoli.
The Head of State took part in the G7 Summit in Naples.

11.4.3 Frequentare

Regular attendance at a place, for example school or a café, can be expressed by **frequentare**:

I miei figli frequentano una scuola privata.
My children go to a private school.

I miei colleghi frequentavano il bar di fronte.
My colleagues always went to the café opposite.

11.5 Talking about availability

When talking about availability or non-availability, most of the verbs and verb phrases listed below, with the exception of **avere**, can be used to refer either to a person or to a thing:

avere	to have (e.g. in shop or restaurant)
essere disponibile	to be available
essere libero/occupato	to be free/engaged
rimanere	to be left (over)

11.5.1 Avere

In shops, restaurants, hotels or similar situations, **c'è, ci sono** can be replaced by the verb **avere** 'to have' to express or enquire about availability:

Avete una mappa della città?
Do you have a map of the town?

Abbiamo questa qui, che costa €6.
We have this one, which costs six euros.

When **avere** is used with a direct object pronoun such as **lo, li**, the particle **ci** is usually added (see 3.4.5); this is a purely idiomatic use and does not change the meaning. **Ci** becomes **ce** before direct object pronouns or **ne**:

Avete la Repubblica? **No, non ce l'abbiamo oggi.**
Do you have the 'Repubblica'? No, we haven't got it today.

Ha il passaporto, signora? **Sì, ce l'ho.**
Do you have your passport, madam? Yes, I do have it.

11.5.2 Rimanere

The concept of 'quantity remaining' is expressed by **rimanere** (see Appendix III Irregular verb forms):

È rimasto un po' di dolce?
Is there any cake left?

Del vecchio paese di prima, non è rimasto più niente.
There's nothing left now, of the old village that was.

Sono rimaste ancora due o tre persone nella sala.
There are still two or three people left in the hall.

11.5.3 Essere disponibile/i

The adjective **disponibile** ‘available’ is often used in shops or business contexts. As an adjective, it has to agree in number with the noun referred to but the masculine and feminine forms are the same:

Le buste sono disponibili in vari formati.

The envelopes are available in various formats.

Il direttore sarà disponibile dopo la riunione.

The director will be available after the meeting.

11.5.4 Essere libero, occupato, impegnato

The adjectives **libero** ‘free’, **occupato** ‘occupied, engaged’ can be used both for a person and for an object. **Impegnato** ‘busy’ is only used for a person. The adjectives have to agree in number and gender with the person or object referred to:

È libero il bagno? No, è occupato.

Is the bathroom free? No, it’s occupied.

La linea è occupata. Può attendere in linea?

The line is busy. Can you hold?

Il professore è impegnato in questo momento. Può richiamarLa quando sarà libero?

The professor is busy right now. Can he call you back when he’s free?

11.6 Expressing ‘some, any’

There are various ways of saying how much is available and of expressing ‘some’ in Italian, depending on whether you are referring to *countable* nouns or *uncountable* nouns.

A ‘countable’ noun refers to people or things that can be counted; you can put a number in front of them and they can be singular (**un biscotto**) or plural (**due biscotti**). An ‘uncountable’ noun is something that cannot usually have a number before it and therefore is normally singular, for example **pane** ‘bread’, **zucchero** ‘sugar’, **vino** ‘wine’ (although of course it is possible to talk about **i vini italiani** ‘Italian wines’).

11.6.1 Del, dei, etc.

The partitive article **del** (plural **dei**) etc. (see 1.3.4) can be used with both countable nouns and uncountable nouns.

With ‘countable’ nouns, the plural forms **dei**, **delle**, **degli** are used, the form varying according to the noun they accompany (see also 1.3.4 and 4.2):

Ci sono dei fichi?

Are there any figs?

Ci sono delle sedie?

Are there any chairs?

Ci sono degli studenti italiani all’Università.

There are some Italian students at the University.

Ci sono degli alberghi economici a Bologna?

Are there any cheap hotels in Bologna?

With ‘uncountable’ nouns, the singular forms **del**, **dello**, **della**, **dell’** are used:

C’è del vino?

Is there any wine?

C'è dello zucchero?

Is there any sugar?

Per colazione, c'è della marmellata di fichi.

For breakfast, there is fig jam.

Alla festa c'era solo dell'acqua da bere!

At the party there was only water to drink!

11.6.2 Un poco di, un po' di

This phrase is used with uncountable nouns such as **caffè, pane, vino, zucchero** in the singular:

È rimasto ancora un po' di vino.

There's still a little wine left.

C'è un poco di caffè anche per me?

Is there some coffee for me too?

It can also be used with countable nouns such as **monete, libri** in the plural:

Dammi un po' di monete!

Give me some coins!

Porto un po' di libri in vacanza.

I'm taking a few books on holiday.

11.6.3 Qualche

Qualche (see 3.9.2) can only be used with *countable* nouns, *not* with uncountable nouns like 'zucchero'. **Qualche** means 'a few, some', but although it has a plural meaning, it is always used with a *singular* noun. Its form is the same for both masculine and feminine nouns:

C'è qualche programma interessante alla televisione stasera?

Are there any interesting programmes on TV tonight?

Tra i meccanici c'è anche qualche donna.

There are even some women amongst the mechanics.

11.6.4 Alcuni, alcune

The adjectives **alcuni/alcune** 'some, a few' (see 3.9.3) can be used with countable nouns, in the plural only:

Ci sono alcuni programmi televisivi educativi, ma i bambini preferiscono guardare i cartoni animati.

There are a few educational TV programmes, but children prefer to watch cartoons.

Tra i meccanici ci sono anche alcune donne.

There are even a few women amongst the mechanics.

11.6.5 With *ne*

Both **alcuni/alcune** (see 3.9.3) and **un po' di** can be used on their own, meaning 'a few things, a few people', and 'a little', with or without the pronoun **ne** (see 11.7 below and 3.4.4):

Ci sono dei ragazzi italiani al corso estivo?

Are there any Italian kids on the summer course?

Ce ne sono alcuni.

There are a few (of them).

Avete delle guide in italiano?

Do you have any guide books in Italian?

Sì, ne abbiamo alcune.

Yes, we have a few.

Ne is elided before **è** to form **ce n'è**:

C'è del parmigiano?

Is there any parmesan?

Sì, ce n'è un po'.

Yes, there's a little.

11.7 Specifying the quantity available

Avere (see 11.5), **essere** (see 11.2) or **rimanere** (see 11.5) can be used with a number or other indication of quantity:

Quanti giorni di vacanza hai? *Ho trenta giorni all'anno.*
How many days' holiday do you have? I have thirty days a year.

Da Roma a Napoli ci sono 190 chilometri.
From Rome to Naples is 190 km.

Sono rimasti solo due panini. Li buttiamo?
There are only two rolls left. Shall we throw them away?

With an indication of quantity, you can use the pronoun **ne** (see 3.4.4) to avoid repeating the noun previously mentioned:

Sono rimasti dei panini? *Sì, ne sono rimasti due.*
Are there any rolls left? Yes, there are two (of them) left.

When **c'è** and **ci sono** combine with **ne**, the **ci** changes to **ce** to give **ce n'è** or **ce ne sono**:

C'è del caffè? *Sì, ce n'è tanto.*
Is there any coffee? Yes, there's lots (of it).

C'è una banca? *Sì, ce ne sono due in centro.*
Is there a bank? Yes, there are two (of them) in the centre.

C'erano molti spettatori al cinema? *Sì, ce n'erano almeno 300.*
Were there many spectators at the cinema? Yes, there were at least 300.

Ne can also be used where there is *no* indication of number or quantity, although this is less common:

C'è del latte? *Sì, ce n'è.*
Is there any milk? Yes, there is some.

Ci sono fichi? *Sì, ce ne sono.*
Are there figs? Yes, there are some.

11.8 Expressing 'something/anything', 'someone/anyone'

While **qualche** 'some' (see 3.9.2 and 11.6.3) is always used with a noun, **qualcosa** 'something, anything' and **qualcuno** 'someone, anyone' (see 3.9.1) are used on their own:

C'è qualcosa da leggere?
Is there anything to read?

C'è qualcuno?
Is anyone there?

Qualcuno, qualcosa can be followed by a 'qualifying' **che** clause ('someone/something, anyone/anything *that* . . .'). This can be followed either by the *indicative* (particularly in spoken Italian or informal writing) or by the *subjunctive* (see 2.2.14 and 9.3). The English translation is the same in both cases:

Cerco qualcuno che sa tradurre le lettere commerciali. (*indicative*)
Cerco qualcuno che sappia tradurre le lettere commerciali. (*subjunctive*)
I'm looking for someone who can translate commercial letters.

11.9 Specifying location, time or frequency

You can specify *where* something/someone is, or *when* or *how often* something happens.

11.9.1 Specifying location

You can indicate where the action is taking place, or where something is, by using adverbs or adverbial phrases referring to place, such as **vicino**, **lontano**, or position, such as **dietro**, **davanti** (see 6.3.2):

La mia casa si trova *qui vicino*.
My house is near here.

La sede è *a due km. dal centro*.
The Head Office is 2 km from the centre.

Nella riunione, il direttore era seduto *davanti a me*.
In the meeting, the director was sitting in front of me.

Or phrases with prepositions (see 6.2.7) which function as adverbs, such as:

C'è un ufficio cambio? Is there a bureau de change?	Sì, ce n'è uno <i>in centro</i>. Yes, there's one in the centre.
C'è un Consolato Britannico? Is there a British Consulate?	Sì, ce n'è uno <i>a Roma</i>. Yes, there's one in Rome.

11.9.2 Specifying time or date

You can indicate *when* the action takes place by adding an indication of date or time (see 7.7 and 7.8):

C'è un treno *alle cinque*.
There's a train at five o'clock

C'è il telegiornale stasera?
Is there a news bulletin this evening?

Quando si svolge il Palio?
When does the Palio take place?

Sì, c'è *alle 8.00*.
Yes, there's one at 8 o'clock.

Si svolge *a luglio e ad agosto*.
It takes place in July and in August.

11.9.3 Specifying frequency

You can indicate *how often* the event or action takes place with phrases of frequency (see 36.5):

una volta alla settimana	once a week
due volte al mese	twice a month
una volta all'anno	once a year
il martedì, ogni martedì	on Tuesdays, every Tuesday

C'è un servizio medico al campeggio?
Sì, c'è *due volte alla settimana, il martedì e il venerdì*.

Is there a medical service at the campsite?
Yes, there's one twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays.

11.10 Expressing non-existence or non-availability**11.10.1 Non**

The easiest way of saying that something does not exist or is not available is to add **non** to any of the verbs or phrases shown in the sections above, for example:

Non ci sono serpenti velenosi in questa zona.
There are no poisonous snakes in this area.

C'è il medico? No, mi dispiace. Non c'è.
Is the doctor here? No, I'm sorry. He isn't here.

Non c'è rimasto più niente.

There's nothing left any more.

Mi dispiace, il direttore non è disponibile oggi.

I'm sorry, the manager is not available today.

No, non è libero questo posto.

No, this place isn't free.

For more on negatives, including **nessuno**, **niente**, see 16.3–7.

11.10.2 Mancare

The verb **mancare** means 'to be missing, to be short'. (It can also be used in the emotional sense of missing a person or a place.) In this context, it is similar to **piacere** in that the object which is lacking (**i fondi**, **il personale**) becomes the grammatical subject of the sentence:

Vorremmo migliorare i nostri servizi, ma mancano i fondi.

We would like to improve our services, but funds are short.

L'ufficio rimarrà chiuso venerdì. Manca il personale.

The office will be shut on Friday. There is a shortage of staff.

Manca solo Giorgio.

Only Giorgio is missing.

Mancano i dati.

There are no facts or figures.

11.10.3 Essere assente

Chi è assente stamattina?

Who's absent this morning?

Someone who has sent his/her excuses and apologies in advance is called:

un assente giustificato

(*Literally*) an explained absentee

The noun **l'assente** can also mean 'the dear departed' (see 11.10.6 below).

Note the very colloquial use of the verb **partire** to express the idea that someone is 'not all there' mentally:

È partito! He's off his head!

11.10.4 Non ... più, essere esaurito, essere finito

When talking about supplies that are finished, or have run out, you can use any of the expressions listed above. Both **esaurito** and **finito** are past participles used with **essere**:

Non c'è più posto per stasera. È tutto esaurito.

There's no more room for tonight. It's all sold out.

Purtroppo sono esaurite le nostre scorte di candele.

Unfortunately, our supplies of candles have run out.

È finita la carta nella stampante.

The paper in the printer is finished.

11.10.5 Estinguersi, scomparire, sparire, spegnersi, sradicare

The verbs above all mean 'to disappear', literally or metaphorically. **Sparire** and **scomparire** are the most colloquial of these. Note how all these verbs use **essere** in the compound tenses.

Sono scomparse le chiavi di casa.

The house keys have disappeared.

Dov'è Alessandro? E' sparito nel nulla!

Where's Alessandro? He's disappeared into thin air!

Il morbillo è praticamente scomparso dagli USA.

Measles has practically disappeared from the USA.

The verb **sradicare** 'to eradicate' is used in the passive form to talk about a disease or other evil which has been eradicated:

Il morbillo è stato quasi completamente sradicato negli USA.

Measles has been almost completely eradicated in the USA.

When talking about a species that has died out or become extinct, use the verbs **estinguersi** or **sparire**. Note that **estinto** also means 'the departed' (see 11.10.6).

Fra 500 anni, alcune specie di animali potrebbero estinguersi.

In 500 years time, some species of animals could die out.

I dinosauri sono spariti dalla terra milioni di anni fa.

The dinosaurs disappeared from the earth millions of years ago.

Both **estinguersi** and **spegnersi** can be used with their literal meaning 'to be extinguished', so are often used to refer to fires, volcanoes, and – metaphorically – the fires of love:

L'amore si spegne e la passione si raffredda.

Love dies out and passion grows cold.

11.10.6 Euphemisms for death

Italian, as other western languages, has a wide range of euphemisms to express the concept of death and dying. Any of the following verbs can be used: **estinguersi**, **mancare**, **scomparire**, **spegnersi**.

The participle **scomparso** is the form most often used in death announcements:

È scomparso il nostro caro Alfredo.

Our dear friend Alfredo has passed away.

The noun **la scomparsa** 'death' is also used frequently in announcements placed in memory of someone who has died:

Nel terzo anniversario della scomparsa di Carlo, la mamma lo ricorda con grande amore.

On the third anniversary of the death of Carlo, his mother remembers him with love.

The verb **spegnersi** 'to be extinguished' can be used as a euphemism for **morire**:

Il conte si spense a mezzanotte, con i familiari attorno al letto.

The count died at midnight, with his family around the bed.

So can **mancare**:

È improvvisamente mancato all'affetto dei suoi cari Marco Strada.

(Literally) Marco Strada has suddenly been lost to the affection of his dear ones.

Note the use of the following present and past participles respectively:

l'assente the absent one (literally)

il caro estinto the dear departed

12

Talking about the present

12.1 Introduction

Situations, actions and events are expressed by the use of verbs (see Chapter 2). Here we look at how to describe situations, actions and events taking place at the *present* time (i.e. in the same period of time when you are speaking or writing). The verb tense most commonly used for this is the *present indicative* (see 2.2.3), as shown in our examples. The examples here are mainly in the affirmative; interrogative and negative statements are covered more fully in Chapters 15 and 16 respectively.

12.2 Describing present situations, actions and events

The present tense is used to describe a fact or situation, action or event that is in effect or taking place at the present time, although not necessarily at the exact moment when you speak or write. Here are some examples:

12.2.1 Facts, situations or descriptions

L'Avv. Bianchi lavora alla FIAT.

Mr Bianchi the lawyer works at FIAT.

Questo film dura due ore.

This film lasts two hours.

Molti italiani amano il calcio.

Many Italians love football.

Mi piace molto passeggiare.

I like walking a lot.

Mia madre è malata. Ha una malattia cardiaca.

My mother is ill. She has a heart disease.

Le autostrade sono invase da turisti stranieri che vengono in vacanza in Italia.

The motorways are invaded by foreign tourists who come on holiday to Italy.

Il turismo in Calabria è poco sviluppato.

Tourism in Calabria is not very developed.

Il tempo è brutto.

The weather is bad.

I gemelli non sono identici.

The twins are not identical.

12.2.2 Actions or events

Single actions and events

Perché non telefoni all'Ufficio Vendite?

Why don't you phone the Sales Department?

Oggi cucina Walter.

Today Walter is cooking.

In Italian, the present tense of the verb is used to describe actions or events which are happening at the time of speaking or writing ('The Boat Show is taking place this week', 'Isabella is teaching this morning'), and those that may not be happening *right now*, but are a regular occurrence ('The Boat Show takes place every year', 'Isabella teaches every Tuesday').

Isabella insegna stamattina.

Isabella is teaching this morning.

Isabella insegna ogni martedì.

Isabella teaches every Tuesday.

Il Salone Nautico si svolge questa settimana a Genova.

The Boat Show is taking place this week in Genova.

Il Salone Nautico si svolge ogni anno ad aprile.

The Boat Show takes place every year in April.

L'infermiera non viene oggi.

The nurse isn't coming today.

L'infermiera non viene il giovedì.

The nurse doesn't come on Thursdays.

Regular actions or events

Often, in fact, the only feature that distinguishes *habitual* actions or events from *single* ones is the use of adverbs or phrases of frequency (see 6.3.1) which convey the notion of habit or regular occurrence, such as:

di solito	usually
generalmente	generally
normalmente	normally
ogni	every (see also 3.9.2, 36.5.2)
tutti i, tutte le	every (see also 3.9.3, 36.5.3)

Ogni mese, andiamo a trovare i parenti in campagna.

Every month, we go to see our relatives in the country.

Ogni giovedì mattina, c'è il mercato a Postiglione.

Every Thursday morning there's the market at Postiglione.

Tutte le settimane facciamo la spesa al Centro Commerciale 'Globus'.

Every week we do the shopping at the 'Globus' shopping centre.

Normalmente mio marito torna a casa prima di me.

Normally my husband comes home before me.

With days of the week, use of the article **il, la** also conveys the idea of a regular weekly action:

Il venerdì mangiamo il pesce.

Every Friday we eat fish.

La domenica mia madre va a messa.

On Sundays my mother goes to Mass.

For other phrases of frequency and repetition, see 36.5.

12.3 Expressing ongoing actions

If you need to express something more immediate, or an action that is still going on at the present time and is not yet completed, you can use the *progressive* form of the present tense. The progressive present, similar to the English ‘to be doing something’, is formed by using the present tense of the verb **stare** together with the *gerund* (see 2.2.24) of the verb expressing the action (**lavorando, leggendo, partendo**):

I ragazzi stanno leggendo.

The boys are reading.

Il signor Rossi sta partendo.

Mr Rossi is just leaving.

Stiamo lavorando.

We are working.

Note that **stare** and the *gerund* cannot be used to translate the English ‘to be doing’ construction when it refers to the future, even if it’s the very near future. For this you use the regular present indicative or the future:

Il Dott. Cuomo arriva fra mezz’ora.

Dr Cuomo is arriving in half an hour.

Dove andrete domani?

Where are you going tomorrow?

12.4 Words and phrases indicating present time

The present time is also indicated by using adverbs or phrases specifying time (see 6.3.1). For more complex time contexts, see 30.4 and Chapter 36. Here are some examples:

ora, adesso now

È tardi. Ora andiamo a casa.

It’s late. Let’s go home now.

Scusami, adesso non voglio parlare.

Excuse me, I don’t wish to talk now.

Ho cambiato ufficio. Adesso lavoro al terzo piano.

I changed my office. I’m working on the third floor now.

subito, immediatamente right now, immediately

Vieni subito qua!

Come here right now!

Attenda un attimo, per favore. Le passo immediatamente il direttore.

Hold on a second, please. I’ll put you through to the manager immediately.

oggi today

Oggi mi sento felice!

I feel happy today!

Oggi è sabato.

Today is Saturday.

ancora still

È ancora presto per partire.

It’s still early to be leaving.

Ho ancora fame!

I am still hungry!

questo this

Quest'anno le vendite vanno bene.

This year the sales are going well.

Questa settimana lavoro fino a tardi.

This week I'm working till late.

Questo pomeriggio fa freddo.

It's cold this afternoon.

Note the shortened forms **stamattina** 'this morning', **stanotte** 'this/last night', **stasera** 'this evening':

Stasera Monica è nervosa.

Tonight Monica is edgy.

Stanotte non sono riuscita a dormire.

I couldn't sleep last night.

12.5

Dialogo

In this dialogue the different forms of the present are highlighted.

Incontro di lavoro

Mario Adinolfi è impiegato alla Camera di Commercio di Bari, ma in questi giorni *sta lavorando* a Roma per organizzare la partecipazione di alcune industrie romane alla Fiera del Levante di Bari. La Ditta Cosmetici 2000 Spa *vuole* presentare alla Fiera un nuovo prodotto per la cura dei capelli e il Sig. Luca Violli, direttore delle vendite, *incontra* il Sig. Adinolfi per chiedere informazioni sui servizi della Fiera. Ecco un brano della loro conversazione:

Violli Quanto *costa* l'affitto di un ufficio per il periodo della Fiera?

Adinolfi Quest'anno *abbiamo* uffici attrezzati con servizi di segreteria, che *costano* €2.500 per 5 giorni.

Violli Quando *posso* visitare gli uffici?

Adinolfi Gli uffici *si possono* visitare dopo il 10 settembre. Ora *stiamo* ancora *completando* i lavori, ma Lei *può* fare una prenotazione adesso. *Deve* solo riempire questo modulo.

Violli Va bene. Chi *deve* firmare il modulo?

Adinolfi *Può* firmare Lei, o un altro responsabile della ditta, come *preferisce*.

A business meeting

Mario Adinolfi is an employee at the Chamber of Commerce in Bari, but at present he is working in Rome making arrangements for several Roman companies in the 'Fiera del Levante' Trade Fair in Bari. The company 'Cosmetics 2000' Ltd wants to present its new hair care product and Mr Luca Violli, Director of Sales, meets Mr Adolfi to ask for information on the services offered by the Fair. Here is a snatch of their conversation.

Violli How much does it cost to rent an office for the duration of the Fair?

Adinolfi This year we have ready-equipped offices with secretarial services, which cost 2,500 euros for 5 days.

Violli When can I visit the offices?

Adinolfi After the 10th of September. We are just finishing the work, but you can book now. You only need to fill in this form.

Violli All right. Who needs to sign the form?

Adinolfi You can sign it, or else some other representative of the company, as you prefer.

13

Speaking and writing about the past

13.1 Introduction

Deciding which verb tense to use to describe the past in Italian, and in particular whether to use a perfect or an imperfect tense, is one of the most difficult points for learners to master. Here we look at the three tenses used to describe the past (*passato prossimo*, *passato remoto*, *imperfetto*), and the way in which they are each used, individually and together:

Passato prossimo ‘perfect’

Ieri ho lavorato fino alle 5.00 e poi sono andata al bar.

Yesterday I worked until 5.00 and then I went to the bar.

Passato remoto ‘past definite’

Ieri lavorai fino alle 5.00 e poi andai al bar.

Yesterday I worked until 5.00 and then I went to the bar.

Imperfetto ‘imperfect’

Di solito lavoravo fino alle 5.00 e poi andavo al bar.

Usually I worked until 5.00 and then I went to the bar.

Combination of *imperfetto* and *passato prossimo*

Quando lavoravo lì, sono andata molte volte nell’ufficio del direttore.

When I worked there, I went several times to the director’s office.

All the examples here are of verbs in the *indicative* mood; for details of past tenses in the *subjunctive* mood, see 2.2.17–19, **Appendix II** (Regular verb forms) and **Appendix III** (Irregular verb forms). See also 25.4, 26.2–4, 27.1–2, 29.3–5, 30.5, 31.4.2, 32.2, 33.3, 35.4, 36.3.2, 38.3–5, 39.2–3 in particular, for examples of how the subjunctive is used in complex sentences of different kinds.

13.2 *Passato prossimo* and *passato remoto*

When talking about events in the past, regarded as complete, Italian uses the *passato prossimo* (see 2.2.5) or the *passato remoto* (see 2.2.6). Both these tenses are *perfect tenses* and in fact some grammar books refer to them as *compound perfect* and *simple perfect* respectively.

The *passato prossimo* (literally ‘near past’) is often called the *present perfect* in English, while the *passato remoto* (literally ‘distant past’) is sometimes called the *past historic*, leading to the belief that the first is only used to talk about recent events or actions, while the second is only used to talk about historic events. This is only partially true and quite misleading.

The tense most frequently used in spoken and informal written Italian to describe a past action or event is the *passato prossimo*, a *compound* tense formed of an auxiliary (**avere** or **essere**) and past participle (see 2.1.9):

Sono arrivato la settimana scorsa.

I arrived last week.

Ieri ho comprato una camicia rossa.

Yesterday I bought a red shirt.

Ti è piaciuto il film?

Did you like the film?

Avete conosciuto il direttore?

Have you met the director?

In some areas of Italy, however, the *passato remoto* (see 2.2.6) is used instead. Here are the same examples as above, this time using the *passato remoto*:

Arrivai la settimana scorsa.

I arrived last week.

Ieri comprai una camicia rossa.

Yesterday I bought a red shirt.

Ti piacque il film?

Did you like the film?

Conosceste il direttore?

Have you met the director?

The difference between the two sets of examples is *not* one of *time*, but of regional variation. Across Italy, the *passato remoto* is much less frequently used than the *passato prossimo*. You are unlikely to hear the *passato remoto* used in everyday conversation in northern or most of central Italy (see also 13.4 below). You may, however, hear it in Tuscany and in southern Italy, including Sicily, where it is considered perfectly acceptable.

The different functions and uses of these two past tenses in standard Italian are best explained by example.

The *passato remoto* represents events in the past which have *no connection with the present*, i.e. with the time when the sentence is spoken or written. So, when talking about the date someone was born, you would use the *passato remoto* if that person is no longer alive:

Dante nacque nel 1265. Visse per molti anni a Firenze.

Dante was born in 1265. He lived for many years in Florence.

Pier Paolo Pasolini nacque nel 1922. Fu uno dei più famosi scrittori del Neorealismo.

Pier Paolo Pasolini was born in 1922. He was one of the most famous Neorealist writers.

However, if stressing the relationship of Dante or Pasolini with the present, in other words their continuing influence today, you would use the *passato prossimo* (see 2.2.5):

Dante è nato nel 1265, e oggi si festeggia l'anniversario della nascita.

Dante was born in 1265, and today we celebrate the anniversary of his birth.

Pier Paolo Pasolini è nato nel 1922, e i suoi film più famosi sono ancora molto popolari.

Pier Paolo Pasolini was born in 1922, and his best-known films are still very popular today.

The *passato prossimo* is always used if the person is still alive at the present time:

Mio figlio Giovanni è nato nel 1983.

My son Giovanni was born in 1983.

13.3 Using the *passato prossimo*

The *passato prossimo* (see 2.2.5) is very similar to the English present perfect ('I have eaten', etc.); however the past tenses do not always correspond exactly in their use, as shown below:

Gli ho parlato apertamente.

I have spoken openly to him.

Siamo partiti alle 5.00.

We left at 5 o'clock.

Here is an example of a passage in which you will recognise many examples of the *passato prossimo*. Some of the past participles shown do not follow a regular pattern (see 2.2.27 and Appendix III Irregular verb forms).

Sono uscito alle 9.00 per andare a far spese e ho incontrato un vecchio amico che non vedevo da molto tempo. Abbiamo deciso di fare le spese insieme e siamo andati prima alla Rinascente e poi da UPIM. Alle 11.00 abbiamo bevuto un aperitivo al bar e dopo abbiamo comprato verdura e carne per preparare il pranzo. Siamo arrivati a casa a mezzogiorno e abbiamo cucinato e mangiato con appetito. Alle 2.00 il mio amico è tornato a casa sua, perchè aveva un appuntamento.

I went out at 9.00 to go shopping and I met an old friend whom I hadn't seen for a long time. We decided to go shopping together and we went first to 'Rinascente' and then to 'Upim'. At 11.00, we drank an aperitif at the café and then we bought vegetables and meat to make lunch. We arrived home at midday and we cooked and ate hungrily. At 2.00 my friend went back home, because he had an appointment.

13.4 Using the *passato remoto*

Although the *passato remoto* (see 2.2.6) is much less frequently used than the *passato prossimo* in spoken and informal written Italian, there are certain contexts in which it is used to describe events or actions, in all regions of Italy:

13.4.1 In a historical context

The *passato remoto* is used frequently in historical narration, as can be seen from this example, taken from a history textbook for primary schools (*Strumenti*, ed. Alfio Zoi, Editrice La Scuola, 1991, pp. 188–189):

Quando nel 1152, Federico I detto Barbarossa divenne re di Germania, decise di sottomettere i Comuni ribelli. Compì cinque discese in Italia: nella prima (1154) soffocò la ribellione di Roma e si fece incoronare imperatore; nella seconda conquistò Milano e riaffermò solennemente i diritti dell'Imperatore sui Comuni (1158); nella terza assediò e distrusse Milano (1163); nella quarta occupò Roma (1168) e nella quinta fu sconfitto a Legnano dalla Lega Lombarda (Alleanza tra i Comuni, decisa a Pontida nel 1167, e appoggiata dal Papa Alessandro III). Per questo dovette riconoscere la libertà dei Comuni con il trattato di pace di Costanza (1183).

When, in 1152, Frederick I, known as Redbeard, became King of Germany, he decided to suppress the rebellious City States. He carried out five raids in Italy; in the first (1154) he suppressed the rebellion in Rome, and had himself crowned emperor; in the second he conquered Milan and with due ceremony reaffirmed the rights of the emperor over the City States (1158); in the third he besieged and destroyed Milan (1163); in the fourth he occupied Rome (1168) and in the fifth he was defeated at Legnano by the Lombard League (an alliance between the City States, set up in Pontida in 1167, and supported by Pope Alexander III). For this reason he was forced to recognise the freedom of the City States, with the peace treaty of Constance (1183).

Note however that when historical events are seen in their relevance to the present time, the *passato prossimo* is more likely to be used, even if the events happened a long time ago. Here is another example, again from the same textbook *Strumenti* (p. 248):

La storia moderna di Roma è iniziata nel 1870 quando la città è diventata capitale del giovane Regno d'Italia. Allora Roma contava appena 200.000 abitanti ed anche il suo aspetto urbanistico non era molto diverso da quello dei secoli precedenti . . .

Anche nel nostro secolo, e in particolare negli ultimi decenni, Roma ha continuato a espandersi per l'afflusso di lavoratori provenienti da tutto il Lazio e dalle regioni centro-meridionali.

The modern history of Rome began in 1870 when the city became the capital of the young Kingdom of Italy. At that time Rome counted scarcely 200,000 inhabitants, and as a town it did not appear very different from previous centuries . . .

In our own century, and particularly in the last few decades, Rome has continued to grow, because of the influx of workers coming from all over Lazio, and the central and southern regions.

Here the events described, some of which happened more than 100 years ago, are relevant to today's situation (Rome is still the capital of Italy and its population is still expanding because of the influx of immigrants).

13.4.2 In a narrative

Here is another example of the use of the *passato remoto*, this time not in a historical context but in a narrative literary passage (from the novel *Requiem* by Antonio Tabucchi, Feltrinelli, 1992):

E allora vieni avanti, disse la voce di Tadeus, ormai la casa la conosci. Chiusi la porta alle mie spalle e avanzai per il corridoio. Il corridoio era buio, e inciampai in un mucchio di cose che caddero per terra. Mi fermai a raccogliere quel che avevo sparso sul pavimento: libri, un giocattolo di legno, un gallo di Barcelos, la statuetta di un santo . . .

Well, come on through, said Tadeus' voice, you know the house by now. I shut the door behind me, and headed along the corridor. The corridor was dark and I stumbled into a pile of things which fell on the ground. I stopped to pick up what I had spread over the floor: books, a wooden toy, a Barcelos cock, the statuette of a saint . . .

13.5 Using the *imperfetto*

The final tense used in Italian to describe actions or events in the past is the *imperfetto* (see 2.2.4). This section looks at the use of the *imperfetto* by itself, while 13.6 considers its use together with the *passato prossimo*.

The *imperfetto* is used to describe the following situations.

13.5.1 Parallel events or actions

Two past actions or events can be viewed in a symmetrical relationship, taking place within the *same time span*:

Mentre lavorava, Anna pensava alle vacanze in Sardegna.

While she was working, Anna was thinking about the holidays.

Il direttore parlava e gli invitati ascoltavano annoiati.

The director was talking and the guests were listening, bored.

Each of the examples above has two parallel actions that take place at the *same* time and are part of the *same* situation, described as if seen or experienced from within the situation itself, rather than a set of events viewed in relation to the present time (the time when you are speaking or writing).

— Action 1 —————>

— Action 2 —————>

13.5.2 Habitual or repeated actions

In the following examples, the actions are not separate individual actions taking place at the same time; they describe the same action repeated, in other words an action that was carried out regularly during the period concerned. In English, this situation can be expressed with the form 'used to . . .':

A Roma andavo tutti i giorni a mangiare in trattoria.

In Rome I used to go every day to eat in a trattoria.

Da ragazzo facevo molto sport.

When I was a boy, I used to play lots of sport.

13.5.3 Aspect

Another issue to consider is that of ‘aspect’. The general function of the *imperfect* aspect is to represent past events and actions as if seen from *within* the past itself.

The following two sentences illustrate how the same event, happening at the same time, can be seen from two different points of view, in other words from two different *aspects*:

Ieri faceva molto caldo a Napoli.

Yesterday it was very hot in Naples.

Ieri ha fatto molto caldo a Napoli.

Yesterday it was very hot in Naples.

The first example (the *imperfect* aspect) talks about the hot weather as the condition experienced by people *during* that particular span of time; the statement could be spoken, for instance, by someone who was actually in Naples yesterday and wants to talk about his/her own experience of the weather.

The second example (the *perfect* aspect) sees yesterday’s weather from *outside*; the statement could be made, for example, by someone who was not in Naples (for example a weather forecaster) and who wants to tell people about the weather in a more objective detached way.

13.5.4 Describing past events or situations

Here is an example of a narrative, in informal written or spoken Italian, using the *imperfetto*:

All’Università c’era una gran confusione. Gli studenti, che volevano iscriversi, cercavano di capire che cosa fare mentre gli impiegati della Segreteria non riuscivano a farsi sentire nel gran chiasso. Faceva molto caldo e molti si riparavano all’ombra degli alberi nel cortile.

At the University, there was a great deal of confusion. The students, who wanted to enrol, were trying to find out what to do, while the staff in the Administration Office couldn’t make themselves heard in the racket. It was very hot, and many people took refuge in the shade of the trees in the courtyard.

Here we have a descriptive ‘picture’ of a situation, recounted by someone who was there, where the verbs are the elements *inside* the picture, rather than a completed event or action.

Compare the situation above with a narrative description, which uses the *perfect* aspect to recount the events taking place one after the other, i.e. when they are not seen as details inside a picture, but as a sequence of single separate actions, as shown in the example below:

|—————|—————|—————|—————|—————|

Ieri sono andato all’Università e ho trovato una gran confusione. Ho chiesto informazioni in Segreteria e mi hanno detto di aspettare. Faceva molto caldo e mi sono riparato sotto gli alberi nel cortile.

Yesterday I went to the University and I found a great deal of confusion. I asked for information in the Administration office and they told me to wait. It was very hot, and I took refuge under the trees in the courtyard.

Each of these actions had to be carried out before the following one could take place:

| **ho chiesto** | **hanno detto** | **mi sono riparato** |

13.5.5 Narrative using imperfect

Here is a passage from the novel *La Delfina Bizantina* by Aldo Busi (Mondadori, 1992, p. 53), which uses almost entirely verbs in the *imperfect*, because it is describing a scene,

the background to the action. The description then ends with two verbs in the *passato remoto*: **finì, girò**:

Era entrata nella stanza adiacente dove adesso i giornali toccavano il soffitto o comunque la sovrastavano penzolanti e minacciosi. Era una vera e propria foresta di carta con scricchiolanti sottoboschi in fondo ai quali vide farsi largo la luce del giorno e lei, la vecchia striminzita imbacuccata in un mucchio di stracci maschili e di coperte. Era in piedi davanti alla finestra rotta e le presentava la schiena. Stava incollando con impasto di acqua e farina bianca un foglio di giornale sul riquadro senza vetro. E contemporaneamente lo stava bisbigliando dalla a alla zeta. Doveva certo essere così assorta da non averla sentita, non si decideva a girarsi. Brunili finì con calma il duplice lavoro e poi si girò . . .

She had gone into the adjacent room, where the newspapers now touched the ceiling, or at least towered over her, swaying and threatening. It was an absolute forest of paper, with creaking undergrowth at the other side of which she saw the light of day penetrating and then her, the shabby old woman all muffled up in a heap of tattered men's clothes and blankets. She was standing in front of the broken window with her back turned to her. She was using flour and water paste to glue a sheet of newspaper on the window frame with no glass. And at the same time she was whispering the newspaper text to herself from A to Z. She must have been so absorbed that she hadn't heard her, she didn't give any sign of turning around. Brunili calmly finished her twofold task, and then turned around . . .

13.5.6 Progressive imperfect (stare + gerundio)

One very common form of the *imperfect* is the *progressive* form. This is formed using the *imperfetto* of the verb **stare** together with the gerund of the main verb. This form is fairly familiar to English speakers, being similar in form and use to the English 'to be -ing'.

Che cosa stavate facendo ieri sera?

What were you doing yesterday evening?

Stavo lavorando quando mi ha telefonato Andrea.

I was working when Andrea called me.

The progressive form expresses an action in progress, i.e. not completed, at a certain moment in time. It cannot be used to convey, for example, the aspects of repetition or description of past events (as mentioned above), where the simple *imperfetto* is used instead. The *progressive* form in Italian, as in English, can be used not only in the past, but also in the present and future (see 12.3 and 14.5 respectively).

13.6 Combinations of perfect and imperfect tenses

13.6.1 Scene-setting: introduction

In the sections above, we saw how the *imperfect* expresses the elements of a past situation, in contrast with the *perfect* tenses (*passato prossimo* or *passato remoto*) which see actions or events in their entirety and 'separateness'. To understand more clearly how the two aspects interact to depict the past we can use the metaphor of a play seen at the theatre: where the scenery or stage set is the background of the play and is represented by the *imperfect*. The actors, their actions, and the events of the play are in the foreground and represented by the *perfect* tenses, whether *passato prossimo* or *passato remoto*.

13.6.2 Scene-setting in novels

A traditional technique of novelists is to set a scene, using the *imperfetto*, and to let the characters act within it, using the *passato remoto*. In each of the following two passages, taken from Leonardo Sciascia's *Il Giorno della Civetta* (Einaudi, 1981, pp. 9 and 57), it is easy to identify the two aspects, perfect and imperfect:

- (a) **L'autobus stava per partire, rombava sordo con improvvisi raschi e singulti. La piazza era silenziosa nel grigio dell'alba . . . Il bigliettaio chiuse lo sportello, l'autobus si mosse con un rumore di sfasciame . . . Si sentirono due colpi squarciati . . . Il bigliettaio bestemiò: la faccia gli era diventata colore di zolfo, tremava . . .**

The bus was about to leave, it was giving out a dull roar, with sudden rasping or hiccuping noises. The square was silent, in the grey dawn . . . the ticket collector closed the door, the bus moved off with a disintegrating noise . . . then two shots were heard to rip the air . . . the ticket collector swore: his face turned the colour of sulphur, he shook . . .

- (b) **Il corpo di Parrinieddu era ancora sul selciato, coperto da un telo azzurrastrò. I carabinieri di guardia sollevarono il telo: il corpo era contratto come nel sonno prenatale, nella oscura matrice della morte.**

Parrinieddu's body was still on the asphalt, covered by a blueish sheet. The police on duty lifted the cloth: the body was drawn up as if in an antenatal slumber, in the dark womb of death.

13.6.3 Scene (an ongoing action or event) and a new action or event

A less obvious example of scene-setting is the way in which Italian, even in everyday speech or writing, distinguishes between actions in the past, using the *imperfetto* to describe certain actions that are seen as a background to others. Here are a few examples, where the pattern is that of an *action/event* happening at a certain moment, set against the *background scene* of something that was going on at the same moment in time (but also before and possibly after):

Paola è arrivata (event), mentre preparavo la cena (scene).

Paola arrived while I was preparing dinner.

Gli impiegati lavoravano (scene) quando è suonato l'allarme (event).

The staff were working when the alarm went.

Passeggiavamo (scene) lungo il mare, ma all'improvviso è scoppiato (action) un temporale.

We were walking along the sea front but suddenly a storm broke.

13.6.4 Scene (a situation) and a new action or event

Erano le 5.25 quando è esplosa la bomba.

It was 5.25 when the bomb went off.

Sono arrivato alla stazione proprio quando il treno partiva.

I arrived at the station just when the train left.

In both these examples, the *imperfetto* represents a fact that, although happening in an instant (**il treno partiva**), can still be seen as the situation, context or background against which something happened.

13.6.5 Cause (*imperfetto*) and effect (*passato prossimo*)

Non sono venuto a trovarti perché avevo troppo lavoro da fare.

I didn't come to see you, because I had too much work to do.

Avevamo fame e abbiamo deciso di fare due spaghetti.

We were hungry and (so) we decided to cook a bit of spaghetti.

In these sentences the role of the *imperfetto* is clearly that of the background to, or cause of, an event.

13.6.6 Same verbs, different patterns

To illustrate the explanations above, here is an example of how the same two verbs can be used in three different patterns:

Parallel actions:

Mentre io riposavo Sandro telefonava a sua sorella.

While I was resting, Sandro was on the phone to his sister.

Sequence of actions:

Ho riposato e poi ho telefonato a Sandro.

I rested and then I telephoned Sandro.

Situation and action/event:

Mentre riposavo mi ha telefonato Sandro.

While I was resting, Sandro telephoned me.

13.6.7 Further examples of *passato prossimo/imperfetto*

Here are some further examples illustrating the different functions of *passato prossimo* and *imperfetto*; read them carefully and see if you can link them to the explanations above:

Ho ordinato gli articoli che mi interessavano.

I ordered the items that I was interested in.

Ieri sera pensavo a quello che mi hai detto e ho capito che avevi ragione.

Yesterday evening I was thinking about what you said to me, and I realised that you were right.

Mi dispiace, non volevo offenderti quando ti ho rimproverato.

I'm sorry, I didn't want to offend you when I told you off.

Ho visitato Firenze con quell'amico che lavorava al Museo.

I visited Florence with that friend who worked in the Museum.

Abbiamo imparato l'italiano a Roma con un professore che non parlava nemmeno una parola d'inglese.

We learnt Italian in Rome with a teacher who didn't speak a word of English.

Quando abitavo a Napoli ho visitato tre volte il Museo Nazionale.

When I lived in Naples, I visited the National Museum three times.

Per quanto tempo hai vissuto in Cina?

How long did you live in China for?

Ho vissuto a Shanghai per tre anni.

I lived in Shanghai for three years.

Quando vivevo in Cina mangiavo il riso tre volte al giorno.

When I lived in China, I ate rice three times a day.

Ieri ho mangiato riso tre volte.

Yesterday I ate rice three times.

13.6.8 *Passato prossimo/imperfetto*: dovere, potere, volere

With certain verbs, particularly the auxiliary verbs **dovere**, **potere**, **volere**, the choice of past tense is even more important, since it can distinguish an obligation or intention that was not carried out from one that was, as in the examples below:

Volevo andare in banca, ma era chiusa.

I wanted to go to the bank, but it was shut.

(So I couldn't go after all.)

Ho voluto andare in banca.

I wanted to go to the bank.

(The implication is that I did go there.)

Dovevano venire ieri, ma c'era sciopero dei treni.

They should have come yesterday, but there was a train strike.

(They should have come but they didn't.)

Hanno dovuto introdurre un nuovo prodotto per competere con i francesi.

They had to introduce a new product to compete with the French.
(They had to introduce one – and they did.)

Potevi almeno telefonare!

You could have phoned!

Meno male che hai potuto telefonare.

Just as well you were able to phone.

In the first of each pair of examples above, the *imperfetto* can be replaced by the *past conditional* (see 2.2.13):

Avrei voluto andare in banca, ma era chiusa.

Avrebbero (sarebbero) dovuto venire ieri ma ...

Avresti potuto almeno telefonare ...

Non hanno potuto salvare il ragazzo.

They were not able to save the boy.

(One action is implied.)

Non potevano mai uscire perché il padre non glielo permetteva.

They could never go out because their father would not allow them.

(A long-term state or condition is implied.)

13.6.9 **Passato prossimo / imperfetto: conoscere, sapere**

The choice of tense can also alter the meaning in the case of the verbs **conoscere** and **sapere**:

La nostra azienda non conosceva il mercato inglese.

Our firm was not familiar with the English market.

Ho conosciuto il direttore di Marketing alla Fiera di Genova.

I met the director of marketing at the Genova Trade Fair.

(**conoscere** in the *passato prossimo* generally means ‘to meet’)

Sapevamo che lui era disposto a trattare.

We knew that he was prepared to negotiate.

L'abbiamo saputo troppo tardi.

We found it out too late.

(**sapere** in the *passato prossimo* generally means ‘to learn, to find out’)

13.7 Present tense expressing past

There are two situations in which past events are not expressed either by *imperfetto* or *passato prossimo* but by the *present indicative* tense:

13.7.1 When the event in question is still going on

When the event, action or situation in question is still going on, the present tense is used with **da**, the equivalent of the English *since*, to indicate how long it has been going on for:

Studio l'italiano da cinque anni.

I have been studying Italian for five years.

(Implication: And I'm still trying!)

(Literally: I study Italian since five years.)

Compare this with the following example:

Ho studiato l'italiano per cinque anni.

I studied Italian for five years.

(Implication: But now I've given up!)

13.7.2 For dramatic effect

For example, reporting events in newspapers:

Fuori dal bar tabacchi si accende un furibondo litigio. Un signore, in giro con il cane, vede i due sudamericani che si rincorrono.

Outside the bar a furious quarrel started up. A man, out walking his dog, saw the two South Americans chasing each other.

Or in historical descriptions:

Nel settembre 1939 la Germania invade la Polonia e Francia e Gran Bretagna dichiarano la guerra. L'Italia rimane fuori del conflitto fino al 1940.

In September 1939, Germany invaded Poland, and France and Great Britain declared war. Italy stayed out of the conflict until 1940.

13.8 Indicators of past time**13.8.1 Time indicators**

To say how long ago the action took place, use **fa** ('ago') and the appropriate length of time:

due giorni fa	two days ago	poco tempo fa	a short time ago
un mese fa	a month ago		

To express 'last' meaning 'the one just past', use the adjectives **scorso** or **passato** (note that while **scorso** can come either before or after the noun, **passato** can only come after):

la scorsa settimana	last week	l'anno passato	last year
il mese scorso	last month	l'estate passata	last summer

Here are some common time phrases which can be used to refer to the past:

ieri	yesterday	ieri sera	yesterday evening
l'altro ieri	day before yesterday	stamattina	this morning
ieri mattina	yesterday morning		

13.8.2 Negative indicators of past time

When the double negative phrases **non . . . ancora**, **non . . . mai**, **non . . . più** (see 16.6) are used with the *passato prossimo*, **non** goes before the whole verb, while the second negative element will normally go *after* the auxiliary **avere** or **essere**, but *before* the participle:

La consegna non è ancora arrivata.

The delivery hasn't arrived yet.

Non ho ancora mangiato.

I haven't eaten yet.

Non è più venuto.

He didn't come any more.

Non c'è mai stata la pace in quel paese.

There has never been peace in that country.

Alternatively, the second negative element can be placed *after* the *whole* verb:

La consegna non è arrivata ancora.

The delivery hasn't arrived yet.

Non ho mangiato ancora.

I haven't eaten yet.

Non è venuto più.

He didn't come any more.

Non c'è stata mai la pace in quel paese.

There has never been peace in that country.

14

Talking about the future

14.1 Introduction

Learners often assume that in order to talk about future events, actions or situations, they need to use the future tense of Italian verbs (see 2.2.9). This is not always the case. As seen in the following examples, you can use either the *future* tense or the *present* tense, to refer to the same event or facts. Finally, to talk about the *very near future* in Italian, we can use the construction **stare per**.

14.2 Using the future tense

In the examples below, the *future tense* of the verbs is used to imply firm intention or plans or a future event which is certain:

Fra pochi giorni sarò in Italia.

In a few days I'll be in Italy.

Spero che tu non cambierai idea.

I hope you won't change your mind.

La settimana prossima mio marito partirà per gli Stati Uniti.

Next week my husband will leave for the USA.

Arriveremo non appena possibile.

We'll get there as soon as possible.

14.3 Using the present tense

The *future tense* is not always used or needed in colloquial Italian. The *present tense* can be used in its place in almost every situation, just as it can in English:

Fra poco sono a casa.

Soon I'll be home.

La settimana prossima cambi ufficio, vero?

Next week you are changing office, aren't you?

Domani mio marito parte per Genova.

Tomorrow my husband is leaving for Genoa.

Arriviamo alle dieci di sera.

We'll get there at ten o'clock at night.

Even events in the *distant* future can be expressed using the present tense. However an explicit indication which places the events firmly in the future (such as **la settimana prossima**, **l'anno prossimo**, **fra un mese**, etc.) helps to avoid misunderstanding, as in the following examples:

L'anno prossimo passiamo le vacanze a New York.

Next year we are spending the holidays in New York.

Fra un mese siamo in Italia.

In a month we'll be in Italy.

It is generally preferable to use the future tense when speaking or writing in a more formal context.

14.4 Indicators of future time

As mentioned above, markers of future time are important in order to set statements firmly in the future context. Here are some of the most common.

Domani ‘tomorrow’:

Domani porto Filippo dal pediatra.

Tomorrow I’m taking Filippo to the paediatrician.

Dopodomani ‘day after tomorrow’:

Dopodomani l’ufficio rimarrà chiuso.

The day after tomorrow the office will be closed.

Prossimo ‘next’:

Prossimo agrees in gender and number with the noun it refers to. Remember that the days of the week – with the exception of **domenica** – are masculine.

Prossimo generally comes after the noun, in phrases such as **sabato prossimo** ‘next Saturday’, **la settimana prossima** ‘next week’, **il mese prossimo** ‘next month’, **l’anno prossimo** ‘next year’. It can also come before but this is less common.

Le telefonerò il mese prossimo.

I’ll phone you next month.

Domenica prossima andiamo al mare.

Next Sunday we’ll go to the sea.

Prossimo generally comes before the noun in phrases such as **nei prossimi giorni** ‘over the next few days’, **nei prossimi mesi** ‘over the next few months’. It can also come after but this is less common.

Nei prossimi giorni cerco di pulire la casa.

In the next few days, I’ll try and clean the house.

Dovremo lavorare molto nei prossimi mesi.

We’ll be very busy in the next months.

Fra (tra) ‘within a certain time’:

The prepositions **fra / tra** are identical in meaning (see also 4.3.8).

Ci vediamo fra una settimana.

We’ll see each other in a week.

Sandro deve partire tra poco.

Sandro has to leave in a moment.

Mi scusi, sono occupata. La richiamo fra cinque minuti.

Excuse me, I’m busy at the moment. I’ll call you back in five minutes.

Entro ‘by, within’:

The preposition **entro** is used in a more formal context than **fra, tra**:

Il pagamento va effettuato entro un mese dalla data della fattura.

Payment must be made within a month from the date of the invoice.

Prima o poi ‘sooner or later’:

Prima o poi is a colloquial phrase referring to an unspecified future moment, rather than a definite point in time:

Prima o poi riusciranno a risolvere il problema.

Sooner or later they’ll manage to solve the problem.

Verrò a trovarti, *prima o poi!*

I'll come to see you, sooner or later.

D'ora in poi 'from now on':

D'ora in poi non mi sentirò più sola. Ci sei tu.

From now on I won't feel lonely. You're here.

The next group of time markers **alla fine, dopo, poi, stasera** can refer to a present or past time context as well as a future time context, depending on the verb tense used.

Alla fine 'at the end':

Il vertice durerà cinque giorni; alla fine verrà offerto un pranzo dall'ambasciatore britannico.

The summit will last five days; at the end there will be a dinner offered by the British ambassador.

Dopo 'after, afterwards, later':

Andiamo a fare una passeggiata e dopo andiamo a casa tua.

Let's go for a walk and afterwards we'll go to your place.

Poi 'then, later':

Poi is often used in a pair with **prima** 'first'. It is almost interchangeable with **dopo**:

Prima parleremo della riunione poi passeremo all'argomento principale.

First we'll talk about the meeting, then we'll go on to the main subject.

Stasera 'this evening, tonight':

Stasera si trasmetterà la prossima puntata di 'Commissario Montalbano'.

The next episode of 'Inspector Montalbano' will be shown this evening.

Presto 'soon':

Presto cambieremo casa.

We'll soon move house.

Le manderò presto una risposta.

I'll send an answer to you soon.

Presto can also mean 'early', in which case it can refer to present, past or future.

14.5 Expressing the immediate or very near future

There are two particular ways of talking about actions that are imminent or 'about to happen'.

14.5.1 Stare per

The verb **stare** (see 2.2.3) is used with **per** and the *verb infinitive*:

Stiamo per partire.

We are about to leave.

La conferenza sta per cominciare.

The talk will begin soon.

14.5.2 Essere sul punto di

The expression **essere sul punto di . . .** corresponds approximately to the English 'to be on the verge of . . .':

Il professore è sul punto di avere un esaurimento nervoso.

The teacher *is on the verge of* a nervous breakdown.

Attenzione! Il treno è sul punto di partire!

Attention! The train *is just about* to depart!

14.6 Expressing the English 'going to'

The English 'going to' can be a way of expressing future plans or intention, or it can mean 'physically going to'. You have to know which meaning it conveys before you can translate it into Italian.

In the first example, 'going to' expresses future plans or intention and is translated into Italian using a future tense or using **aver intenzione di**:

When I'm on holiday, I'm *going to* learn Italian.

Quando sarò in vacanza, imparerò l'italiano.

Quando sarò in vacanza, ho intenzione di imparare l'italiano.

In the second example, 'going' means physically going to a place and is translated into Italian using the verb **andare**:

Tomorrow I'm *going* shopping.

Domani vado a fare le spese.

For other ways to talk about future planning and intention, see 14.9 below.

14.7 The 'past in the future'

The diagram below is intended to illustrate the 'past in the future'. Sometimes when you talk about a point in the future (3), you need to describe events/actions that have not yet happened at the moment of speaking (1) but that will have happened at an unspecified point (2) before that future point (3).

1	2	3
<i>(moment of speaking)</i>	<i>(action or event)</i>	<i>(future point)</i>

I giornali dicono che il Governo avrà deciso il bilancio prima di agosto.

The newspapers say the Government will have decided on the budget before August.

Franco dice che avremo già finito il lavoro quando arriverà il contratto.

Franco says that we will have finished the work before the contract arrives.

This reference to the *past in the future* – often called the *future perfect* in English – is expressed in Italian by a tense called **futuro anteriore** 'compound future' (see 2.2.10). Here are some examples:

Domani l'ufficio chiuderà alle 12.00. A quell'ora avremo già finito la nostra relazione.

Tomorrow the office will close at 12.00. By then we'll already have finished our report.

È tardi. Quando arriveremo allo stadio, la partita sarà già iniziata.

It's late. When we reach the stadium, the match will already have started.

Potrai superare l'esame soltanto dopo che avrai migliorato il tuo italiano.

You will be able to pass the exam only after improving your Italian.

14.8 The future seen from the past

You do not just talk of future events with reference to the moment when you are speaking or writing ('the present'). You may also be talking *now* about a point in the *past*, when the particular events referred to were still in the *future*. How you express this situation in Italian depends on the sequence of events and on the probability of their happening. You can use a variety of verb tenses and moods to do this (see also 30.5 and Appendix V).

14.8.1 Present or simple future tense

When the future moment has not yet come, and it is still possible for the action or event to take place, you can use either present or future tense:

Carlo ha detto che *passerà* più tardi.

Carlo said he will pass by later.

Carlo ha detto che *passa* più tardi.

Carlo said he will pass by later.

14.8.2 The *condizionale passato* 'past conditional'

The past conditional (see 2.2.13) indicates the future *from a past point of view*. This tense is used after the moment has passed, regardless of whether Carlo came or not:

Carlo ha detto che *sarebbe passato* (ed è venuto).

Carlo said he would pass by later (and he did).

Carlo ha detto che *sarebbe passato* (e non è venuto).

Carlo said he would pass by later (and he didn't).

14.8.3 The *imperfetto* 'imperfect':

In colloquial Italian, the *imperfect* (see 2.2.4) is often used in place of the past conditional:

Carlo ha detto che *passava* più tardi.

Carlo said he would pass by later.

For more examples of putting events in a time context, and the sequence of tenses, see 30.5 and Appendix V.

14.9 Expressing intention and future plans

As seen above, the English 'going to' can be expressed in Italian by **aver intenzione di**:

Ho intenzione di noleggiare una macchina.

I intend hiring a car.

Other expressions of intention and planning for the future include:

aspettarsi	to expect
aver in progetto di	to have planned to
decidere di	to decide to
decidersi a	to make one's mind up to
desiderare	to wish, desire
fare progetti per	to make plans for
non vedere l'ora di	to not be able to wait for
promettere di	to promise to
sperare di	to hope to

Mi sono decisa a passare le feste natalizie in famiglia.

I've made up my mind to spend the Christmas celebrations with my family.

Gli studenti stanno facendo progetti per venire a studiare in Inghilterra.

The students are planning to come and study in England.

Il professore si aspetta di ricevere i nostri compiti domani.

The lecturer expects to receive our homework tomorrow.

I bambini non vedono l'ora di andare in vacanza.

The children can't wait to go on holiday.

► See also 26.2 and 33.3 for further expressions of intention and future plans.

15

Asking questions

15.1 Introduction

There is no specific verb form in Italian to distinguish a statement from a question, such as the English question form ‘Does he . . . ?’ ‘Is he . . . ?’ In Italian the form of the verb and the word order of the sentence generally remain the same. In the last example the interrogative word at the beginning of the sentence makes it clear that this is a question:

Devo chiudere la porta.

I must shut the door.

Devo chiudere la porta?

Should I shut the door?

Perché devo chiudere la porta?

Why do I have to shut the door?

15.2 Asking a question using interrogative intonation

Very often the only difference between a statement and a question in spoken Italian is the intonation of the voice, which therefore becomes particularly important in getting your message across (see 8.5). The pitch of the voice is raised on the word that is the *focus* of the question. In the sentence above you can raise your voice on any one of the components, depending on what the main focus of your question is:

Devo chiudere *la porta*? (o *la finestra*?)

Should I shut *the door*? (or the window?)

Devo *chiudere* la porta? (o *devo aprirla*?)

Should I *shut* the door? (or should I open it?)

Devo chiudere la porta? (o *non devo*?)

Should I shut the door? (or should I not?)

15.3 Asking a question using interrogative words

When you ask questions, you often use *interrogative* words (see 3.6). We now look at three different types of questions and the question words used to introduce them.

15.3.1 Questions about identification (of people and/or things)

Chi?

Chi (who?) can be used in questions or indirect questions (see also 3.6.1). It can be used with a preposition, as shown in the last two examples below; the preposition always comes before **chi**, unlike the equivalent construction in English (‘who is it for?’). **Chi** is invariable: it does not change form regardless of whether it is the *subject* of the verb (as in the first example), the

direct object (as in the second example), or preceded by a preposition (as in the last two examples).

Pronto, *chi* parla?

Hello, who's speaking?

Mi dica *chi* deve vedere oggi. (*indirect question*)

Tell me who you have to see today.

Per *chi* è questo pacco?

Who is this parcel for?

Di *chi* è questa giacca?

Whose jacket is this?

Che cosa?

Che cosa 'what?' (see also 3.6.2) can be used in direct or indirect questions. It can be used with a preposition, as in the last example below:

Buongiorno, *che cosa* desidera?

Good morning, how can I help you? (*Literally: What would you like?*)

Dimmi *che cosa* vuoi fare stasera. (*indirect question*)

Tell me what you want to do tonight.

Di *che cosa* parliamo con l'avvocato?

What shall we talk about with the solicitor?

You can also use **che** or **cosa** (see also 3.6.2) instead of **che cosa**, especially in a more familiar or informal context:

***Che* vuoi?**

What do you want?

***Che* fai?**

What do you do?

***Cos'è* questo?**

What is this?

***Cosa* stai mangiando?**

What are you eating?

***Di cosa* ti occupi?**

What do you do?

Quale?

Quale can be used both as pronoun, meaning 'which one?', or as adjective, meaning 'which?' (see also 3.6.4):

***Qual* è il mio bicchiere?** (*pronoun*)

Which (one) is my glass?

***Quale* computer devo usare?** (*adjective*)

Which computer should I use?

Apart from its meaning of 'which', **quale** as a pronoun is frequently used with the meaning of English 'what':

***Qual* è il Suo indirizzo?**

What is your address?

***Quali* sono i particolari della macchina?**

What are the details of the car?

In spoken informal Italian, **quale** – when used as an adjective – can be replaced by **che**:

***Che* computer devo usare?**

Which computer should I use?

Quale is elided to **Qual** before the verb form *è*, but never found with an apostrophe:

Qual è il tuo cognome?

What is your surname?

15.3.2 Questions about quantity

Quanto can be used either as an adjective or pronoun (see 3.6.3) or as an adverb (see 6.3.3). As an adjective or pronoun, **quanto** agrees with the gender and number of the noun it refers to (masculine/feminine, singular/plural). As an adverb, it is invariable. It can be elided (**quant'**) before a vowel.

As adjective:

Quante stanze ci sono in questa casa?

How many rooms are there in this house?

Quanto zucchero vuole nel caffè?

How much sugar do you want in your coffee?

Di quanta carta ha bisogno?

How much paper do you need?

Fra quanti giorni sarai a Roma?

In how many days' time will you be in Rome?

As pronoun:

In quanti siete? (Note idiomatic use of 'in')

How many people are you?

Anche le amiche di Laura vogliono venire. Quante sono?

Laura's friends want to come too. How many are they?

As adverb:

Quanto costa? Quant'è?

How much is it?

Scusi, quanto ci vuole per Palermo?

Excuse me, how long does it take to get to Palermo?

Quanto pesa la tua valigia?

How much does your case weigh?

Quanto is also used as an exclamative to express surprise or admiration or amazement, whether it is an adverb (see 6.3.3), an adjective or a pronoun (see 3.6.3):

Quanto siete stupidi voi ragazzi! (*adverb*)

How stupid you boys are!

Quanto mi piace questo posto! (*adverb*)

How I love this place!

Guarda quante persone sono venute! (*adjective*)

Look how many people have come!

Finally, **quanto** is used in the comparative expression **tanto . . . quanto** 'as . . . as' (see 17.2.4).

15.3.3 Other types of questions

There are several other words commonly used to introduce questions. These include **come**, **dove**, **quando** and, lastly, **perché**. All of these can be used both in direct and in indirect questions, as shown in the examples below. Some can also be used with a preposition.

Come? 'How?'

Direct question:

Come si dice "bank account" in Italiano?

How do you say 'bank account' in Italian?

Indirect question:

Ditemi come avete fatto a dormire.

Tell me how you managed to sleep.

In the next two examples, compare the use of **come** with **stare** and with **essere**.

Come sta? is used to ask how someone is:

Come sta il marito di Daniela?

How is Daniela's husband?

Com'è? is used to ask what someone looks like:

Com'è il marito di Daniela? Alto? Basso?

What is Daniela's husband like? Tall? Short?

Like **quanto**, **come** is also used as an exclamative (see 6.3.3) to express surprise or admiration or amazement:

Come sei bella stasera!

How lovely you are tonight!

► See also **come mai** as an alternative to **perché** (see below).

Dove? 'Where?'

Direct question:

Dove va Paolo in vacanza?

Where does Paolo go on holiday?

Indirect question:

Non capisco dove hanno trovato la casa a questo prezzo.

I don't understand where they found a house at this price.

With preposition:

Di dove sei?

Where are you from?

Dove can be elided before a vowel and used with an apostrophe:

Scusi, dov'è il bagno?

Excuse me, where is the toilet?

Quando? 'When?'

Direct question:

Quando comincia la scuola?

When does school begin?

Indirect question:

Non ho capito quando è arrivato questo pacco.

I don't understand when this parcel came.

With preposition:

Fino a quando resti a Napoli?

Until when are you staying in Naples?

Perché? 'Why?'

Direct question:

Perché non vai in ufficio oggi?

Why aren't you going to the office today?

Indirect question:

Dimmi perché piangi.

Tell me why you are crying.

Note that **perché** also means *because*, and can be used to answer a question as well as to ask it:

Perché hai mangiato il pane?

Why did you eat the bread?

... **perché avevo fame.**

... because I was hungry.

Come mai? 'How come?'

The idiomatic expression **Come mai?** is often used, instead of **perché**, in a familiar context:

Come mai torni a casa così presto?

How come you're going home so early?

15.4 Dialogo

Un esame di storia

Professore Si accomodi. Cominciamo con una domanda generale. *Che cosa* è il Risorgimento italiano?

Candidato È il movimento di indipendenza e unità nazionale dell'Italia.

Prof E *quando* è avvenuto questo movimento?

Cand Nel XIX secolo.

Prof Mi dica ... *chi* era Giuseppe Mazzini?

Cand Mazzini è stato un grande leader democratico e repubblicano. Insieme a Giuseppe Garibaldi lottò per realizzare la partecipazione popolare al movimento nazionale.

Prof *Quali* sono stati gli altri grandi protagonisti del Risorgimento?

Cand I più importanti sono stati Camillo Cavour, il Re Vittorio Emanuele II, il Papa Pio IX ... e tanti altri ...

Prof Senta ... saprebbe dirmi *come* e in *quale* anno Roma divenne capitale d'Italia?

Cand Nel 1870. Roma fu presa con la forza.

Prof *Perché* fu necessaria la forza?

Cand Perché il Papa non voleva perdere la sua autorità politica e la sovranità su Roma.

Prof Per concludere ... *come mai* Garibaldi ebbe il soprannome di 'eroe dei due mondi'?

Cand Perché aveva combattuto sia in Italia che in America Latina per la causa della libertà e indipendenza dei popoli.

Prof Bene, complimenti! Si accomodi pure, l'esame è finito.

A history exam

Professor Sit down. Let's begin with a general question. *What* is the Italian Risorgimento?

Candidate It was the movement for independence and national unity in Italy.

Prof And *when* did this movement take place?

Cand In the 19th century.

Prof Tell me ... *who* was Giuseppe Mazzini?

Cand Mazzini was a great democratic and republican leader. Together with Giuseppe Garibaldi he fought to achieve popular participation in the national movement.

Prof *Who* were the other great characters in the Risorgimento?

Cand The most important were Camillo Cavour, King Vittorio Emanuele II, Pope Pius IX ... and many others ...

Prof Listen ... could you tell me *how* and in *what* year Rome became capital of Italy?

Cand In 1870. Rome was taken by force.

Prof *Why* was force necessary?

Cand Because the Pope didn't want to lose his political authority and sovereignty over Rome.

Prof To conclude ... *how come* Garibaldi was known as the "hero of the two worlds"?

Cand Because he had fought both in Italy and in Latin America for the cause of freedom and independence for the people.

Prof Good, well done! You may go, the exam is finished.

16

Negative sentences

16.1 Introduction

The most common way to form a negative statement or question is to use **non** before the verb. There is usually no specific word order that distinguishes a negative sentence from an affirmative one.

Sono stanca.

I'm tired.

Non sono stanca.

I am not tired.

Potete venire alla festa?

Can you come to the party?

Non potete venire alla festa?

Can't you come to the party?

Mio marito ha due fratelli.

My husband has two brothers.

Mio marito non ha fratelli.

My husband has no brothers.

C'erano molti studenti in aula.

There were lots of students in the classroom.

Non c'erano molti studenti in aula.

There weren't many students in the classroom.

To answer a question with a negative, simply use **no**. You can also repeat the verb but use an object pronoun such as **lo**, **la** or **ne**, or the particle **ci**, to avoid repetition of the noun or other element (see 3.4.1, 3.4.4–5):

Hai dieci euro?

Have you got ten euros?

No! (No, non li ho.)

No, I haven't.

Sa guidare la macchina?

Can you drive a car?

No! (No, non la so guidare.)

No, I can't.

Vai in centro stasera?

Are you going to the cinema this evening?

No. Non ci vado.

No, I'm not going.

16.2 Reinforcing a negative statement

Several other words expressing negation can be used to reinforce a negative statement. Since these are generally used together with **non**, they form a *double negative* (two negative words in the same sentence). See 16.8 for exceptions to this.

16.2.1 Affatto, per niente, mica

A negative statement can be reinforced by using **affatto, per niente, mica** (the last is rather colloquial) along with **non**:

Non ho affatto paura!

I am *not* afraid *at all*!

“No. Non mi disturba affatto . . . nemmeno in bagno.”

(Article about Italians and mobile phones)

‘No, you’re not disturbing me at all . . . not even in the bathroom.’

(http://lucanews.tv/no_non_mi_disturba_affatonemmeno_in_bagno-4137.html,
retrieved 24 February 2012)

Il film non era per niente interessante!

The film was *not at all* interesting!

Non sono mica scema!

I am not stupid!

Notice how all the reinforcing adverbs come *after* the verb. With a compound tense such as *passato prossimo*, they can either come after the whole verb or come after the auxiliary (**avere, essere**) and before the participle:

Non è stata per niente una bella serata.

It wasn’t a nice evening at all.

Non ho affatto detto una bugia.

I certainly didn’t tell a lie.

Non ho mica preso le tue cose.

I certainly didn’t take your things.

Affatto can also be used on its own to reply to a question in the negative:

Hai speso tutti i soldi che ti ho dato?

Did you spend all the money I gave you?

No, affatto!

No, certainly not!

16.2.2 Neanche, nemmeno, neppure

These adverbs, used with **non**, can be used to reinforce or expand a negative statement, with the specific meaning of ‘not even’, ‘neither’ or ‘not either’. They are often closely linked to a noun, either person or object, as in the examples below:

Non ho neanche un centesimo!

I haven’t even got a penny! (*Literally*: a cent)

Non viene neanche mio fratello.

My brother isn’t coming either.

Guardo poco la TV. Non guardo nemmeno il telegiornale.

I don’t watch much TV. I don’t even watch the news.

L’inverno non risparmia neppure la Sicilia.

Not even Sicily is being spared the winter weather.

Nemmeno can also be used with the meaning of ‘neither, not either’:

Non abbiamo mangiato bene nemmeno in albergo.

We didn’t eat well in the hotel either.

Neanche and **nemmeno** do not need **non** when they come before the verb or in a phrase without a verb (see also 16.8).

16.3 Expressing negation using *niente, nulla*

Niente (and the less common **nulla**) mean ‘nothing’ and are normally used together with **non** (see also 3.9.1):

Non ho niente da dire.

I have nothing to say.

Non vedo niente.

I can't see anything.

Non c'è nulla di buono da mangiare.

There isn't anything good to eat.

Niente, nulla can also come before the verb, in which case the **non** is not needed (see 16.8).

16.4 Expressing negation using the pronoun *nessuno/a*

Nessuno is a negative *pronoun*, standing on its own; it has a masculine form **nessuno** (occasionally abbreviated to **nessun**) and feminine form **nessuna**:

A questo numero non risponde nessuno.

Nobody answers on this number.

In casa non c'è nessuno.

There isn't anybody at home.

Nessuno is usually found with **non**, but if it comes before the verb, **non** is not needed (see 16.8 below, see also 3.9.3).

16.5 Expressing negation using the adjective *nessun/o/a*

You can reinforce the idea that a person or object is not available by adding the negative adjective **nessun/o/a** (‘no’, ‘not any’). **Nessun/o/a** (see 3.9.3) follows the pattern of the indefinite article **un, uno, una** (see 1.3.2):

Non c'è nessuna guida.

There is no guidebook.

Non c'è nessun'automobile disponibile.

There are no cars available.

(Literally: There is no car available.)

Non c'è nessun posto.

There is no space free.

Non c'era nessuno scrittore italiano presente.

There were no Italian writers present.

Nessun (nessuno, nessuna, nessun') can also come before the verb, in which case **non** is not needed (see 16.8).

Particularly in more formal written Italian, **nessun** may be replaced by **alcun** in the singular (**alcuno, alcuna, alcun'**), as in the examples below. **Alcun** can also be used after **senza** ‘without’ with the meaning ‘any’. For the various uses of **alcun**, see also 3.9.3.

Non c'è alcun motivo per offendersi.

There's absolutely no reason to take offence.

Due settimane senza alcuna traccia. (newspaper headline)

Two weeks without a single trace.

Other alternatives to **nessun** include **minimo** ‘the slightest’, which has to agree with the noun it refers to:

Non ha la minima intenzione di finire quel progetto.

He hasn't the slightest intention of completing that project.

Or the more colloquial expression **il più pallido**, where the adjective also has to agree with the noun it refers to:

Non ho la più pallida idea di quello che sta facendo.

I haven't got the faintest idea what he's doing.

16.6 Other negative elements: *non ... mai, non ... ancora, non ... più*

Non ... mai 'never', **non ... ancora** 'not yet' and **non ... più** 'no longer' are used to express negation, with reference to present, past or future time (see also 13.8.2):

Non leggiamo mai i giornali.

We never read the newspapers.

Non sei ancora pronta?

Aren't you ready yet?

Non lavora più alla Fiat.

He doesn't work at Fiat any longer.

With a simple verb, such as those in the examples above, **non** comes before the verb, while any other negative elements come *after*. With a compound tense such as *passato prossimo*, these elements can generally either come after the whole verb or – more commonly – after the auxiliary (**avere, essere**) and before the participle:

Non sono mai stato in America.

(**Non sono stato mai in America.**)

I've never been to America.

I nostri ospiti non sono ancora arrivati.

(**I nostri ospiti non sono arrivati ancora.**)

Our guests have not arrived yet.

Il mio ex-marito non mi ha più telefonato.

My ex-husband hasn't phoned me any more.

Non ... più can also be used with the meaning 'no more':

Non c'è più benzina.

There isn't any more petrol.

Non ci sono più mele.

There are no more apples.

16.7 Expressing negation using *né ... né*

A negative statement about two (or more) related words or sentences can be introduced by **non ... né ... né** (see 5.2.2), corresponding to the English 'neither ... nor' or 'either ... or' preceded by 'not'.

Sto bene. Non ho né fame né sete.

I'm fine. I'm neither hungry nor thirsty.

Di domenica non voleva né lavorare né studiare.

On Sundays he didn't want either to work or to study.

Questo bicchiere non è né mio né tuo, è di Andrea.

This glass is neither mine nor yours. It's Andrea's.

Like other negative phrases, **né ... né** can also come before the verb, in which case **non** is not needed (see 16.8).

16.8 Omitting *non*

Neanche and **nemmeno** (see 16.2.2) can come before the verb or in a phrase without a verb, in which case they do not need **non**:

Neanche mia sorella mi ha fatto gli auguri.

Not even my sister wished me happy birthday.

Non vai a sciare quest'anno? Neanch'io.

Aren't you going skiing this year? Me neither.

Non hai la patente di guida? Nemmeno io.

Don't you have a driver's licence? Neither do I.

Niente or **nulla** (see 16.3) can also come before the verb, in which case **non** is not needed. This word order is rather dramatic in style, however, and perhaps more common in Sicily and the south:

Niente succede.

Nothing happens.

Nulla lo preoccupa.

Nothing worries him.

Nessuno as pronoun or adjective (see 16.4–5) can come before the verb, in which case **non** is not needed. (It is more common to find **nessuno** in this word order than **niente**.)

As a pronoun:

Nessuno viene dopo le 4.00.

No one comes after 4.00.

Nessun dorma! (*from Puccini's opera Turandot*)

Let nobody sleep!

As an adjective:

Nessun compito gli era difficile.

No task was difficult for him.

Nessuna guida ti spiega queste cose.

No guidebook explains these things to you.

Né . . . né (see 16.7) can also come before the verb, in which case **non** is not needed. The verb used can be either singular or plural:

Né Marco né Luisa sapeva come far funzionare la fotocopiatrice.

Neither Marco nor Luisa knew how to make the photocopier work.

Né io né lui sapevamo dove andare.

Neither I nor he knew where to go.

16.9 Specifying negation with a *che* clause

When **nessun**, **nessuno**, **niente** (see 16.3–5) are followed by a clause that more closely defines or specifies the negative ('no guidebook . . . *that explains clearly*'), Italian uses a relative clause introduced by **che**, normally followed by the subjunctive (see 2.2.15):

Non c'è nessuna guida *che spieghi* la storia della città in modo chiaro.

There is no guidebook *that explains* the history of the town clearly.

Non c'è nessuno *che sappia* fare la pizza come mia cugina.

There is no one *that can make* pizza like my cousin.

Non c'è niente *che possa* soddisfarlo.

There's nothing *that can satisfy* him.

17

Comparisons and degrees of intensity

17.1 Introduction

Comparisons between objects or people, or situations, can be defined in terms of *more*, *less* or *the same as*.

In Part A the comparative forms of adjectives (see 1.4.6) and adverbs (see 6.4.1) are shown. Here we look at the ways in which these forms are used, and also at other ways of expressing degrees of intensity.

17.2 Using comparative adjectives and adverbs

17.2.1 Più

To express 'more', use the comparative form **più** + adjective (see 1.4.6) or adverb (see 6.4.1):

Adjective:

La situazione economica è più grave in Italia che in Inghilterra.

The economic situation is more serious in Italy than in England.

Adverb:

Gli inglesi guidano più prudentemente degli italiani.

The English drive more carefully than the Italians.

You can also make a comparison using one of the irregular forms of comparison of adjectives (see 1.4.6) or adverbs (see 6.4.2):

Adjective:

La situazione economica è peggiore in Italia che in Inghilterra.

The economic situation is worse in Italy than in England.

Il rischio sismico è maggiore in Abruzzo che in Lombardia.

The risk from earthquakes is greater in the Abruzzo than in Lombardy.

Secondo me, il corso serale d'italiano è migliore di quello di tedesco.

In my opinion, the Italian evening class is better than the German one.

Adverb:

D'estate si sta meglio in montagna che al mare.

In the summer it's better to stay in the mountains than at the sea.

Mio marito parcheggia la macchina molto peggio di me.

My husband parks the car much worse than me.

17.2.2 Meno

To express 'less', use the comparative form **meno** + adjective (see 1.4.6) or adverb (see 6.4.1):

Adjective:

Enrico era meno intelligente di Enrica.

Enrico was less intelligent than Enrica.

Adverb:

Bisogna guidare meno velocemente del solito.

You should drive less fast than usual.

17.2.3 Using an adverbial phrase

With adverbs, you can also make a comparison by using the irregular forms **maggiore** or **minore** in an adverbial phrase (see 6.2.5):

Guido ha sempre lavorato con maggiore impegno di Franca.

Guido has always worked in a more committed way than Franca.

Il pilota brasiliano ha guidato ad una velocità minore del pilota italiano.

The Brazilian driver drove at a slower speed than the Italian driver.

17.2.4 Tanto ... quanto or così ... come

To express comparison between two equal elements, use **tanto ... quanto** or **così ... come** either with an adjective (see 1.4.6) or with an adverb (see 6.4.1):

Adjective:

Non troverà mai una moglie tanto comprensiva quanto Angelica.

He will never find a wife as understanding as Angelica.

Adverb:

Non guidi così attentamente come me.

You don't drive as carefully as me.

The first adverbs of each pair (**tanto**, **così**) can be omitted:

Non troverà mai una moglie comprensiva quanto Angelica.

He will never find a wife as understanding as Angelica.

Non guidi attentamente come me.

You don't drive as carefully as me.

17.3 Expressing 'than'

English 'than' is translated by **di** or **che** (see examples in 17.2.1–2 above), depending on which elements are being compared and on their position in the sentence.

17.3.1 Comparing two nouns

When comparing two nouns or proper names, you normally use **di** or its combined form **del** (but see 17.3.3–6 below):

Luciano scrive più lentamente di Alessandra al computer.

Luciano writes more slowly than Alessandra on the computer.

In classe, i maschi sono meno estroversi delle ragazze.

In class, the boys are less extrovert than the girls.

17.3.2 Comparing two pronouns

As with nouns, when comparing two pronouns, you normally use **di**.

Personal pronouns

The stressed object pronoun forms (see 3.3.2) are used:

Io sono meno stressata di te.

I am less stressed than you.

Lui guida più velocemente di te.

He drives more quickly than you.

Demonstrative pronouns

To compare two objects, one near the speaker and one further away, use **questo** and **quello** respectively (see 3.8.1):

Questa stanza è più spaziosa di quella.

This room is more spacious than that one.

Quello è più saporito di questo.

That one is more tasty than this one.

Possessive pronouns

To compare objects belonging to two different people, use possessive pronouns (see 3.7):

Lo stipendio di mio marito è più basso del mio.

My husband's salary is lower than mine.

La nostra automobile è meno comoda della vostra.

Our car is less comfortable than yours.

17.3.3 Comparing two adjectives

To compare two adjectives that refer to the *same person* or *same thing*, use **che**:

I genitori del bambino rapito erano più preoccupati che arrabbiati.

The parents of the kidnapped child were worried more than angry.

Questi mobili sono più vecchi che antichi.

This furniture is not so much antique as old.

The same applies when comparing two *nouns* referring to the same person or thing:

La casa è più rudere che rustico!

The house is more ruin than cottage!

17.3.4 Comparing two verbs

When comparing two verb infinitives, use **che**:

Andare a ballare è più divertente che andare al cinema.

Going dancing is more fun than going to the cinema.

Spendere è più facile che risparmiare.

Spending is easier than saving.

17.3.5 Comparing phrases of time or place

When comparing *adverbs* of time/place, use **di**:

Adesso mi stanco più di prima.

Now I get tired more than (I did) before.

But use **che** if the adverbs are next to each other, separated only by 'than':

Sono più stanca adesso che prima.

I am more tired now than before.

Fa meno freddo oggi che ieri.

It is colder today than yesterday.

When at least one of the terms of comparison is a *prepositional phrase* of time/place, use **che**:

Si sta meglio adesso che negli anni Cinquanta.

People are better off now than in the Fifties.

I turisti si divertirebbero più a Napoli che a Roma.

The tourists would enjoy themselves more in Naples than in Rome.

17.3.6 Comparing two elements separated by 'than'

In conclusion, the easiest rule to remember is that if 'than' comes directly between the two elements compared, it is always translated by **che**:

Fa meno freddo oggi che ieri.

It is less cold today than yesterday.

Mia madre era più preoccupata che arrabbiata.

My mother was worried rather than angry.

17.3.7 Comparing with one's expectations

To compare an actual state of affairs with what you thought, expected or imagined beforehand, use the construction **di quanto** or **di quel che** along with either the imperfect indicative (for example, **pensavo**) or the imperfect subjunctive (for example, **pensassi**) – with or without **non** – according to whether you are using a formal or informal register:

Il corso d'italiano era più facile di quel che pensavo.

The Italian course was easier than I thought.

or:

Il corso d'italiano era più facile di quanto pensassi.

or:

Il corso d'italiano era più facile di quanto non pensassi.

17.4 Expressing 'which'

Use the interrogative **quale** (see 3.6.4) as adjective or pronoun to express 'which' or 'which one'.

As an adjective:

Quale città è più interessante, Roma o Firenze?

Which city is more interesting, Rome or Florence?

Quali fichi sono più dolci, quelli bianchi, o quelli neri?

Which figs are sweetest, the white ones or the black ones?

As a pronoun:

Qual è la regione più interessante, l'Abruzzo o la Toscana?

Which is the most interesting region, Abruzzo or Tuscany?

Compriamo dei fichi? Quali sono i più dolci?

Shall we buy some figs? Which ones are the sweetest?

17.5 Expressing different degrees of intensity

17.5.1 Adjectives: superlative (compared to others)

When one person or object has more of a particular quality than all the other ones, you use the superlative followed by **di** (see 1.4.7):

I ragazzi italiani sono i più viziati d'Europa.

Italian kids are the most spoilt in Europe.

È stato il più bel viaggio della mia vita.

It was the best trip of my life.

Per me, venerdì è il giorno meno stressante della settimana.

For me, Friday is the least stressful day of the week.

17.5.2 Adjectives: superlative (no comparison)

When no comparison is being made, use the superlative form ending in **-issimo** (see 1.4.8 and 10.5.2):

I vestiti di Armani sono costosissimi.

Armani clothes are really expensive.

Il viaggio è stato bellissimo.

The trip was really wonderful.

Often Italians prefer not to use this **-issimo** form, seeing it as a little exaggerated, but to use a simple qualifying adverb such as **così**, **molto**, **tanto** or an adverb such as **estremamente**, **veramente**:

Sono tanto stanca.

I'm so tired.

Le sono estremamente grato.

I'm extremely grateful to you.

17.5.3 Adjectives: reducing the intensity

You can reduce the intensity of the adjective by using the adverb **poco** (see 6.3.5):

Ha fatto una mossa poco intelligente.

He made a not very intelligent move.

17.5.4 Adjectives: expressing moderate intensity

The adverbs **piuttosto** and **abbastanza** (see 6.3.5) express only a moderate degree of intensity:

Il processo elettorale è piuttosto lento.

The electoral process is rather slow.

Siamo abbastanza soddisfatti del suo lavoro.

We are quite satisfied with his work.

17.5.5 Numbers and ranking

The superlative form **il ... più / il ... meno**, **la ... più / la ... meno** (see 1.4.6) that you saw used with adjectives can be used also with ordinal numbers **primo**, **secondo**, etc. (see 7.3) to indicate ranking:

Milano è la seconda città più grande d'Italia.

Milan is the second biggest city in Italy.

17.5.6 Adverbs

With adverbs (see 6.4.1), the superlatives are less commonly used.

The equivalent of English 'as ... as possible' is expressed as shown:

Per favore, parla il più lentamente possibile.

Please, speak as slowly as possible.

Ho fatto il meglio possibile. Speriamo bene.

I've done the best I could. Let's hope it goes well.

When no comparison is being made, you can express the absolute superlative by using qualifying adverbs such as **molto**, **tanto**, **così**, **veramente**, **estremamente**, in the same way as for the adjectives (see 17.5.2 above):

Ha guidato molto attentamente.

He drove very carefully.

As for the adjectives, the intensity of the adverbs can be reduced by using **poco**:

Ha seguito la lezione poco attentamente.

He followed the lesson not very attentively.

In the case of adverbial phrases using **con**, **nel modo** or **in/nella maniera**, the comparative and superlative are formed in a similar way to those shown above.

Using a qualifying adjective such as **molto**, **tanto**, **poco**:

Ha suonato la chitarra con tanta passione.

She played the guitar with great passion (very passionately).

Ha studiato con poco impegno.

He studied with little commitment.

Using a comparative or superlative adjective form (**più**, **meno**):

Ha parlato nella maniera più calma possibile.

She spoke in the calmest possible manner.

Cerchiamo di fare tutto nel modo meno complicato possibile.

Let's try to do everything in the least complicated way possible.

18

Referring to objects and people

18.1 Introduction

When talking or writing, you often need to refer to somebody or something without naming them, usually to avoid repeating a name or object already mentioned earlier; in English you can do this by using ‘this’ or ‘that’, ‘he’ or ‘she’ or ‘it’. In Italian, too, you can use pronouns (see Chapter 3) to refer back to someone or something mentioned already.

18.2 Using a pronoun to refer back

There are many different kinds of pronoun (demonstrative, indefinite, interrogative, personal, possessive, relative), and all of them can be used to refer to a noun already mentioned. Here we look in detail at *personal pronouns*, the pronouns that describe people and also objects. For details of all the personal pronoun forms (stressed, unstressed and combined), see 3.3 and 3.4 respectively.

18.3 Using a pronoun: referring to the subject of the action

In Italian, when talking about the person or entity carrying out an action (‘the subject’), you do not usually need the subject pronoun, as you do in English (‘he, she’, etc.); the verb ending indicates who or what is carrying out the action (see 2.1.3 and 3.3.1). But sometimes you want to emphasise who is carrying out an action, to distinguish him/her from someone else or to emphasise the contrast:

Io vado a scuola, lui va a lavorare.

I’m going to school, he’s going to work.

Noi andiamo al cinema. Voi dove andate?

We’re going to the cinema. Where are you going?

18.4 Using a pronoun: referring to the object of the action

When you want to refer to somebody who is the object of the action, use an *object pronoun* (English *me, you, her, him, us, them*). These can be either stressed or unstressed. The forms of stressed and unstressed object pronouns are shown in 3.3.2 and 3.4.1 respectively.

18.4.1 Using stressed object pronouns

When you want to emphasise the identity of the person you are referring to, use the *stressed* or *emphatic* pronouns (see 3.3.2). You also use these if you want to contrast or compare, or to distinguish him/her from somebody else. The three sets of examples below show the different emphasis given, depending on whether you use an unstressed object pronoun (examples A) or a stressed object pronoun (examples B):

- A **Dov'è Paola? *La* chiamo e non risponde.**
Where is Paola? I call her and she doesn't answer.
- B **Dov'è Paola? Chiamo *lei* e risponde Anna.**
Where is Paola? I call *her* and Anna answers instead.
- A **Guardami!**
Look at me!
- B **Guarda *me*, non *lui*.**
Look at *me*, not *him*.
- A **La mia amica mi ha invitato a cena. *Le* porto dei fiori.**
My friend has invited me for dinner. I'll bring some flowers for her.
- B **La mia amica mi ha invitato a cena. Porto dei fiori *a lei* e del vino a suo marito.**
My friend has invited me for dinner. I'll bring some flowers *for her* and some wine for her husband.

After a *preposition* (**con, di, da, a, per** ... etc.) the stressed forms are the only form that can be used:

Ho parlato *di voi* con la Dott.ssa Prati.

I talked about you with Dr Prati.

Ho telefonato *a te* prima che a Sandra.

I rang you before I called Sandra.

Questa lettera è *per lui*.

This letter is for him.

Ti ho visto *con lei*.

I saw you with her.

Stressed object pronouns are used mainly to refer to people. Using **lui, lei, loro** to refer to animals – or even more so to inanimate objects – has the effect of endowing them with a 'human' personality. **Questo, quello** can be used instead.

Here, in this news item, a motorcyclist whose life has been saved says how grateful he is to his crash helmet for protecting him. Clearly he thinks of it almost as a friend, hence the use of **lui**:

Io devo la mia vita a questo casco. È grazie *a lui* che sono vivo.

I owe my life to this helmet. It's thanks to it that I'm alive.

18.4.2 Using unstressed object pronouns

The most common way to refer to somebody or something – when no particular emphasis is required – is to use unstressed object pronouns (3.4.1–2).

The pronouns can be *direct object pronouns* (used when the action directly involves or affects the person or thing):

Conosci Paola?

Do you know Paola?

Sì, *la* conosco.

Yes, I know her.

Pronto, *mi* senti?

Hello, can you hear me?

No, non *ti* sento bene!

No, I can't hear you very well!

Mi piace il caffè italiano, *lo* bevo tutti i giorni.

I like Italian coffee, I drink it every day.

Hai la chiave? Sì, *ce l'*ho.

Have you got the key? Yes, I've got it.

Alternatively, they can be *indirect object pronouns* (used when the action is aimed *at* or directed *to* them). Common verbs which often use indirect pronouns include:

dare to give

dire to say, tell

inviare to send

mandare to send

presentare to present

prestare to lend

raccontare to tell

scrivere to write

offrire to offer**spedire** to send**passare** to pass**telefonare** to telephone**Paola è rimasta senza soldi. Domani *le* mando duecento euro.**

Paola's got no money left. Tomorrow I'll send two hundred euros to her.

A che ora *gli* telefoni?

At what time will you call (to) him?

Ciao. Scrivimi presto!

Bye. Write to me soon.

Dimmi!

Tell me!

Dammi lo zucchero!

Give (to) me the sugar!

Both indirect and direct object pronouns can be found in the same sentence:

***Mi* piacciono le poesie di Montale e *le* ho lette tutte.**

I like Montale's poems and I've read them all.

The direct and indirect pronouns can also be combined (see 3.4.6):

Se vedi Anna, dille di telefonarmi.**Va bene, *glielo* dirò, non preoccuparti.**

If you see Anna, tell her to ring me.

All right, I'll tell her, don't worry.

Ho lasciato le chiavi della macchina a casa tua!**Non ti preoccupare, *te le* porto stasera.**

I left the car keys at your house!

Don't worry, I'll bring you them tonight.

Remember that occasionally the correct pronoun might not be the one you think. An English 'it' might be plural **li**, **le** in Italian, if it refers to a plural noun such as hair, furniture, spaghetti, tagliatelle or other sorts of pasta:**Odio questi mobili. *Li* brucerei.**

I hate this furniture. I'd burn it.

Quanto erano buone le lasagne! *Le* ho mangiate tutte!

How good the lasagne was! I ate all of it!

One of the main problems for English speakers is remembering that the unstressed pronouns usually come before the verb (but see 3.4.7).

18.4.3 Direct or indirect object?

Another problem for English speakers is knowing when to use the indirect object pronoun in Italian. This is because in English direct object and indirect object are not always distinguishable. Sometimes English uses the word *to* before the pronoun, showing clearly that it is an *indirect* object, for example 'I'll give the parcel to him' or 'He lent the novel to me'. But it is equally possible to say in English: 'I'll give him the parcel', 'He lent me the novel', as if the pronoun were a *direct* object.Look at these examples, where Italian distinguishes between *direct* and *indirect* object pronouns, depending on the choice of verbs, but where English uses identical pronoun forms ('him', 'them') for both direct and indirect:*Direct:***Chiamalo subito.**

Call him now.

*Indirect:***Telefonagli subito.**

Ring him now.

Direct:

Li accompagno all'aeroporto.

I'll take them to the airport.

Indirect:

Gli do un passaggio.

I'll give them a lift.

18.4.4 **Piacere, servire**

Piacere sometimes presents difficulties for learners of Italian. With **piacere** (see 28.2.1), the object liked is the grammatical subject of the verb, while the person who likes it is referred to by an indirect pronoun, for example **mi** (literally 'Music pleases *to me*', 'The shoes please *to me*'). You don't need to add a pronoun to refer to the person or object liked, since he, she or it is implicit in the verb form. Look at these examples:

Ti piace la musica moderna?

Do you like modern music?

Sì, mi piace.

Yes, I like it. (*Literally:* It pleases me.)

Ti piacciono queste scarpe?

Do you like these shoes?

Sì, mi piacciono.

Yes, I like them. (*Literally:* They please me.)

Similarly, when we use **servire** 'to be of use to' (see 23.3.6) or similar verbs, the object needed (**le forbici**) is the grammatical subject of the verb ('the scissors are of use to me'), while the person needing them is expressed by the indirect pronoun, either stressed or unstressed. When you want to refer to the objects without mentioning them again, simply miss them out: in the first example, this applies to **le forbici** and in the second example, **la calcolatrice**:

Ti servono le forbici? (*unstressed object pronoun*)

Do you need the scissors?

Le forbici servono a te? (*stressed object pronoun*)

Do you need the scissors?

Sì, mi servono (le forbici).

Yes, I need them (the scissors).

Signora, Le serve la calcolatrice? (*unstressed object pronoun*)

Do you need the calculator, signora?

La calcolatrice serve a Lei, signora? (*stressed object pronoun*)

Do you need the calculator, signora?

Sì, mi serve (la calcolatrice).

Yes, I need it (the calculator).

18.5 **Referring to someone or something using questo, quello**

The demonstrative pronouns **questo**, **quello** can also be used to avoid naming or repeating the object or person (see 3.8.1). Often, however, the use of **quello**, **quella** without naming the person involved indicates dislike or contempt:

Non c'è nessuno più egoista di quella.

There is no one more self-centred than that woman.

È questo il tuo nuovo amico?

Is this your new friend?

Non ho mai mangiato una torta come questa.

I've never eaten a cake as good as this one.

Hai visto quello?

Did you see that man?

Questo è il mio tavolo.

This is my desk.

Ti servono dei fogli? Prendi quelli.

Do you need some sheets of paper? Take those.

The English 'the former . . . the latter' can be conveyed by using **quello** and **questo** respectively, but only in written texts. Sometimes 'the latter' is conveyed by **quest'ultimo**.

18.6 Using indefinite pronouns to refer to someone/something

Often indefinite pronouns such as **alcuni** (see 3.9.3, 11.6.4), **altri**, **certi** (see 3.9.3), **ognuno** (see 3.9.1) can be used to refer to something or someone previously mentioned:

Abbiamo parlato con i prigionieri di guerra. Alcuni di loro erano stati presi all'inizio del conflitto.

We spoke to the prisoners of war. Some of them had been taken at the beginning of the conflict.

Avevamo invitato una ventina di bambini alla festa. Ognuno di loro ha ricevuto un regalino prima di andare a casa.

We invited around twenty children to the party. Each of them received a small present before going home.

La sala d'attesa era piena di viaggiatori pallidi e stanchi. Alcuni sfogliavano giornali, altri sonnecchiavano.

The waiting room was full of pale, tired travellers. Some were flicking through newspapers, others were dozing.

18.7 Referring to something or someone mentioned

The words **simile**, **tale** (see 3.9.3) can be used referring to something or someone already mentioned:

Nell'incidente sono morti cinque giovani tutti di Cornate. Al paese non era mai accaduta una tale tragedia.

In the accident, five young people died, all from Cornate. A similar tragedy had never happened in the village.

Una cosa simile si vedeva a Opicina (vicino Trieste) dove un cane di nome Lucky era un cliente abituale del Bar Centrale.

Something similar used to be seen in Opicina (near Trieste) where a dog called Lucky was a regular customer of the Bar Centrale.

18.8 Referring to what has been said or will be said

Particularly in business or formal letters, Italian makes use of expressions such as **come sopra**, **sopraindicato**, **sopraccitato**, **sopraddetto**, referring back, or **il seguente**, **come segue**, **quanto segue**, to refer forward:

Per eventuali chiarimenti, si prega di telefonare al numero sopraindicato.

For eventual clarification, please telephone the above number.

Prima di accendere il vostro frigorifero, vi suggeriamo di leggere il seguente:

Before turning on your fridge, we suggest you read the following:

19

Focusing on the action

19.1 Introduction

Sometimes you want to focus on the *action*, or on the *person or thing affected* by the action, rather than on the person carrying out the action. In Italian there are various ways in which you can do this.

19.2 Focusing on the action using the passive

Normally, the focus of attention and the grammatical subject of the verb is the person carrying out an action; the verb form is therefore an *active* verb form:

I camerieri hanno servito la cena.

The waiters served dinner.

If you want to focus on the action or on the person/thing affected, you can use a passive verb form (see 2.1.10) and make the person or thing affected by the action (the object) the grammatical subject of the verb instead, so that it becomes more important than the 'doer':

La cena è servita alle ore 20.00.

Dinner is served at 8 pm.

19.2.1 With *essere*

The passive is normally formed with **essere** and the past participle (see 2.1.10). It has a full range of tenses in the same way as the active verb does. There may or may *not* be an agent (person carrying out the action) mentioned, but even when there is, the agent is at the end of the sentence, in a *secondary* position compared to the action or person affected:

Agent not mentioned:

Le destre sono state fermate.

The Right has been stopped.

La merce era stata scaricata a Genova.

The goods had been unloaded at Genoa.

Agent mentioned:

Stamattina il Vesuvio è ricoperto da un bianco manto di neve.

This morning Vesuvio is covered by a white mantle of snow.

Ogni mattina, quando mi alzo, i bagni sono sempre occupati dai miei figli.

Every morning, when I get up, the bathrooms are always occupied by my children.

Domani la Principessa sarà ricevuta dal Papa.

Tomorrow the Princess will be received by the Pope.

Nel 1943 Napoli è stata bombardata dagli Alleati.

In 1943 Naples was bombarded by the Allies.

I ladri furono scoperti dalla guardia mentre entravano da una finestra.

The thieves were discovered by the guard as they came in through a window.

I risultati delle elezioni erano attesi da una grande folla per le strade della città.

The results of the elections were awaited by a great crowd in the streets of the city.

Se avessi più pazienza, forse saresti ascoltato di più dai tuoi figli.

If you had more patience, perhaps you would be listened to more by your children.

Secondo i giornali, i quadri sarebbero stati rubati da una banda di ladri professionisti.

According to the newspapers, the pictures were stolen by a band of professional thieves.

NOTE For this use of the conditional mood to express report or rumour, see Chapter 31.

19.2.2 With *venire*

In the examples above, the *passive* construction is formed with the verb **essere** and the past participle. You can also use **venire** instead of **essere**. This is used only in a more formal register and only when the verb in the active sentence is in one of the simple tenses: *presente*, *imperfetto*, *passato remoto*, *futuro semplice*, *condizionale presente*, *congiuntivo presente*, *congiuntivo imperfetto*.

Venire tends to express the idea of something that happens regularly:

La cena viene servita da camerieri vestiti di giacca bianca.

Dinner is served by waiters dressed in white jackets.

Gli ordini ci venivano trasmessi dai nostri rivenditori italiani.

The orders were sent on to us by our Italian dealers.

Gli studenti verranno ammessi solo se muniti di tessera.

Students will be admitted only if in possession of a membership card.

The other reason for using **venire** is to avoid ambiguity. The passive, used with certain verbs, for example **chiudere**, **aprire**, can sound static ('the door is already closed') rather than expressing an action ('the door is being closed'); this is particularly true when there is no agent mentioned, as shown by the examples below:

La porta è chiusa da Marco.

The door is shut by Marco. (*action*)

La porta è chiusa.

The door is shut / is being shut. (*action or state: ambiguous*)

This ambiguity can be avoided by using the verb **venire**:

La porta viene chiusa.

The door is being shut/gets shut. (*action*)

19.2.3 With *andare*

The passive can also be formed with **andare**, in which case it has a prescriptive sense, in other words talking about how things *should* be done:

Eventuali riparazioni vanno effettuate solo dai nostri tecnici qualificati.

Any repairs should be carried out only by our qualified technicians.

Il vino bianco va servito fresco, mentre il vino rosso va servito a temperatura ambiente.

White wine should be served chilled, while red wine should be served at room temperature.

19.2.4 In scientific papers, news reports, etc.

While Italians tend to avoid the use of passive sentences in everyday speech, there are certain special contexts where the passive is preferred, for example *scientific papers*, *news reports* and *bureaucratic language* where it is used to express detachment and impartiality (see 42.7–9).

Sometimes the passive is used without mention of any agent, because the agent is not known, has already been mentioned, is unimportant, or is too obvious to be stated, especially in scientific writing.

Scientific papers

In the case of scientific papers, the intention is to stress the objectivity of experimental procedures; a passive sentence puts emphasis on the results of an action, rather than on the person who has carried it out (see also 42.8). When scientific observations are described, the 'agent' (i.e. the person or research group that carries them out) is often omitted, to stress the objective nature of the findings:

Il nuovo vaccino contro l'Aids è stato sperimentato presso l'Università di Pisa.

The new Aids vaccine has been tested at Pisa University.

L'eclissi è prevista alle 15.23 del 10 agosto.

The eclipse is expected at 15.23 on the 10th of August.

Il tasso medio di inflazione è calcolato sulla base di rilevazioni che vengono effettuate nelle principali città.

The average inflation rate is calculated on the basis of surveys which are conducted in the main cities.

There can be exceptions where the discovery has made the scientist or inventor famous:

La penicillina fu scoperta da Fleming nel 1928.

Penicillin was discovered by Fleming in 1928.

News reports

Passive statements are widely used in the reporting of news by the press (see also 42.9). Again this is due to the need to present events as facts and to suggest they are true, impartial and accurately verified:

La legge finanziaria è stata approvata dal Parlamento.

The budget bill has been approved by Parliament.

I due ostaggi saranno liberati domani.

The two hostages will be released tomorrow.

Media headlines often omit the **avere/essere** element of the passive and use the subject and the past participle only:

Somalia: liberati due ostaggi occidentali.

Somalia: two western hostages freed.

(<http://www.vita.it/news/view/117629>, retrieved 22 February 2012)

Omofobia: bocciata la proposta di legge.

Homophobia: proposal for new law rejected.

(<http://www.articolo21.org/3207/notizia/omofobia-bocciata-la-proposta-di-legge.html>, retrieved 22 February 2012)

Bureaucratic language

Legal and bureaucratic language uses passive statements to emphasise the impersonality of rules and duties (see also 42.7). Here **dovere** is used along with a dependent passive infinitive (**essere timbrato, essere comunicato**):

Il biglietto deve essere timbrato all'inizio del viaggio.

The ticket must be stamped at the beginning of the journey.

Ogni cambiamento di indirizzo dovrà essere comunicato per iscritto.

Any change of address should be reported in writing.

19.3**Situations when the passive is not used****19.3.1****Verbs with an indirect object only**

Unlike English verbs, in Italian only a transitive verb (a verb taking a direct object) can be turned into a passive in Italian, as shown below:

In English the active sentence

Anna *told* Franco to call the plumber.

can be rephrased using the passive:

Franco *was told* by Anna to call the plumber.

In Italian you can use the active form

Anna ha detto a Franco di chiamare l'idraulico.

but you cannot turn this sentence round into a passive construction. You can only turn a sentence into the passive when there is a *direct* object which can become the subject of the action. An *indirect* object (English 'to Franco, to her') cannot be turned into the grammatical subject. Verbs which take an indirect object include **telefonare**, **dire**, **raccontare**, where the action does not affect the person directly, but indirectly ('to telephone *to me*', 'to say *to him*', 'to tell *to them*').

Here are some more examples where an English passive sentence cannot be translated directly into a passive form in Italian, because the person affected is *not* the direct object. No agent is mentioned, so Italian uses the 'anonymous' *third person* verb form, for example **hanno telefonato** 'they phoned' (see 19.3.3):

Mi hanno telefonato a casa.

I was telephoned at home.

Gli hanno detto di sbrigarsi.

He was told to hurry up.

19.3.2 Verbs with a direct and indirect object

In the case of verbs such as **dare**, **dire**, **inviare**, **mandare**, **passare**, **presentare**, **prestare**, **raccontare**, **regalare**, **rubare**, **spedire**, there is often a direct object *and* an indirect object. The equivalent verbs in English have two direct objects ('to send you it', 'to lend you it', etc.).

Take as an example this sentence in English:

I've had my watch stolen.

You cannot make the person who has had his/her watch stolen the subject of the action in Italian. In this example, **mi** is an indirect object and cannot be made the subject of a passive sentence. So you have two options.

The direct object *can* become the subject of a passive verb:

Mi è stato rubato l'orologio.

(*Literally*: My watch has been stolen from me.)

Alternatively, you can use the third person plural active verb form (see 19.3.3). In informal spoken or written Italian, this is probably the more common of the two options:

Mi hanno rubato l'orologio.

(*Literally*: They have stolen my watch from me.)

The same applies to the next example. You cannot make the person (**gli**) the subject of a passive sentence. So you have two options.

English sentence:

He was offered a good job.

You can either make the direct object (**un buon posto**) the subject of a passive verb:

Gli è stato offerto un buon posto.

Or you can use the third person plural active verb form (see 19.3.3 below):

Gli hanno offerto un buon posto.

Of the two options, the use of the third person plural active verb form is probably the most common in informal spoken or written Italian.

19.3.3 Use of third person plural instead of passive

In Italian the passive construction is used very sparingly. In everyday language an Italian native speaker would almost always prefer to use the corresponding active sentence, if at all possible. Often the third person verb forms are preferred, even where the passive would technically be possible.

So instead of using the passive construction:

Sono stata invitata a una festa.

I've been invited to a party.

most Italians would prefer to use the active construction:

Mi hanno invitata a una festa.

They (some unspecified people) have invited me to a party.

The same applies to this second example.

Passive construction:

Sono state mandate dieci casse di spumante.

Ten crates of spumante were sent.

Most Italians would prefer to use the active construction:

Hanno mandato dieci casse di spumante.

They sent ten crates of spumante.

19.4 Focusing on the action using *si passivante* (passive form with *si*)

Another way of emphasising the action – rather than the subject of the action – is to use the *si passivante* (see 2.1.11), where the pronoun *si* is added to the active form to give the verb (in this case, **possono vedere**) a passive meaning. This is only possible with the third person form, singular or plural.

The *si passivante* can be used only when there is no mention of the *agent* or author of the action. This construction is very common in Italian, because of the reluctance to use the plain passive forms, especially in the more colloquial register.

Like the passive, *si passivante* can only be used with verbs taking a direct object.

So instead of the passive construction

Da Manfredonia, le isole Tremiti possono essere viste.

From Manfredonia, the Tremiti islands can be seen.

you can use the *si passivante*:

Da Manfredonia si possono vedere le isole Tremiti.

From Manfredonia, the Tremiti islands can be seen.

When the object or person affected is plural, use a plural verb:

Qui si parla italiano.

Italian is spoken here.

In Alto Adige si parlano sia l'italiano che il tedesco.

In Alto Adige both Italian and German are spoken.

In quel concessionario Lancia si vendono 25 automobili al giorno.

At that Lancia dealer, 25 cars are sold every day.

Le vendite si registrano su questo libro.

Sales are recorded in this book.

In questo club si deve mettere la cravatta.

In this club a necktie must be worn.

Al centro di Milano, si vende un appartamento di quattro vani per lo stesso prezzo di una villa.

In the centre of Milan, a four-room apartment is being sold for the same price as a villa.

Often in the ‘small ads’ a reverse combination of verb + **si** is used to give forms such as **affittasi, vendesi**. In the plural form, the final vowel is dropped before **si** is attached (**affittano > affittan**):

Vendesi appartamento di quattro vani.

Four-room apartment for sale.

Affittasi monolocale.

One-room apartment for rent.

Affittansi camere.

Rooms for rent.

19.5 *Si impersonale* (impersonal *si*)

The *si impersonale* structure (see 2.1.12), equivalent of English ‘one’, is often confused with *si passivante* (see 19.4 above). Whereas the *si passivante* is always used with a *transitive* verb, and has both singular and plural forms, the *si impersonale* is used with an *intransitive* verb and is only singular.

In genere, quando si va all’aeroporto, si parte un po’ in anticipo.

In general, when one is going to the airport, one leaves a little ahead of time.

Often the *si impersonale* is not really impersonal but is used to indicate ‘we’:

Domenica si va al mare.

On Sundays we go to the seaside.

Both past participle and adjectives, when used with *si impersonale*, are plural. The compound tenses such as *passato prossimo* take **essere**:

La sera dopo una giornata di lavoro, si è stanchi.

In the evening, after a day at work, one is tired.

Si è partiti la mattina presto, e si è arrivati la sera tardi.

We left in the morning early, and we arrived in the evening late.

19.6 Focusing on the object of the action

Italian has more freedom to change word order than English does (see also 40.6). The normal sentence order of *subject, verb, object* either does not emphasise any particular element of the sentence or else puts a little more emphasis on the subject. It does not put any emphasis on the *object*.

You can emphasise the *object* of an action simply by reversing the order of a sentence. You keep the active form of the sentence, but by placing the object in a more prominent position (before the verb), you give more emphasis to it. This is known as ‘dislocation’.

Compare the two examples below. In the second example, the pronoun (**lo**) is used as well (see 3.4.8) to mark the unusual and emphatic position of the object:

(Normal order: *subject–verb–object*)

Il direttore ha già firmato il contratto.

The manager has already signed the contract.

(Reverse order: *object–pronoun–verb–subject*)

Il contratto lo ha già firmato il direttore.

The contract has already been signed by the manager.

II

Actions affecting ourselves and others

20

Social interactions

20.1 Greeting, welcoming

Saying 'hello' and 'goodbye':

Buon giorno	used to greet people during daytime
Buona sera	used to greet people in the evening (after dark or after siesta time in the south)
Buona notte	used only when taking leave of one's companions to go to bed or to go home at the end of the evening
Ciao	a more informal and very common way to say 'hello' as well as 'goodbye'
Salve	another informal greeting, used only when meeting somebody, but less common and limited to certain regions and certain social contexts

When enquiring about someone's state of health, use the verb **stare**.

Come stai? or **Come va?** are used when addressing somebody with the familiar **tu**:

Ciao Paolo. Come stai?
Hello Paolo. How are you?

Come sta? is the formal (**Lei**) form of address (see 3.3.1 and 41.2), both for men and for women:

Buon giorno Dottoressa Serra. Come sta?
Good morning Dr Serra. How are you?

A normal reply might be one of the following (providing some brief information about one's physical state):

(Molto) bene, grazie e tu/Lei?
Very well, thank you. And you?

Bene grazie, non c'è male.
Thanks, not bad.

Insomma . . . non c'è male.
Not bad. (*but said without conviction*)

Non molto bene purtroppo.
Not very well, unfortunately.

Benvenuto means 'welcome' but is used mainly on relatively formal occasions. When welcoming someone into a room, Italians often say:

Si accomodi, signora.
Please come in, signora.
(*Literally: Make yourself comfortable.*)

Accomodati! / Accomodatevi!
Come in! (*familiar form of address, using tu/voi*)

Avanti!
Come in! (*Literally: Forward!*)

When inviting guests to sit down, you can use **accomodarsi**, as above, or else **sedersi**:

Prego, si sieda, signora.

Please take a seat, signora.

Siediti, Angela.

Sit down, Angela.

Sedetevi, ragazzi.

Sit down, boys.

When sending your greetings to someone's family, use **salutare**:

Mi saluti Sua madre.

Say 'hello' to your mother for me.

Salutami la tua mamma.

Say 'hello' to your mum for me.

You can also use **salutare** to pass on greetings from someone else:

Mio marito La saluta.

My husband sends (you) best wishes.

Giorgio ti saluta.

Giorgio sends (you) best wishes.

20.2 Introducing oneself and others

You might want to introduce yourself to someone you have just met, or introduce someone else (see also 8.1). Here are the phrases most commonly used, with approximate translations:

Permette . . . ?

Allow me . . . (*rather formal first approach, followed by your own name*)

Mi chiamo Peter Green.

My name is Peter Green

(*Literally: I am called . . .*)

Piacere, Sally Parker.

My name is Sally Parker. It's a pleasure to meet you.

Molto lieta/o.

Glad to meet you . . .

Here are two examples of typical introductions, the first rather formal (for example, a business situation), the second more informal (for example, two young students):

Dialogue 1

A Permette? . . . Vorrei presentarmi . . . mi chiamo William Hughes.

B Molto lieto . . . io sono Andrea Fulgenzi . . . sono l'agente della ditta Caroli.

A Molto lieto, ho sentito parlare spesso di Lei. Io lavoro per il Ministero degli Esteri canadese.

B Questo è il mio biglietto da visita.

A Grazie, ecco il mio . . .

A Would you mind? I'd like to introduce myself. My name's William Hughes.

B Very pleased to meet you. My name's Andrea Fulgenzi. I'm the agent for Caroli.

A Very pleased (too), I've often heard speak of you. I work for the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

B This is my card.

A Thanks, here's mine.

Dialogue 2

A Ciao, come ti chiami?

B Mi chiamo Sandra, e tu?

- A** **Io mi chiamo Luigi. Piacere!**
B **Piacere!**
 A Hi, what's your name?
 B My name's Sandra, and you?
 A My name's Luigi. Pleased (to meet you).
 B Pleased (to meet you).

When introducing a third person, you can say:

Le presento l'avvocato Negri . . .

Can I introduce Mr Negri (to you)?
(Literally: 'Lawyer Negri')

Posso presentar Le l'avvocato Negri?

Can I introduce Mr Negri (to you)?
(Literally: 'Lawyer Negri')

Ti presento il mio amico Luigi.

This is my friend Luigi.

Notice that in Italy professional titles or qualifications such as **dottore**, **professore**, **ingegnere**, **direttore** are commonly used when addressing or introducing somebody, where you would not use them in English. The same applies to **signora** 'madam' or **signore** 'sir' (see 20.9 below).

20.3 Saying goodbye

The commonest ways to say goodbye in Italian are **arrivederci** or (to friends) **ciao**.

A more formal form is **arrivederLa**, although **arrivederci** is appropriate in almost all circumstances.

Other very common familiar forms of leave-taking are:

a domani	see you tomorrow
a presto	see you soon
buona notte	good night (<i>used only when taking leave at the end of an evening</i>)
ci vediamo	see you
di nuovo	see you again (<i>less familiar</i>)

20.4 Wishes

Here is a series of expressions used as good wishes in various circumstances. These may be exchanged both when meeting and when leaving people:

auguri	best wishes (<i>used in virtually all situations, for example birthdays, Christmas, but never before exams . . . see below</i>)
buon compleanno	happy birthday
buon viaggio	bon voyage
buone vacanze	have a nice holiday
buon Natale	merry Christmas
buon Anno	happy New Year
Felice Anno Nuovo	Happy New Year (<i>on Christmas cards etc.</i>)
buona Pasqua	happy Easter
in bocca al lupo	good luck (<i>idiomatic, literally means 'in the mouth of the wolf', used before exams, tests or competitions. In such circumstances Auguri! is considered to bring bad luck. The traditional reply is Crepi! 'May the wolf die!'</i>)
buona fortuna	good luck (<i>generic</i>)
buon divertimento	enjoy yourself

salute	bless you (<i>when someone sneezes</i>)
cin cin or salute	cheers (<i>raising glasses for a toast</i>)
alla tua, alla vostra	to your health (<i>as a toast</i>)
buon appetito	enjoy your meal (<i>very common before beginning a meal, in both formal and informal situations: as a reply you can say grazie altrettanto although nowadays most people just repeat buon appetito instead</i>)

20.5 Expressing and receiving thanks, appreciation

Saying thank you:

grazie	thanks
molte grazie	many thanks
grazie mille	many thanks

Informal ('tu' form):

ti ringrazio Paola (I) thank you, Paola

Formal ('Lei' form):

La ringrazio, Professore (I) thank you (*Literally: 'teacher'*)

Receiving thanks:

prego	you are welcome
di niente	don't mention it
non c'è di che	don't mention it
per carità, non è nulla	please, it's nothing

Expressing a more intense appreciation:

Grazie, molto gentile.

Thank you, very kind of you.

Molto gentile da parte Sua.

How kind of you.

La ringrazio molto per la Sua ospitalità.

Thank you very much indeed for your hospitality.

Le sono molto grata/o per l'assistenza che ho ricevuto.

I am very grateful to you for the assistance I received.

Ho apprezzato molto il Suo regalo.

I much appreciated your present.

Ho gradito molto i Suoi fiori.

I very much appreciated your flowers.

Ancora mille grazie. Lei è stata/o veramente gentile.

Thank you again. You have been extremely kind.

20.6 Compliments and congratulations

Here are some expressions that can be used to convey your compliments to somebody in various circumstances.

Bravo/a!

Well done! (*friendly and informal*)

Complimenti!

Congratulations!

Complimenti per la laurea!

Congratulations on your degree!

Congratulazioni!

Congratulations! (*more formal*)

Felicitazioni per il vostro matrimonio / anniversario.

Congratulations on your marriage / anniversary.

Che bello!

How beautiful!

Che bel vestito!

What a nice dress!

Che begli occhi che hai!

What beautiful eyes you have!

Come sei elegante!

How elegant you are!

Le sta molto bene questa giacca.

This jacket looks really good on you.

Come parli bene l'italiano!

How good your Italian is!

20.7 Making and accepting excuses, apologies

The following examples show the most usual ways to say 'excuse me' or 'sorry' in Italian.

Speaking formally, using the **Lei** form of address:

Mi scusi Excuse me

Scusi Excuse me

Chiedo scusa I apologise

La prego di scusarmi.

I beg your pardon.

La prego di accettare le mie scuse. (*more formal*)

I hope you will accept my apologies.

Sono *spiacente* che non ci sia abbastanza caffè per tutti. (*very formal*)

I regret there is not enough coffee for everybody.

Speaking informally, using the **tu** form of address:

Scusami Excuse me

Mi dispiace / Mi spiace I'm sorry

Spiacente I'm sorry (*formal*)

To accept someone's apologies, you may say:

Per carità You don't need to apologise (*Literally: For pity's sake . . .*)

Non si preoccupi Don't worry

Non fa niente It doesn't matter

Prego It's all right

20.8 Expressing commiseration, sympathy

To express sympathy for someone's death, whether speaking or in writing, you can use **condoglianze** 'condolences':

Desidero esprimere le mie condoglianze per la perdita di Suo marito.

I wish to express my sympathy for the loss of your husband.

Some common expressions of commiseration or regret are the following:

(Che) peccato!

What a pity! It's a shame!

Peccato che lei sia arrivata in ritardo.

It's a pity that she arrived late.

È un peccato che non abbiate visto quel film.

It's a pity you haven't seen that film.

Poveretto/a!

Poor him/her!

► See also 10.6.2.

Povero Mario!

Poor Mario!

Che pena!

What a shame!

Poveretti, mi fanno pena!

Poor things. I feel sorry for them.

Mi dispiace che abbiate avuto questo brutto incidente.

I'm sorry you had this bad accident.

20.9 Using titles, salutations

As mentioned above (see 20.2), in Italy professional titles and qualifications are commonly used when addressing somebody, either speaking or in writing. Failing to do so, or using the wrong title, may result in embarrassment or offence.

Here we present the titles most commonly used. (See 42.2.3 for details of abbreviations and other conventional forms used in correspondence.) The titles shown below are general forms of address used when the person addressed has no special title, but also when you don't know whether he/she has other titles or not. Italians would tactfully try to find out whether any other title is appropriate, before addressing somebody with **Signor(e)**. A title may be used on its own or followed by the person's surname, in which case the final **-e** is dropped from the masculine form, for example **Signore** is abbreviated to **Signor** (**Signor Rossi**):

Signore	Mister
Signora	Madam
Signorina	Miss (<i>if unmarried</i>)

The final **-e** is also dropped before a surname with many of the following titles (as indicated by the brackets):

Dottor(e)	Doctor (<i>used both for medical doctor and for anybody with a university degree, or when there is not a more specific professional title</i>)
Dottoressa	Doctor (<i>female equivalent of above</i>)
Professor(e)	Professor (<i>used for male university and secondary school teacher</i>)
Professoressa	Professor (<i>female equivalent of above</i>)
Avvocato	Lawyer, solicitor (Avvocata exists but see note below)
Ingegnere(e)	Engineer (<i>only if holding a university degree</i>)
Ragioniere(e)	Accountant
Architetto	Architect
Maestro	Master (<i>used for all male artists and conductors; in southern Italy it is also used for highly skilled manual labourers and artisans</i>)

Onorevole	Member of Parliament
Ministro	Minister
Padre	Father (<i>for priest</i>)
Madre / Sorella	Mother / Sister (<i>for nun</i>)
Monsignor(e)	Monsignor (<i>for high-ranking Catholic priest</i>)

Generally used on its own, not with a surname, is:

Direttore	Director, manager (<i>or other person high up in a company</i>)
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In some professions (such as military or diplomatic), the specific title indicating the rank should be used:

Generale	General
Capitano	Captain
Ambasciatore	Ambassador

In some cases, but not always, there are both masculine and feminine forms. For a list of the most common titles or professions with distinct feminine equivalents (for example **professoressa**, **dottoressa**), see 1.2.2 and 8.3.3. Where there is no feminine form, women should be addressed with the same title as their male counterparts: **Ingegnere Maggioni**, **Avvocato Parma**.

In some cases the feminine form exists but follows the rather old-fashioned tradition of indicating the *wife* of the professional person: **ambasciatrice** ‘the ambassador’s wife’, **presidentessa** ‘the president’s wife’. In these cases, it is common practice not to use the feminine form but to use instead the masculine form to indicate women working in this profession as well:

La presidente della Regione è stata intervistata dal giornale La Repubblica.

The President of the Region was interviewed by the newspaper La Repubblica.

Generally speaking, when there is a choice of forms, the use of the masculine form is perceived as putting less emphasis on the gender aspect and more on the profession of the person, and is therefore seen as less sexist.

The masculine form is used for all those professions for which there is no commonly used feminine form, for example **il ministro** ‘minister’:

Anna Maria Cancellieri è stata nominata ministro degli Interni.

Anna Maria Cancellieri was nominated Minister of the Interior.

Some feminine titles have been created in reaction to the increase of women entering what were traditionally male-only jobs. But use of titles such as **poliziotta** ‘policewoman’, **avvocatessa** ‘female lawyer’, **soldatessa**, ‘female soldier’ and **vigilessa** ‘female traffic warden’ is perceived as ironic and patronising (see 1.2.2 and 8.3.3).

21

Getting other people to do things

21.1 Introduction

Possibly the most important transactional function in any language is to get people to do things for you. Indeed after ‘mamma’, one of the first words some Italian children learn is **Dammi!** ‘Give me!’ There are various ways of getting others to do things, ranging from a polite request or question to an order or command using an *imperative* verb form (see 2.2.21). The question form with **tu** may be used when asking your friend to pass the salt (**Mi passi il sale?** ‘Can you pass me the salt?’) while the imperative form with **Lei** may be used for something as simple as calling the waiter in the restaurant or bar (**Senta! Mi porti il conto!** ‘Listen! Bring me the bill!’).

21.2 Giving orders and commands

The imperative can take the familiar **tu** form or the more formal **Lei** form. Examples are shown below along with the alternative option of using the indicative in a question form. All the imperative forms of regular verbs and of the common irregular verbs **andare, dare, dire, fare, stare** are shown in 2.2.21.

21.2.1 Lei

To give an order to someone you don’t know, or don’t know well, use the **Lei** form of the **imperative**. Here are some imperative forms you may want to use regularly or just to recognise:

Senta! Excuse me! (<i>Literally</i> : Listen!)	Si accomodi! Come in / make yourself comfortable!
---	---

Scusi! Excuse me!	Mi dia il passaporto, signora. Give me your passport, madam.
-----------------------------	--

If you prefer to make a request rather than give a command, you can use the *present indicative*, or even the verb **volere** ‘to wish to’:

Mi dà il passaporto, signora? Would you give me your passport, madam?	Vuole accomodarsi, signora? Would you like to sit down, madam?
--	--

You can also make a polite request using the phrase **Le dispiace . . . ?** (see 22.4.3) followed by a verb infinitive:

Le dispiace aprire la finestra?
Would you mind opening the window?

21.2.2 Tu

To give a command or instruction to someone you are on familiar terms with, use the **tu** form of the *imperative*:

Mangia!

Eat up!

Passami il pane!

Pass me the bread!

Dagli un colpo di telefono!

Give him a call!

Vieni a casa mia alle 6.00.

Come to my house at 6 o'clock.

Siediti qui accanto a me.

Sit here next to me.

As seen already, some speakers may prefer to use the less abrupt *indicative* form of the verb. This means making a request rather than giving an order. The imperative form is shown in brackets:

Mangi un altro po' di dolce?

Would you eat another little bit of cake?

(Mangia un altro po' di dolce!)

(Eat another bit of cake!)

Mi passi il pane, per favore?

Would you pass me the bread?

(Passami il pane!)

(Pass me the bread!)

Mi dai un passaggio?

Would you give me a lift?

(Dammi un passaggio!)

(Give me a lift!)

The one-syllable imperatives (see 2.2.21) of the verbs **andare**, **dare**, **dire**, **fare**, **stare** (**va'**, **da'**, **di'**, **fa'**, **sta'**) can sound particularly abrupt:

Da' retta a me.

Listen to me.

Fa' come vuoi.

Do as you please.

Some speakers therefore prefer to use a straightforward statement or question:

Dai retta a me.

You listen to me.

Fai come vuoi.

You do as you please.

Even with friends, you can make a request politely using **ti dispiace . . .** (see 22.4.3):

Ti dispiace prestarmi la giacca da sci?

Would you mind lending me your ski jacket?

21.2.3 Voi

To give a command or instruction to more than one person, use the **voi** form of the imperative. The **voi** form is the imperative form most frequently used in recipes:

Venite a cena da me sabato prossimo!

Come to dinner at my house next Saturday!

Tagliate i pomodori a pezzi piccoli.

Cut the tomatoes into small pieces.

21.2.4 Loro

Loro is a polite form of 'you' plural, corresponding to the singular **Lei**. **Loro** is however far less common than **Lei**, being used mainly by waiters or hotel staff to address customers. **Loro**, like **Lei** above, takes a third person verb form:

Si accomodino, signore.

Make yourselves comfortable, ladies.

Vengano di qui, signori.

Come this way, ladies and gentlemen.

21.2.5 Noi

When you are personally involved in the action, you use a proposal or exhortation rather than a command. The **noi** form of the imperative is identical to the regular present indicative form:

Controlliamo questi conti adesso.

Let's have a look at these accounts now.

Usciamo.

Let's go out.

21.3 Making negative requests and commands

All the imperative forms shown in 21.2 can also be expressed in a negative form, to tell someone *not* to do something (see also 2.2.22):

Lei

Non si preoccupi!

Don't worry!

tu

Non fumare tanto, Walter.

Don't smoke so much, Walter.

voi

Non andate lontano, ragazzi.

Don't go far away, kids.

Loro

Non si stanchino, signorine.

Don't get tired, ladies.

noi

Non usciamo stasera, restiamo a casa.

Let's not go out tonight, let's stay in.

When it comes to the present *indicative* forms, adding **non** to your request doesn't make any real difference to the meaning, except to sound more persuasive:

Non mi porti a cena?

Aren't you taking me to dinner?

Non andiamo al cinema?

Aren't we going to the cinema?

21.4 Written instructions and recipes

21.4.1 Instructions

Everyone has to cope with written instructions (nowadays often online) varying from recipes to tourist guidebooks, instructions for household or other appliances, getting money out of an ATM or cashpoint or taking medicine. Being addressed to the non-specialist reader, these kinds of instructions are usually very simple in structure, with a series of short sentences (sometimes numbered), and simplified terminology often accompanied by illustrations.

Written instructions often use the infinitive form of the verb (see 2.2.1), rather than one of the imperative forms shown above, to convey a sense of impersonality both as regards the source (often an unnamed authority or expert) and as regards the target reader (the general public). Here is one example which uses the infinitive:

Al Bancomat

- 1 **Inserire la tessera**
- 2 **Digitare il codice personale**
- 3 **Digitare PRELIEVO**
- 4 **Scegliere la cifra desiderata**
- 5 **Premere CONFERMA**
- 6 **Ritirare il denaro**
- 7 **Ritirare la tessera**

At the cashpoint (ATM)

- 1 Insert your card
- 2 Key in your PIN
- 3 Press 'WITHDRAWAL'

- 4 Select the amount required
- 5 Press 'CONFIRM'
- 6 Take your money
- 7 Retrieve your card

Here is a second example, using the infinitive:

ANNAFFIARE LE PIANTE

Quando è possibile usare acqua piovana.

In primavera e in autunno annaffiare al mattino.

In inverno annaffiare nel tardo mattino.

Non usare acqua eccessivamente fredda.

Dare sempre l'acqua gradualmente.

Assicurarsi che l'acqua non sia inquinata da sostanze nocive.

WATERING PLANTS

Whenever possible, use rainwater.

In spring and autumn, water in the mornings.

In winter, water late morning.

Do not use excessively cold water.

Always give water gradually.

Ensure that the water is not contaminated by harmful substances.

In this third example, the instructions for using a manual pasta-making machine also use the infinitive:

Prima di utilizzare la macchina per la prima volta, pulirla perfettamente con un panno asciutto. Non usare acqua. Fissare la macchina al tavolo. Fare un impasto di una certa consistenza. Introdurre dei pezzi d'impasto tra i rulli e girare lentamente la manovella.

Before using the machine for the first time, clean it thoroughly with a dry cloth. Do not use water. Fix the machine to the table. Make a pasta dough of suitable consistency. Introduce pieces of pasta dough between the rollers and turn the handle slowly.

21.4.2 Recipes

For recipes too, instructions are often given using the infinitive, as in example A below. But the same recipe can be given using verbs in the **voi** imperative form (see 21.2.3 above) in order to express a more informal and direct relationship with the reader, as in example B below. The translation into English is exactly the same for both.

La Ricetta di Franco (A)

Pasta e fagioli

(per 4 persone)

Rosolare in 3 cucchiaini di olio extra-vergine d'oliva mezza cipolla tritata finemente ed aggiungere 300 grammi di fagioli cannellini.

Bagnare con un litro di brodo, aggiungere due patate a pezzetti e lasciare cuocere per 15 minuti.

Quindi cuocere 200 gr. di pasta mista nella zuppa e aggiustare di sale e pepe.

In un pentolino a parte friggere una noce di burro con un rametto di rosmarino e uno spicchio d'aglio.

Prima della fine della cottura della pasta, unire alla zuppa il burro, dopo averlo filtrato, e 2 pomodori pelati, tagliati a pezzetti.

Buon appetito!

La Ricetta di Franco (B)

Pasta e fagioli

(per 4 persone)

Rosolate in 3 cucchiaini di olio extra-vergine d'oliva mezza cipolla tritata finemente ed aggiungete 300 grammi di fagioli cannellini.

Bagnate con un litro di brodo, aggiungete due patate a pezzetti e lasciate cuocere per 15 minuti.

Quindi cuocete 200 gr. di pasta mista nella zuppa e aggiustate di sale e pepe.

In un pentolino a parte friggete una noce di burro con un rametto di rosmarino e uno spicchio d'aglio.

Prima della fine della cottura della pasta, unite alla zuppa il burro, dopo averlo filtrato, e 2 pomodori pelati, tagliati a pezzetti.

Buon appetito!

FRANCO'S RECIPE

Pasta and bean soup

(for 4 people)

Sauté in 3 tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil half an onion finely chopped and add 300 grams of cannellini beans.

Add a litre of stock and two potatoes cut in pieces and leave to cook for 15 minutes.

Then cook 200 grams of mixed pasta in the soup and adjust seasoning if necessary.

In a small separate pan, fry a knob of butter with a sprig of rosemary and a clove of garlic in it.

Before the pasta has finished cooking, add the butter, after straining it, to the soup, along with two peeled tomatoes cut in pieces.

Bon appetit!

21.4.3 Informal instructions

When giving instructions in an informal context (for example, to friends) the **tu** form of address is used (see 8.2). In the example below, a guidebook to Pozzuoli written in an informal style uses the **tu** form of imperative (see 21.2.2 above).

Visita alla Solfatara di Pozzuoli

Parcheggia la macchina nel piazzale davanti all'ingresso. Dopo aver comprato il biglietto attraversa il campeggio e entra nell'area del cratere. Attraversalo[†] tutto lungo il diametro centrale e poi fa[†] un giro lungo il margine esterno. Potrai osservare accuratamente lo spettacolo infernale delle fumarole.

Visit to the Solfatara in Pozzuoli

Park the car in the area in front of the entrance. After buying a ticket, cross the car park and go in to the crater area. Walk all the way across the central part and then walk around the outside edge of it. You will be able to see the fiery spectacle of the 'fumarole' (smoke emissions).

NOTE

[†] Note the forms of the imperative of **fare** (see 2.2.21). Note too how the unstressed pronoun **lo** is attached to the **tu** imperative form **attraversa + lo** (see 3.4.7).

21.5 Asking someone to do something

An alternative to the imperative forms shown above is a strongly worded request (one that you expect to be met) using a verb such as **chiedere**, **volere**.

21.5.1 Chiedere with di

Chiedere can be linked to the action (what someone is being asked to do) by **di** followed by a verb in the infinitive (see also 4.4.3). The person who is being asked is indicated by a noun introduced by **a** (**agli student italiani**) or by an indirect object pronoun (**Le**) (see also 3.4.2):

Bisogna chiedere agli studenti italiani di stare un po' più zitti.

We have to ask the Italian students to keep a little quieter.

Le chiedo di rispettare l'orario di lavoro.

I ask you to respect working hours.

21.5.2 Chiedere with *che*

Chiedere can also be followed by **che** and a dependent clause using the subjunctive (see 2.2.14). The people being asked to do something (**i dipendenti**) become the subject of this dependent clause (**che i dipendenti rispettino**):

Chiedo soltanto *che i dipendenti rispettino l'orario di lavoro.*
I only ask that the employees respect the working hours.

21.5.3 Volere with *che*

Volere, like **chiedere**, can also be followed by **che** and the subjunctive. The present indicative **voglio** is used to make a firm request, while the present conditional **vorrei** sounds rather more polite. The subjunctive tense used depends on which tense of **volere** is used in the first part of the sentence (see also 30.5 and Appendix IV):

Voglio *che tu faccia uno sforzo per recuperare il tempo perso.*
I want you to make an effort to recover the time lost.

Vorrei *che tu facessi uno sforzo per recuperare il tempo perso.*
I would like you to make an effort to recover the time lost.

21.6 Giving an order using 'command' verbs

More explicit command forms such as **comandare**, **ordinare**, as well as **dire**, can also be used, as an alternative to the imperative forms or the verbs shown above. Most take an indirect object, either a noun governed by **a**, as in the first example below, or an indirect object pronoun, as in the other two examples (see also 3.4.2), and are followed by **di** and the verb infinitive (see 21.5.1 above):

I carabinieri *hanno comandato ai mafiosi di uscire dalla casa.*
The police ordered the Mafia men to come out from the house.

La padrona di casa *ci ha ordinato di pulire le scale.*
The landlady ordered us to clean the stairs.

Gli *ho detto di sbrigarsi.*
I told him to hurry up.

21.7 Far fare, lasciar fare

When asking someone to *do* something, you can also use the verb **fare** 'to make' with a verb infinitive expressing the action you are making the person carry out. The person carrying out the action becomes the direct *or* indirect object, expressed by a noun or pronoun (see 3.4.1–2).

When there is *no other object* in the sentence, the noun or pronoun is the direct object:

Faccio *venire Isabella.*
I'll call Isabella.

Abbiamo bisogno di Isabella. *La faccio venire.*
We need Isabella. I'll have her come.

Ha fatto entrare il poliziotto.
He let the policeman in.

In the example below, the second verb (**riparare**) already has a *direct* object (**il computer**), so the person (whether noun or pronoun) who is being made to do something (**il fidanzato di Giovanna**) becomes the *indirect* object:

Ho fatto riparare il computer al fidanzato di Giovanna.
I got Giovanna's boyfriend to repair the computer.

Gli ho fatto riparare il computer.

I got him to repair the computer.

Similarly, to allow someone to do something is expressed by **lasciar(e)** and a verb infinitive, with the person as direct object:

Sono tornati gli operai. Li lascio entrare?

The workmen are back. Shall I let them in?

Non lo lascia parlare.

She doesn't let him speak.

In the first example below, when there is a second direct object (**quel lavoro**) the person being asked to carry out the action (**mio marito**) becomes the *indirect* object, in the same way as it did with **fare** (above). Both for **fare** and **lasciare**, the indirect pronoun can be either stressed **a lui** (see 3.3.2) or unstressed **gli** (see 3.4.2):

Ho lasciato fare quel lavoro a mio marito.

Ho lasciato fare quel lavoro a lui.

Gli ho lasciato fare quel lavoro.

I let him do that job.

Il capo ha fatto scrivere la relazione a me.

Il capo mi ha fatto scrivere la relazione.

The boss got me to write the report.

21.8 Using persuasion

Other ways of getting something done include invitation, encouragement, begging, and gentle persuasion.

21.8.1 Using *invitare* 'to invite', *incoraggiare* 'to encourage'

These verbs use a direct object (person or pronoun), and are followed by a verb in the infinitive, linked by **a** (see 4.4.1):

Il preside invitò i ragazzi a riflettere sulle loro azioni.

The headmaster invited the boys to reflect on their actions.

Il mio supervisore mi ha incoraggiato a finire la mia tesi.

My supervisor encouraged me to finish my thesis.

21.8.2 Using *persuadere*, *convincere* 'to persuade'

These verbs also use a direct object (person or pronoun), and are followed by a verb in the infinitive, introduced by **a**:

La mia amica cerca di persuadermi a comprare una macchina sportiva.

My friend is trying to persuade me to buy a sports car.

Convincerò Donatella a cambiare idea.

I'll persuade Donatella to change her mind.

21.8.3 Using *pregare* 'to beg'

Pregare uses a direct object (person or pronoun) and is followed by a verb in the infinitive, linked to it by **di**:

Il direttore mi pregò di sedermi.

The manager begged me to sit down.

Mia madre ha pregato mia sorella di rimanere ferma.

My mother begged my sister to stay still.

Signora, La prego di ricordarsi della patente.

Signora, please remember your driving licence.

21.9 Monologo

And finally, since the **tu** and **voi** imperative verb forms (see 21.2.2, 21.2.3 above) are quite commonly used in the relationship between adults and children, we reproduce two typical, if somewhat exaggerated, ‘conversations’ between a mother and a group of children (adapted from *Il libronuovo* by B. Reggiani and A. Salvatore, IGDA, Novara). The first takes place on the beach, in summer, and the second, also reproduced in Chapter 40 as an example of informal communication, takes place in the winter, when the children are getting ready for school. The imperative forms are in *italic*, to help you identify them:

Mia moglie, d’estate, è così:

Valentina, *spogliati*. Franco *non buttarti* in acqua vestito. Roberta *lascia stare* il secchiello e *togliti* le scarpe. Roberta *sta’ ferma*, Franco dov’è? Franco *vieni* a spogliarti, Valentina *metti* il costumino a Lorenzo, Franco dov’è? Roberta, *vieni* qui, il bagno si fa più tardi! Franco, dov’è Franco? Valentina *acchiappa* Roberta che si butta in acqua! Franco, *perché* hai fatto il bagno? Lorenzino di mamma sua, *non si mangia* la sabbietta, brutta la sabbietta! Franco, *non vedo* più Franco! Franco! *Torna indietro*, *senno’ niente gelato*! Valentina *corri* a prendere Franco. Roberta *non ti muovere*! Franco, dov’è Franco?

This is my wife, in the summer:

Valentina, get undressed. Franco, don’t jump in the water with your clothes on. Roberta, leave the bucket alone and get your shoes off. Roberta keep still, where’s Franco? Franco come and get undressed, Valentina, put Lorenzo’s costume on, where’s Franco? Roberta, come here, you can go swimming later! Franco, where’s Franco? Valentina grab hold of Roberta, she’s jumping in the water! Franco, why did you go swimming now? Lorenzino, mummy’s treasure, you mustn’t eat the sand, nasty sand! Franco, I can’t see Franco any more! Franco! Come back, otherwise no ice cream! Valentina run and get Franco. Roberta don’t move! Franco, where’s Franco?

D’inverno, invece, è così:

Valentina, *svegliati*, Roberta *svegliati* . . . Franco *salta giù* dal letto. Ragazzi sono le sette e cinque! Franco, *presto, vai* a fare la doccia. Valentina *vestiti*. Sono le sette e dieci! Ragazzi, il *caffelatte* è pronto! Franco hai fatto la doccia? *Asciuga* per terra. Roberta, *perché* piangi? Valentina, avanti, *falle* mettere la gonna gialla. Sono le sette e un quarto! Insomma, *venite o no* a prendere il *caffelatte*? *Si sta freddando tutto*! Roberta *se piangi ancora vengo di là e ti ammazzo*! Francooooooooo! *Dov’è* Franco? Roberta *non piangere, vatti* a pettinare invece. Sono le sette e mezzo. Perderete l’autobus. *Ma dimmi tu che razza di figli!*

This is my wife, in the winter:

Valentina, wake up, Roberta wake up . . . Franco get out of bed. Kids, it’s five past seven! Franco, quick, go and have a shower. Valentina get dressed. It’s ten past seven! Kids, your *caffelatte* is ready! Franco, have you had a shower? Dry the floor. Roberta, why are you crying? Valentina, come on, let her put your yellow skirt on. It’s quarter past seven! Come on, are you coming to drink this *caffelatte* or not? It’s all getting cold! Roberta if you keep on crying, I’ll come over there and kill you! Francoooooooooo! Where’s Franco? Roberta don’t cry, go and comb your hair, instead of crying. It’s half past seven. You’ll miss the bus. Honestly, what sort of kids have I got!

22

Permission and possibility

In English, the verb ‘can’ may convey many different meanings, for example: possibility, permission, ability or opportunity. A similar function is expressed in Italian by the verb **potere**, seen below in the examples, but there are many other ways of expressing possibility, also illustrated below.

22.1 Asking or granting permission

22.1.1 Using *potere*

Posso andare in bagno?

Can I go to the bathroom?

Potete andare a giocare fuori, bambini.

You can go and play outside, kids.

Puoi lasciare qui la giacca, se vuoi.

You can leave your jacket here, if you want.

The examples illustrated above use the *present indicative* of **potere** ‘to be able to’ (see 2.2.3), but to formulate a request more politely, the *present conditional* (see 2.2.12) is often used:

Potrei andare in bagno?

Could I go to the bathroom?

Potrebbe accompagnarmi in ufficio, signora?

Could you please come with me to my office, signora?

22.1.2 Using *è possibile*

Potere can often be replaced by the impersonal expression **è possibile** followed immediately (without prepositions such as **di** or **a**) by a verb in the infinitive (see 32.4):

È possibile lasciare qui la giacca?

Is it possible to leave one’s jacket here?

È possibile andare in bagno?

Is it possible to use the bathroom?

22.1.3 Using *permettere*

Another way of asking or granting (*someone*) permission (*to do something*) is to use the verb **permettere a (qualcuno) di (fare qualcosa)**. The person being allowed to do something – or not – is the indirect object of the verb **permettere** while the second verb, always in the infinitive, expresses what the person is allowed to do (or not), and is linked to **permettere** by the preposition **di**.

La legge non ci permette di importare i prodotti direttamente dalla Cina.

The law does not allow us to import the products directly from China.

I genitori non permettono a Marina di andare in vacanza con le amiche.
Her parents won't let Marina go on holiday with her friends.

22.1.4 Granting permission, using *pure*

Pure, best translated by the English expression 'by all means', can be added to an imperative to imply not only permission but encouragement to do something:

Posso dire qualcosa? **Dica *pure*!**
Can I say something? Go ahead, (speak) by all means.

Faccia *pure*!
Go ahead, do it! (Be my guest.)

Prego! also invites someone to do just what they have requested:

Posso andare in bagno? ***Prego, si accomodi.***
May I use the bathroom? Please, go ahead.

22.1.5 Asking permission *not* to do something

If you *don't* want to do something, use the verb **dovere** and the intensifier **proprio**:

Devo proprio andare a letto?
Do I really have to go to bed?

22.2 Denying permission

22.2.1 Using *vietare* or *proibire*

Denying someone permission to do something uses a similar grammatical construction to **permettere** (see 22.1.3): a verb such as **vietare** or **proibire** combined with a person (expressed by either noun or pronoun as indirect object) and followed by a verb in the infinitive, linked by **di**:

La polizia ha vietato ai non residenti di parcheggiare in questa strada.
The police have banned non-residents from parking in this street.

Gli ho proibito di firmare le lettere per conto mio.
I have forbidden him to sign letters on my behalf.

I bambini mi hanno proibito di mangiare il loro cioccolato.
The children have forbidden me to eat their chocolate.

22.3 Speaking about the ability or opportunity to do something

22.3.1 Using *potere*

Potere expresses the ability or the opportunity to do something:

Puoi arrivare per le sette?
Can you arrive by 7 pm?

Potete vedere ancora oggi la grotta dove viveva il santo.
You can still see the cave where the saint lived.

Sometimes the verb **potere** is omitted, when the English 'can' means 'to be able to', especially when used with verbs of 'seeing, hearing, feeling':

Senti la musica?
Can you hear the music?

Non sento niente.
I can't hear anything.

Ci vedi?

Can you see?

(*Ci* is often used with verbs such as **sentire**, **vedere** but has no specific meaning.)

22.3.2 Using *è possibile*

Potere can be replaced by the impersonal expression **è possibile** (see 32.4):

È possibile prendere l'autobus per andare all'aeroporto?

Is it possible to get the bus to go to the airport?

A Malta, è possibile vedere le catacombe di San Paolo.

In Malta, it is possible to see the catacombs of Saint Paul.

22.3.3 Using *sapere*

The English 'can, to be able to' can very often be expressed in Italian by the verb **sapere** (see **Appendix III**), which does not express permission or possibility, but rather *knowledge* or *ability* to do something, referring to a learnt skill:

Sai nuotare?

Can you swim? (Do you know how to swim?)

Il direttore non sa parlare inglese, e quindi si deve rivolgere all'interprete.

The manager can't speak English, and so he has to rely on the interpreter.

The choice of **sapere** rather than **potere** changes the meaning of a phrase entirely:

Sai fare questo esercizio?

Do you know how to do this exercise? (i.e. do you have the correct skills to do it?)

Puoi fare questo esercizio?

Can you do this exercise? (i.e. do you have the time or energy to do it?)

22.3.4 Using *essere in grado di*

The expression **essere in grado di** has the meaning 'to be up to' or 'to be fit to':

Non è in grado di gestire l'ufficio da solo.

He's not up to managing the office on his own.

Non eravamo in grado di prendere una tale decisione.

We weren't able to take a decision of this kind.

22.4 Making a request

22.4.1 Using *potere*

Either the present indicative (see 2.2.3) or the present conditional (see 2.2.12) of **potere** can be used to make a request:

Può indicarmi la fermata del tram?

Can you show me the tram stop?

Potrebbe aiutarmi a portare giù i bagagli, per favore?

Could you help me to get the luggage down, please?

22.4.2 Using *si può, è possibile*

A more formal or general request, not necessarily referring to one specific person, is sometimes expressed using the impersonal form **si può** 'one can' / 'can one?' or again **è possibile**:

Si può prenotare?

Can one book?

Si può partire adesso?

Can one (we) go now?

È possibile prenotare?

Is it possible to book?

È possibile telefonare in Inghilterra?

Is it possible to phone England?

22.4.3 Using *Le/ti/vi dispiace*

A more formal or polite request can be expressed by the verb forms **dispiace** or **dispiacerebbe** followed either by **se** and a finite verb or by a verb infinitive (see 21.2.1–2). The person to whom you are making the request is indicated by the appropriate indirect pronoun: **ti** (informal ‘you’), **Le** (formal ‘you’) or **vi** (plural ‘you’).

Le dispiace se fumo?

Do you mind if I smoke?

Le dispiacerebbe aprire la finestra?

Would you mind opening the window?

Ti dispiace se vado via un po’ prima?

Do you mind if I leave a little earlier?

Ti dispiace darmi una mano?

Would you mind giving me a hand?

Vi dispiace aspettare cinque minuti?

Would you mind waiting five minutes?

23

Expressing need, obligation or desire

23.1 Introduction

Sometimes in Italian, as in other languages, there is little difference between a desire, expressed by the verb **volere**, and a need, expressed by the phrase **aver bisogno di** or a similar expression:

Ho bisogno di un caffè. / Voglio un caffè.

I need a coffee. / I want a coffee.

23.2 Expressing wants

23.2.1 Using *volere*

The verb **volere** can be used both with a noun (something you want) and with a verb (something you want to do), in its role as an auxiliary verb (see 2.1.7):

Gli operai vogliono un aumento di stipendio.

The workmen want a wage increase.

Volete parlare del contratto?

Do you want to talk about the contract?

Vuoi andare a cena?

Do you want to go to dinner?

Vuoi una mano?

Do you want a hand?

Using the *present indicative* form of **volere** can sometimes sound rather demanding, or even discourteous, especially in the first person 'I':

Voglio un francobollo.

I want a stamp.

Il direttore vuole parlarLe.

The manager wants to speak to you.

A request or wish can be expressed more politely by using the *present conditional* (see 2.2.12) rather than the present indicative of **volere**:

Vorrei due biglietti per stasera, per favore.

I would like two tickets for tonight, please.

La signora Giannini vorrebbe parlarLe.

Signora Giannini would like to speak to you.

Vorrei un appuntamento per domani.

I would like an appointment for tomorrow.

It is also possible to use the *imperfect indicative* **volevo** to express a polite request (see 2.2.4):

Volevo duecento grammi di prosciutto.

I would like two hundred grams of ham. (*Literally*: ‘I wanted’)

23.2.2 Using *aver voglia di*

Another way of expressing ‘want’ is the phrase **aver voglia di**, used either with a *verb* or a *noun*:

Gli studenti avevano voglia di andare a casa.

The students wanted to go home.

Non ha voglia di scherzare.

He’s not in the mood for joking.

Ho voglia di un gelato.

I fancy an ice-cream.

23.2.3 Using *mi va*

A very idiomatic way of saying what one wants to do or feels like doing is to use the verb **andare** (see 2.2.3) and an indirect pronoun (see 3.4.2), either with a *noun* or with **di** and a *verb infinitive*:

Ti va un gelato?

Do you fancy an ice-cream?

Non mi vanno queste domande.

I don’t like these questions.

Ti va di mangiare la pizza?

Do you feel like (having) a pizza?

Non gli andava di seguire le mie istruzioni.

He didn’t want to follow my instructions.

23.2.4 Using *me la sento (sentirsela)*

Another idiomatic way to say what you feel like doing is **sentirsela** (the verb **sentire**, a reflexive pronoun and the pronoun **la**). Although the reflexive pronoun changes, the **la** element is invariable. **Sentirsela** can also be linked to a verb infinitive by **di**:

Faccio i compiti domani. Non me la sento stasera.

I’ll do my homework tomorrow. I don’t feel like it tonight.

Te la senti di uscire stasera?

Do you feel like going out tonight?

23.2.5 Making a request in a shop

To request something in a shop or restaurant, use either the present conditional form **Vorrei** (see 23.2.1) or the question form **Mi dà . . . ?** (see 2.2.3) ‘Please would you give me . . . ?’ You can also use an imperative form **Mi dia** ‘Give me’ (see 2.2.21) but this might sound a little demanding.

Mi dà dieci biglietti per l’autobus, per favore?

Would you give me ten bus tickets, please?

23.3 Expressing needs

23.3.1 Using *bisogna*

The verb **bisogna** ‘it is necessary’ can be followed by a verb infinitive, or by **che** and subjunctive, but *not* by a noun. **Bisogna** is generally used only in the 3rd person singular and confined to

the simple tenses: *present indicative* (**bisogna**), *imperfect indicative* (**bisognava**), *future* (**bisognerà**) and *present conditional* (**bisognerebbe**):

Bisogna farlo subito.

It needs to be done straightaway.

(Literally: It is necessary to do it straightaway.)

Bisognava vedere qual era la soluzione migliore.

We had to see what the best solution was.

Bisognerebbe che loro capissero la situazione.

They would have to understand the situation.

(Literally: It would be necessary for them to understand the situation.)

23.3.2 Using *aver bisogno di*

The phrase **aver bisogno di** 'to have need of' can be used with either a noun or a verb infinitive, to express what you need or what you need to do:

Ho bisogno di tempo per studiare.

I need time to study.

Avete bisogno di me?

Do you need me?

Avevamo bisogno di riposare.

We needed to rest.

23.3.3 Using *c'è bisogno*

The phrase **c'è bisogno di** (literally: 'there is need of') can be followed by a noun (object or person), a verb infinitive linked by **di**, or **che** + subjunctive:

Ci sarà bisogno di un interprete. Il direttore parla solo italiano.

We will need an interpreter. The director only speaks Italian.

Non c'era bisogno di spiegare. Avevamo già capito.

There wasn't any need to explain. We had already understood.

Non c'è bisogno che Lei mi accompagni. Penso di trovare l'ufficio senza problemi.

There's no need for you to accompany me. I think I can find the office without any problem.

23.3.4 Using *è necessario*

Another impersonal phrase expressing need is **è necessario** 'it is necessary' which can be followed directly by a verb infinitive or **che** + subjunctive:

È necessario iscriversi prima di venire alla lezione.

It's necessary to enrol before coming to the lesson.

Era necessario collaborare per avere i fondi.

It was necessary to collaborate in order to get funding.

È necessario che i gruppi collaborino per avere dei buoni risultati.

It's necessary for the groups to collaborate in order to get good results.

23.3.5 Using *dovere*

The verb **dovere** (see 2.1.7) expresses a personal obligation as well as a need:

Devo prendere il treno delle 8.00 per arrivare in tempo per la riunione.

I have to get the 8 o'clock train to arrive in time for the meeting.

Gli studenti devono impegnarsi di più.

The students must make more of an effort.

The present conditional of **dovere** expresses what one *ought* to do, rather than what one *must* do:

Dovremmo organizzare la prossima riunione prima di Natale.

We ought to organise the next meeting before Christmas.

23.3.6 Using **servire**, **occorrere**

To express *need*, the verbs **servire** and **occorrere** are used.

Needing an object

The third person singular and plural forms (**serve**, **servono**; **occorre**, **occorrono**) are used to talk about an object (or objects) needed. The construction is similar to **piacere** (see 28.2.1): the person needing something is expressed by an indirect pronoun **mi**, **ti**, **gli**, etc. (see 3.4.2 and 18.4.2) while the object needed becomes the grammatical subject of the verb and the verb has to be either singular or plural to agree with it:

Mi serve un cacciavite.

I need a screwdriver.

Quanti fogli ti servono?

How many sheets do you need?

Quanto tempo vi occorre?

How much time do you need?

Per fare la torta, occorrono sei uova.

Six eggs are needed to make the cake.

Needing to do something

Both **servire** and **occorrere** can also be used *impersonally* ('it is necessary') followed by a verb infinitive (see 2.2.1) or by **che** + subjunctive (see 2.2.14). **Occorrere** tends to be used in more formal contexts, while **servire** is more widely used.

Occorrere is generally followed by a verb infinitive when no subject is mentioned (as in the first example), or by **che** + subjunctive when the subject is mentioned (as in the second example):

Occorre controllare prima di consegnare la traduzione.

One should check before handing in the translation.

Occorre che lei mi dia un documento.

She has to give me a document.

Servire can be used *impersonally*, meaning 'it is necessary, it's useful'. **Servire** is generally followed by a verb infinitive when no particular person is mentioned (as in the first example), or by **che** + subjunctive when the person involved is mentioned, particularly in a more formal context (as in the second example). It can also be followed by a verb infinitive even when a person is mentioned (as in the last example).

Non serve a niente studiare.

There's no point in studying.

Non serve che Lei mi dia il documento.

It's not necessary/useful for you to give me your document.

Non mi serve imparare l'italiano.

Learning Italian is not any use to me.

When used impersonally, as here, both **servire** and **occorrere** can be replaced by phrases such as **bisogna** (see 23.3.1), **c'è bisogno** (see 23.3.3), **è necessario** (see 23.3.4).

24

Suggesting, proposing, advising and recommending

24.1 Giving advice

24.1.1 Introduction

There are lots of ways of giving advice, some formal, some informal. Advice can range from encouragement or a recommendation to a firm order or stern warning. Here we look at some ways of expressing these functions in Italian.

One of the most common ways to give advice in Italian is to use a suitable verb with a direct or indirect object (the person or people advised) and a preposition (**a**, **di**) to link the verb to a verb infinitive. Verbs that can be used in this way include: **consigliare**, **raccomandare** and **raccomandarsi** (see 24.1.2–4 below). **Dire** can sometimes be used to give advice, though less specific in meaning (see 24.4.1 below).

24.1.2 Consigliare

With *di* and a verb infinitive

In the act of advising or recommending, there are usually two people involved: the person giving advice and the person receiving it. **Consigliare** ('to advise, to recommend') can be used with an indirect object indicating the person receiving the advice (**agli italiani**) and linked by **di** to the verb infinitive (**di lasciare**). (See Appendix IV.)

Gli addetti consolari consigliavano agli italiani di lasciare il paese al più presto possibile.
The consular officials were advising Italians to leave the country as soon as possible.

Sometimes the person receiving advice is represented by a *pronoun*, normally an unstressed *indirect* object pronoun such as **mi**, **ti**, **gli** (see 3.4.2):

Gli addetti consolari gli consigliavano di lasciare il paese al più presto.
The consular officials were advising them to leave the country as soon as possible.

Mia madre mi ha consigliato di studiare lingue.
My mother advised me to study languages.

Occasionally there might be a reason to emphasise the person who is receiving the advice, or to contrast him or her with another person; in this case the emphatic stressed forms of indirect object pronouns **a me**, **a te**, **a lui**, etc. (see 3.3.2) are used:

Mia madre ha consigliato a me di studiare lingue, ma a mio fratello di studiare medicina.
My mother advised me to study languages but (advised) my brother to study medicine.

With a noun

Consigliare can also be used with a noun as direct object (the thing which is being advised or recommended):

Making a suggestion

Mi può consigliare un buon ristorante?

Can you recommend (to me) a good restaurant?

I nostri avvocati hanno consigliato la massima cautela.

Our lawyers advised the utmost caution.

With *che* and subjunctive

Consigliare can also be followed by **che** + subjunctive (see 2.2.15):

I professori consigliano che gli studenti controllino le fonti prima di citarli. (*present subjunctive*)

The lecturers recommend that the students check their sources before quoting them.

24.1.3 Raccomandare

With *di* and a verb infinitive

Raccomandare is almost synonymous with **consigliare** (see 24.1.2 above) and can be used in a similar way, i.e. with a person or personal pronoun as indirect object (**mi**) and followed by a verb infinitive (**andare**) linked by **di**:

Mi ha raccomandato di andare a parlare con il contabile.

He advised me to go and speak to the accountant.

With a noun

Like **consigliare**, it can also be used with a person as indirect object (**gli**) and a noun as direct object (**prudenza**) as below:

Gli hanno raccomandato prudenza.

They advised him to be prudent.

With *che* and subjunctive

La consulente ha raccomandato che il direttore si informasse sul mercato prima di lanciare il nuovo prodotto. (*imperfect subjunctive*)

The consultant recommended that the director find out about the market before launching the new product.

24.1.4 Using *raccomandarsi*

Raccomandarsi is difficult to translate. Used by the parents of toddlers and teenagers throughout Italy, it means something like 'I'm warning you' or 'Listen to me'. It is used mainly in two ways.

Standing on its own

Used on its own, **raccomandarsi** is often found alongside an imperative:

Mi raccomando, non fate tardi!

Listen to me, don't be late!

With *di* and a verb infinitive

Si è raccomandato di fare attenzione.

He warned (them) to be careful.

Note: This verb should not be confused with the phrase **dare/fare una raccomandazione** which has come to mean 'recommending someone for a job'.

24.2 Making a suggestion

Verbs used to make a suggestion include **suggerire** (see 24.2.1) and **proporre** (see 24.2.2).

24.2.1 Suggestire**With *di* and a verb infinitive**

The verb **suggestire** can be used in a similar construction to **consigliare** (see 24.1.2). The person making the suggestion is normally the grammatical *subject* of the verb **suggestire**, the person receiving it is the *indirect object* (preceded if necessary by **a**), while the suggestion being given is in the infinitive, linked by **di**:

Le compagnie aeree suggeriscono ai passeggeri di non portare troppi bagagli a mano.

The airlines suggest to passengers that they should not bring too much hand luggage.

Here the indirect object is expressed by an indirect pronoun (**ci**):

L'impiegata ci ha suggerito di prenotare subito il traghetto per la Sardegna, perché non c'erano tanti posti disponibili.

The sales assistant suggested we should book the ferry for Sardinia straightaway because there weren't so many places left.

With *che* and the subjunctive

Like **consigliare** and **raccomandare**, **suggestire** can also be used with **che** + subjunctive (see 2.2.15):

Suggeriamo che i cani siano identificati tramite un microcip.

We suggest that dogs should be identified by a microchip.

24.2.2 Proporre

The verb **proporre** 'to propose', 'to suggest' can be used with two possible constructions, in the same way as **consigliare**, **raccomandare**, **suggestire**.

With *di* and a verb infinitive

You can use **proporre** with a verb infinitive linked by **di**, with the person receiving the proposal as an indirect object. Generally this construction is used when the person proposing is himself part of the action and proposing that he/she and others do something together:

Antonio mi ha proposto di fare una passeggiata lungo il fiume.

Antonio suggested (to me) taking a walk along the river.

Vorrei proporre agli azionisti di accettare l'offerta.

I would like to suggest to the shareholders that they accept the offer.

With *che* and subjunctive

Generally this construction is used when there is someone or something (**l'ufficio**) other than the proposer and the person receiving the proposal:

Propongo che l'ufficio rimanga chiuso per due giorni prima dell'ispezione.

I propose that the office stays closed for two days before the inspection.

24.3 Choices**24.3.1 *Di* and infinitive or *che* and subjunctive?**

Whichever verb is used, deciding which of these constructions to use is often a question of register. So long as there are only two parties involved (the person advising and the person being advised) the **che** and subjunctive construction can always be replaced by **di** and the infinitive, with the person advised as indirect object. In fact in informal spoken or written Italian, the simpler construction is always preferred:

Formal:

I professori consigliano che gli studenti controllino le fonti prima di citarli.

Informal:

I professori consigliano agli studenti di controllare le fonti prima di citarli.

24.3.2 Stressed or unstressed pronoun?

The people receiving the suggestion or advice, whatever verb is used, are often represented by *indirect object pronouns*, which have two different forms.

Unstressed forms **mi, ti, gli**, etc. (see 3.4.2):

Il suo capo le ha suggerito di fare una breve pausa.

Her boss suggested she take a short break.

Stressed (emphatic) forms **a me, a te, a lui**, etc. (see 3.3.2):

Il capo ha suggerito a lei di fare una breve pausa, ma ha detto agli altri di continuare a lavorare.

The boss told her to have a short break but he told the others to carry on working.

24.4 More expressions of advising or suggesting**24.4.1 Dire**

The verb **dire** 'to say' can sometimes be used to give advice or make a suggestion. It is most commonly used in the present conditional form **direi** etc. (see 2.2.12) followed either by **di** and the infinitive or by **che** and the subjunctive:

Ti direi di portare l'impermeabile.

I would say (to you) to take a raincoat.

Direi che sia meglio rinviare a domani.

I would say that it is better to postpone until tomorrow.

Direi che Giovanni debba impegnarsi di più.

I would say that Giovanni needs to show more commitment.

24.4.2 Dare indicazioni, dare informazioni, dare suggerimenti

The expression **dare un'indicazione** means to give advice or information, usually on one particular thing; **un'indicazione** is just one piece of advice, whereas **delle indicazioni** and **qualche indicazione** mean advice in general. The same applies to **dare informazioni** and **dare un'informazione**.

Vorrei trovare un albergo vicino al centro. Mi può dare qualche indicazione?

I would like to find a hotel near the centre. Can you give me some suggestions?

Il mio collega mi ha dato delle indicazioni per il congresso.

My colleague gave me some suggestions for the conference.

Almost synonymous are **dare suggerimenti / un suggerimento** and **dare consigli / un consiglio**:

Mi daresti un consiglio per arredare questa stanza?

Would you give me advice for furnishing this room?

24.4.3 Fare una proposta

The phrase **fare una proposta**, depending on the context, can mean a business proposition or similar. Occasionally, however, it can also mean a proposal of an unwanted kind:

L'azienda aveva delle difficoltà economiche, e il direttore ha fatto una proposta di riorganizzazione finanziaria all'assemblea generale.

The company had some economic difficulties and the director made a proposal for financial reorganisation at the general meeting.

Preferirei non stare nello stesso albergo di Marco. L'altra volta mi ha fatto una proposta.

I would prefer not to stay in the same hotel as Marco. The last time he propositioned me.

24.4.4 Stressing a personal point of view

In spoken Italian, advice is often preceded by the expression **Se (io) fossi in te** ('If I were you . . .'):

Se io fossi in te, farei la domanda per aver quel posto a Milano.

If I were you, I would apply for that post in Milan.

The same thing can be expressed more plainly and less emphatically:

Per me, è pericoloso.

(If you want to know what I think) it's dangerous.

Secondo te, non dovrei chiedere un aumento di stipendio?

In your opinion, shouldn't I ask for a rise?

► See also 27.1.5.

24.4.5 Other ways of making suggestions

To propose or suggest something for yourself and others you can use **perché non?**

Perché non facciamo una gita in montagna?

Why don't we have a trip to the mountains?

Or an imperative verb form:

Vieni a prendere un caffè a casa mia!

Come and have a coffee at my house!

24.5 Advising someone not to do something, giving a warning

When advising someone *not* to do something, use **avvertire**. With this verb, the person being warned or advised is the *direct* object:

Il portiere mi ha avvertito che l'acqua non è potabile.

The porter warned me that the water is not drinkable.

La maestra dovrebbe avvertire i ragazzi che domani non c'è scuola.

The teacher should warn the children that tomorrow there is no school.

When warning people to be careful, use **stare attento** or one of the other expressions below:

Gli operai dicono al pubblico di stare attenti a non cadere.

The workmen are telling the public to be careful not to fall.

NOTE In the example above, the adjective is plural (**attenti**) because **il pubblico** is a collective noun which refers to more than one person (see 1.2.3).

24.5.1 Attenzione!

Attenzione a non bruciare la cravatta con la candela.

Watch you don't burn your tie on the candle.

24.5.2 Fare attenzione

Faccia attenzione al semaforo.

Look out for the traffic light.

24.5.3 Stare attento

State attenti a non cadere.

Be careful you don't fall.

24.6 Asking for advice

All the verbs seen above (**consigliare, raccomandare, proporre, suggerire**) can also be used to *ask for* advice:

Cosa mi consiglia di fare?

What do you advise me to do?

Other ways of asking for advice include:

Cosa faccio?

What shall I do? (*Literally*: What do I do?)

Cosa devo fare?

What shall I do? (*Literally*: What must I do?)

Secondo te, cosa dovrei fare?

In your opinion, what should I do?



III

**Expressing emotions,
feelings, attitudes
and opinions**

25

Expressing emotions: positive, negative, other

25.1 Introduction

The ways in which emotion can be expressed vary from straightforward *vocal interjections* (see 25.2 below), for example **Ah, oh, ahimé . . .**, to *exclamations* such as **Che bello!** ‘That’s lovely!’ or **Quanto mi piace questa casa!** ‘I like this house so much!’, through to more *complex statements*, for example **Mi dispiace che tu abbia avuto tanti problemi** ‘I’m sorry that you’ve had so many problems’.

Here are some of the ways in which we use language to express emotion in Italian, whether positive, negative or neutral.

25.2 Interjections (positive, negative, other)

Emotions can often be conveyed with very simple utterances, which have no specific meaning in themselves, but can be inserted at any point in the conversation and can express a variety of emotions according to the context. These include:

Simple vowel sounds, in general expressing surprise, amazement, shock or horror:

Ah! Oh! Eh! Uh!

Sounds indicating doubt, uncertainty:

Boh!

Di chi è questa macchina? Boh!
Whose car is this? Who knows?

Expressing perplexity and sometimes exasperation:

Mah!

Mah! Chissà come andrà a finire!
Well, I don’t know! Who knows how it will end up!

Expressing embarrassment:

Ehm!

Expressing doubt but sounding almost challenging:

Beh! Cosa volete?
So? What do you want?

Painful feelings (physical or psychological):

(Note that the **h** is silent – it is not pronounced – in all these interjections.)

Ahi! Ahimè! Ohimè!

Ahi! Mi sono scottato!
Ouch! I’ve burnt myself!

Ahi serva Italia, di dolore ostello

Alas, Italy enslaved, wherein dwells grief
(Dante, *Purgatorio* VI, 76)

Ahimè è finito il vino!

Oh no, the wine is finished!
(Literally: Alas!)

Expressing boredom, impatience, irritation:

Uffa! Non ce la faccio più!

Enough! I can’t stand it any longer!
(no exact translation exists in English)

25.3 Expressing positive emotions

25.3.1 Exclamations

Common adjectives (see 1.4), sometimes accompanying nouns, can be used as exclamations, expressing for example *pleasure, admiration, enthusiasm, approval, gratitude*. Obviously there is a wide range of adjectives that can be used, though only a few are shown here:

Bello! Beautiful!	Eccezionale! Exceptional!	Ottima idea! Wonderful idea!
Bravo! Bravissimo! Well done!	Fantastico! Fantastic!	Perfetto! Perfect!
Buon'idea! Good idea!	Magnifico! Magnificent!	Stupendo! Wonderful!
Eccellente! Excellent!	Ottimo! Very good!	

Adjectives can be used with the verb **essere** to convey positive feelings about someone or something:

È magnifico! It's magnificent!	È un regalo stupendo! It's a splendid present!	È bravissimo il solista. The soloist is really good.
--	--	--

Che (see 3.6.5) can be used with common adjectives such as **bello, buono** and also with nouns to express a positive emotion:

Che bello! How nice!	Che bel bambino! What a beautiful child!	Che serata perfetta! What a perfect evening!
Che bravo! How clever!	Che meraviglia! How wonderful!	Che bella giornata! What a lovely day!
Che buono! How good!	Che piacere! What a pleasure!	

Adjectives can also be used in combination with the adverbs **quanto** (see 6.3.3) or **come** (see 6.3.3) to express an emotion or reaction:

Quanto sei bella stasera! How lovely you look tonight!
Quant'è bravo quello studente! How clever that student is!
Come sei furbo! How crafty you are!

Another exclamation, which is untranslatable but expresses admiration as well as amazement, is:

Caspita! Wow! (<i>the translation is approximate</i>)

25.3.2 Satisfaction, admiration, happiness, pleasure

Essere, rimanere

The verbs **essere** and **rimanere** can both be used with a past participle or an adjective to express feelings or reactions. **Rimanere** takes **essere** in the compound tenses.

Il direttore era molto soddisfatto del mio lavoro.
The manager was very satisfied with my work.

I ragazzi erano contenti dei regali che gli ho portato dagli USA.
The kids were pleased with the presents I brought them from the USA.

Siamo rimasti veramente delusi della nostra esperienza.
We were really disappointed with our experience.

Sei rimasta contenta dei voti che hai preso?

Were you happy with the marks you got?

Contento, felice, soddisfatto

The adjectives **contento**, **felice**, **soddisfatto** can either be followed by **di** and the verb infinitive (see 2.2.1) or by **che** introducing a dependent clause. The verb in this clause is normally in the subjunctive (see 2.2.14) in a more formal context or in the indicative (see 2.2.2) in a less formal context:

Era contento di venire con voi.

He was happy to come with you.

Gli studenti erano soddisfatti di aver superato gli esami.

The students were satisfied at having got through the exams.

Sono felice che Lei possa venire al convegno. (*subjunctive*)

I'm glad you can come to the conference.

Sono contento che vieni anche tu stasera. (*indicative*)

I'm happy you're coming too tonight.

Fare piacere

The phrase **fare piacere** means 'to give pleasure' (*literally* 'to make pleasure'). The subject of the verb is the action, event or item giving pleasure, expressed by a noun, a verb infinitive or **che** and the subjunctive, as shown in the three examples below. The person who takes pleasure in the action or event or item – here shown in italics – is indicated by a name or a noun (with **a**) or an *indirect* object pronoun (see 3.4.2):

Questa notizia farà molto piacere a Marco.

(*Subject: Questa notizia*)

This news will make Marco very happy.

Al professore ha fatto piacere sentire le nostre notizie.

(*Subject: sentire le nostre notizie*)

The teacher was happy to hear our news.

Ci fa piacere che i ragazzi stiano tutti bene.

(*Subject: che i ragazzi stiano tutti bene*)

We're happy that the kids are all well.

► See also 28.2.

25.3.3

Approval, appreciation, gratitude

Some expressions of approval, appreciation and gratitude include:

Simple phrases

D'accordo!

Agreed!

Giusto!

Right!

Sono trenta euro.

That's thirty euros.

(Va) Bene!

All right!

Certo!

Sure!

Va bene così?

Is that all right?

Benissimo!

Very good!

Esatto!

Precisely!

Sì, va bene.

Yes, fine.

Chiaro!

Of course!

► See also 27.2.1.

Fare bene

The phrase **fare bene** addressed to someone expresses satisfaction or approval of their action:

Fai bene a dirmelo.

You are right to tell me.

Daniela ha fatto bene a scegliere l'Università di Viterbo.

Daniela did well to choose the University of Viterbo.

25.3.4 Relief

Some expressions of relief include:

Grazie al cielo!

Thank heavens!

Meno male!

Just as well! Thank goodness!

Per fortuna!

Luckily!

Meno male che ti sei informato.

Just as well you took the trouble to find out.

Per fortuna è arrivato subito il medico.

Luckily the doctor arrived straightaway.

25.3.5 Support

Some expressions of support and solidarity include:

Evviva!

Hooray!

Viva gli sposi!

Long live the bride and groom!

25.3.6 Interest or enthusiasm

The following expressions express interest and enthusiasm of varying degrees.

***Interessare* (verb used both transitively and intransitively)**

Interessare ‘to interest’ can be used either transitively or intransitively and the meaning in each case is very similar. When **interessare** is used intransitively, the construction is similar to that of **piacere** (see 18.4.4): the grammatical subject of **interessare** is the object of interest (**il tuo lavoro**), while the person interested becomes the indirect object (**ti**).

Ti interessa il tuo lavoro?

Does your work interest you?

***Interessarsi di / a* (verb used reflexively)**

When used reflexively, meaning ‘to be interested in’, **interessarsi** is followed by **di** or **a**:

Il professore si è interessato molto della ricerca degli studenti.

The professor took a great interest in the students’ research.

Ci siamo interessati alle storie dei bambini.

We were interested in the children’s stories.

The same expressions can be used with **non** to express a lack of enthusiasm or interest:

***Interessato* (adjective)**

Alfredo non si è mai interessato dei figli.

Alfredo never showed any interest in the children.

***Interessante* (adjective)**

Sono interessanti i lavori di quest’artista, ma non mi piacciono.

The works of this artist are interesting, but I don’t like them.

***Entusiasmarsi di* (verb used reflexively)**

Entusiasmarsi is normally followed by **di**:

Dopo un mese mi sono veramente entusiasmata del mio lavoro.

After a month I got really enthusiastic about my work.

***Entusiasta* (adjective)**

Entusiasta, which takes the same form whether masculine or feminine, is normally followed by **di**:

Mio padre ha novanta anni ma è sempre entusiasta della musica.
My father is ninety but he is still enthusiastic about music.

I turisti sono sempre entusiasti di Venezia.
Tourists are always enthusiastic about Venice.

Appassionarsi (verb used reflexively)

Due anni fa mi sono appassionata della cultura giapponese e ho deciso di trasferirmi a Tokyo.

Two years ago I developed a passion for Japanese culture and I decided to move to Tokyo.

Appassionato (adjective)

Gianni e Luisa sono appassionati di mobili antichi.
Gianni and Luisa are passionate about antique furniture.

Motivato (adjective)

Bisogna essere motivati per fare il dottorato di ricerche.
You have to be motivated to do a Ph.D.

25.4 Expressing negative emotions

25.4.1 Regret, sorrow, unhappiness

Purtroppo expresses regret at a fact:

Purtroppo il treno è in ritardo.
Unfortunately the train is late.

The verb **dispiacere** (see 28.3.1) can be used with an indirect object noun or pronoun, indicating the person who is expressing regret. It is normally followed by **che** and the subjunctive:

Ci dispiace che tu non abbia avuto il posto. ***Mi dispiace che tu la pensi così.***
We're sorry that you didn't get the job. I'm sorry you feel like that.

You can also use the expression (**è un**) **peccato che**, again followed by the indicative in informal spoken Italian but the subjunctive in formal language:

Peccato che voi dovete studiare. (*indicative*)
Pity (shame) you have to study!

È un peccato che i suoi genitori abitino così lontano. (*subjunctive*)
It's a pity (shame) that her parents live so far away.

25.4.2 Desperation

Examples of expressions of despair or desperation are shown below:

Sono disperata, è partito il mio fidanzato per un viaggio di sei mesi.
I'm in despair, my fiancé has left for a six-month-long journey.

Non so più come fare. Non ce la faccio più.
I don't know what to do any more. I can't go on.

25.4.3 Disappointment

Simple expressions of disappointment include:

Che delusione! How disappointing!
Che disastro! What a disaster!
Per amor del cielo! Heaven forbid!

You can use the verb **deludere** to talk about your disappointment:

Sono veramente delusa del tuo comportamento. ***Mi hai proprio deluso.***
I'm really disappointed with your behaviour. You've really disappointed me.

The verb **dispiacere**, seen above, can also be used to express disappointment, followed by **che** and the subjunctive:

Sono proprio dispiacuto che i nostri amici non siano (sono) venuti.
I'm really upset that our friends didn't come.

Dispiacere can also be used as a noun:

Che dispiacere mi ha fatto vederlo così mal ridotto!
I found it so hard to see him in such bad shape!

25.4.4 Dissatisfaction

Examples of expressions of dissatisfaction are shown below:

Così non va bene.
That won't do.

Il tuo supervisore non è molto soddisfatto del tuo lavoro.
Your supervisor isn't very satisfied with your work.

A volte i clienti rimangono insoddisfatti della qualità del prodotto.
Sometimes customers are dissatisfied with the quality of the product.

25.4.5 Disapproval, disagreement

Examples of expressions of disapproval or disagreement are shown below:

Sono contrario all'idea di andare al mare solo per la giornata.
I'm against the idea of going to the seaside just for the day.

Mia madre non approva le mie scelte.
My mother doesn't approve of my choices.

Hai fatto male a scegliere Giurisprudenza.
You made a mistake choosing law.

► See also 27.2.2.

25.4.6 Irritation, annoyance, displeasure

Irritation, annoyance or displeasure can be expressed in many different ways, ranging from mild to extreme, as in the examples below:

Non mi piace il tuo comportamento.
I don't like your behaviour.

Non mi va!
I don't like it!

Basta!
That's enough!

Il mio fidanzato era proprio seccato con me.
My boyfriend was really fed-up with me.

Se mia madre venisse a sapere, sarebbe furiosa.
If my mother were to find out, she would be furious.

I professori sono furibondi con gli studenti che non hanno partecipato al seminario.
The lecturers are furious with the students who didn't take part in the seminar.

Quando ha saputo della macchina, è andato su tutte le furie.
When he found out about the car, he went wild.

25.4.7 Boredom

Boredom is expressed by an adjective such as **noioso** or a noun such as **noia**:

È un libro veramente noioso.

It's a really boring book.

Che noia!

What a bore!

È noioso imparare i verbi irregolari.

It's boring learning irregular verbs.

Other more colloquial expressions include:

Che barba!

What a bore!

Che palle! (*vulgar*)

What a bore!

25.4.8 Anger

Anger can be conveyed with stronger language, such as the interjections below. These kinds of words do not always have an exact translation in English and should be used with care:

Mannaggia! Accidenti! Porca miseria!

There is an infinite variety of curses and swear words used by Italians of different age groups, regions and dialects. We leave it to the reader to investigate further.

Less harsh but more explicit ways of expressing anger include:

Che rabbia!

That's really infuriating!

Che nervi!

It gets on my nerves!

Mi fa una rabbia pensare che ha vinto lui invece di me.

It makes me angry to think that he won instead of me.

Le fanno venire i nervi tutti questi spostamenti.

All these moves get on her nerves.

25.4.9 Antipathy, hostility

A variety of idiomatic expressions can be used to indicate the speaker's antipathy towards somebody. Mild dislike can be expressed as follows:

Non mi piacevano gli amici di mia madre.

I didn't like my mother's friends.

Non ci va il nuovo preside.

We don't like the new headmaster.

Alfredo le è sempre stato antipatico.

She's always disliked Alfredo.

Non lo trovi un po' antipatico?

Don't you find him rather unlikeable?

Se viene Caterina, io non vengo. Non la sopporto.

If Caterina is coming, I'm not coming. I can't stand her.

► See also 28.3.

You can express your hostility with a range of appropriate curses:

Al diavolo!

To hell!

Va al diavolo!

Go to hell!

Che gli venga un accidente!

Damn him!

You can use adjectives such as **antipatico**, **aggressivo**, **ostile**:

Sei proprio antipatico. Vattene.

You're really horrible. Go away.

Leonardo è una persona molto aggressiva.

Leonardo is a really aggressive person.

A volte gli inglesi possono sembrare addirittura ostili.

Sometimes the English can seem downright hostile.

You may want to employ a certain degree of courtesy and formality:

Per favore, mi lasci in pace. Si accomodi fuori!

Please, leave me alone. Leave the room now.

25.4.10 Disgust

Disgust is usually conveyed by the following expressions, rather informal and vulgar, but very common:

Che schifo! Mi fa schifo!

Disgusting! I'm disgusted! It makes me sick.

Mi fa schifo dover lavorare con gente del genere!

It makes me sick having to work with this sort of people!

Questi episodi di razzismo fanno schifo.

These episodes of racism are sickening.

25.5 Expressing other emotions

In this section we look at ways of expressing emotions which are neither positive nor negative. Some expressions are neutral, some can be used in either a positive or a negative context and some express a mixture of emotions.

25.5.1 Indifference

Ways of expressing indifference to a person, object or proposal include the following:

è lo stesso	it's the same
è uguale	it's the same
fa lo stesso	it's the same
non fa differenza	it doesn't make any difference
non ha importanza	it's not important
non importa	it's not important (<i>can be used with indirect pronoun</i>)
non interessa	it's of no interest, I don't care (<i>used with indirect pronoun</i>)

Look at these examples:

A me non interessa se vieni o no. Fai come vuoi.

I don't care if you come or not. Do what you want.

Se per te è uguale, rimaniamo fino al 15 dicembre.

If it's all the same for you, we'll stay until the 15th of December.

Scegli quello che vuoi, tanto per me è lo stesso.

Choose what you want, it's all the same for me anyway.

Fa lo stesso se viaggiamo in treno o in macchina?

Does it matter whether we travel by train or by car?

Che lui venga o no per me fa lo stesso.

Whether he comes or not, it's the same for me.

Non importa se finisci l'esercizio o no.

It doesn't matter if you finish the exercise or not.

Non mi importa niente della tua vita personale.

I don't care about your personal life.

I voti che danno i professori non importano a nessuno.

The marks the teachers give don't matter to anyone.

Scusa, che t'importa di quello che dice lui?

Excuse me, what do you care about what he says?

Mangiamo dove vuoi tu, per me è indifferente.

Let's eat where you want, for me it's the same.

Quello che pensano loro non mi interessa.

I don't care what they think.

Non me ne importa niente.

I don't care a bit about it.

Non ha importanza.

It doesn't matter.

Non fa nessuna differenza.

It doesn't make any difference.

The *lack* of positive qualities such as interest and enthusiasm (see 25.3.6) can also convey indifference:

Gli manca proprio l'entusiasmo.

He's really lacking enthusiasm.

Non ha interesse (nel suo lavoro).

He has no interest (in his work).

Gli studenti sono poco motivati.

The students are not very motivated.

Or, more forcefully:

Non gliene frega niente.

He couldn't give a damn.

Chi se ne frega?

Who cares?

In the expression **non me ne importa niente**, **niente** can be replaced by **un corno / un fico (secco)**, both very colloquial expressions:

Non me ne importa un fico (secco).

(Literally) I don't care a (dried) fig.

25.5.2 Resignation

When you are resigned to a situation, or feel you can do little about it:

Pazienza!

Never mind! (Literally: Patience!)

Mi dispiace, sono finite le lasagne.

Sorry, the lasagne is finished.

Fa lo stesso. Prendo i tortellini.

It doesn't matter. I'll have the tortellini.

Non c'è niente da fare.

There's nothing to be done.

Cosa vuoi! Hanno sedici anni.

What do you expect? They're sixteen years old.

25.5.3 Puzzlement, perplexity

Cosa faccio?

What shall I do now?

Non so (più) cosa fare.

I don't know what to do (now).

25.5.4 Pity

Pity for others is conveyed by expressions such as **fare pena** or **far pietà**:

Questi bambini mi fanno pena.

I feel sorry for these children.

Faceva pena vedere i mendicanti per la strada.

It was pitiful to see the beggars on the street.

I profughi fanno pietà a tutti.

Everyone feels sorry for refugees.

The exclamation **Poveretto!** also expresses pity, as does the adjective **povero** used with a noun, proper name or stressed object pronoun (see 3.3.2):

La professoressa ha lavorato anche durante l'intervallo. Poveretta!

The teacher worked during the interval as well. Poor thing!

Povero Mario, gli va tutto storto.

Poor Mario, everything goes wrong for him.

Povero me! Devo preparare due conferenze in una settimana.

Poor me! I have to prepare two talks in a week.

25.5.5 Trust

Verbs and verb phrases conveying trust and confidence – or lack of it – in someone or something include: **fidarsi (di)**, **avere fiducia (in)**:

Mi posso fidare di lui?

Can I trust him?

Non hai fiducia in me.

You don't have any confidence in me.

In Italia, non c'è fiducia nelle banche.

In Italy, there is no trust / confidence in the banks.

25.5.6 Surprise, shock, amazement

The following expressions can express either *positive* or *negative* emotions according to the context:

Che sorpresa!

What a surprise!

Veramente?

Really?

Che bella sorpresa!

What a nice surprise!

Mamma mia!

(*untranslatable*)

Che brutta sorpresa!

What a horrible surprise!

Non ci credo!

I don't believe it!

Davvero?

Really?

Roba da pazzi!

You must be joking! (*approximate meaning*)

Some verbs or verb phrases can also be used:

Il film mi ha fatto impressione.

The film shocked me.

25.5.7 Expectation

The expression **non vedere l'ora** means that you are looking forward to something:

Non vedo l'ora di finire questo libro!

I can't wait to finish this book!

I bambini non vedono l'ora di andare in vacanza.

The children can't wait to go on holiday.

► See also 25.2 for an interjection expressing impatience in a less positive way.

26

Expressing emotions: hope, fear, doubt

26.1 Introduction

Emotions you might want to express in Italian include hope, fear and doubt. Like the other subjective utterances, they are often represented by a verb construction requiring the subjunctive (see 2.2.14).

26.2 Expressing hope

26.2.1 Sperare

The verb **sperare** is used to express 'hope', followed either by **di** and a verb infinitive (see 2.2.1) or by **che** and a subjunctive (see 2.2.14).

The construction **di** + verb infinitive can only be used where the subject or implied subject is the same in both parts of the sentence ('*I* hope that *I* will see you tomorrow'):

Spero di vederti domani.

I hope to see you tomorrow.

Otherwise, when the two verbs have a different subject ('*I* hope that *your mother* feels better now'), **che** must be used, followed by the subjunctive:

Spero che tua madre si senta meglio adesso.

I hope your mother feels better now.

Speriamo is often used as a kind of imperative form ('let's hope'), thus conveying a certain anxiety or pessimistic expectation:

Speriamo di farcela!

Let's hope we can manage it! (*but it's going to be hard*)

Arriverai in tempo?

Will you arrive in time?

Speriamo di sì!

Hopefully yes! (*or I'll be in trouble*)

Sta finendo la benzina?

Are we running out of petrol?

Speriamo di no!

Let's hope not!

26.2.2 Augurarsi

In formal conversation and greetings you can use **mi auguro** instead of **spero** to convey a combination of hoping and wishing. It is most often followed by **che** and the subjunctive but can also be followed by **di** and the infinitive, in the same way as **sperare** is:

ArrivederLa. *Mi auguro che faccia un buon viaggio.*

Goodbye. I hope you'll have a nice journey.

Mi auguro che il vostro progetto abbia successo.

I hope your project will be successful.

Mi auguro di vederti presto.

I hope to see you soon.

26.2.3 Magari

This is a very common exclamation expressing hope combined with a strong desire. It can be used with a verb in the imperfect subjunctive (see 2.2.18), pluperfect subjunctive (see 2.2.19) or on its own as an interjection meaning ‘if only’.

Magari vincessi il Superenalotto!

If only I could win the National Lottery!

Magari avessi seguito i consigli di mia madre.

If only I had followed my mother’s advice.

Ti piacerebbe avere una casa sul mare?

Would you like to have a home at the seaside?

Magari!

If only!

26.3 Expressing fear, pessimism or regret

Both **avere paura** and **temere** express fear but can also convey anxiety, pessimism or even regret.

26.3.1 Fear

When expressing real fear, **temere** is normally followed by a direct object, while the more common **avere paura** is followed by **di** then the object of fear:

Ho paura dei temporali.

I am scared of thunderstorms.

Mia nonna teme anche le più piccole malattie.

My grandmother is afraid of even the slightest illness.

26.3.2 Pessimism or anxiety

When expressing pessimism or anxiety, both **avere paura** and **temere** can be followed by **di** and a verb infinitive or by **che** and the subjunctive, in the same way as the verbs expressing emotion in Chapter 25.

Ho sempre paura di sbagliare.

I am always afraid of making a mistake.

I genitori hanno sempre paura che i ragazzi vengano bocciati.

Parents are always afraid that their children will fail their exams.

La mia amica teme di essere incinta.

My friend is afraid she might be pregnant.

Gli italiani temono che l’euro perda valore.

The Italians fear that the euro will lose value.

Quattro genitori su cinque temono che i loro figli diventino “Facebook-dipendenti”.

Four parents out of five fear that their children will become ‘Facebook-dependent’.

(<http://salute24.ilsole24ore.com/articles/13320-facebook-dipendenza-4-genitori-su-5-hanno-paura-che-il-figlio-ne-sia-affetto>, retrieved 26 February 2012)

Sperare can also be used to express anxiety:

Speriamo che non succeda niente di brutto.

Let’s hope nothing awful happens.

► See also 26.2.1.

26.3.3 Regret

In the following examples **temere** and **avere paura** are used, in the same way as the English 'to be afraid', as an expression of regret rather than fear. They are followed either by **di** and the infinitive or by **che** and the subjunctive:

Temo di disturbare.

I am afraid I am disturbing (you).

Si è rotta la macchina? Ho paura di sì!

Has the car broken down? I am afraid so!

Ho paura che sia troppo tardi per disdire l'appuntamento.

I am afraid it is too late to cancel the appointment.

26.3.4 Terror, panic

Stronger feelings such as terror or panic can be represented by nouns such as:

fifa 'fear' (*rather ironical*)

panico 'panic'

spavento 'fear'

terrore 'terror'

Che fifa!

What a fright! (*said scathingly, if someone is exaggerating their fear*)

Che spavento!

What a fright!

Various phrases use these nouns or a variation of them:

avere fifa

to be scared

lasciarsi prendere dal panico

to get in a panic

prendere uno spavento

to get a fright

essere in preda al panico

to be in the grip of panic

avere il terrore

to be terrified

essere terrorizzato

to be terrified

Tutti gli studenti hanno una fifa eccessiva degli esami.

All students have an exaggerated fear of exams.

Non lasciarti prendere dal panico.

Don't panic.

A grandi altezze mi prende il panico.

I get panicky at heights.

Durante i bombardamenti la popolazione era in preda al panico.

During the bombardments, the population was in a panic.

Quando l'aereo è atterrato nella tempesta ho preso uno spavento che non dimenticherò mai più!

When the plane landed in the storm, I was so scared that I'll never forget it!

Here the pronominal verb form (**mi sono presa**) is used to express emotional involvement:

Mi sono presa uno spavento.

I got a fright.

Spavento can also be used as the grammatical subject of **prendere**:

Mi ha preso uno spavento.

I got a fright. (*Literally*: Fear gripped me.)

Il mio collega ha il terrore di essere licenziato.

My colleague is terrified of being sacked.

Mia moglie è terrorizzata dai topi.

My wife is terrified of rats.

26.4 Expressing doubt

26.4.1 With a verb followed by the subjunctive

As you have seen in several parts of this book, the use of verbs in the *subjunctive* mood (see 2.2.14), as an alternative to the *indicative* mood (see 2.2.2), is the most common way to express doubt or uncertainty in Italian. The subjunctive is frequently found linked with verbs indicating doubt, opinion, guessing and possibility such as **credere**, **dubitare**, **immaginare**, **pensare**, **ritenere**, **sembrare**, while the indicative is used where there is more certainty:

Ritengo che Luigi potrà laurearsi il prossimo luglio.

I believe that Luigi will be able to graduate next July. (*quite certain*)

Ritengo che Luigi possa laurearsi il prossimo luglio.

I believe that Luigi might be able to graduate next July. (*possible*)

Immagino che sei stanco.

I imagine that you are tired. (*quite certain*)

Immagino che tu sia stanco.

I imagine that you must be tired. (*possible/probable*)

Information on the forms of the subjunctive can be found in 2.2.14, while other examples of how it is used will be found throughout Sections III and IV.

26.4.2 With the future indicative

The *future indicative* (see 2.2.9) is also often used to express something that is probable but not definite. The *future perfect* is used in a similar way but referring to the past.

Non ho l'orologio. Saranno quasi le otto.

I don't have a watch. It must be almost eight o'clock.

Che bella macchina. Costerà un occhio della testa.

What a beautiful car. It must cost a fortune.

Marco non c'è. Sarà uscito.

Marco's not there. He must have gone out.

26.4.3 With specific verbs such as *dubitare*

The verb **dubitare** expresses doubt in an explicit way. It is followed by **che** and the subjunctive, or by **di** and a verb infinitive (see also 26.2.1 above):

Il tecnico dubita che il problema si risolva così facilmente.

The technician doubts whether the problem will be solved so easily.

Dubito di poter risolvere facilmente il problema.

I doubt whether I'll be able to solve the problem easily.

26.4.4 **Forse**, **possibilmente**, **probabilmente**, **eventualmente**

The adverbs listed above (see also 6.3.7) can be used to imply an element of doubt in anything you say.

Forse is the most colloquial and also generic in meaning. **Possibilmente** is similar in meaning but less used. **Probabilmente** implies something more likely to happen. **Eventualmente** expresses an option or a possible alternative. It must not be confused with the English 'eventually' which conveys the idea of something that will happen in the future. **Eventualmente** expresses something that is only a possibility ('if something were to happen').

Non so se avrò tempo. Eventualmente passerò a salutarti verso le 5.00.

I don't know whether I'll have time. Possibly (*if I have the time*) I'll pop in to say hello around 5 o'clock.

In frigorifero non c'è quasi nulla. *Eventualmente* possiamo uscire a mangiare una pizza.

There is almost nothing in the fridge. We can (*if you agree with the idea*) go out and eat a pizza.

26.4.5 Può darsi

This expression also indicates doubt or possibility. It is normally followed by **che** and the subjunctive, but can also be used on its own in answer to a question. It is possible to replace the subjunctive with a future indicative, depending on how likely the event is to happen, as in the second example below.

Non rispondono al telefono. *Può darsi che siano usciti.*

They're not answering the phone. They might have gone out.

Può darsi che stasera venga/verrà Marinella a cena.

It's possible that Marinella will come for dinner tonight.

Ci sarà la Divina Commedia in biblioteca?

Do you think there is a copy of the Divine Comedy in the library?

Può darsi!

Possibly!

26.4.6 Chissà se ...

This expression means 'who knows whether . . . ?' and is followed by a verb in the indicative. It carries a strong sense of doubt.

Chissà se c'è ancora qualcuno in ufficio?

Is it possible that someone is still in the office?

Chissà se sono già partiti?

Could they have already left?

Chissà can also be used as the answer to a question, expressing considerable doubt:

Pensi che ci pagheranno in tempo?

Do you think they will pay us in time?

Chissà?!

God knows!

27

Expressing an opinion or belief, agreement or disagreement

27.1 Expressing or seeking an opinion or belief

There are many ways of expressing your own opinion, whether hesitantly or forcefully. You can also seek someone else's opinion using a similar range of expressions.

27.1.1 *Pensare, credere* expressing an opinion

The verb **pensare** can be used in three different ways to express an opinion.

Pensare di and a noun:

Cosa pensate di questo cantante?
What do you think of this singer?

Pensare di followed by a verb infinitive (see 2.2.1):

Pensi di essere infallibile?
Do you think you are infallible?

Pensare che followed by the subjunctive (see 2.2.14):

I clienti pensavano che il direttore fosse molto in gamba.
The customers thought that the manager was very good.

Where **pensare** means 'to think', 'to believe' (not 'to think of' as in the first example), it can be replaced by **credere**:

Lo credevano un genio.
They thought he was a genius.

I clienti credevano che il direttore fosse onesto.
The customers thought that the manager was honest.

Another verb which expresses opinion is **ritenere** which can be followed by **di** and an infinitive or **che** and a subjunctive:

Ritengo di avere i requisiti da voi richiesti.
I believe I have the qualities you are looking for.

Mio padre riteneva che le vacanze fossero una perdita di tempo e denaro.
My father thought that holidays were a waste of time and money.

For ways in which you can make a point in a discussion or argument, see 41.4.3.

27.1.2 *Credere* expressing a belief

Credere can also be used to convey religious, political, ideological or other strong belief. In this context it is generally used with **in**:

Credo in Dio Padre onnipotente, creatore del cielo e della terra.

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
(*adapted from the Creed*)

I buddisti credono nella reincarnazione dell'anima.

Buddhists believe in the reincarnation of the soul.

I musulmani credono nella rivelazione del Corano.

Muslims believe in the revelations of the Koran.

Se non credi in te stesso non raggiungerai mai il tuo scopo.

If you don't believe in yourself, you will never reach your goal.

Molti italiani credono in un sistema educativo pubblico e gratuito.

Many Italians believe in an education system that is public and free.

27.1.3 **Sembrare, parere expressing an opinion**

The verbs **sembrare**, **parere** are used impersonally ('it seems . . .') with an indirect object or object pronoun (see 3.4.2) to express an opinion. They are slightly more tentative in expressing a view than **pensare** or **credere**:

Ci sembra che sia una iniziativa valida.

It seems to us that this is a worthwhile initiative.

Ti pare giusto escludere Teresa?

Do you think it's fair to exclude Teresa?

As well as this impersonal use, **sembrare** and **parere** can also be used to say how a person or object seems, in which case the person or object becomes the grammatical subject of the sentence:

Il suo ragionamento non mi è sembrato molto valido.

His reasoning didn't seem very sound to me.

Come ti sembra questo progetto?

What do you think of this project?

Come vi è parso il direttore d'orchestra?

How did the conductor seem to you?

I bambini non mi sembravano molto contenti.

The children didn't seem very happy to me.

27.1.4 **Nouns meaning 'opinion'**

There are lots of words meaning 'opinion': **il giudizio, l'opinione, il parere, la valutazione**. Probably the most frequently used is **il parere**. They are followed by **di** or **su**.

Vorrei conoscere il Suo parere sulla qualità dei nostri prodotti.

I would like to know your opinion of the quality of our products.

Qual è la tua valutazione della situazione?

What is your evaluation of the situation?

You can also use the expression **essere del parere** 'to be of the opinion (that)':

Mio marito è del parere che dovremmo andare a sciare nelle Dolomiti quest'anno.

My husband is of the opinion that we ought to go skiing in the Dolomites this year.

Noi siamo del parere opposto.

We are of the opposite opinion.

27.1.5 **Phrases meaning 'in my opinion'**

Any of the following phrases can be used as an adjunct to the main message of the sentence, with the meaning 'in my opinion': **a mio parere, a parer mio, nella mia opinione, per me, secondo me, secondo la mia opinione**. The phrases do not alter the verb tense or mood. The

conditional mood can convey the fact that the view expressed is a personal opinion, especially in the press (see also 42.9), where it is important to stress that the opinion is subjective and not a proven fact.

A mio parere, Berlusconi era molto abile nel manipolare l'opinione pubblica.

In my opinion, Berlusconi was very skilled at manipulating public opinion.

Al parere del mio professore di storia, il Risorgimento è il periodo più interessante della storia italiana.

In my history teacher's opinion, the Risorgimento is the most interesting period in Italian history.

Per me, non ci sono alternative.

In my opinion there are no alternatives.

Secondo mio padre i genovesi sarebbero tirchi.

According to my father the Genoese are mean.

Nella mia opinione, imparare una lingua significa imparare anche una cultura.

In my opinion, learning a language means learning a culture as well.

You can also say:

Secondo la mia opinione, imparare una lingua significa imparare anche una cultura.

Secondo can be used not only with a personal opinion, but also with a saying, a tradition, or a legend:

Secondo la leggenda, nel castello girerebbe il fantasma di un soldato austriaco morto in modo violento.

According to legend, the castle is haunted by the ghost of an Austrian soldier who died violently.

Secondo un detto popolare, 'chi dorme non piglia pesci'.

According to a popular saying, 'he who sleeps doesn't catch fish'.

27.2 Expressing agreement, disagreement

An important linguistic function in any language is to be able to express or indicate agreement or disagreement with a person or a statement. Not surprisingly, there are many ways of doing this in Italian, some more polite than others.

27.2.1 Expressing agreement

Simple expressions of agreement include:

OK	OK
va bene	all right
essere d'accordo	(to be) agreed / in agreement
essere favorevole	to be in favour (of)
è vero / è giusto	that's true / that's correct

Note how these expressions are used:

È vero quello che dici tu.

What you say is true.

Era vero che c'erano pochi dipendenti disposti a lavorare anche il sabato.

It was true that there were few employees willing to work on Saturdays too.

Sono d'accordo che bisogna cambiare la struttura del reparto.

I agree that we need to change the structure of the department.

Essere d'accordo is followed by **con** when saying you agree with someone:

Sono d'accordo con te.

I agree with you.

Essere d'accordo can be followed by **con** or **su** with a noun, to say what you agree with:

I dipendenti saranno d'accordo con la decisione del sindacato.

The employees will agree with the decision of the trade union.

I clienti sono d'accordo sul prezzo.

The customers are in agreement on the price.

The expression **mettersi d'accordo** (to come to an agreement) can also be used (see also 27.2.2):

I paesi islamici devono mettersi d'accordo per aiutare a risolvere i problemi in Siria.

The Islamic countries have to come to an agreement, in order to help solve the problems in Syria.

Other ways of expressing agreement, particularly in the spoken language, include:

Hai proprio ragione.

You're absolutely right.

Naturalmente.

Naturally. (Of course.)

Sì, anch'io la vedo così.

Yes, I see it like that too.

27.2.2 Expressing disagreement

Expressions of disagreement include:

essere contrario a

to be against

non è vero

it's not true

non condividere (una scelta, una decisione)

not to agree with (a choice, a decision)

per niente

not at all

non essere d'accordo

not to be in agreement

sbagliare

to be wrong

Here are some examples of how these expressions are used:

Non condivido la tua scelta di partner.

I don't agree with your choice of partner.

Su questo aspetto del Trattato di Maastricht gli Eurodeputati inglesi non sono mai stati d'accordo con gli Eurodeputati francesi.

On this aspect of the Treaty of Maastricht the English Euro MPs have never been in agreement with the French Euro MPs.

Sbagli. Vincerà la Juventus, non il Milan.

You are wrong. Juventus will win, not Milan. (*Italian football teams*)

The phrase **non è vero** can be used to correct a statement or deny an accusation. In formal language, the construction **non è vero** takes the verb in the subjunctive:

Non è vero che l'abbiano licenziato. È stato lui a dare le dimissioni.

It's not true that they've fired him. It was he who resigned.

Often in less formal language, the indicative is used instead:

Non è vero che Marco è stato fuori per una settimana.

It's not true that Marco has been away for a week.

Another way of expressing disbelief is:

Non ci credo per niente.

I don't believe a word.

27.2.3 Agreeing in part: *non dico che*

Non dico takes **che** followed by a verb in the subjunctive:

Non dico che vada bene il suo comportamento, ma lo capisco.

I'm not saying that his behaviour is all right, but I can understand it.

28

Indicating preference, likes and dislikes

28.1 Introduction

One of the communicative functions that you need to master in Italian is how to express likes, preferences, and, on occasions, dislikes. Some of the ways of expressing likes or dislikes are more appropriate for people, others for objects.

28.2 Expressing likes

28.2.1 Things and people, using *piacere*

Probably the commonest way of expressing likes or dislikes is to use the verb **piacere** (see 18.4.4) and an indirect object pronoun (see 3.4.2). **Piacere** means ‘to please’, so the English sentence ‘I like music’ becomes in Italian ‘Music is pleasing to me’ **La musica mi piace**. Since Italian word order is flexible, you can also say **mi piace la musica**. Whichever way round, the item or person giving pleasure is the *grammatical subject* of the sentence and the person receiving pleasure is the *indirect object*:

Mi piace la musica.
I like music.

To emphasise the person who likes music, you can use a stressed indirect object pronoun (see 3.3.2):

La musica piace a me.

Piacere is equally suitable for people, objects or activities. If the person or item liked is plural, the verb must be plural too:

Ci piace la pasta.
We like pasta.

Ci piacciono gli spaghetti.
We like spaghetti.

Piacere can be used in a full range of tenses and uses **essere** in all compound tenses:

Mi piaceva andare a trovare i nonni.
I liked going to see my grandparents.

Quella ragazza mi è piaciuta tanto.
I really liked that girl.

Mi piacerebbe andare in Sicilia.
I would like to go to Sicily.

The indirect object (the person receiving pleasure) can be a proper name or a noun governed by **a**:

A Marco piaceva andare in bicicletta.
Marco used to like going by bike.

Il caldo piace solo *alla gente che è in vacanza.*

Only people who are on holiday like the heat.

Ai ragazzi italiani piacciono le magliette americane.

Italian kids like American T-shirts.

An unstressed indirect object pronoun (see 3.4.2), here indicated in bold italic, can be used in place of the person:

Come può piacerti una persona così superficiale?

How can you like such a superficial person?

Vi sono piaciuti i cannelloni fatti con spinaci?

Did you like the cannelloni made with spinach?

The following example uses the emphatic (stressed) form of indirect pronoun (see 3.3.2) to contrast and compare differing tastes:

A noi piaceva fare delle lunghe passeggiate, a loro piaceva stare fermi.

We liked going for long walks; *they* liked staying still.

Molto, tanto, poco, abbastanza

The extent of like or dislike can be indicated with an adverb of quantity such as **molto** ‘a lot’, **tanto** ‘a lot’, ‘so much’, **poco** ‘not very much’, ‘a little’, **abbastanza** ‘fairly’, ‘enough’, ‘sort of’, etc. (see also 6.3.5):

Mi piace molto questo paese.

I like this village a lot.

Gli piaceva tanto andare in barca.

He used to love going in the boat.

Ti piacciono queste scarpe? *Abbastanza.*

Do you like these shoes? Sort of.

28.2.2 Liking a person

Because likes and loves are a subject much discussed in everyday life, there is no shortage of phrases used to express them:

amare	to love
prendere la/una cotta per	to get a crush on
trovare simpatico	to find someone likeable
volere bene a	to love, to like

Ho conosciuto il nuovo insegnante; l’ho trovato molto simpatico.

I’ve met the new teacher; I found him very nice.

Amare and **volere bene a** can be used for any friendly or loving relationship, whether romantic or not:

Vogliamo bene a tutti i nostri figli.

We love all our children.

Ti amo più di ieri, meno di domani.

I love you more than yesterday, less than tomorrow.

(a romantic declaration often engraved on medallions and lockets)

Prendere la/una cotta always has a romantic/sexual connotation:

Pino mi ha telefonato di nuovo stasera; ha proprio preso una cotta.

Pino rang me again tonight; he’s really got a crush on me.

28.2.3 Liking an object or activity

Apart from **piacere**, you can use one of the following expressions to say what you like or what you like doing:

amare	to love
andare b(ene)	to be all right, OK, acceptable
gradire	to please (<i>mainly used when offering food and drink and considered rather old-fashioned</i>)
I miei genitori amano la musica classica.	My parents love classical music.
Gradisce un aperitivo?	Would you like an aperitif?

Like **piacere**, **andare (bene)** can be used with an indirect object pronoun, referring to the person doing the liking, and either a noun or **di** and a verb infinitive, to say what he/she likes or likes doing:

Ti va bene questo posto?

Is this place all right for you?

Vi va di mangiare fuori stasera?

Do you feel like eating out tonight?

To talk about enjoyment, you can use verbs such as:

divertirsi to enjoy oneself

godersi to enjoy (something)

Divertirsi and **godersi** are pronominal verbs (see 2.1.10) which act like reflexives, in other words they are always used with the reflexive pronoun:

Vi siete divertiti a Londra?

Did you enjoy yourselves in London?

Ti diverti a giocare a carte?

Do you like playing cards?

Unlike true reflexive verbs, however, **godere** can also take a direct object, either noun (**le vacanze**) or direct object pronoun. The past participle can either agree with the direct object (as in the second example below) or with the grammatical subject (as in the first example below):

I ragazzi si sono goduti le vacanze al mare.

The boys enjoyed their holiday at the seaside.

Me la sono proprio goduta, la vacanza.

I really enjoyed it, the holiday.

► See also 3.4.8 on dislocation.

La vita è una sola. Goditela!

You've only got one life. Enjoy it!

28.3 Expressing dislikes

Most of the expressions conveying dislikes can be used equally for a person, object, event or activity.

28.3.1 Non ... piacere

If you really don't like something or someone, you can say so just by using **piacere** and adding **non**:

Non mi è piaciuto il tuo comportamento.

I didn't like your behaviour.

Gli spinaci non piacevano ai ragazzi.

The boys didn't like spinach.

Al direttore non piace scrivere delle relazioni.

The manager doesn't like writing reports.

Non mi piacciono le persone maleducate.

I don't like bad-mannered people.

Note that **dispiacere** is not the exact opposite of **piacere**; it does not mean ‘to dislike’. It expresses a polite request, as in **Ti dispiace passarmi il sale?** ‘Would you mind passing me the salt?’, or an apology, as in **Mi dispiace** ‘I am sorry’ (*literally*: ‘It is displeasing to me’) (see 20.7).

Dispiacere uses a construction similar to that of **piacere**; the indirect pronoun **mi, ti, gli**, etc. (see 3.4.2) indicates the *person* who is apologising:

Scusi, mi dispiace disturbarla.
Excuse me, I’m sorry to disturb you.

28.3.2 Conveying mild dislike

Sometimes it is better to be tactful and tell someone that you ‘don’t like something very much’ by using the adverb **poco** (see 6.3.5):

Le piace questo libro? **A me piace poco.**
Do you like this book? I don’t like it very much.

The adverb **abbastanza** (see 6.3.5, 28.2.1) expresses a distinct lack of enthusiasm:

Le piacciono le vongole? **Abbastanza.**
Do you like clams? A bit. (*Literally*: enough)

28.3.3 Other expressions of dislike

trovare antipatico to find (someone) unpleasant, disagreeable
(non) andare (bene) to be not all right, not acceptable

Trovare antipatico is normally used to refer to a person, expressed as direct object of **trovare**:

Trovo il mio capo proprio antipatico.
I find my boss really disagreeable.

The verb **(non) andare (bene)** is normally used with an object or activity and can be followed by a noun or by **di** and an infinitive:

Non mi va il tuo comportamento.
I don’t like your behaviour.
Non le va di uscire stasera.
She doesn’t feel like going out this evening.

It is occasionally used to refer to a person:

Non gli va bene Marco al posto di Giorgio.
He’s not happy about Marco (being) in place of Giorgio.

28.3.4 Conveying strong dislike

Here are some stronger ways of conveying dislike, of a person or object:

detestare to hate
fare schifo a qualcuno to make somebody sick
fare effetto a qualcuno to make somebody sick (*mainly referring to an object that makes someone sick*)
non sopportare to not be able to stand
non tollerare to not be able to stand
non potere vedere to not be able to bear
odiare to hate

Non sopporto il mio collega, lo trovo proprio antipatico.
I can’t bear my colleague, I find him really unpleasant.

Il direttore non poteva vedere Berlusconi.
The manager couldn’t stand Berlusconi.

Mio padre detesta i fannulloni.

My father detests layabouts.

Non mi piacciono le vongole. Mi fanno effetto.

I don't like clams. They make me want to throw up.

Vedere le mosche sulla carne mi ha fatto schifo.

Seeing the flies on the meat made me feel sick.

Odio gli spinaci.

I hate spinach.

28.4 Expressing a preference

To express a preference, you can use **piacere**, with **(di) più** 'more' or **(di) meno** 'less':

Noi andiamo al mare quest'estate, ma ci piacerebbe di più andare in montagna.

We're going to the sea this summer, but we would prefer to go to the mountains.

Secondo un sondaggio recente sui personaggi famosi, sono i politici che piacciono di meno alla gente.

According to a recent survey on famous people, it's the politicians who are the least liked by people.

You can also use **preferire** 'to prefer', followed by a noun or a verb infinitive:

I professori preferiscono gli studenti che si impegnano di più.

Lecturers prefer students who are more committed.

Oggi si preferisce mangiare meno carne, più verdura e frutta fresca.

Today people prefer eating less meat, more vegetables and fresh fruit.

29

Expressing certainty and knowledge

29.1 Introduction

This section of the book is about expressing states of mind and emotions. In this particular chapter we look at ways of expressing degrees of certainty, including knowing, remembering and forgetting. The various degrees of uncertainty are reflected in the choice of verb mood: indicative for statements that are concrete or certain, subjunctive for those statements that have an element of uncertainty.

29.2 Sapere

The verb **sapere** 'to know' (see 2.2.3) can be used in four different ways.

With a noun or noun equivalent (a fact or piece of information):

Lei sa quanto è il cambio con la sterlina?

Do you know how much the exchange with sterling is?

Bisogna sapere queste date a memoria.

These dates must be known by heart.

Non so niente di questo.

I don't know anything about this.

With a verb infinitive:

Per chi sa usare il computer, è facile fare acquisti in internet.

For those who know how to use the computer, it's easy to shop online.

With a dependent clause introduced by **se**:

Sai se arrivano oggi i nostri amici?

Do you know if our friends are arriving today?

With a dependent clause introduced by **che**:

Sapevamo che lui veniva, ma non l'ora precisa del suo arrivo.

We knew he was coming, but not the precise time of his arrival.

Normally, **sapere che** and **sapere se** are followed by a verb in the indicative:

Il direttore sa che c'è ancora molto da fare.

The manager knows there's still a lot to do.

Sappiamo se lui vuole il posto?

Do we know if he wants the job?

When **sapere** is negative, it is often followed by the subjunctive to stress *uncertainty*, as shown below (see also 32.3). However this is not essential in informal conversation or writing, where the indicative is often used, as shown in the last example:

Non sapevo che tu cantassi così bene.

I didn't know you sang so well.

Non so se si possa rimborsare il biglietto.

I don't know if the ticket can be refunded.

Non so se questa sia una mossa intelligente.

I don't know if this is an intelligent move.

Il mio collega non sa che sta per essere licenziato.

My colleague doesn't know he's about to be sacked.

At the end of a sentence expressing uncertainty, you can add the phrase **o no**, for example:

Non so se questa sia una mossa intelligente, o no.

I don't know if this is an intelligent move, or not.

29.3 Essere certo, sicuro, convinto

Certainty or uncertainty can be expressed using the verb **essere** and one of the following adjectives:

certo	certain
convinto	convinced
sicuro	sure

Convinto is the past participle of the verb **convincere**.

The message that follows can be introduced either by **di** and the infinitive or by **che**.

The construction **di** + infinitive can be used *only* if the subject of the two parts of the sentence is the same ('you . . . you'):

Siete sicuri di trovare la strada?

Are you sure you'll find the road?

Otherwise use **che** followed by either the subjunctive or the indicative. The *indicative* (see 2.2.2) is used when you are reasonably certain of something, as in the first example below. The *subjunctive* (see 2.2.14) is used when the sentence is negative or interrogative, expressing doubt or uncertainty, as in the second example:

Siamo sicuri che questa è la strada giusta. (*indicative*)

We are sure that this is the right road.

Siete sicuri che questa sia la strada giusta? (*subjunctive*)

Are you sure that this is the right road?

Here are further examples showing the different uses of indicative and subjunctive after **certo** and **sicuro**:

Sono certo che hanno già ricevuto la merce. (*indicative*)

I am certain they have already received the goods.

Non sono certo che abbiano ricevuto la nostra fattura. (*subjunctive*)

I'm not certain if they have received our invoice.

Sono sicura che questa è la casa di Cristina.

I'm certain that this is Cristina's house.

Non sono sicura che questa sia la casa di Cristina.

I'm not certain that this is Cristina's house.

In the following two examples, the difference is one of register. The first example uses informal spoken language, and the indicative is used. The second example is a more formal register so the subjunctive is preferred.

Sei sicura che il ristorante è aperto di domenica?

Are you sure that the restaurant is open on Sundays?

Lei è sicuro che il ristorante sia aperto di domenica?

Are you sure that the restaurant is open on Sundays?

When a fact that you are certain of at the time is later disproved, then the subjunctive is essential, after **certo**, **sicuro** or **convinto**:

Eravamo convinti che la merce fosse in magazzino ma ci sbagliavamo. L'avevano rubata.

We were convinced that the goods were in the warehouse, but we were wrong. They had been stolen.

For illustrations of how **certo** and **sicuro** are used to express *possibility* and *probability*, see 32.2.

29.4 Non . . . certo, poco certo, incerto, poco sicuro

Lack of certainty can be expressed by adding **non** or **poco** to the adjectives seen above:

I ragazzi sono poco sicuri di trovare la strada.

The boys are not at all certain of finding the way.

Il cliente non era certo di ricevere l'ordine.

The customer was not certain of receiving the order.

The adjective **incerto**, on the other hand, applies not only to personal feelings of uncertainty, but to an uncertain situation:

Sono un po' incerta sul da farsi.

I'm a bit uncertain as to what to do.

È una situazione un po' incerta.

It's an uncertain situation.

29.5 Pensare, credere, sembrare, parere

The verbs **pensare**, **credere** 'to think', followed by **che** and the subjunctive, can also express an opinion, with either certainty or uncertainty (see 27.1.1–2):

pensare/credere che

to think that . . .

Mia madre pensa che io sia troppo vecchia per sposarmi.

My mother thinks that I am too old to get married.

The impersonal verbs **sembrare**, **parere** (see 27.1.3), followed by **che** and the subjunctive, can be used in a similar way. They are used with an indirect object (noun or pronoun) to indicate the person expressing a view.

(mi) sembra/pare che

it seems (to me) . . .

A me sembrava che mia madre fosse troppo vecchia per capire.

I thought that my mother was too old to understand.

29.6 Ricordare, dimenticare

'Remembering' and 'forgetting' are expressed in Italian by the verbs **ricordare** and **dimenticare** respectively. **Ricordare** can express both 'to remember' and 'to remind'.

29.6.1 Ricordare

When **ricordare** means 'to remember', it can be used with or without the reflexive pronoun (see 3.4.3) depending on how involved the person is (see also 2.1.10). It can be followed by a noun (the person or thing remembered) either directly or preceded by **di**, by **di** + infinitive, or by **che** + indicative:

I professori ricordano solo gli studenti più bravi.

The teachers only remember the cleverest students.

Daniela ha aspettato mezz'ora davanti all'Università perché non ci siamo ricordati di lei.

Daniela waited half an hour in front of the University because we didn't remember her.

Non ti ricordi dove hai messo quella cartella?

Don't you remember where you put that file?

Ricordati di comprare il giornale.

Remember to buy the newspaper.

Il vigile si ricordava di aver visto la macchina parcheggiata vicino all'incrocio.

The traffic warden remembered seeing the car parked near the crossroads.

Mia moglie si è ricordata che io avevo lasciato i biglietti sul comodino.

My wife remembered that I had left the tickets on the bedside cabinet.

When **ricordare** means 'to remind', it takes as indirect object a noun or pronoun, to indicate the person or people being reminded:

Il direttore ha ricordato agli impiegati la riunione generale alle 6.00.

The director reminded the employees of the general meeting at 6 o'clock.

Questa casa ci ricorda le vecchie case di montagna.

This house reminds us of the old houses in the mountains.

Ricordare can also be followed by **di** and a verb infinitive:

Stasera cambia l'ora. Ricordami di aggiustare l'orologio.

Tonight the clocks change. Remind me to adjust my watch.

Un ricordo conveys the idea of nostalgia rather than a practical reminder:

Questo orsacchiotto è un ricordo della mia infanzia.

This teddy bear is a reminder/souvenir of my childhood.

Finally **ricordare** can also be used with the sense of 'to commemorate':

Oggi ricordiamo il nostro caro compagno Enrico.

Today we remember our dear companion Enrico.

29.6.2

Dimenticare

Like **ricordare**, **dimenticare** 'to forget' can be used, with or without a reflexive pronoun, with a noun ('something, someone') or with a verb, followed either by **di** + infinitive or by **che** + indicative:

Scusi, ho dimenticato il Suo nome.

I'm sorry, I've forgotten your name.

Marco, non dimenticare di prendere le chiavi.

Marco, don't forget to take your keys.

Carla, ti sei dimenticata di comprare la carta igienica.

Carla, you forgot to buy toilet paper.

Mio marito si era dimenticato che oggi è il nostro anniversario.

My husband had forgotten that today is our anniversary.

It can also mean 'to leave something behind':

Mia moglie ha dimenticato la borsa in ufficio.

My wife left her briefcase in the office.

Lastly, verbs of 'remembering' and 'forgetting' (**ricordare**, **dimenticare**) can also convey uncertainty, by use of the subjunctive or conditional mood:

Non mi ricordo se Carlo abbia già compiuto 40 anni.

I don't remember if Carlo has already reached 40 or not.

La direttrice aveva dimenticato che la segretaria sarebbe stata in vacanza.

The manager had forgotten that the secretary would be on holiday.

IV

Putting in context

30

Combining messages

30.1 Introduction

Many of the early sections in *Modern Italian Grammar* show how to get your message across: communicating information, completing a transaction, expressing a feeling or emotion.

In this section of the book, ‘Putting in context’ (Chapters 30–39), we deal with the various ways of conveying a more complex message, of combining more than one message, and of putting our message *in a context*. The examples chosen are taken from various sources including the press and contemporary literature.

Some chapters look at *specific contexts*, such as expressing certainty (Chapter 32), purpose (Chapter 33), reason (Chapter 34), result (Chapter 35), place and manner (Chapter 37), condition and hypothesis (Chapter 38), and reservation and concession (Chapter 39). Chapter 31 illustrates time relationships in the context of *relating* or *reporting* an event or action, while Chapter 36 illustrates sentences where there is a *specific time reference*, such as **mentre**, **quando**, **prima** or **dopo**.

In this introductory chapter ‘Combining messages’, we look at some *general points* that need to be borne in mind when combining messages: for example, the structure of the sentence and the tenses and moods of the verbs used. When the message is more complex, the sentence structure also tends to become more complex. The possible sentence structures can be summarised in *two* broad categories: sentences where there are two or more clauses of equal weight (*coordinated clauses*), and sentences where there is a *main* clause and one or more *dependent* (*subordinate*) clauses.

30.2 Combining statements of equal importance

30.2.1 Separate sentences

Two statements of equal importance are conveyed by using two clauses or groups of words of equal weight. These can be completely *separate sentences*:

Non è essenziale l’ammorbidente. I detersivi oggi sono più delicati.
It’s not essential to use softener. Detergents today are more delicate.

30.2.2 Basic coordinated clauses

Alternatively they can be separate clauses linked by coordinating conjunctions or other elements (see 5.2) such as **e** ‘and’, **ma** ‘but’, in which case they are known as *coordinated clauses*:

I detersivi oggi sono più delicati e non induriscono i tessuti.
Today’s detergents are more delicate and they don’t make fabrics harsh.

Lavo quasi tutto in lavatrice ma lavo le maglie di lana a mano.
I wash almost everything in the washing machine but I wash wool sweaters by hand.

30.2.3 Common coordinating elements

Other common coordinating elements, with varying meanings, include:

anche	also, as well
inoltre	besides
né	nor
neppure	not even
nonché	not to mention
o, oppure	or, or else
pure	also, as well

Non ho i soldi per andare in vacanza e inoltre non ho neanche il tempo per andarci.
I haven't got the money to go on holiday and besides I don't even have the time to go.

Non l'ho comprato né lo voglio.
I haven't bought it nor do I want it.

Possiamo andare a vedere i templi oppure se preferisci andiamo al mare.
We can go to see the temples or if you prefer we'll go to the seaside.

Elements such as **anche** or **pure** are normally attached to a specific element in the sentence, for example noun or pronoun:

La lavatrice è rotta, la lavastoviglie è rotta, anche il frigo è rotto.
The washing machine's broken, the dishwasher's broken, even the fridge is broken.

I miei cugini vanno in Sicilia; anch'io voglio andarci.
My cousins are going to Sicily: I want to go too.

30.2.4 Contrasts

Coordinating conjunctions and elements that express *contrast* (adversative conjunctions) include:

bensì	but
invece	on the other hand
mentre	whereas
però	however
piuttosto	rather (<i>can be followed by che or di</i>)
tuttavia	however

Pensavo che avrei avuto difficoltà a seguire i corsi in inglese. Invece non ho avuto problemi.

I thought I would find it difficult to follow courses in English. But I didn't have any problems.

A Milano ho trovato subito un posto mentre il mio ragazzo ha avuto un po' di difficoltà.
In Milan I found a job straightaway while my boyfriend had a bit of difficulty.

Bettina si impegnava al massimo negli studi. Però i professori le davano sempre voti alquanto bassi.

Bettina studied as hard as she could. However her lecturers always gave her rather low marks.

Piuttosto che aumentare il numero di canali televisivi, penso che sia il caso di aumentare la qualità dei programmi televisivi già esistenti.

Rather than increasing the number of TV channels, I think it would be a good idea to improve the quality of the existing TV programmes.

Non spetta a me preparare i corsi. Piuttosto aspetto che il mio collega mi passi il materiale.

It's not up to me to prepare the courses. Rather I'm waiting for my colleague to give me the material.

Preferirei non riscrivere questo capitolo, tuttavia lo farò se proprio insisti.
I would prefer not to rewrite this chapter, however I will do it if you insist.

30.2.5 Confirmation and affirmation

Difficult to translate into English, **anzi** can mean ‘on the contrary’ but can also express confirmation of what has just been said:

Luisa era veramente brava. Anzi, era la studentessa più brava della classe.

Luisa was really clever. In fact she was the cleverest student in the class.

Il turismo non è ancora molto sviluppato, anzi le infrastrutture sono praticamente inesistenti.

Tourism isn’t very developed yet; in fact the infrastructures are almost non-existent.

The following are conjunctions and discourse markers that affirm what has just been said or written (declarative conjunctions):

anzi	in fact (<i>see above</i>)
cioè	in other words, that is
infatti	indeed
vale a dire	in other words

Le scoperte scientifiche possono essere anche pericolose cioè possono avere conseguenze negative – basta pensare alla bomba atomica.

Scientific discoveries can even be dangerous, in other words they can have negative consequences – one need only think of the atomic bomb.

Gli studenti laureati devono imparare ad essere autonomi, infatti l’autonomia è la qualità più importante per un ricercatore.

Graduate students must learn to be independent, in fact independence is the most important quality for a researcher.

30.2.6 Conclusion, results

For details of *conclusive conjunctions* such as **allora** ‘and so’, **dunque** ‘therefore’, **per cui** ‘and so’ and **quindi** ‘therefore’, which express conclusion, result or consequence, see 35.2.

30.3 Combining statements of unequal importance

When there are two messages that are *not* of equal importance, one message usually expresses a main event or action, while the other expresses an action or event linked to it. The main action or event is normally expressed by a *main clause* (one that can stand on its own without another clause) while the linked action or event is expressed by a clause that cannot stand on its own but is *dependent* on or *subordinate* to the main clause. There are many types of *dependent* clauses, for example relative clauses, clauses of purpose, clauses of reason, all of which are illustrated in other chapters of Section IV (see also 30.5).

30.4 Setting events in a time context

30.4.1 Simple time context

When facts or events are related only to the moment of speaking or writing, the time context is simple. Section I gives examples of simple time contexts: the *present* (Chapter 12); the *past* (Chapter 13); the *future* (Chapter 14). Usually the verb tense alone (present, past, future) is enough to indicate the time when the action took place, although the sentence sometimes includes a more specific *marker of time* (phrase, adverb or noun group):

(Oggi) è il compleanno di Marta.

(Today) it is Marta’s birthday.

Siamo andati a Londra (la settimana scorsa).

We went to London (last week).

(L’anno prossimo) ci trasferiremo negli Stati Uniti.

(Next year) we will be moving to the USA.

30.4.2 Complex time context

In a complex sentence, where two or more messages are combined, the verbs used are closely interlinked in a relationship of time, which determines the *mood* and *tense* of the verbs used. When the sentence is composed of main clause and dependent clause, the choice of verb mood and tense in the dependent clause is determined by the verb in the *main* clause. Italian has a set of 'rules' known as the *concordanza dei tempi* ('sequence of tenses') which demonstrate this, shown in **Appendix V** and illustrated below in **30.5**. These are only guidelines, and how rigidly they are applied depends on the *type* of dependent clause; they are particularly important when the dependent clause acts as the *object* of a verb (for example, **Spero che tu possa venire; lui dice che partiranno più tardi**) or as its *subject* (as in **Mi sembra assurdo che tu debba fare il lavoro della segretaria**). In **30.5**, therefore, we look only at this type of dependent clause, often known as *noun clauses*. You will meet the sequence of tenses again in Chapter 31, in the context of reported or indirect speech. In **Appendix V**, we summarise all the 'rules' of the sequence of tenses, in easy-to-read table form.

The choice of verb mood and tense used depends on the relationship between the event or act referred to and the moment of speaking or writing: this may be the *same time context* (where the event or action takes place at the same time as the moment of writing or speaking), an *earlier time context* (where the event or action takes place in the past in relation to the moment of speaking or writing) or a *later time context* (where the event or action takes place in the future in relation to the moment of speaking or writing).

30.5 Sequence of tenses

Here we look at the way in which the sequence of tenses works in practice. We take as a starting point the different tenses used in the main clause (present, past or future), then look at each of the different time contexts (same, earlier, later) in turn. Focusing on noun clauses (which are either the subject or the object of the main verb), we see how the sequence of tenses works for verbs such as **dire, sapere** which are normally followed by a verb in the indicative mood, and also how it works for verbs such as **credere, pensare, sembrare, volere** which are normally followed by a verb in the subjunctive. (See also **Appendix V**.)

30.5.1 Main verb in present tense

When the verb in the main clause is in the present tense (present indicative, present conditional), the verb in the dependent clause can be in any of the moods or tenses shown in the tables below, depending on the time context (same, earlier, later) and on whether the verb normally takes the indicative or the subjunctive.

Same time context

Speaking about events or actions taking place at the *same* time as the moment of speaking or writing:

Main verb in present tense

Verb in dependent clause

Verbs normally followed by indicative or conditional

Present indicative:

So

Present indicative:

che l'aereo parte sempre in orario.

Present conditional:

che i miei amici verrebbero volentieri.

Verbs normally followed by subjunctive

Present indicative:

Sembra

Present conditional:

Vorrei

Present subjunctive:

che sappiate tutto.

Imperfect subjunctive:

che i miei figli fossero qui.

The *indicative mood* (see 2.2.2) expresses certainty or objectivity:

I passeggeri sanno che *devono* arrivare due ore prima della partenza.

Passengers know they have to arrive two hours before departure time.

The *conditional mood* (see 2.2.11) is often used to indicate an unconfirmed report (see also 31.4.1). Italian uses the present conditional, where English would use simply the present indicative:

Gli esperti dicono che la situazione economica *sarebbe* più grave di quanto sembra.

The experts say that the economic situation *is* more serious than it seems.

The *subjunctive mood* (see 2.2.14–15) indicates a relationship of uncertainty or subjectivity and is always used after certain verbs, for example verbs expressing an opinion, such as **pensare**, **sembrare**, or wishing or hoping, such as **chiedere**, **volere**, **sperare**. In accordance with the sequence of tenses shown above, either present subjunctive (see 2.2.16) or imperfect subjunctive (see 2.2.18) can be used:

Pare che mio cugino *sia* pronto a partire.

It seems my cousin is ready to leave.

Vorrei che tu *fossi* meno prepotente.

I wish you were less domineering.

Earlier time context

Speaking about events or actions which took place *in the past* in relation to the moment of speaking or writing:

Main verb in present tense

Verb in dependent clause

Verbs normally followed by indicative or conditional

Present indicative:

So

Perfect:

che si sono sposati nel 1992.

Imperfect:

che abitavano a Londra.

Past definite:

che suo marito morì nel 1978.

Pluperfect:

che avevano comprato la casa in Italia.

Past conditional:

che avrebbero preferito un figlio maschio.

Verbs normally followed by subjunctive

Present indicative:

Sembra

Perfect subjunctive:

che abbia vinto un premio importante.

Imperfect subjunctive:

che avessero fretta.

Pluperfect subjunctive:

che lui avesse detto la verità.

Present conditional:

Direi

Perfect subjunctive:

che tu abbia fatto bene.

Imperfect subjunctive:

che il professore fosse troppo stanco.

Pluperfect subjunctive:

che tu mi avessi detto la verità.

The *indicative mood* (see 2.2.2) describes an action or event in the past and expresses a fact or certainty. After a main verb in the present tense, any of the past tenses (imperfect, perfect, past definite or pluperfect) can be used in the dependent clause:

Sappiamo che migliaia di nordafricani hanno perso la vita nel tentativo di raggiungere le coste europee.

We know that thousands of North Africans have lost their lives trying to reach the European coasts.

A scuola ci insegnano che gli antichi romani costruirono ponti e strade su tutto il loro territorio.

At school they teach us that the ancient Romans built bridges and roads throughout their territory.

Mia madre sa che mio fratello fumava di nascosto.

My mother knows that my brother smoked in secret.

The *past conditional* (see 2.2.13) is often used to indicate a report which has not been confirmed (expressed in English by a simple past indicative, sometimes with a caveat or disclaimer such as 'apparently'):

I giornali dicono che Berlusconi avrebbe organizzato molte feste anche alla sua villa privata.

The newspapers say that Berlusconi (apparently) organized lots of parties at his private villa too.

The *subjunctive mood* (see 2.2.14–15) is used after verbs such as **pensare**, **sembrare**, etc. to express uncertainty; either perfect or imperfect subjunctive are used to talk about events or actions which took place in the past but the pluperfect subjunctive can also be used, as shown in the third example:

Sembra che la regina abbia voluto incontrare i responsabili del progetto.

It seems the queen wanted to meet those responsible for the project.

Penso che da piccolo mio fratello mangiasse solo la pasta.

I think my brother only ate pasta when he was little.

Vorrei che mio marito mi avesse chiamato prima di decidere.

I wish that my husband had called me before taking a decision.

Later time context

Speaking about events or actions taking place *in the future* in relation to the moment of speaking or writing:

Main verb in present tense

Verb in dependent clause

*Verbs normally followed
by indicative or conditional
Present indicative:*

So

Present indicative:

che il medico viene domani.

Future indicative:

che prenderà il posto a Padova.

Present conditional:

che vorrebbe lavorare a Padova.

*Verbs normally followed
by subjunctive*

The subjunctive has no future tense so the future indicative or present subjunctive are used instead. The present conditional can also be used, if a condition is implied.

Present indicative:

Sembra

Future indicative:

che darà le dimissioni.

Present subjunctive:

che venga domani.

Present conditional:

che vorrebbe dare le dimissioni.

Present conditional:

Direi

Present conditional:

che Paolo sarebbe il candidato ideale.

The *indicative mood* (see 2.2.2) used to talk about future events expresses a fact or certainty. The example below uses the future indicative (see 2.2.9):

Non mi vuole dire quanto costerà.

He doesn't want to tell me how much it will cost.

The present tense (see 2.2.3) can also be used, especially in less formal language, when talking of the very near and immediate future, and when using a marker of future time such as **domani**:

Mi spiega che suo figlio arriva domani.

She explains to me that her son is arriving tomorrow.

The *conditional mood* (see 2.2.11) is used when it is not yet certain that the event or action will take place. The example below uses the present conditional:

Penso che mia madre sarebbe disposta a fare la baby sitter sabato sera.

I think that my mother would be willing to babysit on Saturday evening.

The *subjunctive mood* (see 2.2.14–15) is used where there is more uncertainty about whether the statement is true or whether the event will take place. This example uses the present tense of the subjunctive (the subjunctive does not have a future tense):

Molti italiani sperano che il Presidente del Consiglio si dimetta anche prima delle elezioni.

Many Italians hope that the Prime Minister will resign even before the elections.

30.5.2 Main verb in past tense

Same time context

Speaking about events or actions taking place in the *same* time context as the moment of speaking or writing:

Main verb in past tense

Verb in dependent clause

Verbs normally followed by indicative or conditional

Imperfect / Perfect / Past definite / Pluperfect:

Stefano mi diceva / mi ha detto / mi disse / mi aveva detto

Present indicative:

che tu lavori in centro adesso.

Imperfect indicative:

che tu lavoravi in biblioteca.

Past definite:

che i soldati distrussero i ponti.

Verbs normally followed by subjunctive

Imperfect / Perfect / Past definite / Pluperfect:

Pensavo / ho pensato / pensai / avevo pensato

Imperfect subjunctive:

che sua moglie avesse un ruolo importante nella ditta.

Giacomo mi ha detto che Stefano è sposato. (implies fact or certainty)

Giacomo told me that Stefano is married.

Giacomo mi ha detto che Stefano era sposato. (implies fact or certainty)

Giacomo told me that Stefano was married.

Pensavo che Stefano fosse sposato. (implies uncertainty)

I thought Stefano was married.

Earlier time context

Speaking about events or actions which took place *in the past* in relation to the moment of speaking or writing:

*Main verb in past tense**Verb in dependent clause*

Verbs normally followed by indicative or conditional

Imperfect / Perfect / Past definite / Pluperfect:
Stefano mi diceva / mi ha detto / mi disse / mi aveva detto

Pluperfect indicative:

**che tu avevi lavorato in Italia prima di venire a Londra.
 che tu eri andata a Milano per Natale.**

Verbs normally followed by subjunctive

Imperfect / Perfect / Past definite / Pluperfect:
Immaginavo / ho immaginato / immaginai / avevo immaginato

Pluperfect subjunctive:

**che sua moglie lo avesse sposato per motivi economici.
 che lui fosse tornato in Italia.**

The *indicative mood* (see 2.2.2) is used to recount a fact or objective statement:

Il direttore ha rivelato che almeno 30 milioni di euro erano spariti dal conto.

The manager revealed that at least 30 million euros had disappeared from the account.

The *subjunctive mood* (see 2.2.14–15) is used after certain verbs which require it:

Il cameriere attendeva che avessimo finito di mangiare prima di portare il conto.

The waiter was waiting until we had finished eating before bringing the bill.

Later time context

Speaking about events or actions taking place *in the future* in relation to the moment of speaking or writing:

*Main verb in past tense**Verb in dependent clause*

Verbs normally followed by indicative or conditional

Imperfect / Perfect / Past definite / Pluperfect:
Stefano mi diceva / mi ha detto / mi disse / mi aveva detto

Future indicative:

che arriverà domani mattina presto.

Past conditional:

che avrebbe finito i compiti prima di cena.

Imperfect indicative (in informal speech replacing past conditional):

che finiva i compiti prima di cena.

The subjunctive has no future tense so the past conditional is normally used.

In informal speech it is possible to use the imperfect indicative in its place.

Past conditional:

che tu saresti venuta con me.

che mia madre mi avrebbe accompagnato in macchina.

Imperfect:

che tu venivi con me.

che mia madre mi accompagnava in macchina.

Verbs normally followed by subjunctive

Imperfect / Perfect / Past definite / Pluperfect:
Stefano pensava / ha pensato / aveva pensato

If the events still have to take place, the *future indicative* is used, even when the verb depends on a main clause in a past tense:

Mia mamma mi ha promesso che verrà a trovarmi domani mattina.

My mother has promised me that she will come to see me tomorrow morning.

The *past conditional* (see 2.2.13) is used when the events will already have taken place (or not) at the moment of speaking/writing:

Il Presidente ha dichiarato che avrebbe posto il veto a una decisione del Congresso in favore dell'abolizione dell'embargo.

The President declared that he would impose a veto if Congress were to decide to lift the embargo.

In colloquial Italian, the past conditional is sometimes replaced by the *imperfect indicative*:

Mia mamma mi aveva promesso (mi ha promesso) che sarebbe venuta a trovarmi ieri sera.

Mia mamma mi aveva promesso che veniva a trovarmi ieri sera.

My mother had promised me that she would come to see me yesterday evening.

30.5.3 Main verb in future tense

The future tense is far less commonly used than the present tense, in Italian. In fact there is very little difference between sentences where the main clause has a verb in the present tense (see 30.5.1) and those where the main clause has a verb in the future tense, as shown below.

Same time context

Talking about events or actions taking place in the *same* time context:

Main verb in future tense

Verb in dependent clause

Verbs normally followed by indicative or conditional

Future indicative:

Dirò

Present indicative:

che sei stanca dopo il viaggio

Present conditional:

che vorreste avere due camere separate.

Verbs normally followed by subjunctive

The subjunctive has no future tense so the present subjunctive is normally used in its place.

Future indicative:

Penserà

Present subjunctive:

che tu sia stanca dopo il viaggio.

The *future indicative* (see 2.2.9) is used when an outcome is definite:

Dirò che arriverai alle 9 di sera.

I will say that you will get here at 9 o'clock in the evening.

The *present conditional* (see 2.2.12) is used when the outcome is possible but not definite:

Le dirò che sarebbe meglio lavorare in gruppo.

I'll tell her that it would be better to work in a team.

The *present subjunctive* (see 2.2.16) is used after certain verbs that require it, for example verbs of hoping, wishing, requesting and ordering:

La manager chiederà che le cameriere puliscano le camere prima di mezzogiorno.

The manager will ask the maids to clean the bedrooms before midday.

Earlier time context

Talking about events or actions which took place *in the past* in relation to the moment of speaking or writing:

Main verb in future tense

Verb in dependent clause

Verbs normally followed by indicative or conditional

Future indicative:

Dirò

Perfect:

che avete già pagato.

Imperfect:

che preferivate pagare con la carta.

Past definite:

che tuo marito venne l'anno scorso.

Pluperfect:

che avevamo deciso di rimanere a casa.

Past conditional:

che avremmo preferito stare da soli.

Verbs normally followed by subjunctive

Future indicative:

Penserà

Perfect subjunctive:

che tu abbia cambiato idea.

Imperfect subjunctive:

che avessimo fretta.

Pluperfect subjunctive:

che tu avessi detto una bugia.**Later time context**Talking about events or actions taking place *in the future* in relation to the moment of speaking or writing:

Main verb in future tense

Verb in dependent clause

Verbs normally followed by indicative or conditional

Future indicative:

Gli dirò

Future indicative:

che verremo più tardi.

Present conditional:

che verremmo molto volentieri.

Verbs normally followed by subjunctive

Future indicative:

Penserà*The subjunctive has no future tense so either the present subjunctive or the future indicative are used in its place.*

Future indicative:

che avremo fretta domani mattina.

Present subjunctive:

che non ci siano problemi di traffico domani mattina.The *future indicative* (see 2.2.9) is used in a more formal context. Otherwise the present tense can be used here, just as it is when it is in the main clause not the dependent clause:**Gli comunicheremo che dovrà pagare entro una settimana.**

We'll inform him that he will have to pay within one week.

The *present conditional* (see 2.2.11) is used when a condition is implied:**Gli dirò che verremmo molto volentieri (se avessimo tempo).**

I will tell him that we would come very willingly (if we had time).

Since there is no future subjunctive, the *present subjunctive* (see 2.2.16) can be used after those verbs that require the subjunctive, for example verbs of hoping, wishing, requesting and ordering:**Penserà che domani non ci siano problemi di traffico.**

In this section, we look at how gerunds (see 2.2.23–5) and infinitives (see 2.2.1) can also be used to complement main verbs.

30.6.1 Dependent clauses using infinitive or gerund

Both the infinitive (present or past) and the gerund (present or past) can be used to express actions and situations in a dependent clause, *whatever the tense and mood of the main verb*. You can only use the infinitive or the gerund when the grammatical subject of the dependent clause is *the same as* that of the verb in the main clause, as in the examples below.

Infinitive (present)

Cerco di risparmiare soldi per andare in vacanza a luglio.

I'm trying to save money to go on holiday in July.

Infinitive (past)

In the example below, Italian uses the past infinitive, while English uses the gerund.

Dopo aver lavorato tutto l'anno, ora posso andare in vacanza!

After working all year, now I can go on holiday!

Gerund (present)

Risparmiando soldi sulla casa posso permettermi di andare in vacanza.

By saving money on the house, I can go on holiday.

Gerund (past)

Avendo risparmiato soldi, posso andare in vacanza!

Having saved some money, I can go on holiday!

30.6.2 Dependent clauses using *che*

If the grammatical subject of the main clause is different from that of the dependent clause, then you cannot use a dependent gerund or infinitive but have to use a clause introduced by **che** or other conjunction. Here are some examples based on those in 30.6.1 above, with the different grammatical subjects in bold in the English sentences:

Cerco di risparmiare soldi in modo che possiamo permetterci una vacanza.

I try and save money so that **we** can afford a holiday.

Se risparmio soldi questo mese, potremo permetterci di andare in vacanza.

If **I** save money this month, **we** will be able to afford to go on holiday.

30.6.3 Contrast with use of gerund and infinitive in English

Many learners make the mistake of trying to translate an English sentence directly into Italian. But because English and Italian have very different sentence structures, this doesn't always work. One example of this is the way in which the gerunds and infinitives are used.

Infinitive (present/past)

Where Italian uses a past infinitive, English can use a gerund:

Dopo aver studiato tutto l'anno, ora posso rilassarmi.

After *studying* all year, now I can relax.

Gerund (present)

While English can use a preposition (for example, 'by, on') with the gerund form, Italian can't. The 'by' or 'on' is implicit in the Italian gerund and does not need to be added:

Vedendo arrivare mio cugino, sono andata ad aprire la porta.

On seeing my cousin arrive, I went to open the door.

Gerund, infinitive or *che* clause

English often uses a gerund form (-ing) after verbs such as 'seeing, hearing'. In Italian you cannot use the gerund form after verbs such as **sentire**, **vedere**. You have to use either the infinitive or else a **che** clause with a finite verb:

All'alba sentivo gli uccelli *che cantavano*.

All'alba sentivo *cantare* gli uccelli.

At dawn I used to hear the birds singing.

Alle quattro di pomeriggio, vedevo i bambini *che uscivano* dalla scuola.

Alle quattro di pomeriggio, vedevo *uscire* i bambini dalla scuola.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, I saw the children coming out of school.

30.6.4 Examples from the press

The examples here show how the gerund and the infinitive can be used where the grammatical subject of both actions or events is the same:

Example 1

This first press extract uses the past infinitive (**per aver identificato**):

Nel 1962, lo scienziato inglese Francis Crick, è stato insignito del premio Nobel per la medicina, insieme a James Watson, per avere identificato la struttura a doppia elica del Dna.

In 1962 the English scientist Francis Crick was awarded the Nobel prize for medicine, along with James Watson, for having identified the double helix structure of DNA.

Example 2

In this second press extract, there is a succession of dependent present infinitives (**a prendere, per uscire, a non riuscire, per andare in vacanza, comprarmi vestiti, andare a cena**). The past infinitive (**aver fatto**) refers to a past action or non-action. The gerunds (**lavorando, limitandomi, guadagnando**) provide information which complements the main verb (for example the means by which something was done) by expressing actions or events that take place in the same time context as the main event. The extract ends with a conditional sentence where the condition is expressed by an imperfect subjunctive (**se tornassi**) and the possible outcome is described by a present conditional (**i risultati sarebbero gli stessi**). Look at how all these verbs work together in the text:

Vivere con 988 euro al mese

Vivo da sola, in Italia, da circa 3 anni. Da gennaio, *lavorando con contratto Co.Co. Co, senza aver fatto un singolo giorno di ferie, riesco a prendere circa 988 euro al mese. Lavoro 8-9 ore per 5 o 6 giorni a settimana, non ho tempo e soldi per uscire, sono sempre stanca e continuo a non riuscire a mettere da parte un centesimo per andare in vacanza, comprarmi vestiti, andare a cena fuori. Se tornassi a vivere con mamma e papà, limitandomi a fare qualche lavoretto saltuario, i risultati sarebbero esattamente gli stessi, guadagnando addirittura qualcosa in tempo libero e salute.*

(Adapted from letter to 'Italians' by Beppe Severgnini, Corriere della Sera online)

Living on 988 euros a month

I have been living on my own, in Italy, for about 3 years. Since January, working on a temporary contract, without having taken a single day's holiday, I've managed to take home about 988 euros a month. I work 8–9 hours for 5–6 days a week, I haven't got the time or money to go out, am always tired, and am still unable to set aside a single penny to go on holiday, buy myself clothes, or eat out. If I went back to mum and dad, restricting myself to the odd temporary job, the result would be exactly the same, gaining something, even, in terms of my free time and my health.

30.7 Relationship of tenses in complex texts

Here we look at some extracts from the media which illustrate the way in which different time contexts are handled in current journalistic Italian and the way in which tenses relate to one another in complex texts. In real life examples, the link between main and dependent clauses

is not always obvious. Some of the sentences contain only main clauses, while sometimes the main verb is implied but not stated. The same basic ‘rules’ of the sequence of tenses seen in 30.5, however, still apply. In this section, the examples are arranged by time context (present, past, future), not by the tense used in the main clause.

30.7.1 Present time context

Example 1

This article about the ‘new homeless’ shows how present indicative verb forms (see 2.2.3) are used in the main clauses (**vivono, si incontrano, troviamo, non possono permettersi**), and in a series of dependent relative clauses (**che non ce la fanno, che non riescono, che devono passare**) to express events happening in the same time context (present). A gerund (see 2.2.24) is used to express concession (**pur avendo**), while another gerund expresses the reason behind the main statement (**avendo**).

L'identikit dei nuovi senzateo

Padri separati e anziani soli

Padri separati, anziani con la pensione minima, giovani immigrati in cerca di lavoro, working poor, interi nuclei familiari. È l'identikit dei nuovi senzateo: vivono nelle grandi città, ma si incontrano anche in provincia. Oltre agli “storici” homeless (italiani, tra i 45 ed i 65 anni, spesso con problemi psichiatrici o di alcolismo o tossicodipendenza) troviamo giovani stranieri in cerca di un'occupazione, anziani che non ce la fanno più con la sola pensione a far fronte a tutte le spese, working poor che, pur avendo un lavoro, non riescono a farcela ad arrivare a fine mese, uomini e padri separati che devono passare gli alimenti alla moglie e ai figli e avendo solo un reddito modesto non possono permettersi una casa propria.

(http://www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/immigrazione/2012/01/20/news/polchi_povert-28493875/, retrieved 1 March 2012)

Separated fathers, old people with the minimum pension, young immigrants in search of work, the working poor, entire family groups. This is the profile of the new homeless: they live in the big cities, but you can find them in the provinces too. As well as the ‘traditional’ homeless (Italians between the ages of 45 and 65, often with psychiatric problems or problems of alcoholism or drug addiction), we find young foreigners in search of work, old people who find that their pension alone can't cover all their expenditure, working poor who, despite having a job, can't make it to the end of the month, separated men and fathers who have to pay maintenance for their wives and children and with just one modest income, can't afford a house of their own.

Example 2

This text, about a possible future event involving the computer company Apple, shows how the present conditional (see also 2.2.11) is used in Italian to express an unconfirmed report. It would be expressed in English by a plain present indicative:

Apple starebbe pianificando un evento per gennaio

Secondo quanto riporta TechCrunch, Apple starebbe pianificando un'evento per gennaio, focalizzato su possibili miglioramenti che riguarderebbero la distribuzione di media attraverso i suoi canali. L'evento dovrebbe essere tenuto da Eddy Cue, Senior Vice President of Internet Service e Software. Come riportato durante l'evento non dovrebbe essere annunciato nessun tipo di nuovo hardware. Restiamo in attesa di una conferma da parte di Apple, ed eventualmente della data e del luogo in cui dovrebbe tenersi l'evento; New York è data come la possibile location.

According to TechCrunch, Apple is planning an event in January, focusing on possible upgrades which relate to the distribution of media through its channels. The event is to be held apparently by Eddy Cue, Senior Vice President of Internet Service and Software. According to the report, no new hardware should be announced during the event. We await confirmation from Apple, and if possible the date and place where the event will take place. New York has been given as a possible location.

30.7.2 Past time context

Example 1

In this eyewitness account by two survivors from the sinking of the *Costa Concordia* off the island of Giglio (Tuscany), the actions or events all take place in the same time context, the past. Since this is an interview rather than just a third person account, however, the text is interspersed with references to the present time (**Francesca racconta**). The first two linked sentences express the background to this tragedy (**erano passeggeri, facevano parte**) using the *imperfetto* (see 2.2.4), while the next sentence expresses an action (**sono tornati**), using the *passato prossimo* (see 2.2.5), but also expresses the survivors' present condition (**stanno bene, vogliono raccontare**) using the present tense (see 2.2.3). In the next sentences there is a mix of *imperfetto* describing the background (**l'equipaggio non parlava italiano, c'erano problemi di comunicazione**) and *passato prossimo* to describe actions and events (**ci hanno diviso, la gente non ci ha fatto passare, abbiamo tentato**):

Enrico e Francesca erano passeggeri della *Costa Concordia* affondata vicino all'isola del Giglio; facevano parte di una comitiva di nove persone, tutte di Anacapri, tra loro anche tre bambini di un anno. Sono già tornati tutti a casa, e per fortuna stanno bene ma vogliono raccontare la loro esperienza personale. "La maggior parte dell'equipaggio non parlava italiano e c'erano problemi di comunicazione". Francesca racconta la drammatica ricerca di una scialuppa per salvarsi. "Ci hanno diviso dagli altri nostri amici con i bambini, perché la gente non ci ha fatto passare avanti. Abbiamo tentato di prendere un'altra scialuppa, ma era rotta".

(http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xnqkeo_costa-concordia-i-superstiti-abbandonati-a-noi-stessi-la-storia-di-enrico-e-francesca-di-anacapri_news, retrieved 1 March 2012)

Enrico and Francesca were passengers on the *Costa Concordia* which sank near the island of Giglio; they were part of a group of nine people, all from Anacapri, with three one-year-old children amongst them. They have all gone back home already, and luckily are all fine, but they want to talk about their own personal experience. 'Most of the crew didn't speak Italian and there were communication problems.' Francesca talks about the dramatic search for a lifeboat to escape on. 'We got separated from our other friends with children, because people wouldn't let us get past. We tried to take another lifeboat, but it was broken.'

Example 2

This passage is also about the sinking of the *Costa Concordia* and in particular a video clip which shows that the ship stayed upright for two hours, so all the passengers could have been saved, if the captain had raised the alarm straightaway. The references to the video clip are in the present tense (**segna, dimostra**), and the statement that the Guardia di Finanza motor launch filmed it (**lo ha realizzato**) is therefore in the *passato prossimo*, a past tense which has a close relationship to the present. The main action or event, however, is in the *passato remoto* (see 2.2.6) and describes what the ship did (**rimase**). There is a past infinitive (see 2.2.1) which refers to the grammatical subject, the motor launch (**dopo aver captato**). Finally there is a conditional sentence which uses a verb in the past conditional (see 2.2.13) to say what would have happened (**avrebbe consentito**) and a pluperfect subjunctive (see 2.2.19) for the 'if' clause (**se l'ordine di sbarco fosse stato dato per tempo**):

Il filmato segna l'ora delle 22,30: ovvero 45 minuti dopo l'impatto della *Concordia* con gli scogli. Lo ha realizzato una motovedetta della Guardia di Finanza, la prima ad arrivare vicino alla nave, dopo aver captato le perplessità della Guardia Costiera di Livorno, in contatto radio con la plancia della *Concordia*. E dimostra una cosa semplicissima: la nave per quasi due ore rimase quasi senza inclinazioni. Se l'ordine di sbarco fosse stato dato per tempo, avrebbe consentito di utilizzare tutte le scialuppe di salvataggio. E soprattutto, avrebbe consentito di portare in salvo davvero tutti i passeggeri e il personale di bordo.

The film clip shows the time 22.30: 45 minutes after the *Costa Concordia* hit the rocks. It was filmed by the motor launch of the Guardia di Finanza, the first to reach the ship, after picking up the concerns expressed by the Livorno coastguard, who were in radio contact with the bridge of the *Costa Concordia*. And (the film clip) demonstrates a simple fact: for almost two hours the ship did not tilt. If the order to evacuate had been given in time, it would have allowed (the crew) to use all the lifeboats. And, more importantly, it would have allowed them to get all the passengers and crew to safety.

30.7.3 Future time context

A variety of verb moods and tenses can be used to express related actions taking place in the future time context. These include the present indicative, the future indicative, the present conditional and the present subjunctive.

Example 1

This passage on possible travel problems caused by heavy snow uses a combination of future indicative (see 2.2.9), to say what will happen (**saranno**), and present conditional (see 2.2.11), to say what should or should not happen (**dovrebbe**):

4 febbraio 2012 22:00

Continua a nevicare ma gli aeroporti di Heathrow, Stansted e Gatwick sono sempre aperti. La neve dovrebbe continuare a cadere tutta la notte e si prevede che molti voli saranno cancellati o in ritardo.

5 febbraio 2012 9:00

Non dovrebbe nevicare più per oggi. L'aeroporto di Stansted è aperto ma ci saranno ritardi e forse voli cancellati.

(Adapted from www.londranews.com, retrieved 14 February 2012)

4 February 2012, 22.00

It is still snowing but the airports of Heathrow, Stansted and Gatwick are still open. The snow is expected to continue to fall all night and it is expected that many flights will be cancelled or delayed.

5 February 2012, 9.00

There should be no more snow today. The airport of Stansted is open but there will be delays and perhaps cancelled flights.

Example 2

In this next example, about the summer 'exodus' from the cities, there is a series of verbs in the future tense (see 2.2.9) in main clauses (**si metteranno**, **sarà**, **saranno**, **partirà**), in a dependent relative clause (**che oggi raggiungerà**) and in a dependent clause expressing reason (**perché anche i treni risulteranno strapieni**).

È' iniziato ieri pomeriggio il grande esodo estivo, che oggi raggiungerà il suo apice. Secondo una prima stima circa 11 milioni di italiani si metteranno al volante per raggiungere le località di vacanza e anche sulle autostrade liguri il traffico sarà notevole, soprattutto nelle ore di punta. Ma non saranno solo le strade e le autostrade ad essere prese d'assalto, perché anche i treni risulteranno strapieni. Secondo Ferrovie dello Stato, infatti, oltre un milione di persone partirà in treno.

(<http://www.genova24.it/2011/07/genova-e-iniziato-il-grade-esodo-giornata-da-bollino-nero-17258/>, retrieved 14 February 2012)

The great summer exodus began yesterday afternoon, and will reach its peak today. According to an early estimate, around 11 million Italians will get behind the steering wheel to get to their holiday destination and on the motorways of Liguria too, the volume of traffic will be high, especially in the peak hours. But it won't only be the roads and motorways which are under siege, because the trains will be overcrowded as well. According to the State Railways, in fact, over a million people will set off by train.

31

Quoting or reporting events and hearsay

31.1 Introduction

There are two main ways of reporting what somebody has said (or what we ourselves may have said).

31.1.1 Direct speech

Direct speech (see also 31.2) quotes verbatim what someone has said, using quotation marks or *virgolette* in Italian:

“Lo spirito del ’68”, afferma il regista Bertolucci, “metteva insieme politica, cinema, arte, musica, rock’n’roll e sesso . . .”

(Adapted from Il Venerdì di Repubblica, 29 August 2003)

‘The spirit of ’68’, states the film director Bertolucci, ‘put together politics, cinema, art, music, rock’n’roll, and sex . . .’

Il direttore mi ha detto: “Può andare a casa”.

The manager said to me ‘You can go home’.

Gli ho chiesto: “Quando mi restituisci i soldi?”

I asked him: ‘When are you giving me back the money?’

“Eravamo amici, lui è parte di Bologna. Adesso è come arrivare a Bologna e non trovare più le torri”, dice Red Ronnie.

‘We were friends, he was part of Bologna. Now it’s like coming to Bologna and finding its towers have gone’, says Red Ronnie. *(on the death of the singer-songwriter Lucio Dalla)*

(http://www.repubblica.it/spettacoli-e-cultura/2012/03/02/news/oggi_la_salma_a_bologna_domenica_i_funerali-30802179/?ref=HREC1-6, retrieved 2 March 2012)

31.1.2 Indirect speech

Indirect speech or reported speech (see also 31.3) reports what the person said. No quotation marks are needed and various features of the original statement have to change: verb tense, pronouns, adverbs of place, and so on. Some of the examples above are shown below as reported speech. Note the changes in verb tense: the main verb in the present tense or *passato prossimo* is followed by the *imperfetto*, *trapassato* or past conditional in the dependent clause. Note too the changes in pronouns (**ti** > **mi**) and possessives (**tuo** > **mio**).

Imperfetto (imperfect):

Il regista Bertolucci afferma che lo spirito del ’68 metteva insieme politica, cinema, arte, musica, rock’n’roll e sesso.

The film director Bertolucci states that the spirit of ’68 put together politics, cinema, art, music, rock’n’roll and sex.

Il direttore mi ha detto che *potevo* andare a casa.

The manager told me that I could go home.

Trapassato (pluperfect):

Mio marito mi ha detto che mi *aveva comprato* un bel regalo per il mio compleanno.

My husband told me that he had bought me a lovely present for my birthday.

Condizionale al passato (past conditional):

Gli ho chiesto quando mi *avrebbe restituito* i soldi.

I asked him when he would give me back the money.

31.2 Quoting: direct speech

The form of *direct speech* is used for all kinds of quotations, whenever we want to report something that has been said or written, with exactly the same words used by the quoted person or text. It is very common in newspaper titles; here are a couple of examples from *La Repubblica*:

Arbitri: “Vogliamo più soldi”.

Football referees: ‘We want more money’.

Vasco Rossi: “Era il nostro padre famiglia”.

Vasco Rossi: ‘He was our father figure’.

(on the death of the singer-songwriter Lucio Dalla)

(http://www.repubblica.it/spettacoli-e-cultura/2012/03/01/news/de_gregori_morte_dalla_momento_tristissimo_jovanotti_davvero_non_posso_crederci-30758018/?ref=NRCT-30802179-8, retrieved 2 March 2012)

Written Italian normally uses a pair of **virgolette** (“. . .”) to open and close a quotation. Sometimes, however, writers use pairs of **freccette** (« . . . »), as shown below. When the quotation is interrupted by a phrase such as ‘he said’ or ‘they asked’, the convention is to use a pair of dashes or hyphens:

«Bene – ha detto Marco – andiamo a letto.»

Written texts, too, are often quoted directly. This is very common not only in essays and scientific literature, but also in everyday language, business correspondence and newspapers:

Ho ricevuto una cartolina di Venezia con un bel cuoricino rosso e la scritta: “Manchi solo tu”.

I got a postcard of Venice with a lovely little red heart on it and the words ‘All it needs is you’.

Nel suo libro ‘Gli Inglesi’ (Rizzoli, 1990) Beppe Severgnini afferma che: “Gli anni Ottanta sono stati per la Gran Bretagna gli anni di Margaret Thatcher, come gli anni Sessanta furono gli anni dei Beatles”.

In his book *The English* (Rizzoli, 1990) Beppe Severgnini states that ‘The eighties were for Great Britain the years of Margaret Thatcher, just as the sixties were the years of the Beatles’.

“Confindustria deve cambiare”, si legge nella relazione.

‘Confindustria must change’, says the report.

(<http://www.100news.it/site/2012/02/23/si-scalda-la-campagna-elettorale-trai-vertici-della-confindustria/>, retrieved 27 February 2012)

Notice how, when quoting a report (as in the last example above), an impersonal verb form (see 2.1.12 and 19.5) such as **si legge** can be used to stress the objective nature of its content rather than its ‘author’. This and other impersonal expressions are often used when a quotation is included in formal or legal reports and correspondence, as below:

Nella Vostra lettera del 15 maggio u.s. *si dichiarava* quanto segue: “La consegna della merce avverrà entro e non oltre il 10 giugno p.v.”.

In your letter of 15 May last, the following was stated: ‘The delivery of the goods will take place no later than 10 June’.

► See also the use of the impersonal verb form *si dice* in 31.4.2 below.

31.3 Reporting: indirect speech

When using *indirect speech* to report what someone has said or written, the reported discourse is often introduced by the conjunction **che** (see 5.3.1).

Le previsioni del tempo dicono *che* oggi farà caldo.

The weather forecast says that today it will be hot.

Sui manuali di enologia abbiamo trovato la notizia storica *che* la Vernaccia di San Gimignano è stato il primo vino a Denominazione d’Origine Controllata in Italia.

In the wine-making manuals we found the historic information that Vernaccia of San Gimignano was the first DOC wine in Italy.

When referring to something that one has been told, you can sometimes use a passive construction similar to the English passive construction (‘I have been told . . .’). Verbs such as **informare** which take a direct object can be used in their passive form (see 19.2.1), as shown below:

Sono stata informata che la mia patente è scaduta.

I have been told (informed) that my driver’s licence has expired.

If the verb in question takes an indirect object (verbs such as **dire**, **comunicare**) it is not possible to turn it round into a passive construction (see also 19.3.1). An alternative is to use a third person plural subject (**Mi hanno comunicato . . .**), as shown below (see also 19.3.3):

Mi hanno detto che dovevo rivolgermi a questo ufficio per il rinnovo del passaporto.

I was told that I had to apply to this office for the extension of my passport.

Mi hanno comunicato in ritardo che la data della partenza era stata cambiata.

I was informed too late that the departure date had been changed.

An indirect quotation of the kind shown in the examples above is usually composed of a main clause containing the verb of ‘saying’, ‘stating’, etc. (for example **dicono**, **hanno detto**, **mi hanno comunicato**) and a dependent clause, introduced by **che**, in the indicative.

31.3.1 Choosing the verb tense and mood

When deciding which tense and mood to use for the dependent verb, it is important to take into account the tense of the main verb, and the time context, and to apply the guidelines of the sequence of tenses (*concordanza dei tempi*), illustrated in 30.5 and in Appendix V.

Most examples of reporting and indirect speech involve verbs such as **dire**, **affermare**, **comunicare** which are followed by the indicative mood (see 2.2.2). In 31.4, however, we illustrate contexts in which the conditional or subjunctive moods are used instead, for example expressing hearsay and unconfirmed reports.

First let’s see how to transform a direct quotation into an indirect quotation, applying the sequence of tenses. The table below is a simplified version of the guidelines on the sequence of tenses.

Main clause	Dependent clause	Dependent clause	Dependent clause
Present	Present	Past	Future
Mario dice	“Finisco all’una”	“Ho finito all’una”	“Finirò all’una”
Mario dice che	finisce all’una	ha finito all’una	finirà all’una
Past	Present	Past	Future
Mario ha detto	“Finisco all’una”	“Ho finito all’una”	“Finirò all’una”
Mario ha detto che	finiva all’una	aveva finito all’una	avrebbe finito/finiva all’una

31.3.2 Changing other elements

When transforming speech into the indirect form, other elements must change, as well as the tense of the verbs. Subject pronouns, indications of time, indications of place, and demonstratives such as **questo** (see 3.8) also need to be adapted when direct speech turns to indirect speech, as in the following examples:

Subject pronouns (for example, *io* / *lui*)

Mario dice: “*(Io) finisco all’una*”.

Mario says ‘I finish at 1 o’clock’.

Mario dice che (*lui*) finisce all’una.

Mario says that he finishes at 1 o’clock.

Indicator of time (for example, *domani* / *il giorno dopo*)

Mario ha detto: “*Finirò la relazione domani*”.

Mario said ‘I will finish the report tomorrow’.

Mario ha detto che avrebbe finito la relazione *il giorno dopo*.

Mario said that he would finish the report the next day.

Indicator of place (for example, *qui* / *lì*)

Ho detto al mio fidanzato: “*Io e le mie amiche ci vediamo sempre qui per un caffè*”.

I said to my boyfriend: ‘My friends and I always meet here for a coffee’.

Ho detto al mio fidanzato che io e le mie amiche ci vedevamo sempre *lì* per un caffè.

I said to my boyfriend that my friends and I always met there for a coffee.

Demonstratives (for example, *questo* / *quello*)

Mia madre mi ha chiesto: “*Hai letto questo libro di Eco?*”

My mother asked me: ‘Have you read this book by Eco?’

Mia madre mi ha chiesto se avevo letto *quel* libro di Eco.

My mother asked me if I had read that book by Eco.

Here is an illustration of how time references and other elements change when direct speech is transformed into indirect speech:

<i>Direct speech</i>	<i>Indirect speech</i>
Mario ha detto: “ Parto oggi. ”	Mario ha detto che <i>partiva quel giorno.</i>
“ Sono partito ieri. ”	... <i>era partito il giorno prima.</i>
“ Partirò domani. ”	... <i>sarebbe partito il giorno dopo.</i>
“ Questo mese / quest’anno ho fatto buoni affari. ”	... <i>quel mese / quell’anno aveva fatto buoni affari.</i>
“ Il mese / l’anno scorso ho fatto buoni affari. ”	... <i>il mese / l’anno precedente aveva fatto buoni affari.</i>
“ Il mese / l’anno prossimo farò buoni affari. ”	... <i>il mese / l’anno successivo avrebbe fatto buoni affari.</i>

31.4 Reporting information or quoting hearsay

Reporting information may be done with a greater or lesser degree of certainty and/or objectivity. For this purpose different moods of verbs can be used: *indicative* (see 2.2.2) to show objectivity, *conditional* (see 2.2.11) and *subjunctive* (see 2.2.14) to show uncertainty or subjectivity.

31.4.1 Using the conditional

The following example shows how the fact of an event is reported in the *indicative*, while something less certain – such as the possible causes of it – is in the *conditional*. In English, a plain indicative tense is used, sometimes accompanied by a word such as ‘apparently’ to indicate lack of proof or certainty. Here the first example, about an OCSE report, is in the present conditional to say what is (apparently) true while the second example, about the death of two journalists in Syria, is in the past conditional to say what (apparently) happened:

Dei 34 paesi che fanno parte dell’OCSE, un’organizzazione internazionale di studi economici, chi lavora di più sarebbero i sudcoreani, con 2.193 ore di lavoro all’anno.

Of the 34 countries that make up OCSE, an international organisation of economic research, the people who work the most are apparently the South Koreans, working 2,193 hours per year.

(<http://www.cnim.it/cnimnm/manutenzione/man-news.aspx?articleid=2759&zoneid=1>, retrieved 2 March 2012)

Oggi in Siria sono stati uccisi due giornalisti, l’americana Marie Colvin del *Sunday Times* e il fotografo francese Remi Ochlik. I due sarebbero stati uccisi a Homs, la città roccaforte dei ribelli.

Today in Syria two journalists have been killed, the American Marie Colvin, of the *Sunday Times*, and the French photographer Remi Ochlik. The pair were apparently killed in Homs, the stronghold of the rebels.

(<http://www.cnim.it/cnimnm/manutenzione/man-news.aspx?articleid=2759&zoneid=1>, retrieved 2 March 2012)

31.4.2 Using the subjunctive

Hearsay or highly doubtful information is usually introduced by such verbs as **pare che**, **sembra che**, **si dice che** followed by the subjunctive. These verbs, being impersonal, also convey information without referring to its source. Let’s see some examples:

Pareva che andasse tutto troppo bene.

It seemed it was all going too well.

Sembra che i testimoni abbiano detto la verità.

It seems the witnesses told the truth.

Si dice che gli uomini facciano più incidenti stradali delle donne.

They say that men have more road accidents than women.

Here is an example of how gossip about a star is reported in a music magazine, using the subjunctive to express a lack of certainty:

E’ possibile che sia la solita esagerazione dei tabloid britannici, ma pare che la lunga relazione di Leona Lewis col fidanzato sia finita.

It might be the usual exaggeration by the British tabloid press, but it seems that the long relationship of Leona Lewis with her fiancé is over.

31.4.3 Secondo

When you want to refer to the source of some information, without endorsing its content, you use the preposition **secondo** (see also 4.5) followed by the source. The choice of mood – indicative or conditional – indicates how certain or otherwise the information is. Here is a further extract from the same news item about the singer Leona Lewis seen above. The past conditional is used to talk about the couple’s apparent decision to split up and the source is given as a London daily newspaper.

I due, secondo un quotidiano londinese, avrebbero deciso di lasciarsi quando hanno capito che gli impegni di lei non avrebbero più consentito loro di trascorrere insieme più di una giornata ogni tanto.

The couple, according to a London daily newspaper, decided to leave each other when they realised that her commitments would not have allowed them to spend more than an occasional day together.

When used to express one's own opinion (**secondo me, secondo noi**), use of the *conditional* softens the forcefulness of our opinion and sounds more polite (see also 27.1.5):

... e secondo te tutte queste notizie sarebbero vere?

... and in your opinion, are all these news stories true?

Secondo me i giornalisti dovrebbero controllare meglio le informazioni.

In my opinion, the journalists should check their information more carefully.

The use of the *indicative*, on the other hand, conveys strong conviction or belief, presented as a fact, as in the following examples:

Secondo me tutte queste notizie sono false.

In my opinion, all these news stories are false.

Secondo un sondaggio 8 italiani su 10 tradiscono il coniuge.

According to an opinion poll, eight Italians out of ten betray their partner.

31.4.4 Per

Another very simple way to convey an opinion is to use the preposition **per** (see also 4.3.6) with the *indicative* or the *conditional*:

Per me, hai torto.

In my opinion, you are wrong.

Per me, Andreotti ha commesso un errore.

In my opinion, Andreotti made a mistake.

Per la stampa italiana, la situazione economica del paese sarebbe in via di miglioramento.

According to the Italian press, the economic situation is improving.

Per gran parte del pubblico americano, OJ Simpson non avrebbe commesso nessun delitto.

According to a large sector of the American public, OJ Simpson did not commit any crime.

32

Expressing possibility and probability

32.1 Introduction

This section looks at ways of putting your message in context in a complex sentence. One important context is that of *possibility* and *probability*: saying how certain or how likely it is that something has happened/is happening/will happen.

On the whole, we can separate statements of possibility or probability into two broad categories: those which represent a *personal opinion or subjective point of view* ('I think', 'we believe'), and those which represent an *impersonal or objective point of view*, whether proved or otherwise ('it seems', 'it is likely').

The first category – *personal opinion or subjective point of view* – is covered in Chapter 27 and in 29.2–5 and involves verbs such as **credere, essere certo/sicuro, pensare, ritenere, sembrare, sapere**.

In this chapter we look at the second category, the *impersonal or objective point of view*.

32.2 Certainty, uncertainty

The adjectives **certo, sicuro** can be used impersonally, along with **essere**, to express the English 'it is certain' (compare with their more personalised use illustrated in 29.3). They are followed by a verb in the indicative mood:

È certo che la vita è più cara in Italia.

It's certain that life is dearer in Italy.

È sicuro che lui prende il posto.

It's certain that he will get the job.

When used in the negative (**non è sicuro**), they should be followed by a verb in the subjunctive:

Non è certo che la vita sia più cara in Italia.

It's not certain that life is dearer in Italy.

Non è sicuro che lui prenda il posto.

It's not certain that he will get the job.

È certo (che), è sicuro (che) can be replaced by the adverbs or adverbial phrases **certamente, sicuramente, di sicuro**:

Certamente la vita è più cara in Italia.

Certainly life is dearer in Italy.

Sicuramente non prende il posto.

Certainly he won't get the job.

Di sicuro lo vediamo domani.

We'll certainly see him tomorrow.

Note the difference in degree of certainty between the two negative statements: **Non è sicuro che lui prenda il posto**, where the subjunctive expresses doubt, and **Sicuramente non prende il posto**, in which no doubt is expressed and the indicative is used.

32.3 Knowing, not knowing

Sapere can also be used with an impersonal subject **si** ‘one’, as in the expression **si sa** (see also 2.1.12 and 19.5). Normally it is followed by an indicative tense. As with **certo**, **sicuro**, however, when **sapere** is used in the negative, it should be followed by the subjunctive, expressing some uncertainty. In informal speech, some speakers may choose to use the indicative.

Si sa che gli inglesi sono molto riservati.

It is generally known that the English are reserved.

Non si sa se gli ostaggi siano ancora vivi.

It is not known if the hostages are still alive.

Non sappiamo se la Ferrari sia migliorata.

We don't know if the Ferrari team has improved.

(www.tuttosport.com, retrieved 13 March 2012)

32.4 Possible or impossible, probable or improbable

Certain adjectives can be used with the verb **essere** to form impersonal phrases, followed by a verb infinitive, in which no specific person or object is mentioned:

È impossibile imparare l'italiano.

It is impossible to learn Italian.

The most common impersonal phrases are the following:

è possibile	it's possible
è impossibile	it's impossible
è facile	it's easy/likely
è difficile	it's difficult/unlikely

These four adjectives can also be used simply to refer to a person or an object: **è una persona difficile** ‘she is a difficult person’, **è un compito impossibile** ‘it is an impossible task’.

The four impersonal phrases above can be followed either by a verb infinitive, or by **che** and a dependent clause.

In a *general statement*, where *no* individual subject is mentioned, these impersonal phrases are followed directly by a verb infinitive:

È possibile mangiare fuori?

Is it possible to eat outside?

È impossibile completare questi ordini prima della fine del mese.

It's impossible to complete these orders before the end of the month.

È facile imparare l'italiano.

It's easy to learn Italian.

È difficile organizzare una vacanza per la famiglia.

It's difficult to organise a holiday for the family.

When a *specific subject* needs to be mentioned (for example ‘you’, ‘the hotel’), you need to use **che**, introducing a verb in the subjunctive to express uncertainty:

È possibile che tu abbia dormito fino a mezzogiorno?

Is it really possible that you slept to midday?

È impossibile che i conti siano sbagliati.

It's impossible that the accounts are wrong.

È possibile che can be replaced by the idiomatic phrase **può darsi** ('it may be, it may happen'), followed by a **che** clause, usually with a verb in the subjunctive:

Può darsi che la segretaria l'abbia già mandata.

It may be that the secretary has already sent it.

In addition to their literal meaning shown above ('it's easy', 'it's difficult'), **è facile**, **è difficile** can also convey the meaning of 'it's likely', 'it's unlikely', in which context they are always followed by **che** and the subjunctive:

È facile che il contabile sbagli.

It's easy (likely) for the accountant to make mistakes.

È difficile che loro arrivino prima di pranzo.

It's unlikely that they will arrive before lunch.

Two further impersonal phrases can be followed by **che** and the subjunctive (but not by a verb infinitive):

è probabile it's probable/likely

è improbabile it's improbable/unlikely

È probabile che l'albergo sia pieno.

It is likely that the hotel will be full.

È poco probabile che lui l'abbia rubato.

It's not very likely that he stole it.

È improbabile che facciano una vacanza in montagna.

It's unlikely that they will have a holiday in the mountains.

The expressions **si dice**, **dicono** 'one says', 'they say' are used to report what someone said, but since this is hearsay (see also 31.4) rather than a fact, they are followed by the subjunctive:

Si dice che Joan Collins abbia fatto il lifting varie volte.

It is said that Joan Collins has had several facelifts.

32.5 Evident, obvious

Impersonal phrases which express certainty, rather than probability, include:

è chiaro it's clear

è evidente it's evident, obvious

è ovvio it's obvious

These expressions, by their very nature, always express certainty, so are followed by the indicative:

È chiaro che l'autore scrive di una sua esperienza personale.

It is clear that the author is writing about a personal experience.

Era evidente che l'impiegato non era in grado di svolgere quella funzione.

It was obvious that the employee was not able to carry out that function.

NOTE For guidance on which tense to use in the dependent clauses, see 30.5 and Appendix V.

33

Expressing purpose

33.1 Introduction

Purpose involves an element of premeditation. A *purpose* clause tells us what the subject's *intention* or *purpose* is, or was, in advance of the action. A *reason* clause tells us – after the event – why someone did something or why something happened. Both 'reason' clauses and 'purpose' clauses are introduced by conjunctions (see 5.3) or other connecting words. Generally, clauses of reason (see also 34.3.1) have a verb in the *indicative* (see 2.2.2), while clauses of purpose have a verb in the *subjunctive* (see 2.2.14). The difference between them is best illustrated by the conjunction **perché** which is used to express both *reason* (see 15.3.3) and *purpose* (see below), followed by the indicative and the subjunctive respectively.

Reason: **perché** and verb in indicative:

Ho parlato lentamente perché l'interprete doveva tradurre.

I spoke slowly *because* the interpreter had to translate.

Purpose: **perché** and verb in subjunctive:

Parlerò lentamente perché l'interprete possa tradurre.

I will speak slowly *so that* the interpreter can translate.

In grammatical terms, the most important factor in expressing *purpose* is to determine whether only the subject of the first verb is affected by the action or whether another person or object is affected as well. These two different situations are explained in 33.2 and 33.3 respectively.

33.2 Purpose involving only the subject of the action

In Italian, when the aim or purpose involves *only the subject of the action*, it is expressed by one of the following:

- (a) Prepositions **per**, **a** and infinitive (see 2.2.1)

The preposition most frequently used to express purpose is **per** (see 4.3.6, 4.4.4) 'in order to':

Lucia ha lavorato per pagarsi le vacanze.

Lucia worked to pay for her holidays.

Lo facciamo per risparmiare tempo.

We are doing it to save time.

Mi sono alzata presto per prendere il treno delle 5.00.

I got up early to catch the 5.00 am train.

Chiudi la porta per non far entrare il gatto.

Shut the door so as not to let the cat in.

With verbs expressing *movement*, such as **andare**, **venire**, **correre**, you can use either **a** or **per** (see 4.4.1, 4.4.4). Whereas **a** tends to focus on *where* you are going, **per** has more of a sense of purpose and indicates *the reason why* you are going there:

I turisti vanno a Roma per vedere il Papa.

Tourists go to Rome to see the Pope.

Mentre eravamo a Roma, siamo andati a vedere il Papa.

While we were in Rome, we went to see the Pope.

Devo andare a Londra per rinnovare il passaporto al Consolato italiano.

I have to go to London to renew my passport at the Italian Consulate.

I ragazzi sono andati a casa di Edoardo a guardare un DVD.

The boys went to Edoardo's house to watch a DVD.

Teresa veniva da me per fare lezioni d'italiano.

Teresa used to come to me to do Italian lessons.

- (b) Prepositional phrases **al fine di**, **allo scopo di** and infinitive

Phrases used to express purpose include:

allo scopo di (con lo scopo di) with the aim of . . .

al fine di with the aim of . . .

Lucia ha lavorato allo scopo di pagarsi gli studi universitari.

Lucia worked to pay for her university studies.

Abbiamo lanciato il nuovo prodotto al fine di conquistare il mercato italiano.

We have launched the new product with the aim of conquering the Italian market.

Other phrases expressing future intention can be found in 14.9.

- (c) **Pur di**

An element of desperation is implied by use of the phrase **pur di** 'just to':

È disposto a tutto pur di non fare il servizio militare.

He's willing to do anything just to get out of military service.

La signora Ferri avrebbe fatto di tutto pur di essere invitata all'ambasciata.

Signora Ferri would have done anything to be invited to the embassy.

33.3 Purpose involving someone or something else

Where the aim or purpose expressed involves *another person* or object, other than the one carrying out the original action (the subject of the main verb), Italian uses a *conjunction* (see 5.3) to introduce a subordinate clause in which the person involved or affected is the subject of a verb in the *subjunctive*.

33.3.1 Conjunctions

Examples of conjunctions and phrases used to introduce a purpose clause are, in order of frequency, **perché** 'in order that', **affinché** 'in order that', **in modo che** 'in such a way that', **in maniera che** 'in such a way that' (see also 5.3.3 and 5.3.5).

The *subjunctive* is used after these conjunctions because it is not certain that the purpose can be achieved. When the main verb is a present or future tense, the *present subjunctive* (see 2.2.16) is used; when the main verb is a past tense or present conditional, the *imperfect subjunctive* (see 2.2.18) is used:

Chiediamo agli albergatori di mettere a disposizione alcune camere al pianterreno perché i clienti disabili possano venire ospitati.

We ask hotel-owners to make available a few rooms on the ground floor so that disabled clients can be put up.

Il governo si impegnerà affinché la guerra civile non diventi un massacro.

The government will take steps so that the civil war does not become a massacre.

Volevamo organizzare il congresso per settembre in modo che venissero tutti i rappresentanti.

We wanted to organise the congress for September so that all the representatives came.

The normal order in sentences of this kind is to have the main clause followed by the subordinate clause (the purpose clause). But it is possible to reverse the order so that the purpose clause comes first:

Perché i clienti disabili possano venire ospitati in albergo, chiediamo agli albergatori di mettere a disposizione alcune camere al pianterreno.

So that disabled clients can be put up in hotels, we ask hotel-owners to put at their disposal a few rooms on the ground floor.

33.3.2 Alternatives to a purpose clause

In everyday speech and writing, in order to avoid a 'heavy' construction such as those above, Italians prefer alternative ways of expressing purpose.

***Che* expressing purpose**

Where another person (or an object) is involved, you can use the relative pronoun **che** (see 3.5) to express what your intention is for that person or object, i.e. what you want him/it to do. The implication of 'purpose' is marked by the use of the subjunctive:

Facciamo venire un meccanico *che* ripari la lavatrice.

We'll call a mechanic who can repair the washing machine.

Volevamo prenotare una vacanza *che* ci permettesse di rilassarci e di visitare dei posti d'interesse.

We wanted to book a holiday which would allow us to relax and to visit some places of interest.

In spoken Italian, when the objective is more likely to be met, an *indicative* verb is sometimes used:

Chiamiamo il cameriere *che* ci porta una bella bibita fresca.

Let's call the waiter, who'll bring us a nice cold drink.

The use of the subjunctive to express purpose also implies that the speaker is looking for a *type* of person or object and not one specific person or object known to him or her. Note the difference between these two sentences:

Il direttore cerca un'assistente *che* possa tradurre le lettere commerciali e scrivere mail in inglese. (*a type of person*)

The manager is looking for an assistant who can translate commercial letters and write emails in English.

Il direttore cerca l'assistente nuova *che* può tradurre le lettere commerciali e scrivere mail in inglese. (*a particular known person*)

The manager is looking for the new assistant who can translate commercial letters and write emails in English.

Fare + infinitive

Another way to mention or bring into the conversation the person affected by your plans, is to use **fare**, with a direct or indirect object pronoun identifying the person affected either directly or indirectly (see 21.7). Study the examples below.

In this sentence 'us' is the *indirect* object of **portare**:

Telefoniamo alla Reception, *per farci* portare la colazione in camera.

Let's ring Reception to have breakfast brought to us in the room.

In this sentence 'him' is the *direct* object of **fare**:

Valentina ha chiamato il fidanzato *per farlo* venire alle 7.00.

Valentina called her boyfriend to have him come at 7 pm.

In the sentence below, 'him' is the *indirect* object of **fare**. This is because there is already a *direct* object in the sentence (**macchina**) and the person involved can only be expressed by an indirect object:

Valentina ha chiamato il fidanzato *per fargli portare la macchina.*

Valentina called her boyfriend to have him bring the car.

To summarise, there are three different ways of expressing purpose, depending on the register used. Ranging from highly formal to informal, they are:

Perché followed by the subjunctive (see 33.3.1):

Chiamo mia figlia *perché prepari la cena.*

I'll call my daughter so that she can make supper.

Per . . . fare, with a direct or indirect object pronoun and an infinitive (see above):

Chiamo mia figlia *per farle preparare la cena.*

I'll call my daughter to get her to make supper.

Che followed by an indicative (see above):

Chiamo mia figlia *che prepara la cena.*

I'll call my daughter who will make supper.

33.4 Purpose attached to a person or object

33.4.1 Per

Per can also describe the purpose of an object or person, for example:

Questo è un nuovo prodotto *per liberare il bagno dagli scarafaggi.*

This is a new product to free the bathroom of cockroaches.

Gli studenti hanno formato un'organizzazione *per proteggere i diritti delle minoranze etniche.*

The students formed an organisation to protect the rights of ethnic minorities.

Adesso che ho deciso di tornare al lavoro, devo trovare una persona *per tenermi la bimba.*

Now that I've decided to go back to work, I have to find someone to look after my child for me.

33.4.2 Da

Da can be used to express the purpose or use of an object in the passive sense, for example 'a magazine *to be read*', 'something *to be eaten*':

Vorrei comprare una rivista *da leggere sul treno.*

I'd like to buy a magazine to read on the train.

Dopo averci fatto aspettare 12 ore all'aeroporto, finalmente ci hanno offerto qualcosa *da mangiare.*

After making us wait 12 hours at the airport, they finally gave us something to eat.

34

Expressing causes and reasons

34.1 Introduction

You often need to explain the reason behind an event or action, or to justify your actions or those of someone else. There are various ways in which you can do this in Italian. Sometimes one person or thing is responsible, sometimes the cause is a factor or set of circumstances.

34.2 Specific people, factors or events responsible

Sometimes the cause of an event can be attributed to just one person, thing or event (expressed by a noun or pronoun), in which case one of the following *prepositional phrases* can be used:

a causa di	because of
grazie a	thanks to
per via di	because of

A causa degli scioperi, l'aereo è arrivato a Catania con due ore di ritardo.

Because of the strikes, the plane was two hours late arriving in Catania.

È grazie al chirurgo che mio figlio è ancora vivo oggi.

It's thanks to the surgeon that my son is still alive today.

Per via del traffico, siamo arrivati a casa stanchi e nervosi.

Because of the traffic, we arrived home tired and edgy.

34.3 General cause or reason

Sometimes the cause of an event or action is a situation or combination of factors. There are several ways of expressing such a cause.

34.3.1 Using a causal clause

A conjunction (see 5.3.4) or similar phrase can be used to introduce a causal clause (clause of reason). The most common conjunctions are:

considerato che	considering that
dal momento che	since
dato che	given that
giacché	since
in quanto	inasmuch as
per il fatto che	for the fact that
per il motivo che	for the reason that
perché	because
poiché	since
siccome	since
visto che	seeing as

By far the most common of these conjunctions is **perché**, followed by **poiché**, **giacché**, with **siccome** frequently used in the spoken language (see also 5.3.4). These all use the *indicative* (see however the note on **non perché** below). Compare this use of **perché** with **perché** expressing ‘purpose’ (see 33.1, 33.3.1). The position of the ‘since’/‘because’ clauses differs according to the conjunction used.

A causal clause introduced by **perché** always comes after the main clause:

Sono stata bocciata perché non avevo studiato per niente.

I failed because I didn’t study at all.

Clauses introduced by other conjunctions/phrases are more flexible, and can come either before or after the main clause:

Poiché non avevano il capitale per formare una società, hanno deciso di cercare collaboratori.

Since they didn’t have enough capital to form a company, they decided to look for collaborators.

Ci metteremo subito al lavoro, giacché abbiamo cominciato con un po’ di ritardo.

We will start work straightaway, since we began a little late.

Siccome sei stato tu a comprare i calamari, adesso li puoi preparare.

Since it was you who bought the squid, now you can prepare them.

Dato che la situazione peggiorava, l’ONU ha deciso di ritirare le sue truppe.

Since the situation was getting worse, the UN decided to withdraw its troops.

Sometimes **perché** is substituted by the shortened form **ché**, considered rather old-fashioned, but still seen in written texts:

Non far rumore, ché ho mal di testa.

Don’t make a noise because I’ve got a headache.

In informal spoken language, you often find the connecting word **che** used with a causal meaning:

Vieni con me, che vado a vedere cosa succede.

Come with me (since) I’m going to see what’s happening.

The phrases **visto che**, **considerato che**, **visto e considerato che**, **in quanto** tend to be used particularly in bureaucratic or legal language:

Visto che non si è concluso niente, sarebbe meglio rimandare la riunione a domani.

Since nothing has been decided, it would be better to put off our meeting until tomorrow.

Visto e considerato che non stati rispettati i termini del contratto, possiamo procedere all’annullamento dello stesso.

In view of the fact that the terms of the contract have not been fulfilled, we can proceed to the annulment of the same.

È in parte responsabile il direttore di marketing in quanto non aveva pensato a come realizzare il progetto.

The director of marketing is partially responsible in that he hadn’t thought about how to put the plan into effect.

Note that **in quanto** can also be used *without* a verb, for example:

Dopo il disastro, l’Ingegnere è stato criticato in quanto responsabile della manutenzione della diga.

After the disaster, the Chief Engineer was criticised as the person responsible for the upkeep of the dam.

Non perché and **non ché** are used to say that something is *not* the real reason behind an event or action; both are usually followed by the subjunctive, although the indicative is frequently used in everyday speech:

Non perché ti voglia offendere, ma forse la danza classica non è il tuo forte.

Not that I want to offend you, but perhaps classical dance isn’t your strong point.

If the *real* reason is given as well, this is in the indicative:

Il capo vuole mandarla via, non perché gli sia antipatica (not the real reason), ma perché proprio non sa fare il suo lavoro (the real reason).

The boss wants to get rid of her, not because he doesn't like her, but because she really doesn't know how to do her job.

34.3.2 Using *per* + infinitive

When the same person is the subject of both cause and effect, **per** (see also 4.4.4) and an infinitive (usually a past infinitive) can be used:

Un nostro collega fu licenziato per aver portato a casa un computer.

A colleague of ours was sacked for having taken a computer home.

Per can be expanded into **per il fatto di**:

Mio fratello è rimasto stupito per il fatto di aver vinto il premio.

My brother was amazed at having won the prize.

Il direttore è arrabbiato per il fatto di dover riprogrammare tutto.

The director is angry at having to reschedule everything.

Il ragazzo viene giudicato male per il fatto di essere timido.

The boy is judged harshly because of being shy.

34.3.3 Using the gerund

The gerund, present or past (see 2.2.25), can also have a *causal* meaning. The subject of the gerund must also be the grammatical subject of the 'result' clause, as in the first two examples, or should be mentioned explicitly, as in the last example:

Sapendo che saremmo tornati in montagna a Natale, abbiamo lasciato gli sci a casa dei nostri amici.

Knowing that we would be coming back to the mountains at Christmas, we left our skis at our friends' house.

Avendo già chiesto il prezzo della camera all'ufficio turistico, abbiamo capito subito che la padrona di casa ci faceva pagare troppo.

Having already asked the price of the room at the tourist office, we realised immediately that the landlady was charging us too much.

Essendo chiuso il negozietto, abbiamo comprato il latte al bar.

Since the corner shop was shut, we bought milk from the café.

34.3.4 Using the past participle

Similarly, the past participle (see 2.2.27) can also express a reason or cause. Like the gerund, the subject of the participle must be that of the main verb, as in the first example, or else must be specifically expressed, as in the second example:

Laureato con 110 e lode, Marco pensava di trovare subito un posto, ma non era così facile.

Having graduated with top marks, Marco thought he would find a job straightaway, but it wasn't so easy.

Partiti i genitori, i ragazzi hanno organizzato una festa in casa.

With their parents away, the kids organised a party at their house.

34.4 Il motivo, la causa, la ragione

Italian, as English, has several nouns denoting *cause* or *reason* such as **il motivo, la causa** or **la ragione**:

Per quale motivo bisogna fare il check-in due ore prima del volo?

Why does one have to check-in two hours before the flight?

Il disaccordo tra i soci è stato la causa del fallimento dell'azienda.

The disagreement between the shareholders was the cause of the company's bankruptcy.

Che ragioni aveva per agire in questo modo?

What reasons did she have to act in this way?

La causa, il motivo, la ragione can be used with **per** and a relative pronoun, for example **cui** (see 3.5.2) or **il quale/la quale**:

Il motivo per cui abbiamo scelto questa casa è la posizione tranquilla.

The reason we have chosen this house is its quiet position.

La ragione per la quale non sono venuti è che avevano dei compiti da finire.

The reason why they didn't come is that they had homework to finish.

You can give more details by adding an *adjective*, for example:

per ragioni familiari

for family reasons

per motivi finanziari

for financial reasons

per motivi personali

for personal reasons

Ha dato le dimissioni per motivi familiari.

She resigned for family reasons.

34.5 Causare, provocare, suscitare

Verbs meaning 'to cause' include **causare**, **portare a**, **produrre**, **provocare**, **stimolare**, **suscitare** (see also 35.5.1):

Una sigaretta buttata per terra ha provocato l'incendio.

A cigarette thrown on the ground caused the fire.

All the above verbs except **portare a** can be used in a passive construction:

La sua malattia era causata dallo stress.

Her illness was caused by stress.

Le proteste erano suscitate dall'inerzia delle autorità.

The protests were caused by the inertia of the authorities.

34.6 Dovere, dovuto

The verb **dovere** (see 2.2.3 and Appendix III) can have the meaning 'to be due to' and can be used to express cause.

Here the impersonal construction **si deve** is used:

Si deve al tuo lavoro se abbiamo ottenuto buoni risultati.

If we have had good results, it's due to your work.

Far more common is the use of the past participle **dovuto**. It must relate to one specific noun, shown in italics in our examples, with which it agrees in gender and number:

Il problema del traffico a Napoli è dovuto alla struttura della città.

The traffic problem in Naples is due to the structure of the city.

Abbiamo incontrato delle code sull'autostrada dovute a una manifestazione dei camionisti.

We met queues on the *autostrada* (motorway) due to a demonstration by lorry-drivers.

Where the reason is not a single factor but a whole set of circumstances, you can still use **dovuto** but need to incorporate the phrase **il fatto che** 'the fact that' to introduce the reason:

Marisa non si decideva a buttarsi in acqua. La sua indecisione era dovuta al fatto che non sapeva nuotare.

Marisa couldn't make up her mind whether to jump into the water. Her indecision was due to the fact that she couldn't swim.

34.7 Asking why

The question 'why' (see 15.3.3) can also be asked by using **come mai** or **perché**:

Come mai non sei venuto stasera?

How come you didn't come tonight?

Perché non mi rivolge la parola?

Why isn't she speaking to me?

You can also ask the reason using **quale**:

Qual è il motivo della sua gelosia?

What is the reason for her jealousy?

Qual è la spiegazione di questo comportamento?

What is the explanation for this behaviour?

Or using **come**:

Come si può spiegare questo fenomeno?

How can one explain this phenomenon?

34.8 Using the imperfect tense to give reasons

Often the *imperfect* tense (see 2.2.4 and 13.6.5) is used to supply the background to an action or event, expressed in the *passato prossimo*. Even without a specific conjunction of *cause*, the 'reason' aspect is clear from the context:

Siamo andati a casa. Eravamo stanchi.

We went home. We were tired.

Avevo fame. Ho mangiato due panini e un toast.

I was hungry. I ate two rolls and a toasted sandwich.

35

Expressing result, effect and consequence

35.1 Introduction

In narrative, and in everyday conversation, events can be seen as a sequence of purpose–action–result. In Chapters 33 and 34 we looked at *purpose* and *reason* respectively. Here we look at how to express results, effects and consequences in Italian.

35.2 Coordinating conjunctions

Conclusions and results can be expressed by two equal clauses of *consequence* or *result* introduced by simple *coordinating conjunctions* such as **e**, **ma** (see 30.2) and/or by other adverbs or phrases which link an action or event to its end result, for example:

allora	therefore
così	thus
dunque	therefore
in questo modo	in this way
perciò	therefore
per cui	and so
pertanto	therefore
quindi	therefore

Marco non fa mai niente in casa, e allora perché devo sempre lavare i piatti io?
Marco never does anything in the house, (and) so why do I always have to wash the dishes?

L'agricoltura ormai è in declino allora bisogna sfruttare le nostre risorse naturali per il turismo.

Agriculture is in decline now so we must exploit our natural resources for tourism.

Mi hanno rubato la borsetta con tutte le carte di credito e i soldi e così mi sono trovata senza soldi.

They stole my handbag with all my credit cards and cash, and so I found myself without any money.

Penso, dunque esisto.

I think, therefore I am.

Nell'ambiente di lavoro siamo tutti sotto pressione e dunque si creano delle tensioni.
In the work environment we are all under pressure and so tensions are created.

Ti sei comportato malissimo alla festa. In questo modo non avrai più amici.
You behaved really badly at the party. If you carry on like this, you won't have any more friends.

La ditta versava in condizioni economiche disastrose e perciò ha licenziato più di duecento impiegati.

The company was in a disastrous economic condition and therefore they sacked more than two hundred employees.

Eravamo tutti stanchi per cui abbiamo preferito non uscire.

We were all tired so we preferred not to go out.

Il settore automobilistico è in crisi. Pertanto si potranno verificare dei ribassi nelle assunzioni in questo settore.

The automobile sector is in crisis. Therefore there may be some reductions in employment in this sector.

Non ho potuto fare una vacanza quest'anno e quindi mi sento veramente stanca.

I wasn't able to have a holiday this year, so I feel really tired.

Used almost exclusively in spoken Italian is the phrase **ecco che** 'and there you are', as in the example below:

La gente corre, le strade sono bagnate. Ed ecco che succedono degli incidenti stradali.

People drive too fast, the roads are wet. And there you are with road accidents happening.

35.3 Conclusive (result) conjunctions

Consequence or result can also be expressed by a sequence of main clause (the original action) and dependent clause (the consequence) linked by conjunctions (see 5.3) such as **cosicché**, **di modo che**, **in modo che**, **perché**, **sicché** and informally **che**. The verb expressing the result or consequence can be in the indicative, especially if it refers to a past event:

La strada era bagnata cosicché quando mio marito ha frenato, la macchina ha sbandato.

The road was wet, so that when my husband braked, the car skidded.

Andava troppo veloce di modo che arrivata alla curva la macchina è andata fuori strada.

She was going too fast, so that when it got to the bend the car went off the road.

The verb expressing the result may be in the subjunctive, however, if the result is seen as unlikely or improbable, or, as in this example, where deliberate purpose is implied:

Ha versato da bere in modo che non vedessimo quello che faceva.

He poured the drinks in such a way that we didn't see what he was doing.

► See also 35.4 for an example using **perché** and the subjunctive.

35.4 Così, tale, tanto, troppo

Result and consequence are often linked to a main clause containing an adjective or adverb expressing *excess* or *extent*. Adjectives include **tale** 'of such a kind (that, as to)', **tanto** 'so much, so great (that)', **troppo** 'too much (for)'. Adverbs include **così** 'so, so much, so (that)', **talmente** 'so, so much (that)', **tanto** 'so, so much (that)', **troppo** 'too, too much (for)' (see also 6.3.5).

The consequence can be expressed by an infinitive introduced by **da** or **per**. In this case, the subject of the infinitive must be the same as that of the main clause:

La sua intelligenza è tale da far paura.

His intelligence is so great as to be frightening.

I miei amici americani hanno tanti soldi da non dovere mai lavorare.

My American friends have so much money that they don't have to work.

Ha bevuto troppa birra per poter guidare la macchina.

He has drunk too much beer to be able to drive the car.

Sono così demoralizzata da non riuscire a prendere una decisione.

I'm so demoralised that I can't even make a decision.

Sono talmente stanca da volere solo dormire.

I'm so tired that I just want to sleep.

È cambiato tanto da non essere più riconoscibile.

He's changed so much that he isn't recognisable any more.

Il direttore è troppo impegnato per riceverla oggi.

The manager is too busy to see you today.

Ha studiato troppo poco per potere superare l'esame.

He's studied too little to be able to pass the exam.

Alternatively, consequence can be expressed by **che** and a dependent clause. The verb expressing the consequence or result is normally in the indicative or conditional:

Eravamo così stanchi che non riuscivamo a tenere gli occhi aperti.

We were so tired that we couldn't keep our eyes open.

Provo una tale antipatia per Carlo che vorrei ucciderlo.

I dislike Carlo so much that I could kill him.

La soluzione mi sembra talmente facile che potrei anche cominciare domani.

The solution seems to me so easy that I could even start tomorrow.

Mi sento tanto male che non riesco a stare in piedi.

I feel so ill I can't stand up.

The verb in the result clause may be in the subjunctive, however, if the result is seen as unlikely or improbable, as in this example, introduced by **perché**:

Gli studenti sono troppo giovani perché possano capire i nostri problemi.

The students are too young to be able to understand our problems.

Cause and effect, including the notion of *extent*, can also be expressed by using **basta** 'it is enough to, one need only' and **solo** 'only' in the main clause:

Basta un minimo di intelligenza per imparare una lingua straniera.

One only needs a minimum of intelligence to learn a foreign language.

Devi solo leggere i giornali per capire i problemi del mondo.

You only have to read the newspapers to understand the problems of the world.

In the example below, **perché** is followed by the subjunctive, to express the *result* or *effect* of an action:

Ci sono la radio, la televisione, basta aprirle per un secondo perché il male ci raggiunga, ci entri dentro.

(Susanna Tamaro, *Va dove ti porta il cuore*)

There is radio and television. You only have to switch them on for one second, for the evil to reach us, to get inside us.

35.5 Words expressing result, effect

35.5.1 Nouns expressing result, effect, consequence

la conclusione	conclusion
la conseguenza	consequence
l'effetto/gli effetti	effect(s)
l'impatto	impact
il risultato	result

L'iniziativa ha avuto risultati inattesi.

The initiative had unexpected results.

La mancanza di azione da parte dell'ONU ha avuto conseguenze disastrose per la popolazione.

The lack of action on the part of the UN had disastrous consequences for the population.

Questa medicina può avere effetti collaterali. Leggere attentamente le istruzioni.

This medicine can have side effects. Read the instructions carefully.

L'effetto dello sciopero è stato minimo.

The effect of the strike was minimal.

► See also 34.5.

35.5.2 Expressing the extent of the effects or consequences

The *extent* of an effect or consequence is expressed by adjectives such as **rilevante**, **importante**, **notevole** or by phrases such as **di lunga portata**, **di rilievo**, if you want to stress its significance:

Il terremoto ha provocato poche morti, ma ha avuto conseguenze economiche di lunga portata.

The earthquake caused few deaths, but had far-reaching economic consequences.

In Italia, la recessione ha avuto un impatto notevole.

In Italy, the recession has had a considerable impact.

If stressing the insignificance of the consequences, however, you can use adjectives such as **irrelevante**, **minimo**, **insignificante** or phrases such as **di nessun rilievo**, **(di) nessuna importanza**:

Secondo il governo francese, gli effetti degli esperimenti nucleari a Mururoa sarebbero di nessuna importanza.

According to the French government, the effects of the nuclear experiments at Mururoa are of no importance.

35.5.3 Surveys and opinion polls

The results of surveys, opinion polls, etc. are often expressed by the verbs **risultare**, **emergere**:

Stretto di Messina. Da un sondaggio sui traghetti, Metromare risulta la più soddisfacente.

(<http://www.costaviolaonline.it/>, retrieved 14 March 2012)

Straits of Messina. From a survey on ferry companies, Metromare emerges as the most satisfactory.

Risulta da un sondaggio che 16 milioni di italiani tiferanno Liverpool.

(<http://it.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080310072731AAogyRN>)

It emerges from a survey that 16 million Italians will be cheering for Liverpool.

Emerge un quadro generale della situazione che non è molto positivo.

A general picture emerges of the situation which is not very positive.

► See also 42.6 for more information on writing reports.

36

Specifying time

36.1 Introduction

When you need to indicate explicitly the time context in which different actions or events take place, or in which different facts are set, you use *time clauses* and/or *adjuncts of time* (phrases which specify a time context).

Adjuncts of time may be *adverbs* (see 6.3.1) such as **oggi** or **domani**, or *adverbial phrases* such as **fra dieci giorni**, **un anno fa**, **più tardi**. Examples are shown below.

Time clauses are dependent (subordinate) clauses (see 30.3) and their function is to expand the content of a main clause with a specification of time. They are usually introduced by a conjunction (see 5.3.6) such as **quando**, **mentre**, **dopo**. When using dependent clauses, the tenses of main and dependent verbs must follow the rules of the *sequence of tenses* (see Appendix V for the basic rules and 30.5 for a further illustration of how these rules are applied).

We have divided our examples into three time contexts: *same time context*, *actions happening earlier*, *actions happening later*. In all three time contexts, the relationship of one event to another may be that of two or more linked main clauses (see 30.2) or of main and dependent clause (see 30.3).

36.2 Expressing same time context

Actions happening at the same time as those of the main clause are generally marked by words such as those below, followed by a verb in the *indicative*:

quando	when
mentre	while
al tempo in cui	at the time when
nel momento in cui	at the moment when, just as, when

36.2.1 Quando 'when'

This is by far the most frequently used specification of time, used for present, past or future time contexts:

Quando sono stanca, non mangio.

When I'm tired, I don't eat.

Quando verrai in Inghilterra, vieni a trovarmi.

When you come to England, come and visit me.

Quando ero ragazzo giocavo a pallacanestro.

When I was a teenager I used to play basketball.

Ho visitato Siena quando sono stato in Italia.

I visited Siena when I was in Italy.

Quando ci hai telefonato stavamo cenando.

When you phoned us we were having dinner.

36.2.2 *Mentre* ‘while’

Mentre introduces an action which takes place at the same time as the action in the main clause. It is followed by a verb in the indicative, in present, past or future tenses:

Cerco di lavorare un po’ *mentre* i bambini giocano in giardino.

I’m trying to do a little work while the children are playing in the garden.

***Mentre* tu eri al telefono sono arrivati due clienti.**

While you were on the telephone two clients arrived.

***Mentre* tu sarai al lavoro, io sarò in vacanza!**

While you are at work, I will be on holiday!

36.2.3 *Al tempo in cui* ‘at the time when’

Al tempo in cui is used to talk about a period of time contemporary to that of the main clause. It is followed by a verb in the indicative, in present, past or future tenses:

***Al tempo in cui* noi abitavamo a Trieste, loro abitavano a Venezia.**

At the time when we were living in Trieste, they were living in Venice.

36.2.4 *Nel momento in cui ...* ‘at the same time as, just as, just when, when’

Nel momento in cui refers to a precise moment in time and is used to talk about what someone was doing, when the action in the main clause took place. It is followed by a verb in the indicative, in a present, past or future tense:

Il direttore mi ha chiamato proprio *nel momento in cui* stavo per uscire.

The manager called me just when I was about to go out.

In the next example Italian uses the future tense after *nel momento in cui*, while English uses the present tense, after ‘when’ (the same applies to other time clauses in the future tense):

Pagheremo in contanti *nel momento in cui* riceveremo la merce.

We’ll pay in cash when we receive the goods.

36.2.5 *Come* ‘as, when, just as’

Although less common, *come* can also be used with the sense of ‘as soon as’ or ‘just as’:

***Come* sono arrivata a casa, ho fatto una doccia.**

As soon as I arrived home, I took a shower.

36.3 Sequences of events

When talking about a series of events, we can use words such as **prima**, **poi** or **dopo**, to indicate the sequence they come in.

36.3.1 *Prima, poi, più tardi, dopo*

The time relationship of one event happening earlier than another can be represented by two clauses, or groups of words, of equal weight, introduced by **prima** ‘first’, followed by **poi** ‘then, after, later’, **più tardi** ‘later’ or **dopo** ‘after, later’.

***Prima* siamo andati a Monaco e *poi* abbiamo visitato Salisburgo.**

First we went to Munich and then we visited Salzburg.

***Prima* andremo al mare e *poi* dopo Ferragosto andremo in montagna.**

First we’ll go to the seaside and then after the 15th of August we’ll go to the mountains.

***Prima* ho fatto lezione e *più tardi* sono andata in biblioteca.**

First I taught my class and later I went to the library.

Per cambiare valuta estera, bisogna andare *prima* allo sportello no. 6 e *dopo* alla cassa.
To change foreign currency, you have to go first to cashier no. 6 and then to the cash desk.

36.3.2 **Prima di, prima che 'before'**

When the time relationship is represented by a combination of *main* clause and *dependent* clause, with one fact, action or event occurring *earlier* than the other, the action which takes place later is introduced by **prima di** or **prima che**.

Prima di is followed by the *present infinitive*. This construction can only be used when the subject of main and dependent clause is the same person ('I have to do the shopping', 'I have to go back home'). In the third example below, the infinitive is in passive form.

Devo fare la spesa *prima di* tornare a casa.

I have to do some shopping before going back home.

***Prima di* venire in ufficio sono andata a trovare mia cugina.**

Before coming to the office I went to visit my cousin.

***Prima di essere nominata* preside, la Dottoressa Belloni aveva insegnato al liceo 'Parini'.**

Before being appointed headmistress, Dr Belloni had taught at the 'Parini' high school.

Prima che introduces a dependent time clause containing a *subjunctive*. This construction is generally used when the two parts of the sentence have a different subject:

***Prima che* Lei arrivasse in ufficio ha telefonato il dott. Rosi.**

Before you arrived in the office Dr Rosi phoned.

Devo informare Lucio di quello che è successo *prima che* sia troppo tardi.

I must inform Lucio of what happened before it is too late.

36.3.3 **Dopo, dopo che 'after'**

When the time relationship is represented by a combination of *main* clause and *dependent* clause, with one fact, action or event occurring *later* than the other, the action which takes place earlier is introduced by **dopo** or **dopo che**:

Dopo is followed by a *past infinitive*:

***Dopo aver cenato* faremo una passeggiata.**

After having dinner we'll have a walk.

Andammo tutti insieme al cinema *dopo essere stati* da Franco un'ora.

We went all together to the cinema after being at Franco's for an hour.

Dopo che is followed by a verb in the *indicative* in a range of tenses:

Partirò solo *dopo che* avrò finito il mio lavoro.

I'll leave only after I've finished my work.

Vieni a trovarmi *dopo che* hai finito il tuo lavoro.

Come to see me after you've finished your work.

Andrea è venuto a trovarmi *dopo che* aveva finito il lavoro.

Andrea came to see me after he had finished his work.

36.3.4 **Appena, non appena 'as soon as'**

Appena is used to indicate that the action of the main clause happens *immediately after* something else. Note the optional use of **non**:

Telefonami (*non*) *appena* hai finito.

Ring me as soon as you have finished.

***Appena sei partito* ci siamo accorti che avevi dimenticato le chiavi.**

As soon as you left, we realised that you had forgotten the keys.

Note the use of the *futuro anteriore* (see 2.2.10) in the following example:

Ti telefonerò non appena sarò arrivato a Tokyo.

I'll ring you as soon as I have arrived in Tokyo.

Note in the following example the use of the *trapassato remoto* (**ebbe visto**), generally only used in written texts, and only when there is a *passato remoto* (**corse via**) in the main clause:

Non appena ebbe visto l'orologio, corse via senza dire una parola.

As soon as he caught sight of the clock, he ran off without saying a word.

36.4 Defining the limits of a period: 'since'/'until'

You can also define the period of time in which several facts happened, by specifying the moment when the period began ('time from when') and the moment when it ended ('time until when'), as in the examples below.

36.4.1 Time from when (since)

(fin) da

da quando

dal momento in cui

Fin dal momento in cui ti ho conosciuta ho sempre pensato che tu fossi la persona ideale per me.

Da quando sono arrivata ho già letto la corrispondenza, risposto a due lettere, ricevuto due clienti, e ho perfino avuto il tempo di prendere il caffè con Sara.

Dal 2011 abbiamo già cambiato tre macchine.

Lavoro alla Fiat da cinque anni.

since

since when

since the moment when

Since the moment I first met you I've always thought you to be the ideal person for me.

Since I arrived I've already read the mail, answered two letters, received two clients, and I've even had the time to have a coffee with Sara.

Since 2011 we have already changed car three times.

I've been working at Fiat for five years.

Note the use of the present tense, with **da**, in the last example, where English uses the perfect continuous ('I have been working'). The present tense is used to stress that the action is still going on, or the situation still applies (see 2.2.3).

Similarly, **da** can be used with the imperfect tense to show that the action *was* still going on at that time:

Vivevo in Italia già da due anni, quando ho conosciuto Carlo.

I had been living in Italy for two years when I met Carlo.

36.4.2 Time until when

You can also define how long a period of time lasts, by specifying the moment *up to when* the actions or events referred to continue/will continue/have continued, by using one of the following:

fino a until

finché (non) until, as long as

fino a quando up to the moment when

The preposition **fino a** can be followed by a specific day (**fino a martedì, fino a ieri**) or by a specific date or year:

Ho lavorato in questo ufficio fino al 2011 e ho realizzato molti progetti collaborando con numerose ditte e clienti.

I worked in this office up until 2011 and I carried out many projects collaborating with several companies and clients.

The conjunction **finché** is normally followed by **non** as well as the verb, when it expresses the meaning of 'until something happens':

Rimarremo in ufficio finché non avremo finito il nostro lavoro.

We'll stay in the office until we finish the job.

It can be followed by a verb in the *subjunctive* rather than the more normal indicative form, but this tends to convey doubt as to whether the event or action will ever be complete:

Dovremo fare economie, finché la nostra situazione finanziaria non sia più sicura.

We will need to cut back, until our financial situation becomes more certain.

Finché can also convey the meaning of 'during the length of time that' or 'during the whole period that':

Finché l'avvocato Prati ha lavorato con noi non abbiamo mai avuto problemi e gli affari sono andati a gonfie vele.

In all the time Mr Prati, the lawyer, worked with us, we had no problems and business went very well.

When the starting and finishing point of the time context are specified (as in the last example), the verbs are in the *passato prossimo* (perfect) rather than the *imperfetto* (imperfect), even when the facts took place over a long span of time. In fact, as shown in 13.2, the perfect aspect stresses the completion of an action rather than its duration.

36.4.3 Duration of time

The phrase **tutta la giornata** expresses an action or event that went on *all* day. In fact the use of the feminine form ending in **-ata** tends to convey the meaning of a long stretch of time or a special day: **una serata** 'an evening out', 'an evening together', **una mattinata** 'a whole morning':

Abbiamo passato una bellissima serata.

We spent a beautiful evening.

Ci aspetta una mattinata di lavoro.

We've got a morning of work ahead of us.

36.5 Specifying repetition and frequency

There are various ways to indicate the repetition of a fact or action in certain circumstances.

36.5.1 Ogni volta che, tutte le volte che 'every time that'

You can add a dependent time clause introduced by one of the following:

ogni volta che

every time (that)

tutte le volte che

every time

ogni qual volta (che)

every time

Non rimproverarmi ogni volta che accendo una sigaretta.

Don't tell me off every time I light a cigarette.

Tutte le volte che andavamo a Londra, trovavamo sempre traffico.

Every time we went to London, we always used to find traffic.

Ogni qual volta ho avuto bisogno di aiuto, ho sempre trovato la massima collaborazione dei miei colleghi.

Every time I needed some help, I always had the greatest support from my colleagues.

Venga pure a trovarmi ogni volta che avrà bisogno di una mano.

Come and see me any time you need a hand.

36.5.2 Ogni 'every'

The indefinite adjective **ogni** (see 3.9.2) followed by a unit of time can indicate the frequency of repetition, as in the example below. **Ogni** is invariable in form and always followed by a singular noun.

ogni giorno
ogni mese
ogni cinque minuti
ogni tanto

Ogni giorno riceviamo almeno venti telefonate.

Il telefono suona ogni cinque minuti.

Dose prescritta: due pillole ogni quattro ore.

Ogni tanto Franco perde la pazienza.

Ogni lunedì giochiamo a carte.

every day
every month
every five minutes
every so often

We receive at least twenty telephone calls every day.

The telephone rings every five minutes.

Prescribed dose: two tablets every four hours.

Every so often Franco loses patience.

Every Monday we play cards.

36.5.3 *Tutti i, tutti gli, tutte le 'every...'*

The indefinite adjective **tutti** (see 3.9.3) followed by a time element can also indicate the frequency of repetition, as in:

tutti i giorni
tutti gli anni
tutte le settimane

Vado a scuola tutti i giorni.

Abbiamo pagato regolarmente le tasse tutti gli anni.

Prendo lezioni d'italiano tutte le settimane.

Tutte le domeniche, andiamo a messa.

every day
every year
every week

I go to school every day.

We paid taxes regularly every year.

I take Italian lessons every week.

Every Sunday we go to Mass.

36.5.4 Other expressions of frequency

un giorno sì e un giorno no
Da ragazzo andavo al cinema un giorno sì e un giorno no.

raramente
Al cinema andiamo molto raramente.

spesso
Mia madre mi telefona spesso.

sempre
Mio fratello legge sempre i fumetti.

every other day
When I was a teenager I used to go to the cinema every other day.

seldom
We go very seldom to the cinema.

often, frequently
My mother telephones me frequently.

always
My brother always reads cartoons.

36.6 Other expressions of time

Expressions of time which refer to a particular time context (*present, past* or *future*) can be found in the relevant chapters. Some expressions of time which are not specifically related to any one time context are:

man mano (che)
subito
nel frattempo

Man mano che i lavori procedevano, il costo aumentava vertiginosamente.

Ha capito subito cosa volevo.

Pulisco io la cucina – nel frattempo tu prepara la cena!

gradually as
immediately
meanwhile

As the works went on, the cost went soaring up.

He understood immediately what I wanted.

I'll clean the kitchen – meanwhile you prepare dinner!

37

Place and manner

37.1 Introduction

Chapter 36 showed how to put events in a time context, by saying *when* and *how frequently* something happened. Another way of setting an action or event in context is to say *where* it happened or *how* it happened, in other words to indicate place and manner. There are various ways of doing this, including using adverbs (see 6.2), prepositions (see Chapter 4) and adverbial phrases (see 6.2.5).

37.2 Place: adverbs

Adverbs of place indicate the place where an event or action happened. The most common adverbs of place are:

accanto	next to
davanti	in front of
dentro	inside
dietro	behind
fuori	outside
lontano	far, far away
sopra	above, upstairs
sotto	underneath, under, below, downstairs
vicino	nearby, near

All of the adverbs listed above are also used as prepositions (see 37.3.6).

Mia madre abita a Via Carducci e mia zia ha comprato la casa accanto.

My mother lives in Via Carducci and my aunt has bought the house next door.

Ho freddo. Vado dentro.

I'm cold. I'm going inside.

Vai tu davanti. Io mi siedo dietro.

You go in front. I'll sit behind.

Mangiamo fuori stasera?

Shall we eat out tonight?

Il mio collega si deve alzare alle 6.00 perché abita lontano.

My colleague has to get up at 6 am because he lives far away.

In un condominio sente più rumori chi abita sotto o chi abita sopra?

In a block of flats, who hears the most noise – the person who lives underneath or the person who lives above?

Non ho bisogno della macchina. Abito qui vicino.

I don't need a car. I live near here.

Adverbs and adverbial phrases indicating position include:

a destra	on the right
a sinistra	on the left
giù	down
in alto	high up
in basso	low down
in centro	in the centre
in fondo	in the background, at the bottom
su	up

Guardi *in alto*, poi *in basso*.

Look up, then down.

Questo panorama è bellissimo: *a sinistra* il Vesuvio, *a destra* Posillipo, e *in centro* il mare. *In fondo* si vede Capri.

This view is very beautiful: on the left, Vesuvius, on the right Posillipo, in the middle the sea. In the background you can see Capri.

Vengo giù dopo il 15 agosto.

I'm coming down after the 15th of August.

Quando torni su?

When are you going back up?

Some of these adverbs can also be used as prepositions (see 37.3.6).

37.3 Place: prepositions

Prepositions of place can indicate the place *where* an action or event happens, the place *to where* an action or a person is directed, and the place *from where* something originates.

37.3.1 Forms of prepositions

There are many prepositions that relate to place (see 4.3). Full information on each specific preposition and on their forms when combined with the definite article (**al**, **dal**, **del**, **nel**, **sul**) can be found in 4.3 and 4.2 respectively.

37.3.2 To a place

The prepositions most often used to indicate *to* a place or other kinds of destination, including people, include **a** 'at, to', **in** 'in, into', **per** 'for', **su** 'on, onto', **verso** 'towards' and also **da** 'at, to' (see also 4.3.1, 4.3.5). While **a** is used for towns, cities and small islands, **in** is used for countries, regions and larger islands.

Quest'estate andiamo *in* Sicilia.

This summer we are going to Sicily.

Vorrei andare *a* Venezia per Carnevale.

I would like to go to Venice for Carnival.

A maggio si sono trasferiti *negli* Stati Uniti.

In May they moved to the USA.

Domani devo partire presto *per* Roma.

Tomorrow I have to leave early for Rome.

È arrivato un pacco *per* Lei.

There is a parcel for you.

Il passeggero ha cercato di saltare *sull'*autobus che però era già *in* partenza.

The passenger tried to jump onto the bus, which however was already leaving.

L'aereo stava scendendo *verso* l'aeroporto quando è caduta *a* terra una porta.

The plane was making its descent towards the airport when a door fell to the ground.

Da can indicate movement *to* somewhere, normally the place (shop, studio, surgery, house) of an individual indicated by name or by trade:

Devo accompagnare i bambini *dal* dentista.

I have to take the children to the dentist.

Stasera andiamo *da* Gianni.

Tonight we're going to Gianni's place.

37.3.3 In or at a place

Prepositions that indicate *in* or *at* a place include **a**, **da**, **in**. While **a** is used for towns, cities and small islands, **in** is used for countries, regions and larger islands (see also 37.3.2 above).

Ho fatto i miei studi *a* Padova.

I carried out my studies at Padua.

Abbiamo fatto una bellissima vacanza *a* Capri.

We had a lovely holiday on Capri.

Molti scozzesi hanno comprato casa *in* Garfagnana.

Many Scottish people have bought a house in the Garfagnana region.

Una grande percentuale dei lavoratori lavora *in* centro ma abita *in* periferia o anche *in* campagna.

A large percentage of workers work in the city centre but live in the suburbs or even in the country.

Da (see also 4.3.3 and 37.3.2) has no equivalent in English but can roughly be translated as 'at the house of' or 'at the shop/restaurant/office of'.

Abbiamo mangiato benissimo *da* Gianni.

We ate really well at Gianni's.

Ho comprato dei gamberi *dal* pescivendolo.

I bought some prawns at the fishmongers.

Facciamo il Cenone di Capodanno *da* mia sorella.

We're having the New Year's Eve dinner at my sister's house.

The combined form of prepositions is used for many phrases such as:

al mare at the seaside

al cinema at the cinema

With many common destinations, however, the simple preposition is used:

a casa at home

a scuola at school

a teatro at the theatre

37.3.4 From a place

Prepositions which express movement from a place include **da** and less frequently **di**:

Il treno *da* Trieste arriverà al binario 10.

The train from Trieste will arrive on platform 10.

Venendo *dal* centro, si prende Viale Cavour con direzione Ovest.

Coming from the centre, you take Viale Cavour heading west.

Per arrivare alle 7.00 all'aeroporto, bisognerà uscire *di* casa alle 6.00.

To get to the airport by 7.00, we will have to leave the house at 6.00.

Vai via *di* qua, brutto cane.

Get away from here, you horrible dog.

Esci *di* là, stupido.

Get out of there, idiot.

37.3.5 Position (using prepositions)

Prepositions that indicate position include: **fra**, **tra** ‘between’, ‘among’ (there is no difference in meaning), **in** ‘in’, **su** ‘on’ (and their combined article and preposition forms).

La mia macchina è parcheggiata tra due camion. Non si vede da qui.

My car is parked between two lorries. You can't see it from here.

La farina per fare la pasta si trova nell'armadietto.

The flour to make pasta is in the kitchen cupboard.

Quando vengono i nipoti, metto i vasi di porcellana sullo scaffale più alto.

When my grandchildren come, I put the china vases on the highest shelf.

37.3.6 Position (using prepositions and/or adverbs)

Many of the adverbs you saw earlier (see 37.2 above) can also be used as prepositions (see also 4.5.1). These include **accanto** ‘next to’, **davanti** ‘in front of’, **dentro** ‘inside’, **dietro** ‘behind’, **di fronte** ‘opposite’, **fuori** ‘outside’, **lontano** ‘far’, **sopra** ‘above’, **sotto** ‘underneath, under’, **vicino** ‘nearby, near’.

Some of these prepositions require a second preposition (for example, **a**, **da**, **di**) depending on whether they are followed by a noun or a pronoun. Others only require a preposition before a stressed pronoun such as **me**, **te**. For some prepositions, use of a second preposition is optional.

accanto (a)

Siediti accanto a me!

Sit next to me!

Accanto can also have the less literal meaning of ‘to be close to someone’:

Sono sempre accanto a te.

I'm always near you.

davanti (a)

La macchina era parcheggiata davanti alla casa.

The car was parked in front of the house.

La signora davanti a me era molto elegante.

The woman in front of me was very elegant.

dentro (di)

Ci sono dei negozi anche dentro la galleria, ma sono costosi.

There are some shops inside the shopping mall as well, but they're expensive.

Dentro di me, mi sentivo molto triste.

I felt very sad inside.

dietro (a, di)

La salumeria si trova dietro l'angolo.

The delicatessen is just round the corner.

Il portafogli è caduto dietro all'armadio.

The wallet has fallen behind the cupboard.

Il signore dietro di me russava.

The man behind me was snoring.

di fronte (a)

Tragedia di fronte a un asilo – bimbo di 5 anni ucciso da un Suv.

Tragedy opposite a nursery – five year old killed by an SUV.

Di fronte a can also have the less literal meaning of ‘faced with’:

Di fronte ad una tragedia del genere, non sappiamo cosa dire.

When faced with a tragedy of this kind, we don't know what to say.

fuori (di)

La chiesa era affollatissima, c'erano dei fedeli che ascoltavano la messa fuori della chiesa.

The church was packed out, there were some worshippers who were listening to the mass outside the church.

lontano (da)

Per me è triste abitare lontano dalla famiglia.

In my opinion, it's sad living far away from one's family.

sopra (di)

Mia madre nascondeva i regali sopra l'armadio nella sua camera.

My mother hid the presents on top of the cupboard in her bedroom.

Guardavamo il cielo e le nuvole sopra di noi.

We watched the sky and the clouds above us.

sotto (di)

I gattini dormivano sotto il letto.

The kittens were sleeping under the bed.

Il Mondo Sotto di Noi è un kit per osservare il mondo delle formiche.

‘The World Beneath Us’ is a kit for observing the world of ants.

vicino (a)

Loro abitano vicino a casa mia.

They live near my house.

A few of the adverbs which specify position (see 37.2) can also be used as prepositions, along with a second preposition as required:

In fondo alla strada, giri a destra.

At the bottom of the street, turn right.

Il museo si trova a destra della chiesa.

The museum is on the right of the church.

37.4 Manner

37.4.1 Introduction

The easiest way of stating *how* an action is carried out is to use an adverb. Full details of the *formation* and *use* of adverbs are found in Chapter 6. Here we look at other ways to specify or state how an action is carried out, using alternatives to adverbs.

37.4.2 Adverbial phrases

An adverbial phrase is composed of preposition (see Chapter 4) and noun and has the function of an adverb. We list the most common ones.

Adverbial phrases formed with **maniera** or **modo** indicate the way or manner in which something is done:

Nell'ultimo anno, le vendite degli smartphone (cellulari intelligenti) sono aumentate in una maniera incredibile.

Over the last year, sales of smartphones have increased at an incredible rate.

Mi ha risposto *in maniera molto brusca*.

He replied to me in a very abrupt manner.

Non parlarmi *in questo modo*.

Don't speak to me in this way.

Adverbial phrase with **con** (see also 4.3.2):

Mariolina suonava il violino *con molto entusiasmo ma con poca accuratezza*.

Mariolina played the violin with great enthusiasm but with little accuracy.

Adverbial phrase with **a** (see also 4.3.1):

I bambini dormivano e noi parlavamo *a bassa voce*.

The children were asleep and we were speaking in a low voice.

I treni Interregionali corrono *a grande velocità*.

The Inter-regional trains run at high speed.

Adverbial phrase with **in** (see also 4.3.5):

Guardavano il programma *in silenzio e senza commentare*.

They watched the programme in silence and without commenting.

Ho preso un basso voto perché ho fatto il compito *in fretta*.

I got a low mark because I did the work in a hurry.

Adverbial phrase with **senza** (see also 4.5.3):

Ha fatto l'esame di guida cinque volte *senza successo*.

She's taken the driving test five times without success.

Adverbial phrase composed of **alla, all'** and either an adjective in feminine form or adverb (see also 4.3.1):

Saltimbocca *alla romana*

Saltimbocca Roman style

Scaloppe *alla milanese*

Escalopes Milanese style

Salutare *all'inglese*

To say goodbye English fashion (i.e. to leave without saying goodbye!)

This expression uses the adverb **meglio** to imply that you did things as well as you could but not perfectly:

Abbiamo sistemato la casa *alla meglio*.

We sorted the house out as well as we could.

The following expression meaning 'sloppily, without much care' apparently derives from the name of king Carlo Magno ('Carlone') who always did things in a rather haphazard way:

Fa le cose sempre *alla carlona*.

He always does things in a sloppy way.

37.4.3 Adverbial adjective

The so-called *adverbial adjective*, an adjective used with the force of an adverb, is becoming more and more common, for example in advertising language. The masculine singular form is the form always used: for example **parlare chiaro** instead of **chiaramente**. Here are some more examples:

Mangiare sano. Mangiare Yomo.

Eat healthy. Eat Yomo.

Abbiamo lavorato *sodo* per una settimana.

We worked solidly for a week.

Chi va piano va sano e va lontano.

He who goes slowly goes healthily and goes far.

37.4.4 Benino, benone

Some common adverbs such as **bene** can also have suffixes such as **-ino**, **-one** added (see 6.2.6) to produce the forms **benino** ‘quite well’, **benone** ‘very well’.

Come va Alessandro a scuola? Benino.
How is Alessandro doing at school? Quite well.

Nel villaggio turistico, abbiamo mangiato benone.
In the tourist village, we ate very well.

37.4.5 Unusual adverbial forms

Unusual adverbial forms include those ending in **-oni** (see 6.2.2) which apply mainly to physical actions. Examples include:

bocconi face down
carponi crawling, on all fours
gattoni cat-like
penzoloni dangling
tentoni feeling one’s way

Il bambino aveva cinque mesi e già andava carponi.

The baby was five months old and was already crawling.

Stare con i piedi penzoloni guardando il mondo girare.

Sitting with your feet dangling down, watching the world go round.

(from the lyrics of ‘Dolce far niente’, by Italian singer-songwriter Jovanotti)

37.4.6 With come or da

You can use **come** (see also 4.5.3) or **da** (see also 4.3.3, 4.4.2) when you want to compare the way someone does something to a person or to an animal:

Camminava con la testa alta, come una giraffa.

She walked with her head high, like a giraffe.

Si è comportato da pazzo.

He behaved like a lunatic.

37.4.7 Come se

Come se ‘as if, as though’ takes the subjunctive, most commonly the imperfect:

Vivi ogni giorno come se fosse l’ultimo.

Live every day as if it were your last.

Camminava come se avesse i tacchi alti.

She walked as though she had high heels.

Si comportava come se fosse la regina.

She behaved as though she were the queen.

38

Expressing a condition or hypothesis

38.1 Introduction

In English you express a condition by using the word 'if'. Normally, the second half of the sentence expresses what *will or would* happen if the condition is met, or what *would have* happened if it had been met. Look at these three examples:

- 'If you are good, I will buy you an ice-cream' (a genuine possibility)
- 'If we win the Lottery, we will buy a house in Tuscany' (possible but unlikely)
- 'If you had drunk less wine, you wouldn't have crashed the car' (event has already occurred, so this is no longer a possibility)

Similarly, in Italian, **se** 'if' can introduce a hypothesis or condition (the **periodo ipotetico**). Conditional sentences can be split into three categories: real or probable, possible and impossible.

38.2 A condition which is likely to be met (probable or highly possible)

Here the condition is either likely to be met or may even be a reality already. The verb in the **se** clause is in the *indicative* (see 2.2.2), using the *present*, *future* or *past* tense, or a combination of tenses, to express certainty or reality. The *imperative* (see 2.2.21) may also be used. Most of the time, the **se** clause comes first in the sentence, but it can also come *after* the 'result' clause.

The choice of verbs used depends on the *degree of probability*, in other words, on how likely it is that the condition will be met. If you are expressing a near-certainty, rather than a condition (in the last example you may already know that your friends are going to Italy in October), you use a verb in the *indicative* for the **se** clause, and another *indicative*, in the appropriate tense, for the 'result' clause.

Present + present:

Se c'è qualche problema, mi puoi chiamare sul cellulare.

If there's a problem, you can call me on the mobile phone.

Se piove, entra l'acqua.

If it rains, water gets in.

Present + imperative:

Se decidi di andare via, lasciami la chiave.

If you decide to go away, leave me the key.

Chiudi la porta, se esci.

Shut the door if you go out.

Present + future:

Se c'è un problema, mi potrai chiamare con il cellulare.

If there's a problem, you'll be able to call me on the mobile phone.

Se tu sei intelligente, non avrai difficoltà a imparare l'italiano.

If you're clever, you won't have any trouble learning Italian.

Past + future:

Se l'aereo non ha fatto un ritardo, lui sarà già all'aeroporto.

If the plane hasn't arrived late, he will be at the airport already.

Future + future:

Se voi sarete in Italia ad ottobre, potrete partecipare alla vendemmia.

If you are in Italy in October, you can take part in the grape-picking.

38.3 A condition which is unlikely to be met (improbable)

Where there is little chance of the conditions coming true (for example in the case of the Lottery), the *present conditional* (see 2.2.12) is used to express what *would* happen if the condition were met, while the *imperfect subjunctive* (see 2.2.18) is used in the conditional or *se* clause, to express the hypothetical nature of the situation or the impossibility of the condition coming true:

Se noi vincessimo la lotteria, compreremmo una seconda casa, magari al mare.

If we were to win the Lottery, we would buy a second home, maybe at the seaside.

Note the use of **magari** 'perhaps' in the example above.

Se io fossi in te, non accetterei quell'incarico.

If I were you, I wouldn't accept that job.

Se avessimo più tempo, potremmo andare a vedere anche il Duomo.

If we had more time, we could go and see the Duomo as well.

The example using two present tenses in 38.2 above can also be expressed with this same combination of imperfect subjunctive and present conditional to imply that there are unlikely to be any problems:

Se ci fosse qualche problema, mi potresti chiamare sul cellulare.

If there were any problem, you could call me on my mobile phone.

38.4 A condition which can no longer be met (impossible)

This type of conditional sentence uses the *past conditional* (see 2.2.13) to express what *could* or *would have* happened if the condition had been met, while the conditional or *se* clause uses the *pluperfect subjunctive* (see 2.2.19) to express the condition. Obviously, in the examples below, the moment of opportunity has passed and the condition can no longer be met.

Se il direttore fosse stato più gentile, non avrebbe licenziato il nostro collega in questo modo.

If the manager had been kinder, he wouldn't have sacked our colleague in this way.

Se tu me l'avessi detto, avrei potuto aiutarti.

If you had told me, I could have helped you.

It is also possible to have a combination of *present conditional* (see 2.2.12) and *pluperfect subjunctive* (see 2.2.19) to express a condition which can no longer be met:

Se io avessi sposato un inglese, sarei più felice oggi.

If I had married an Englishman, I would be happier today.

In *spoken* language – rarely in written – the pluperfect subjunctive in the *se* clause is often replaced by the *imperfect indicative* (see 2.2.4). Compare the example below with the same sentence expressed more formally above:

Se tu me lo dicevi, avrei potuto aiutarti.

If you had told me, I could have helped you.

The past conditional in the result clause can also be replaced by the imperfect indicative:

Se tu me lo dicevi, ti potevo aiutare.

If you had told me, I could have helped you.

The choice of moods and tenses (pluperfect subjunctive and past conditional, imperfect and past conditional, imperfect and imperfect) depends very much on the register (spoken or written, formal or conversational). The same statement can be expressed in three different ways, depending on the register, all with the same meaning:

Se ti fossi comportata meglio, ti avrebbero invitata alla festa.

Se ti comportavi meglio, ti avrebbero invitato alla festa.

Se ti comportavi meglio, ti invitavano alla festa.

If you had behaved better, they would have invited you to the party.

There is a general tendency for Italian to become less formal and more colloquial, and the imperfect indicative is an easier verb form to use, even for Italians. In formal writing, it is usually preferable to use the first verb combination shown above.

38.5 Expressing conditions with other conjunctions

Apart from **se**, there are several other conjunctions or phrases that can introduce a condition, such as:

a condizione che	on condition that
a patto che	on condition that
ammesso che	given that
nel caso (che)	if
nell'eventualità che	in the event that
nell'ipotesi che	in the event that
posto che	given that
purché	provided that
qualora	if (ever)

Generally speaking, these phrases are used in the first and second types of conditional sentences (probable, possible), with the *subjunctive*:

Nel caso che vi perdiate, chiedete informazioni ad un vigile.

If you get lost, ask a traffic warden for information.

Similar in meaning, but followed by a noun rather than a verb, is the prepositional phrase **in caso di** 'in case of':

In caso di incendio, rompete il vetro.

In case of fire, break the glass.

The conjunction **qualora** is used in a hypothetical clause; its nearest translation in English is 'if ever':

Qualora dovesse presentarsi l'occasione, Francesco e Chiara si trasferirebbero a Trieste.

If ever the occasion were to arise, Francesco and Chiara would move to Trieste.

Both **a patto che** and **a condizione che** express the more specific meaning 'on condition that' and are always used with the subjunctive:

Gli stiro le camicie a patto che lui lavi i piatti.

I iron his shirts on condition that (if) he washes the dishes.

La Madison firmerà il contratto solo a condizione che la commissione venga aumentata del 10%.

Madison will sign the contract only on condition that the commission is increased by 10%.

Purché expresses ‘provided that’:

Mi piace tutti i tipi di musica purché siano originali.

I like all kinds of music provided that they are original.

The phrase **anche se** ‘even if . . .’ acts like **se**; it can express either a possible condition (using the indicative) or an improbable condition (using the subjunctive):

Anche se lui mi dice che va bene, aspetterò la conferma del direttore.

Even if he tells me that it is OK, I will wait for confirmation from the manager.

Anche se mi pagassero diecimila euro al mese, non accetterei il posto.

Even if they paid me ten thousand euros a month, I wouldn’t take the position.

38.6 Expressing conditions with gerund, infinitive or participle

Instead of using a conditional or **se** clause, you can also express a condition by using one of the following verb forms: *gerund*, *infinitive*, *participle*. This is slightly less common than using a **se** clause. In each case, the subject of the main verb either has to be the subject of the other verb form as well or else has to be explicitly mentioned.

38.6.1 Gerund

With the gerund (present) expressing a condition, a range of tenses is possible in the main clause (see also 2.2.23). There is no need for **se** since the condition is implied in the gerund:

Andando in macchina, ci metto due ore.

Going by car, it takes me two hours.

(If I go by car it takes me two hours.)

Andando in treno, risparmiesti un’ora.

If you went by train, you would save an hour.

Even when referring to a past context, only the present gerund can be used:

Guidando con più prudenza, non avresti preso la multa.

If you had driven more carefully, you wouldn’t have got a fine.

38.6.2 Past participle

The past participle (see 2.2.27) can be used with **se** to express a condition, as in the example below:

Se elaborato con attenzione, il questionario può essere uno strumento utile.

If designed carefully, the questionnaire can be a useful tool.

It can also be used without **se**, with the condition implicit in the past participle:

Fatto in modo incompleto, il sondaggio non sarebbe molto valido.

(If) done in an incomplete way, the survey wouldn’t be very valid.

38.6.3 Infinitive

The infinitive (see also 2.2.1) used with **a** can be used to express a condition:

A guardarla bene, sembra più vecchia di lui.

If you look at her closely, she seems older than him.

A reagire in modo eccessivo, rischi di allontanare tuo figlio.

If you over-react, you risk alienating your son.

38.7 Unfinished conditional sentence

Sometimes in English we express a half-finished thought, for example a desire or regret, with the words 'if . . . / if only . . .' ('If only I had listened to my teacher . . .'). A similar construction is possible in Italian, either with imperfect subjunctive or with pluperfect subjunctive. Only the **se** clause is expressed, while the 'consequence' or 'result' is left unspoken. In the examples below, we add suggestions for the possible consequence in brackets:

Se si potesse tornare indietro nel tempo . . . (si potrebbero evitare tanti disastri).

If only one could turn the clock back . . . (so many disasters could be avoided).

Se l'avessi saputo . . . (avrei fatto le cose in modo diverso).

If only I had known . . . (I would have done things differently).

Se mia madre avesse saputo . . . (mi avrebbe ammazzata).

If my mother had found out . . . (she would have killed me).

Sometimes **se** is replaced by **magari**:

Magari me lo avesse detto . . .

If he had only told me . . .

Compare this use of **magari** with its use in 38.3 above.

Sometimes the half-finished thought is a tentative idea, a suggestion:

Se prendessimo il treno invece di andare in macchina . . . ?

What if we took the train instead of going by car . . . ?

Se gli dicessimo la verità . . . ?

What if we told him the truth . . . ?

38.8 Other uses of **se**

38.8.1 Contrast

The examples below refer to an action or event that clearly did take place (a *fact* rather than a hypothesis). In this case the **se** is not really expressing a condition, but has the *contrasting* meaning of 'while', 'whereas':

Se lui parlava molto, sua moglie parlava due volte tanto.

If ('while') he spoke a lot, his wife spoke twice as much.

Se nell'Ottocento la gente usava ancora la carrozza, già agli inizi del Novecento si cominciava ad andare in treno.

If ('while', 'whereas') in the nineteenth century people were still using carriages, already at the beginning of the twentieth century, they were starting to go by train.

38.8.2 Indirect questions

In an indirect question, **se** does not express a condition but means 'whether':

Voleva sapere se noi avevamo visto sua moglie.

He wanted to know if we had seen his wife.

► See also 31.3.

39

Expressing reservation, exception and concession

39.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we look at sentences expressing *exception* (a fact or circumstance that is true *except for* a particular detail), *reservation* (an event or action which will take place *unless* a particular circumstance prevents it) and *concession* (an event or action that takes place, *although* there are adverse circumstances or *despite* problems).

39.2 Expressing reservation or exception

39.2.1 Conjunctions or phrases expressing reservation or exception

You can express reservation or exception in Italian by using a conjunction or phrase followed by **che** and a dependent clause, by a verb infinitive or, in some cases, by a noun. Conjunctions and phrases expressing reservation or exception are shown below. Many of these can also have the function of a preposition and can be followed by a verb infinitive.

a meno che (non)	unless
eccetto che	except that
fuorché	except
salvo che	save for, unless
se non che	except that
tranne che	except, unless

39.2.2 Using a conjunction followed by *che* and a dependent clause

The phrases or conjunctions above introduce a dependent clause; the verb can be in the indicative (see 2.2.2) or the subjunctive (see 2.2.14).

The indicative expresses a reality rather than a possibility:

Avrei piacere di accompagnarti, se non che ho un appuntamento.

I would happily go with you, except that I have an appointment.

È tutto pronto per la cena, eccetto che non sono ancora arrivati gli ospiti.

Everything is ready for dinner, except that the guests haven't arrived yet.

The subjunctive expresses something which may or may not happen or have happened:

Il Ministro non darà le dimissioni, tranne che il Presidente del Consiglio non lo costringa a farlo.

The Minister won't resign unless the Prime Minister forces him to do so.

Le persone difficilmente cambiano salvo che siano costrette a farlo dalla legge.

People rarely ever change except when they are forced to do so by the law.

Dobbiamo spedire le lettere, *salvo che non le abbia già spedite* la segretaria.

We have to send the letters, unless the secretary has already sent them.

La settimana prossima verrò a Napoli, *eccetto che ci sia sciopero dei treni!*

Next week I'll come to Naples, unless there is a train strike!

A meno che is always followed by **non** and can be translated either as 'unless' (when followed by an affirmative statement) or 'as long as' (when followed by a negative statement):

I bambini non mangiano la carne *a meno che non* abbiano molta fame.

The children won't eat meat unless they are really hungry.

Domani mangiamo all'aperto *a meno che non* piova.

Tomorrow we will eat in the open air as long as it doesn't rain.

39.2.3 Using a preposition followed by a verb infinitive

Four of the conjunctions seen in 39.2.1 above, **eccetto**, **fuorché**, **salvo**, **tranne**, can also be used as prepositions followed by a verb infinitive. The most common of these is **tranne**:

Fanno tutto al rallentatore, *eccetto guidare!*

They do everything in slow motion except driving!

Lei fa tutto *fuorché* aiutarmi.

She does everything except help me.

Non è mai possibile evitare completamente il rischio di valanghe *salvo rinunciare al piacere delle sciare fuori pista.*

It's never possible to avoid the risk of avalanches completely without giving up the pleasure of skiing off-piste.

Chiedetemi qualsiasi cosa, *tranne cantare!*

Ask me anything, but don't ask me to sing!

39.2.4 Using a preposition followed by a noun or pronoun

The same four prepositions (**eccetto**, **fuorché**, **salvo**, **tranne**) can also be followed by a noun (object or person) or pronoun.

Eccetto is often followed by **per**:

La regola vale per tutti, *eccetto per i minorenni.*

The rule applies to everyone, except for minors.

Il viaggio era molto rilassante *eccetto per il comportamento dei bambini.*

The journey was very relaxing except for the behaviour of the children.

Eccetto can be replaced by **fatta eccezione**:

La regola vale per tutti, *fatta eccezione per i minorenni.*

The rule applies to everyone with the exception of minors.

“Tutto è perduto *fuorché* l'amore” è il titolo di un romanzo di Francesca Colosi.

'All is lost except love' is the title of a novel by Francesca Colosi.

Salvo often implies an unforeseen or unexpected consequence, something that is unlikely to happen. It is also often used in contracts or legal documents.

salvo errori e omissioni

save for errors and omissions (*phrase found in contracts*)

La merce arriverà domani *salvo* imprevisti.

The goods will arrive tomorrow, barring any unforeseen problems.

Tranne is probably the most common of all these expressions:

Non ho mangiato niente *tranne* quello che mi hai preparato tu.

I haven't eaten anything except what *you* made for me.

39.3 Modifying a statement by concession

39.3.1 Introduction

Using a clause or phrase of *concession* means that you are *conceding* the existence of a possible factor which can alter circumstances, but saying that the event or action expressed in the main clause will take place despite it:

Per quanto tu possa lamentarti, non cambierai niente.

However much you complain, you won't change anything.

There are several ways in which a statement can be modified by an expression of concession in Italian (English 'although, despite, even if'): some are *explicit*, some are *implicit* (in other words the idea of concession is understood or implied from the context, even without a specific conjunction being used).

39.3.2 Using a conjunction

Clauses of concession are often introduced by a conjunction or phrase such as:

anche se	even if
benché	although
con tutto che	with all that
malgrado	in spite of
nonostante	despite
per quanto	however
quantunque	however (much)
sebbene	although

Generally, these conjunctions are followed by the subjunctive:

Benché fosse tardi, voleva presentarmi tutti i suoi amici e parenti.

Although it was late, he wanted to introduce me to all his friends and relatives.

Malgrado la segretaria abbia lavorato fino alle 8.00 di sera, non è riuscita a completare la relazione.

Despite the secretary having worked until 8 pm in the evening, she wasn't able to finish the report.

Quantunque fosse preparato Marco, l'esame di guida si è rivelato più difficile di quanto si aspettasse.

However well prepared Marco was, the driving test turned out to be more difficult than he expected.

Sebbene non avessimo dormito tutta la notte, abbiamo deciso di andare a fare una passeggiata lungo il mare.

Although we had not slept all night, we decided to go for a walk along the seafront.

Very occasionally **nonostante** is followed by **che**:

Nonostante (che) sia piccolo, ha già cominciato a studiare il violino.

Despite being young, he has already begun to study the violin.

Anche se can be followed by either *indicative* or *subjunctive* (imperfect or pluperfect subjunctive only), depending on how likely or unlikely the situation is:

Likely:

Anche se tu sei la mia migliore amica, ci sono delle cose che non ti potrò mai raccontare.

Even though you are my best friend, there are some things that I can never tell you.

Unlikely:

Anche se fosse l'ultimo uomo su questa terra, non accetterei di uscire con lui.

Even if he were the last man on earth, I wouldn't agree to go out with him.

Con tutto che is usually followed by the indicative:

Con tutto che aveva da fare 200 chilometri in macchina, ha voluto accompagnarmi prima all'aeroporto.

Despite the fact that she had 200 km to drive, she wanted to take me to the airport first.

39.3.3 Using a preposition

Malgrado, nonostante can also be used as prepositions followed by a noun:

Malgrado la nostra esperienza, torneremo in Calabria l'anno prossimo.

Despite our experience, we will go back to Calabria next year.

Se si votasse ora, dicono gli ultimi sondaggi pubblicati, il presidente americano vincerebbe nonostante tutto.

If people were to vote now, according to the latest surveys published, the American president would win despite everything.

Nonostante i suoi difetti la LionAir è la compagnia aerea inglese più importante.

Despite its faults, LionAir is the most important English airline.

39.3.4 Using the construction *per... che*

The combination of an adjective with **per... che** is followed by a dependent clause with a verb in the subjunctive:

Per intelligente che sia, non è stato promosso.

Bright though he is, he didn't pass his exams.

Casa mia, casa mia, per piccina che tu sia, tu mi sembri una badia.

Home sweet home, however small you are, to me you seem like a fortress.

(Italian saying)

A similar construction is possible with a verb, although less common (see also 39.3.8 below):

Per studiare che lei faccia, sarà bocciata agli esami.

However she studies, she will fail the exams.

39.3.5 Using *chiunque, qualunque, qualsiasi*

Indefinite adjectives and pronouns (see 3.9), such as **chiunque** 'whoever', **qualunque** 'whichever' and **qualsiasi** 'whatever', can introduce a concessive clause and are followed by the subjunctive:

Non dire niente, chiunque ti chieda informazioni.

Don't say anything, whoever asks you for information.

Qualunque risultato si ottenga, val la pena di provare.

Whatever result is achieved, it is worth trying.

Qualsiasi cosa io dico, mi dai sempre torto.

Whatever I say, you always say I'm wrong.

39.3.6 Using a past participle or adjective

A past participle or an adjective alone can have a concessive meaning, as shown below:

Nata in Inghilterra, Giuseppina si sentiva tuttavia italiana al cento per cento.

(Although) born in England, Giuseppina however felt 100 per cent Italian.

Benché, anche se, sebbene can be added to reinforce the meaning:

Anche se malato, volle partecipare alla gara.

Even though (he was) ill, he wanted to take part in the competition.

Benché invecchiato un po', era ancora molto in forma.

Although (he had) aged a little, he was still very fit.

39.3.7 Using a gerund: *pur essendo, pur avendo*

Where the subject of the concessive clause is the same as that of the main verb, a gerund – normally present – can be used, preceded by **pur** ‘although’:

Pur avendo pochi clienti, la commessa ci ha messo mezz’ora a servirmi.

Although she had few customers, the shop assistant took half an hour to serve me.

Pur volendo aiutarmi, mio padre non era in grado di finanziare i miei studi.

Although wanting to help me, my father was unable to finance my studies.

39.3.8 Using the construction *per essere, per avere*

The construction **per essere** or **per avere** can be used only where the grammatical subject is the same for both verbs:

Per essere così giovane, è proprio in gamba.

Considering he’s so young, he’s really on the ball.

Per aver studiato l’italiano cinque anni, non lo parla tanto bene.

Considering he has studied Italian for five years, he doesn’t speak it so well.

39.3.9 Using the phrase *a costo di*

This means ‘even at the cost of’:

All’età di 75 anni, insisté per fare un’ultima scalata del Monte Bianco a costo di rimetterci la pelle.

At the age of 75, he insisted on making a last ascent of Mont Blanc even at the cost of losing his life.

39.3.10 Using *manco a, neanche, nemmeno, neppure a*

These negative expressions can be followed by **se** and a verb (subjunctive) or by **a** and then the infinitive. This construction can only be used when the main clause is a negative statement.

Manco a fare la coda per 24 ore, non si trovano i biglietti per quel concerto.

Not even if one queues for 24 hours, can one get tickets for that concert.

Io non lo farei, neanche se tu mi pagassi.

I wouldn’t do it, not even if you paid me.

Nemmeno a volerlo, non riuscirei a mangiare le lumache.

I couldn’t eat snails even if I wanted to.

39.3.11 Using *tuttavia, nondimeno*

Often the idea that the event will go ahead anyway is reinforced by the addition of the adverbs **tuttavia** ‘however’ or **nondimeno** ‘nonetheless’ in the main clause:

Sebbene stanchi, volevamo tuttavia andare a vedere il centro.

Although tired, we wanted however to go and see the centre.

V

Expanding the horizons

40

Register and style

40.1 Introduction

Italy's long and complex history has left its distinctive mark on the Italian language. Used almost exclusively as a written and literary language until Italy became one nation in the late 1800s, spoken only by an educated elite, it has preserved unchanged until recent years many features of its origins in the aristocratic society of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

These origins and the fact that the literary language existed side-by-side with a diversity of dialects, together with the influence of foreign domination (particularly Spanish and French), have contributed to the complexity of Italian syntax, the richness of vocabulary and the variety of stylistic forms.

The Italian language has inherited a fondness for elegance and eloquence, a sometimes excessive emphasis on precise terminology (often to the detriment of clarity), and an unabashed love of formality. These characteristics of the language of an educated elite are still strong today in certain sectors of Italian life, although there is a growing trend towards the modernisation and simplification of the language.

Today Italian is a modern and dynamic language, spoken by 60 million people, but it still retains certain features of its literary and aristocratic tradition. In this section of the book, we highlight just a few.

In this chapter we look at several points to consider in relation to the spoken and written language and the difference between them. Many of the points have been covered individually in earlier chapters but here we bring them all together to see how register and style affect the way you write and speak.

While this chapter looks at register and style in general, Chapter 41 looks specifically at spoken communication and Chapter 42 at written communication.

40.2 Spoken and written discourse

Just as any other language, Italian has different patterns of expression depending on whether it is being used as spoken or written means of communication. There are differences in the choice of words (lexis), as well as in the structures used (syntax), which distinguish spoken from written style. There are of course people who speak **come un libro stampato** 'like a printed book', whose speech is formal or elegant, just as there are people – including many present-day authors – who adopt the patterns of the spoken language in their writing.

In Italy, the gap dividing written from spoken language has traditionally been wider than in English-speaking countries. Until just over 100 years ago, Italian was almost exclusively used as a written language, while the language spoken was mainly dialect, even amongst the more educated social classes. In the next three sections, we provide some examples of how spoken Italian and written Italian can be very different, at the same time making a comparison with English, where applicable.

40.3 Differences in lexis

40.3.1 Exclamations

Many words are used frequently in everyday conversation, but rarely found in a written text. These include exclamations such as:

Mannaggia! Damn!	Che casino! What a mess!	Caspita! Good gracious!
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It is difficult but not impossible to find a corresponding expression you can use in written Italian, as shown below:

Peccato. That's a pity.	Che confusione! What a muddle!	Sorprendente. Surprising.
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The written language is almost always associated with a greater formality and should avoid the kind of words used in everyday conversation, as well as the widespread and typically Italian use of regional or local languages.

Here are just a few examples of words commonly used in familiar contexts and spoken communication, with suggestions for alternatives suitable for written Italian. This list can be expanded by learners themselves, with the help of dictionaries and experience.

<i>Spoken</i>	<i>Written</i>	
abbuffarsi	riempirsi	to stuff oneself
balla	bugia	a lie
faticare	lavorare	to work
fifa	paura	fear
fregare	ingannare	to swindle
tele	televisione	TV
OK	va bene	all right

40.3.2 Vocabulary and synonyms

Italian is blessed with an extraordinary wealth of words drawn from its ancient literary tradition, enriched by the diversity of its regional and local varieties and by contributions from other languages, both in recent years as well as in the past. The written language cannot call on the intonation, gestures, pauses or repetitions that make oral communication easier and more effective. So a rich vocabulary is one way in which you can make your written messages effective.

Synonyms are an important tool in exploiting the rich and quickly evolving vocabulary of Italian. A good dictionary of Italian synonyms is useful for more complex communication needs.

One of the most common problems faced by students of Italian is how to choose from the variety of adjectives with identical or similar meanings. Here are just a few of the most commonly used adjectives with a choice of alternatives which have slightly different nuances of meaning:

bello (magnifico, meraviglioso) beautiful (magnificent, marvellous)
grande (enorme, gigantesco) big (enormous, huge)
piccolo (minuscolo) small (tiny)

40.4 Differences in syntax

40.4.1 Coordination

The pattern of spoken discourse is generally that of coordinating phrases (see 30.2) which tend to be short, simple, similar in form and separated only by pauses. In spoken discourse,

phrases of different value, connecting links and time relationships can all be represented by pauses, changes in intonation or in the pitch of voice, gestures or repetitions. Eye contact is often a more effective channel of communication than words or . . . grammar.

Here is an example of this typical pattern of spoken language, in a very familiar situation: the short sharp bursts of communication between a mother and her three children at the beginning of a normal busy weekday.

Valentina, svegliati, Roberta svegliati . . . Franco salta giù dal letto. Ragazzi sono le sette e cinque! Franco, presto, vai a fare la doccia. Valentina vestiti. Sono le sette e dieci! Ragazzi, il caffelatte è pronto! Franco hai fatto la doccia? Asciuga per terra. Roberta, perché piangi? Valentina, avanti, falle mettere la gonna gialla. Sono le sette e un quarto! Insomma, venite o no a prendere il caffelatte? Si sta freddando tutto! Roberta se piangi ancora vengo di là e ti ammazzo! Francoooooo! Dov'è Franco? Roberta non piangere, vatti a pettinare invece. Sono le sette e mezzo. Perderete l'autobus. Ma dimmi tu che razza di figli!

(Adapted from Il libronuovo by B. Reggiani and A. Salvatore, IGDA, Novara, also reproduced in Chapter 21)

Valentina, wake up, Roberta wake up . . . Franco get out of bed. Kids, its five past seven! Franco, quick, go and have a shower. Valentina get dressed. It's ten past seven! Kids, your *caffelatte* is ready! Franco, have you had a shower? Dry the floor. Roberta, why are you crying? Valentina, come on, let her put your yellow skirt on. It's quarter past seven! Come on, are you coming to have this *caffelatte* or not? It's all getting cold! Roberta if you keep on crying, I'll come over there and kill you! Francoooooo! Where's Franco? Roberta don't cry, go and comb your hair instead. It's half past seven. You'll miss the bus. Honestly, tell me, what sort of kids have I got!

40.4.2 Subordination

In written Italian, you do not have the same direct contact as in spoken Italian to help get your message across. Pauses must be represented by punctuation and emphasis and emotions must be expressed by a careful choice of words.

The organisation of written discourse is usually much more complex than that of speech, since you have to use a range of grammatical and syntactical devices to create a logical texture and facilitate communication. Phrases are usually more complex and there is a clear preference for a pattern of subordination involving main and dependent clauses (see 30.3).

Italian has a particularly complex system of relationships between clauses due to having existed for so long only as a written and literary language. For example the system of 'sequence of tenses' (see Chapter 30 and **Appendix V**), and the use of different verb moods (indicative, subjunctive, conditional, etc.), creates a network of relationships between clauses which is very effective in written communication, but also difficult for learners to master.

Let's see how a spoken passage like the one above could be transformed into a piece of narrative description:

Ecco cosa succede a casa mia tutte le mattine all'ora del risveglio. Devo chiamare ad alta voce Valentina, Roberta e Franco, dicendo loro di svegliarsi, di alzarsi, di andare a fare la doccia e vestirsi!!! Alle sette e dieci la colazione è pronta, ma Franco non ha ancora fatto la doccia e deve asciugare per terra. Intanto Roberta piange e Valentina deve aiutarla a mettere la gonna. Alle sette e un quarto il caffelatte sta diventando freddo e Roberta piange ancora. Devo minacciarla per farle smettere di piangere e per farla pettinare, mentre, intanto, non trovo più Franco. A questo punto sono già le sette e mezzo e i ragazzi rischiano di perdere l'autobus. Ditemi voi che razza di figli ho!

Here is what happens in my house every morning when it's time to get up. I have to call at the top of my voice Valentina, Roberta and Franco, telling them to wake up, get up, go and have a shower and get dressed. At ten past seven, breakfast is ready, but Franco has not yet had a shower and has to mop up the floor. Meanwhile Roberta is crying and Valentina has to help her to put her skirt on. At quarter past seven, the *caffelatte* is becoming cold and Roberta is still crying. I have to threaten her to make her stop crying and get her hair combed, while, meanwhile, I can't find Franco any more. At this point it's already half past seven and the kids risk missing the bus. Tell me what kind of kids have I got!

40.4.3 Pronouns

References to known persons or objects are made by using pronouns, which therefore create the thread of the discourse. The Italian system of pronouns is rather complex (see Chapter 3) including both stressed pronouns (see 3.3) and unstressed pronouns (see 3.4). For practice, see if you can identify all the pronouns used in the text above.

Questo, quello

Demonstrative pronouns like **questo**, **quello** and others (see 3.8) are largely used in spoken language where it is clear which person or object is being referred to because of their physical presence and the fact that the speaker can point to them, whether they are near him/her (**questo**) or further away (**quello**).

In written Italian, demonstrative pronouns can only make references to persons or things previously mentioned in the text, not to those seen. In the case of **questo** and **quello**, the first refers to something that has just been mentioned, while the second will be used when referring to something more distant in the text. Let's see an example of this situation:

Stamattina ho incontrato Stefania sull'autobus, mentre andavo a scuola. Poi, quando ero già arrivato, ho incontrato anche Raffaella. Questa (Raffaella) mi ha salutato affettuosamente. Quella (Stefania), invece, ha fatto finta di non riconoscermi.

This morning I met Stefania on the bus, while I was going to school. Then when I had (already) arrived, I met Raffaella as well. She (Raffaella) greeted me affectionately. The former (Stefania) on the other hand pretended not to recognise me.

Although in written language **questa** simply means 'the latter' and **quella** 'the former', **quella** tends to express dislike or at least a lack of friendliness. Take care using these very common pronouns in writing; the pronouns must make it absolutely clear who or what is being referred to.

40.4.4 Conjunctions

Conjunctions (see Chapter 5) are also important words that allow you to construct the complex phrases typical of a written text. We can distinguish *coordinating* conjunctions (see 5.2) such as **e**, **o**, **oppure**, **né**, **sia** from *subordinating* conjunctions (see 5.3) such as **che**, **se**, **sebbene**, **poiché**. Written Italian has a preference for sentences made up of subordinating clauses which means that conjunctions are very important in constructing a text.

When using subordinating conjunctions it is important to know which verb mood (see 2.1.8) to use in the subordinate clause they introduce. Many conjunctions require the subjunctive (see 2.2.14), for example **affinché**, **benché**, **perché**, **purché**, **sebbene** (see 5.3.5, 33.3.1 and 39.3.2).

40.4.5 Adverbs

Adverbs (see Chapter 6) are also important for constructing complex phrases. This is especially true when having to create a time context, where adverbs play an essential role in creating a network of relationships of time among the actions, events or facts you are writing about (for examples see Chapter 36).

40.4.6 Tenses and moods of verbs

To write fluently in Italian you need to be completely familiar with the complex system of verb tenses and inflexions. When constructing complex sentences, you need to understand and follow the 'sequence of tenses' (see **Appendix V** and also **30.5**), which will allow you to write Italian accurately, elegantly and effectively. Finally you need to understand when to use the subjunctive mood and when you can get away with just using the indicative (see also **40.5.1**).

40.4.7 Omission of elements

In the more casual pattern of the spoken language, elements are sometimes omitted, for example the **non** of the negative pair **non . . . mica**:

(Non) sai mica a che ora comincia la festa?

You don't happen to know what time the party begins?

(Non) hai mica visto Giorgio a scuola?

You haven't by chance seen Giorgio at school?

► See also Chapter 41.

40.5 Formal and informal registers

The distinction between formal and informal registers is not a hard and fast one, rather a sliding scale. It applies mainly to written texts. At the informal end of the scale, the language of written texts tends to be similar to that of spoken Italian. Certain features separate the formal from the informal register.

40.5.1 Subjunctive or indicative?

An important marker of formality in Italian is the use of the subjunctive even in those cases where it is optional. The subjunctive tends to be used in a more formal style of text, while the spoken and informal register normally uses the indicative. Deciding whether to use indicative or subjunctive can often be a question of personal choice but is very dependent on the context. Here are some examples where there is a choice between subjunctive and indicative, depending on how formal or informal the context is. In the pairs of examples below, the first uses the subjunctive, the second the indicative.

In conditional sentences in the past context (see **38.3**):

Se tu me *l'avessi detto* prima, avrei potuto accompagnarti.

Se tu me lo *dicevi* prima, avrei potuto accompagnarti.

If you had told me earlier, I could have given you a lift.

After **pensare** (see **27.1.1**):

Penso che si *debba* prendere in considerazione questo fatto.

I think one must take this fact into consideration.

Penso che *devi* prendere l'autobus delle 7.00.

I think you should get the 7 am bus.

After **sperare** (see **2.2.15**, **26.2.1**):

Spero che la nostra collaborazione *possa* continuare.

I hope our collaboration can continue.

Spero che *ti piacciono* le lasagne.

I hope you like lasagne.

After **qualunque** (see **3.9.2**):

Qualunque cosa *faccia*, non vincerà mai le elezioni.

Whatever he does, he will never win the elections.

Qualunque cosa vuoi, non fare complimenti.

Whatever you want, don't stand on ceremony.

40.5.2 Passive, *si passivante*, *si impersonale*

Another important marker of formality is the use of the passive, the *si impersonale* and the *si passivante*. The passive, *si impersonale* and *si passivante* are particularly common in instructional texts and scientific papers and also in the press (see 42.8 and 42.9 respectively) where they express objectivity and impersonality. These forms are far less common in the spoken language and in informal texts. Note the difference in the following texts:

Si passivante, si impersonale

Cosa si fa al mare? Di giorno si fanno i bagni e la sera si fa una passeggiata sul lungomare.

What does one do at the seaside? In the daytime one goes swimming and in the evening one goes for a walk along the seafront.

Personal *noi* form

Cosa facciamo al mare? Di giorno facciamo i bagni e la sera facciamo una passeggiata sul lungomare.

What do we do at the seaside? In the daytime we go swimming and in the evening we go for a walk along the seafront.

40.6 Word order

This final section looks at word order. Word order in both spoken and written Italian is extremely flexible. You can see examples of this throughout the book. Here are just a few points to look out for.

40.6.1 Noun + adjective

Unlike English where the *adjective + noun* order is rigidly fixed, in Italian the order is more flexible. You can say either:

adjective + noun

un grande giardino

a big garden

or

noun + adjective

un giardino grande

a big garden

The position of the adjective can make a difference in emphasis or even in meaning. (See 1.4.5)

40.6.2 Subject - verb

English learners tend to translate sentences directly from English into Italian. In Italian – as in English – the sentence can have the order *subject – verb*:

Subject

Verb

Gianni ha chiamato.

Gianni called.

Il postino è arrivato.

The postman's arrived.

But it is equally possible to reverse the order, to give *verb – subject*:

<i>Verb</i>	<i>Subject</i>
Ha chiamato	Gianni.
Gianni called.	
È arrivato	il postino.
The postman's arrived.	

Often the 'normal' order is reversed or altered in order to emphasise who carried out the action:

Chi ha mangiato tutti i cioccolatini?

Who ate all the chocolates?

<i>Verb</i>	<i>Subject</i>
Li ha mangiati	Sonia.
Sonia ate them.	

But in the first examples above, no particular emphasis is given to the subject. It might just as well be the dustman who has called, or someone else who has telephoned.

In exclamative sentences, using **che** or **come**, the subject usually has to follow the verb:

Com'è bella la tua casa!

How lovely your house is!

Che begli occhi (che) ha quel bambino!

What lovely eyes that child has!

Similarly, in interrogative sentences, the subject often comes *after* the verb:

Finiranno mai questo libro Franco e Anna?

Will Franco and Anna ever finish this book?

And it *has* to come after the verb when the interrogative sentence is introduced by interrogative words such as **che cosa**, **chi**, **come**, **dove**, **quale**, **quando**, **quanto**:

Quando finiranno il progetto di ricerche i nostri colleghi?

When will our colleagues finish their research project?

40.6.3 Subject – verb – object

When there is a noun direct object, the normal sentence order in Italian is *subject – verb – object*:

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Verb</i>	<i>Object</i>
Gianni	vedrà	la sua amica stasera.
Gianni	will see	his friend tonight.

When you want to place emphasis on the object (in this case **la sua amica**), the normal order can be changed, so that the *object* is placed first in the sentence. There is a further direct object before the verb, in the form of a direct object pronoun (**lo**, **la**, **li**, **le**). This is called *dislocation* (see also 3.4.8).

<i>Object</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Verb</i>
La sua amica	Gianni	la vedrà stasera.
Gianni will see his friend tonight.		
<i>(Literally: His friend, Gianni will see her tonight.)</i>		

It is equally possible to emphasise the object of the sentence by moving it to the end:

Lo vedrò domani all'aeroporto mio padre.

I will see my father tomorrow at the airport.

(Literally: Him I will see tomorrow at the airport my father.)

40.6.4 Split sentence

In Italian – as in English – it is also possible to *split* the sentence, using a phrase with **essere**, to emphasise the person or object in question, while the rest of the sentence stays in the same position.

Emphasising the *subject* of the action:

Sei tu che mi chiami?

Is it you who is calling me?

È Luca che ci ha aiutato a fare trasloco.

It was Luca who helped us move.

(Compare the last example with the non-emphatic sentence **Luca ci ha aiutato a fare trasloco.**)

Emphasising the *object* of the action:

È lei che ho visto con mio marito.

It was she that I saw with my husband.

È Naomi che sono andata a trovare a Genova.

It was Naomi that I went to see in Genova.

(Compare this with the non-emphatic sentence **Sono andata a trovare Naomi a Genova.**)

41

Oral communication and telephone skills

41.1 Introduction

Chapter 40 on register and style illustrates some differences between the spoken and written language. This chapter now looks specifically at the features of spoken Italian with which you need to become familiar, including the use of the **Lei** form, the use of discourse markers specific to spoken Italian, and the use of specific techniques needed to get your message across.

Another feature of spoken Italian not covered specifically here is the use of colloquialisms. You can consult one of the many texts on **modi di dire** to expand your grasp of colloquial expressions.

Making or receiving a telephone call in Italian is probably one of the most difficult tasks for a non-native speaker to carry out. The later sections of this chapter give some standard telephone phrases to help you, including how to spell your name.

For interjections used in different situations to express different reactions and/or emotions, see 25.2.

41.2 The *Lei* form

The formal form of address is known as the **Lei** form, while the informal form of address is known as the **tu** form. Although the use of the **Lei** form applies to written Italian too, it is most important in spoken interaction. The use of the **Lei** courtesy form to address people is probably the most important characteristic inherited from the period of Spanish domination (fifteenth to eighteenth century). The **Lei** form is an indirect way of addressing a person using the third person instead of the second person **tu** or **voi**, as if you were speaking not to 'you' but to 'her'. **Lei** ('she') is a feminine pronoun but the **Lei** form of address is used both for men and for women.

The **Lei** form of address is one of the most difficult patterns of language for foreigners to learn, since it sounds slightly unnatural and confusing. It is particularly alien to English speakers, who are used to interacting with others in a simple, more direct fashion. Even students from an Italian background, who within the family have only ever used **tu**, sometimes find it difficult to use **Lei**.

Nonetheless the **Lei** form is an unavoidable part of everyday life and relationships in Italian society. Although the foreign learner will be treated with a certain amount of tolerance, failure to use it, amongst Italians, is perceived as an omission of a sign of respect and a serious infringement of good manners.

Here we highlight a few points to remember when using the formal (**Lei**) form.

41.2.1 Verb forms

The **Lei** form of address uses the third person verb form. Compare the two forms in the examples below:

Tu Prendi un caffè? Would you like a coffee?	Lei Prende un caffè?
Hai ragione! You are right!	Ha ragione!

Particular care should be taken over the imperative forms (see 2.2.21). The **Lei** form uses the present subjunctive (see 2.2.16) as an imperative:

Tu Vieni. Accomodati. Come in. Have a seat.	Lei Venga. Si accomodi.
Dammi quel libro. Give me that book.	Mi dia quel libro.

The **Lei** forms of imperatives most commonly needed, even by tourists or visitors, are those used to attract someone's attention or ask a question:

Senta! Listen!	Scusi! Excuse me!
--------------------------	-----------------------------

41.2.2 Possessive

The possessive adjective or pronoun used (see 3.7) must be **suo** rather than **tuo**:

Tu Dimmi il tuo nome. Tell me your name.	Lei Mi dica il suo nome.
È tua questa giacca? Is this your jacket?	È sua questa giacca?

41.2.3 Pronouns

Personal pronouns (see 3.2) must be in the *third person feminine* form, whether subject pronoun (**Lei**), direct object (**la**), indirect object (**le**) or stressed object pronoun (**Lei**):

Tu Tu sei inglese? Are you English?	Lei Lei è inglese?
Non ti sento. I can't hear you.	Non la sento.
Ti piace Mozart? Do you like Mozart?	Le piace Mozart?
A te piace sciare? Do you like skiing?	A Lei piace sciare?

The formal (**Lei**) form of direct, indirect and combined pronouns (see 3.4.1–2) often has to be used when speaking on the telephone, in a business situation:

Vuole che La faccia richiamare? Do you want to be called back?	
Le mando il listino prezzi oggi pomeriggio. I'll send you the price list this afternoon.	
Vuole il catalogo? Do you want the catalogue?	Glielo spedisco domani. I'll send you it tomorrow.

41.3 Discourse markers

While discourse markers are found in both spoken and written Italian, some are more suited to the informal context of the spoken language.

41.3.1 Discourse markers in conversation

Typical of spoken discourse are those phrases which try to involve the listener, for example *vero, è vero? no? non è vero?* and the northern Italian contraction *nevvero?*

Ha studiato a Londra Lei, *non è vero?*

You studied in London, didn't you?

Andiamo tutti con la tua macchina, *no?*

We're all going with your car, no?

Quella ragazza è la nuova assistente, *vero?*

That girl is the new assistant, isn't she?

Molto bella la fidanzata di Walter, *nevvero?*

Very beautiful Walter's girlfriend, isn't she?

Some discourse markers summarise what you have just said:

insomma in short

allora so . . .

in breve in short

Some reinforce what you have just said:

anzi on the contrary, in fact

In spoken Italian – unlike in written Italian – **anzi** can be used entirely on its own, at the end of a discourse:

Non ho nessuna intenzione di copiare il tuo tema. *Anzi.*

I've got no intention of copying your essay. Quite the contrary.

Other discourse markers are also used in written communication to join the parts of complex sentences. These are explained in Chapter 30: Combining messages. They are however used in a slightly different way in spoken Italian and we have tried to illustrate them in the following two examples. The discourse markers are in italics.

41.3.2 Dialogo (informal conversation)

Carlo and Gianna are going to the seaside:

Gita al mare

C *Allora, siamo pronti? Sono già le 11.00.*

G *Ma vogliamo portare dei panini? Così mangiamo al mare a mezzogiorno senza dovere salire.*

C *Dunque se ci fermiamo prima in paese, possiamo comprare un po' di prosciutto dal salumiere, anzi ci facciamo preparare i panini da lui.*

G *Va bene, facciamo così, si fa prima . . . dai, su, andiamo!*

C *E ora piove! Inutile andare al mare con questo tempo!*

G *E quindi cosa vuoi fare?*

C *Ma che ne so! Sei stata tu a volere andare al mare!*

G *Infatti le previsioni del tempo erano brutte. Perciò ti ho detto, andiamo presto!*

C *Cioè?*

G *Cioè verso le 8.00 di mattina!*

C *Sì, grazie!*

C Well, are we ready? It's already 11 o'clock.

G Shall we take some sandwiches? That way we can eat on the beach at midday instead of having to come up again.

C Well, if we stop in the village first, we can buy a bit of ham at the *salumiere*, in fact we can have him make up some sandwiches for us.

G Ok, let's do that, it'll be quicker . . . come on, get a move on, let's go!

- C And now it's raining! It's pointless going to the seaside with this weather!
 G So what do you want to do?
 C What do I know! It was you who wanted to go to the seaside!
 G In fact the weather forecast was bad. That's why I said to you, let's go early!
 C In other words?
 G In other words about 8.00 in the morning!
 C Yes, thanks a lot!

41.3.3 Lecture (formal context)

A lecture on the reform of the universities in Italy:

La riforma universitaria in Italia

Dunque oggi parliamo del sistema scolastico in Italia e in modo particolare dell'Università. Allora la riforma universitaria prevede l'esistenza di due cicli: il cosiddetto 'tre + due' cioè tre anni di corso di laurea di base più due anni di specializzazione per il Master. Il sistema universitario diventa cioè più simile a quello inglese, anzi a quello europeo, perché in effetti tutti i paesi membri della Unione Europea dovrebbero aderire ai provvedimenti della riforma Bologna. In questo modo la mobilità europea diventa una realtà. Perciò le Università in Italia hanno dato il via ad una serie di cambiamenti, sia nell'organizzazione dei corsi, sia nel riconoscimento di esami superati all'estero.

So today we are talking about the education system in Italy and in particular about the Universities. Now the reform of the universities provides for the existence of two cycles: the so-called 'three plus two', in other words three years of undergraduate degree course plus two years of specialisation for the Masters. The university system, in other words, becomes more similar to the British one, or rather to the European one, because in fact all the member countries of the EU should follow the provisions of the Bologna reform. In this way European mobility is becoming a reality. The Italian universities, therefore, have started a series of changes, both in the organisation of their courses, and in the recognition of exams taken abroad.

41.4 Techniques of oral communication

Some specific techniques needed in oral communication with others are illustrated below. Sections 41.4.2–5 focus on effective ways of getting your point across in discussions and debates. A useful way of understanding and developing oral communication skills is to listen to debates and discussions on one of the many Italian TV channels now available online.

41.4.1 Attracting attention

In a restaurant or shop, the most normal way of attracting a waiter's or assistant's attention is to use the verb **sentire**:

Senta, scusi! Listen, excuse me! (*literally*)

In the same context, the shop assistant wishing to start off a dialogue will say:

Dica, signora Tell me, signora (*literally*)

Similar phrases can be used to initiate or to join in a conversation in an informal social situation, using **tu**:

Senti . . . Listen (*literally*)

Dimmi, Marco . . . Tell me, Marco

41.4.2 Interrupting

To interrupt while acknowledging points made by others, you can use:

Ecco. There! (I *told* you so . . .)

Vedi, You see,

Ho capito. Ma . . . I've got the point, but . . .

Vedi, io non sono d'accordo.

Look, I don't agree.

Ho capito. Ma penso che le regole valgono per tutti.

I understand. But I think the rules apply to everyone.

41.4.3 Getting your point across

To emphasise the point you are making strongly, use **dico che**:

Dico che bisogna mandarli tutti in galera.

I say we should send them all to jail.

For a range of ways of expressing opinion, see Chapter 27.

41.4.4 Asking/giving permission to speak

Asking permission:

Permetti? Permette? May I speak? (*Literally*: Will you allow . . . ?)

Una parola? (May I have) a word?

Giving permission or inviting to speak:

Prego. Please . . .

Dica (pure). Please speak (please do)

41.4.5 Clarifying or explaining what has been said

Explaining what you have said:

Cioè

That is, in other words

Mi spiego

I'll explain myself

Voglio dire

I mean

il cosiddetto 'tre + due' cioè tre anni di corso di laurea di base

the so-called 'two plus three', in other words, three years for the first degree course

Volevo sapere dove trovo lo zoom . . .

I wanted to know where I can find the zoom . . . I'll explain: I open the window to read my e-mail, but it's very small . . .

mi spiego: apro la finestra per leggere la posta elettronica, ma è piccolissima . . . che faccio?

what should I do?

Cosa c'è nel vostro frigorifero? Voglio dire: ora, in questo preciso momento.

What's in your fridge? I mean, now, at this very moment.

Checking someone has understood what you have said:

È chiaro?

Is that clear?

Mi spiego?

Am I explaining myself?

Giving examples:

ad esempio, per esempio for example

Asking someone to repeat what he/she has said:

Può ripetere?

Can you repeat?

Non ho capito

I didn't understand

Non ho sentito

I didn't catch what you said

Può spiegare?

Can you explain?

41.5 Spelling on the telephone

On the phone, you often have to spell your name or the name of the place where you live, using the Italian alphabet (see **Appendix I**). Italians often use the names of cities to represent the sounds they wish to clarify: A Ancona, G Genova, and so on.

Some letters such as **J, K, X, Y** (**i lunga** or **i greca**, **cappa**, **ics**, **ipsilon**) do not exist in the traditional Italian alphabet but can be used for spelling foreign names. Here is a list of the cities which are most often used for spelling. The less common letters (H, J, K, Q, X, Y, Z) just go by their name. They do not need to be spelled out since they are not easily confused with other letters:

A	Ancona	N	Napoli
B	Bologna	O	Otranto
C	Como	P	Palermo
D	Domodossola	Q	cu
E	Empoli	R	Roma
F	Firenze	S	Salerno
G	Genova	T	Torino
H	acca	U	Udine
I	Imola	V	Venezia
J	i lunga	W	doppio/a vi/vu
K	cappa	X	ics
L	Livorno	Y	ipsilon
M	Milano	Z	zeta

So to spell the name **Jones** you would have to say: **i lunga**, **O** come Otranto, **N** come Napoli, **E** come Empoli, **S** come Salerno.

41.6 Telephone phrases

Initial greetings, saying goodbye:

Pronto.

Hello.

Arrivederci.

Goodbye.

Asking to speak to someone:

Potrei parlare con il direttore?

Could I speak to the director?

C'è il medico, per favore?

Is the doctor there, please?

Mi passa il dottor Caselli, per favore?

Could you pass me Dr Caselli, please?

Being put through:

Attenda un momento. Gliela passo.

Wait a minute. I'll put you through (to him/her).

Le passo la linea.

I'll put you through.

Se vuole attendere . . .

If you want to hold . . .

. . . Le faccio il nuovo interno.

. . . I'll dial the new extension for you.

Mi potrebbe passare . . . ?

Could you put me through to . . . ?

Saying someone is not there/not available:

Mi dispiace, non c'è in questo momento.

I'm sorry. He's out at the moment.

È sull'altra linea.

He's on the other line.

È in riunione.

She's/he's in a meeting.

Un momento. Non è in ufficio.

Just a minute. He's not in his office.

Credo che sia nel palazzo.

I think he's somewhere in the building.

Cercherò di rintracciarlo con l'intercom.

I'll try and page him on the intercom.

Vuole attendere?

Do you wish to hold?

Vuole provare più tardi?

Do you want to try later?

Non riesco a rintracciarlo.

I can't get hold of him.

Saying when someone is back:

Dovrebbe essere qui più tardi.

He/she should be back later.

Leaving a message:

Potrei lasciare un messaggio?

Could I leave a message?

Vuole lasciare un messaggio?

Would you like to leave a message?

Vuole ripetere il suo nome?

Could you repeat your name?

Come si scrive, per favore?

How is it spelt, please?

Dove posso rintracciarla?

Where can I get hold of you?

Va bene. Glielo dico.

I'll tell him.

Calling back:

Gli chiedo di chiamarLa appena torna (appena rientra).

I'll have him call you as soon as he gets back.

Vuole che la faccia richiamare?

Do you want me to have him call you back?

La faccio richiamare.

I'll have him call you back.

Può lasciare il suo numero?

Can you leave your number?

La richiamiamo appena possibile.

We'll get back to you as soon as possible.

Ho preso nota del suo numero.

I've made a note of your number.

Reasons for calling:

Chiamo per fissare un incontro.

I'm calling to arrange a meeting.

E il motivo della chiamata?

And the purpose of your call?

Qual è il motivo della chiamata?

What is the purpose of your call / what is it about?

Mi può dire il motivo della sua chiamata?

Can you tell me what it's about?

Fixing an appointment:

Le va bene domani a mezzogiorno?

Would tomorrow at 12.00 suit you?

Adesso controllo i suoi impegni sull'agenda . . .

I'll just check his/her appointments in the diary . . .

Sarà disponibile giovedì . . .

She'll/he'll be available Thursday . . .

Facciamo alle due?

Let's make it 2 o'clock?

Mi potrebbe chiamare per la conferma?

Will you call me back for confirmation?

Dovrei verificare . . .

I would need to check . . .

È abbastanza impegnato in questo periodo . . .

She's/he's rather busy at the moment . . .

Non sarà possibile nei prossimi giorni . . .

It won't be possible over the next few days . . .

L'appuntamento fissato in precedenza non è più possibile/conveniente . . .

The appointment arranged earlier is no longer possible . . .

Other useful phrases:

numero interno / interno

extension (number)

Si può chiamare l'interno 329 componendo il numero 06 230 329.

You can call extension 329 by dialling the number 06 230 329.

L'interno del direttore è occupato.

The manager's extension is engaged.

contattare

to contact

La linea è libera/occupata.

The line is free/engaged.

41.7 On the telephone

When greeting somebody on the telephone Italians say **Pronto** (Hello). Here are two examples of simple telephone conversations, the first using the polite **Lei** forms, the second using the familiar **tu**.

Call (A)

Pronto, sono Nicola Serra, vorrei parlare con l'avvocato Pira.

Hello, it's Nicola Serra, I'd like to speak to Mr (Lawyer) Pira.

Attenda un attimo, glielo passo subito.

Wait a minute, I'll pass him to you straightaway.

Pronto. Con chi parlo?

Hello, who am I speaking to?

Buongiorno avvocato, sono Serra.

Good morning (lawyer), I'm Serra.

Buongiorno dottor Serra, mi dica.

Good morning, Mr Serra, what can I do for you?

Call (B)

Pronto, sono Giulio Tramonti. C'è Andrea per favore?

Hello, it's Giulio Tramonti. Is Andrea there, please?

No, mi dispiace, è appena uscito.

No, I'm sorry, he's just gone out.

Posso lasciare un messaggio?

Can I leave a message?

Certo, dimmi.

Certainly, tell me.

Se possibile, Andrea dovrebbe richiamarmi stasera, dopo le 8. Devo dirgli una cosa importante.

If possible, Andrea should call me back tonight, after 8.00. I have to tell him something important.

Va bene. Glielo dirò certamente.

OK. I'll certainly tell him.

Grazie, arrivederci.

Thanks, goodbye.

Prego, arrivederci.

Not at all. Goodbye.

42

Written communication

42.1 Introduction

In this chapter we look at different forms of written communication and see how the grammar structures used vary according to the type of communication. We look at business correspondence, but also give some pointers for writing an essay or report. We also examine the types of written language you may come across in everyday life in Italy: bureaucratic language, scientific and technical language, and journalistic language. Lastly, we also look at informal forms of written communication such as emails and SMS.

42.2 Business letters

Business letters are very important in the world of commerce, even more so now that e-mails have become the accepted means of communication, replacing the telephone call. Faxes, which have almost disappeared in many European countries, are still an important means of communication in some small Italian businesses such as hotels. They follow the same style as letters but often use a cover sheet detailing the date, fax number and the number of pages being transmitted.

There is a set form for business letters in Italian, which tend to be more formal than their English equivalent. Here we look at just a few important features of letters. If you regularly need to send business letters in Italian, you should purchase one of the many books on **corrispondenza commerciale** (business correspondence) available on the market. Here we give just a few important points regarding the layout of a business letter.

42.2.1 Date

The name of the town or city is indicated top right, followed by the day (in figures), the month (written in full) and the year:

Milano, 14 ottobre 2012

This is often abbreviated in faxes and less formal letters to **Milano, 14/10/12**.

42.2.2 The recipient/addressee

The name and address of the recipient can be written either on the left or on the right. On the first line of the letter is the name of the addressee, with the appropriate title in full or in abbreviated form. On the second line is the street, with street number following it; on the third line, the **CAP (Codice Avviamento Postale** or postcode), followed by the name of the town or city. If the town is not the provincial capital, you may add in brackets the abbreviation for the province. Here is an example:

Egregio Dott. Augusto Parente
Via G. Verdi, 42
43035 FELINO (PR)

You may address a specific person within a company:

Ing. Carlo Biancardi
Direttore Tecnico
Metaldomus

When replying to an Italian business letter, the *title* of the addressee must be used even if he/she hasn't used it when signing.

When writing to a company, the name of the company or organisation is preceded by the abbreviation **Spett.** (*spettabile* 'worthy of respect'):

Spett.Bianchi S.p.A.[†]

or

Spett. Ditta Bianchi S.p.A.

NOTE

[†] **Società per Azioni** or PLC.

The name of the office or department can be given either after the company name:

Spett.Bianchi S.p.A.
Ufficio Contabilità

or as the addressee:

Spett. Ufficio Marketing
Bianchi S.p.A.

If you want to mark the letter for the attention of someone specific (English 'FAO') you can use:

Alla cortese attenzione del Sig. Di Giacomo
Alla cortese attenzione dell'Amministratore Delegato

42.2.3 Academic, honorary and other titles

For a fuller discussion on when and how to use professional titles, see **20.9**. Professional qualifications are not generally used to address people in English, with the exception of 'Doctor', but they are always used in Italy where it is normal to address people as **Ingegnere**, **Avvocato** both in speaking and in writing:

Sig.	signore	Sig. Carlo Rossi
Sig.na	signorina	Sig.na Carla Rossi
Sig.ra	signora	Signora Celina Ginelli
Sig.a	<i>See note</i>	
Dott.	Dottore	Dott. Carlo Rossi
Ing.	Ingegnere	Ing. Carlo Rossi
Avv.	Avvocato	
Rag.	Ragioniere	
Prof.	Professore	

NOTE

When you don't know whether a woman is married or not, you should address her as **Sig.a (signora)**.

If you know the name of the person, use their name and title:

Gentile Signora Bianchi, Egregio Signore Rossi

If you don't know their name, use their title only:

Egregio Direttore

Usually **Egregio** (abbreviated **Egr.**) is used for a man, **Gentile** (abbreviated **Gent.**) for a woman:

Egregio Professore, Egregio Dottore, Egregio Signore
Gentile Signora, Gentile Dottoressa, Gentile Professoressa

42.2.4 References

You may find the following *references* on a business letter:

Rif.	Ref.
Vs. Rif.	Your ref.
Ns. Rif.	Our ref.

The word **Oggetto** indicates what the letter or fax is about:

Oggetto: Richiesta di campione, prezzi e condizioni di pagamento.

Re: Request for samples, prices and terms of payment.

42.2.5 Salutation ('Dear . . .')

When addressing a letter to a company or organisation, no salutation is used. The name is given at the top of the letter along with the address, **Egregio**, **Gentile**, etc. (see 42.2.3) and is not repeated at the beginning of the letter.

42.2.6 Some common abbreviations in commercial letters

All	allegato/i	enclosures/enclosed
C.P.	casella postale	postbox
C.A.P.	codice di avviamento postale	postcode
c/c	conto corrente	current account
corr.	corrente	current
c.m.	corrente mese	this month
lett.	lettera	letter
n. / N°	numero	number
p.c.	per conoscenza	for information only
p.c.c.	per copia conforme	copy to
p.v.	prossimo venturo	next (month)
Racc.	raccomandata	registered post
u.s.	ultimo scorso	last (month)

42.2.7 Opening and closing phrases

In formal correspondence, you may use either the **voi** form, if addressing the company, or the **Lei** form, if addressing one person. The pronouns and possessives will correspond, with **vostro** for the **voi** form and **Suo** for the **Lei** form:

Opening:

In risposta alla vostra/Sua (lettera) . . .

In reply to your letter . . .

Riguardo alla vostra/Sua (lettera) . . .

With regard to your letter . . .

In riferimento all vostra/Sua del 10 c.m. . . .

With reference to your letter of the 10th of this month . . .

Abbiamo il piacere di informarvi/informarLa . . .

We have the pleasure to inform you . . .

Vi/Le comunichiamo che . . .

We inform you that . . .

Ci dispiace dovervi/doverLa informare . . .

We are sorry to have to inform you . . .

Closing:

Speriamo in una vostra/Sua sollecita risposta . . .

We look forward to a speedy reply . . .

In attesa di una vostra/Sua risposta . . .

Awaiting your reply . . .

. . . siamo a vostra/Sua disposizione . . .

. . . we are at your disposal . . .

Vi/La salutiamo distintamente

Yours faithfully

42.2.8 Signature

The signature at the bottom indicates the name and position of the writer. The actual signature is generally handwritten. The abbreviation **p** indicates that the person has been authorised to write on behalf of someone else.

42.3 Informal written communication

The popularity of more direct forms of communication such as email or SMS is encouraging the use of a simpler, more accessible language more akin to the spoken language. Here we look at some key features of emails and SMS.

42.3.1 Emails

Emailing (**la posta elettronica**) is now commonly used for both business and social communication. An email (**un'email** or **una mail**) can vary in formality, in the same way as letters. Generally, in emails people take less care over spelling and are more inclined to use an informal register, often more akin to spoken Italian. As seen in the email below, for example, this means using indicative rather than subjunctive verb forms (**non so se ti è mai arrivato**), disconnected clauses, informally phrased questions, abbreviations, numbers not written out (**1 settimana**), imperative forms (**fatti viva**):

Ciao Carla! sono secoli che non so niente di te. Ti avevo spedito un email, non so se ti è mai arrivato, rispondimi per vedere se è giusto l'indirizzo. Qui tutto normale (il che è tanto), siamo appena stati una settimana in Spagna, sulla spiaggia al sole, molto bello, lontano dal freddo. Cosa fate a Pasqua? Non avete voglia di venire a trovarci in Toscana? Avete già altri piani? Noi andremo 1 settimana. Fatti viva, bacioni.

Hi Carla! It's ages since I've heard anything from you. I had sent you an email, I don't know if you ever got it, answer my email so I can see if the address is correct. Here everything's normal (which is saying something), we have just been a week in Spain, on the beach in the sunshine, really nice, far from the cold. What are you doing at Easter? Don't you want to come and see us in Tuscany? Have you already got other plans? We'll go there for a week. Get in touch, love.

Sometimes however an email can take the place of a formal or official letter and in this case the opening and closing phrases will be very similar to those used in a letter (see 42.2).

42.3.2 SMS (text messages)

The language of text messages (**un SMS** or **un messaggino**) on mobile phones is very similar to that of newspaper headlines, with verbs omitted, prepositions omitted and participles or adjectives used on their own. Here are some real life examples of SMS (text messages) received on a mobile phone. The 'normal' non-abbreviated version of each message is given underneath. In the English translation, the omitted words are shown in brackets:

Bene. Contenta festeggiato anche con te. Baci. Torna presto.
(*Bene. Sono contenta di aver festeggiato anche con te. Baci. Torna presto.*)

Good. Glad (to have) celebrated with you too. Kisses. Come back soon.

Individuata giacca.*(La giacca è stata individuata.)*

(The) jacket (has been) identified.

Fatto contratto nuova casa.*(Ho fatto il contratto per la nuova casa.)*

(I have) done the contract for the new house.

Causa sciopero controllori di volo, arrivo domani mattina.*(A causa di uno sciopero dei controllori di volo, arrivo domani mattina.)*

Because of an air traffic controllers' strike, I'll get there tomorrow morning.

As in English, there is a whole language made up of abbreviations and 'codes' you can use to speed up the process of messaging; these are especially popular with the under-21s. Here are just a few examples:

A17cie	6
<i>Al settimo cielo</i>	<i>sei</i>
In seventh heaven	you are
Ba	+o-
<i>Bacio</i>	<i>più o meno</i>
Kiss	more or less
Ba&ab	X
<i>Baci e abbracci</i>	<i>per</i>
Kisses and hugs	for
C6?	X'
<i>Ci sei?</i>	<i>perché</i>
Are you there?	why/because

Here are a couple of examples of SMS using abbreviations and codes:

Grazie ancora a te e a Massimo x ieri sera! 1 bella cena!

Thanks again to you and to Massimo for yesterday evening! A lovely dinner!

Dimmi quando 6 libera!

Tell me when you are free!

42.4 Extended writing: differences between English and Italian

One of the main differences between English and Italian writing is the length of the sentences. Whereas English writers – and readers! – place high value on the ability to write concisely and without excessive flourishes, Italian writers especially in political commentary or in academic writing feel the need to embellish simple structures and to construct a tissue of complex phrases. As a learner, you should not attempt to reproduce these but should gradually build on your basic writing skills, to transform the simple sentences that most beginners use into something more complex. The main features of extended writing on which to focus are:

- The use of coordinated clauses, linked by a conjunction or other discourse marker (see 30.2).
- The use of main and subordinate clauses, linked by appropriate conjunctions (see 30.3).
- The use of discourse markers appropriate to written Italian (see also 42.5).
- The use of a more appropriate lexis, rather than that of spoken Italian (see also 40.3).

When writing a longer text, it should be remembered that punctuation may be used in a different way from that used in English; for example the use of quote marks differs (see 31.2).

42.5 Writing essays, making connections

Writing an essay tests your ability to link ideas in a language. All Italian children are taught at school to make a **scaletta** or essay plan. This is also good practice for learners of Italian, who

have to find a way of making their essay sound fluent and natural. Italians tend to use longer sentence structures than English writers and it is essential to practise the different ways in which clauses can be joined (see also Chapter 30). Sentences may be composed of coordinated clauses or subordinated clauses.

Depending on how the ideas in the essay link together, the subordinate clauses (see 30.3) may be relative clauses, or clauses of cause and effect, purpose, time or manner, which may be introduced by conjunctions (see Chapters 31–39). Alternatively, connecting words, for example coordinating conjunctions (see 30.2) and other discourse markers, can be used to link your ideas in the essay. The different types of clauses can be used to make or emphasise your points, to contrast with what has been said earlier, to explain something said earlier, and so on.

42.6 Reports

Transforming facts and figures into cohesive text is a skill often required in a work situation or in business. There are certain standard phrases and verbs that are used in compiling a report based on statistics, in addition to the connecting words already mentioned above. Here are a few.

Describing figures:

Si aggira intorno ai 60 milioni.

The figure is around 60 million.

Al censimento erano poco più di 150,000 persone.

At the census, there were a little over 150,000 people.

Percentages and proportions:

Circa i quattro quinti / i due terzi / un quarto / la metà

About four-fifths / two-thirds / a quarter / half

I lavoratori autonomi per il 37% investono in immobili.

37% of self-employed workers invest in property.

Il 27% ha un conto in banca.

27% have a bank account.

Pochi, meno del 20 per cento, hanno una seconda casa.

Few, less than 20 per cent, have a second home.

Una percentuale più o meno analoga è titolare di un conto in banca.

More or less the same percentage have a bank account.

Un reddito pari al 10%.

An income equal to 10%.

Lower than, higher than; more than, less than:

In comparisons, you can use the words **superiore** 'higher than', **inferiore** 'lower than', **uguale** 'same as', with reference to another category, to estimates or to the average:

Era superiore alla media.

It was greater than average.

Erano tremila in più di quanti si pensava.

They were 3,000 more than expected.

Sono il 2,5 per cento contro una media del 9,5%.

They are 2.5% against an average of 9.5%.

Hanno un reddito inferiore del 34% a quello dei lavoratori autonomi.

They have an income 34% lower than that of self-employed workers.

Un tasso di nascita inferiore alla media.

A birth rate lower than the average.

Meno della media.

Less than average.

La stragrande maggioranza.

The overwhelming majority.

Avoiding *essere*:

Various verbs can be used instead of *essere*:

Il reddito individuale media risulta / è risultato di 50.000 euro.

The average income is/was 50,000 euros.

L'aumento maggiore si registra / si è registrato nel settore bancario.

The greatest increase is/was in the banking sector.

La spesa in questo settore ha raggiunto i 10 milioni.

The expenditure in this sector reached 10 million.

Sempre in crescita si dimostra la spesa per le automobili.

Still growing is the expenditure on cars.

La crescita ha interessato sia gli alberghi che le pensioni.

The increase was seen both for hotels and for guest houses.

Other verbs used in report-writing:

Un reddito alto caratterizza il 16% delle famiglie italiane.

A high income is a feature of 16% of Italian families.

I generi alimentari occupano il posto più importante.

Foodstuffs occupy the most important position.

Le voci più importanti riguardano i beni di lusso.

The most important categories relate to luxury goods.

I dati si riferiscono al 2003.

The figures refer to 2003.

Where does the money go?

Su ogni 100 euro spesi per i generi alimentari, gli italiani ne hanno destinati in media 40 alla carne.

Out of every 100 euros spent on foodstuffs, Italians spent on average 40 euros on meat.

Alle spese per la salute è stato destinato il 5,5% del totale.

5.5% of the total was spent on health.

Nel 2006 i generi alimentari incidono soltanto per il 42%.

In 2006 foodstuffs account only for 42%.

Le voci 'Alimentari' e 'Arredamento' coprono nel 2011 il 43% delle spese totali.

The categories 'Foodstuffs' and 'Furnishings' cover in 2011 43% of total expenditure.

La spesa maggiore è andata ai beni alimentari.

The biggest expenditure went on foodstuffs.

Up or down?

La struttura dei consumi si è modificata notevolmente.

The structure of consumer expenditure has changed considerably.

Si è ridotta l'incidenza delle spese per l'alimentazione.

The proportion of expenditure on food has decreased.

È cresciuta del 18% la spesa per i beni di lusso.

The expenditure on luxury goods has grown by 18%.

Cresce dal 13 al 15% circa.

It is growing from 13 to 15% approximately.

Gli studenti sono aumentati; il numero di studenti è aumentato.

The students have increased; the number of students has increased.

Gli studenti sono diminuiti; il numero di studenti è diminuito.

The students have decreased; the number of students has decreased.

Order or position:

Ha battuto la spesa per . . .

It beat the expenditure on . . .

In testa è . . .

At the top (of the list) is . . .

In cima alla graduatoria . . .

At the top of the league table . . .

Al primo posto . . .

In first place . . .

Vince la montagna come meta turistica, con il 15% dei turisti stranieri.

The mountains win, as a tourist destination, with 15% of foreign tourists.

Seguiti da . . .

Followed by . . .

Comparison:

contro i 10.000 del 2010 . . .

compared to the 10,000 in 2010 . . .

contro il 39% del 2012 . . .

compared to 39% in 2012 . . .

paragonato a

compared to

La situazione è cambiata molto rispetto a dieci anni fa.

The situation has changed a lot compared to ten years ago.

La disoccupazione giovanile in Italia è alta in confronto ad altri paesi europei.

Youth unemployment in Italy is high compared to other European countries.

The interviewees, the Don't know's:

Gli intervistati

The interviewees

I "non so" sono il 10 per cento.

The 'don't knows' are 10 per cent.

According to:

Dalla ricerca i lavoratori dipendenti appaiono come scarsi risparmiatori.

From the study, it seems that paid employees are poor savers.

Ecco le sette categorie-tipo che emergono dalla ricerca.

Here are the seven categories which emerge from the study.

Stando ai risultati dell'indagine . . .

According to the results of the study . . .

L'indagine rivela . . .

The study reveals . . .

Risulta dalla tabella . . .

It emerges from the table . . .

Con riferimento (in riferimento) alle tabelle . . .

With reference to the tables . . .

In base ai dati (del 2012) . . .

According to the figures from 2012 . . .

Dati recenti indicano . . .

Recent figures indicate . . .

Secondo le rivelazioni del 2012 . . .

According to the findings of 2012 . . .

42.7 Bureaucratic language

Every day both Italians and foreign visitors are systematically confronted by the web of bureaucratic, highly technical and often mysterious language used by Italian public administration (and often by private enterprise as well) in order to provide the public with ‘information’.

The effect produced by this type of language is to make the average Italian feel like a defendant in a court of law, when in reality he/she is merely being given information as to where to stamp his/her bus or train ticket.

To illustrate this, we have chosen just one original example from the funicular station in Mergellina, Naples. Note the use of the *si passivante* in this official notice, ***Si informano i Signori Viaggiatori*** ‘The passengers are informed’, rather than the more normal ***Informiamo i Signori Viaggiatori*** ‘We inform the passengers’ or the passive form ***I Signori Viaggiatori sono informati*** ‘The passengers are informed’ (see Chapters 2 and 19, and also 40.5.2).

Si informano i Signori Viaggiatori che, ai sensi del regolamento, articolo 567 del 19/11/1973, essi devono munirsi di titolo di viaggio precedentemente all’ingresso sulle vetture della Funicolare. I titoli di viaggio vanno timbrati nelle apposite obliterate collocatae nell’androne della Stazione.

The approximate translation is:

The esteemed passengers are informed that, as prescribed by the relevant ruling, clause 567, of 19/11/1973, travel documents must be purchased in advance of boarding the carriages of the Funicular. The travel documents must be stamped in the specially provided obliterating machines, located in the entrance hall of the Station.

The same concept could perfectly well be expressed by a few simple words, perhaps with an arrow indicating where passengers should insert the tickets:

Obliterare il biglietto qui. Stamp your ticket here.

Or alternatively:

Timbrare il biglietto qui. Stamp your ticket here.

Individuals are also prone to using over-formal language when they have to deal with a formal situation. In particular the third person is often used referring to oneself, as though speaking of someone else, instead of using the first person ‘I’ form. This is done in applications, requests, declarations, and often in CVs addressed to an institution or public office, in order to stress the objectivity and impersonality of the information given. It is also done in juridical documents. In such cases the formula used is **il sottoscritto** (for men) or **la sottoscritta** (for women), literally ‘the undersigned’; all verbs used are in the *third* person. Vocabulary too tends to be formal.

42.8 Scientific and technical language

Another feature of today’s written Italian, widespread in public administration, as well as in many professional areas (for example, medicine, finance, education), is the tendency to use a lavish sprinkling of obscure technical terminology. This applies not only to specialist texts or communication, but also to communications intended to provide information for the general public.

Although examples of this can be found in countries around the world, the extent to which the phenomenon has penetrated practically every area of life is perhaps unique to Italy. Road signs are one example; the ‘technical’ words are in italics:

Inizio *carreggiata a traffico canalizzato*. *Preselezionare corsia*.

Get in lane.

Another feature of scientific and technical language is the use of the passive form (see 19.2.4), a very common way to place less emphasis on the person who does something, and more on the action itself, or on its object. Here is an example:

La struttura a doppia elica del Dna fu scoperta da Watson e Crick.

The double helix structure of DNA was discovered by Watson and Crick.

42.9 Journalistic language

The language of the press is a mixture of styles. The ‘Cronaca’ section for example tends to use the Italian equivalent of the language of the British tabloid press, for example exaggeration and hyperbole, and a simplification of syntax in the headlines. In other sections, for example ‘Politica’, the language can be obscure and difficult to access, not only because of the more complex syntax but because of the ‘coded’ references, historical, mythical, geographical, etc., that pepper the text. Features of journalistic language include the following.

42.9.1 Use of headlines without whole verbs

Newspaper headlines are kept as short as possible and are often composed entirely of nouns, participles or adjectives, without a complete verb:

Domani bus fermi	Buses on strike tomorrow
Minorenne arrestato a Cagliari	Juvenile arrested in Cagliari
Ragazza uccisa da clandestino	Girl killed by illegal immigrant
Prodi stanco e deluso	Prodi tired and disillusioned

42.9.2 Use of the passive, *si impersonale*, *si passivante*

As seen in 2.1.10 and 19.2, the passive form of verbs is a very common way to place less emphasis on the person who does something, and more on the action itself, or on its object. It is therefore very common to use passive constructions whenever the formality of a statement requires an impersonal approach. An example of the passive used in an official notice has already been shown above (see 42.7).

Similarly, the *si impersonale* is often found in newspaper reports in phrases such as **si dice**, **si comunica** (see 2.1.12, 31.2).

42.9.3 Use of hyperbole and exaggerated language

Taking its cue from television, the press – and in particular the sports pages – uses hyperbole extensively. The style is intended to convey the excitement of the moment:

LONDRA – Finisce tra gli applausi l’ultima partita di Gianfranco Zola con la maglia del Chelsea. Un diluvio di applausi prima dell’incontro. E alla fine quando Zola è stato salutato da una vera e propria ovazione.

(Adapted from La Repubblica online, 8 August 2004)

London. The last match of Gianfranco Zola with the Chelsea strip on ends in applause. A flood of applause before the match. And again at the end when the crowd said goodbye to Zola with a real ovation.

Deportivo “galactico”, Milan horror – il mesto addio alla Champions

(Adapted from La Repubblica online, 7 April 2004)

A Deportivo team of superstars, and a shocking performance by Milan – the sad goodbye to the Champions League

Galactico originates from the Spanish *galacticos* used to describe very highly paid football players.

Hyperbole also extends to nouns and adjectives, where there is often a prefix such as **arci-**, **iper-**, **stra-**, **super-**, **ultra-**, or a suffix such as **-issimo**:

In tutto lo stadio soltanto due striscioni: “Chelsea contro il razzismo” e “Tolleranza zero al razzismo”, slogan appropriati per una partitissima “inglese”, dove gli stranieri in campo sono la stragrande maggioranza.

(Adapted from La Repubblica online, 25 March 2004)

In the whole stadium only two banners: ‘Chelsea against racism’ and ‘Zero tolerance for racism’, appropriate slogans for an English super-match, where the foreign players are the overwhelming majority.

Sette minuti di straordinario Milan cancellano dal campo il Deportivo La Coruna, sommerso da un *supergol* di Sheva.

(Adapted from La Repubblica online, 23 March 2004)

Seven minutes of Milan extra time wipe from the field Deportivo La Coruna, sunk by a supergoal from Sheva.

Adriano ha segnato un *bellissimo* gol.

(Adapted from La Repubblica online, 2 August 2004)

Adriano scored a truly beautiful goal.

42.9.4 Use of references and rhetorical devices

Far more than the British press, Italian newspapers, which were never intended for a mass market, make use of a coded language that can be difficult for even the Italian reader to access. This includes historical and literary references, understood only by an elite. Take this example from the press where Berlusconi makes a reference to a humiliating episode in Roman history, the Forche Caudine, where in 314 BC at Caudium, the defeated Roman army were forced to march naked and defenceless under the lances of the victors, the Sannites. Here the reference is used to describe how businessmen are always being squeezed into impossible situations with no way out.

... un imprenditore come me deve passare sotto continue forche caudine.

... a businessman like me is continuously forced into impossible situations.

*(<http://www.giornalettismo.com/archives/67990/berlusconi-difende-legge-bavaglio/>,
retrieved 19 March 2012)*

People are also referred to by their titles or characteristics. For example, Berlusconi, the ex-Prime Minister of Italy, was referred to as **il Cavaliere** ‘the Cavalier’, a reference to an honorary award given for services to industry. In the same way, Giovanni Agnelli, then head of Fiat, was referred to as **l’Avvocato** ‘the lawyer’.

The press also makes use of metaphor, metonym, synecdoche and other rhetorical devices. For example the use of **il carroccio** to refer to the Lega Nord party is a reference to the cart drawn by oxen which in medieval times used to carry the standard of the **comune** (district) into battle. Similarly, **Via delle Botteghe Oscure** was the headquarters of the political party PDS (Partito Democratico della Sinistra) but was commonly used to refer to the party itself.

42.9.5 Use of foreign words

Another example of ‘coded’ language is the use of foreign words, in particular English words. Many of these are now so much accepted part of the language that they are barely regarded as foreign. Examples include **il ticket** ‘voucher’ or ‘amount payable for healthcare costs’, **il budget** ‘budget’, **il welfare** as in **Ministero del Welfare**. Most foreign words are masculine in gender and have no distinct plural form. Some are used in a different sense from the English original, for example **il mobbing** ‘bullying in the workplace’ or **il footing** ‘jogging’.

il mobbing sul posto di lavoro consiste in un comportamento ripetuto, irragionevole, rivolto contro un dipendente o un gruppo di dipendenti, tale da creare un rischio per la salute e la sicurezza.

(<http://osha.europa.eu/it/publications/factsheets/23>, retrieved 5 April 2012)

Bullying in the workplace consists of repeated, unreasonable behaviour, aimed at an employee or a group of employees, to the extent that it creates a risk for health and safety.

Il footing è praticato da persone di varie età e non richiede particolare attrezzatura.

Jogging is practised by people of various ages and doesn’t require any particular equipment.

(<http://www.lopinionista.it/notizia.php?id=687>, retrieved 5 April 2012)

Appendix I

Spelling and pronunciation

Sounds and letters

It is often said that Italian is easy to learn, because it is spoken as it is written. This is not completely true, but certainly, compared with other languages such as English or French, Italian enjoys the advantage of a near ‘phonological’ system of spelling, in which each letter of the alphabet almost always corresponds to only one ‘sound’. Consequently it is usually easy to know how to pronounce an Italian word found in a written text, by simply following some straightforward general rules. The same is true when you need to write down words that you have heard in their spoken form.

However sounds and letters do not always correspond. There are some sounds (‘phonemes’) that are represented by two or three letters, for example [ʃ] = **sc**; there are also some letters that can represent two different sounds, for example **c** can be either [k] as in **ca** or [tʃ] as in **ce**.

The alphabet

The Italian alphabet is composed of twenty-one letters. Below, you will find a table showing the relationship between the written letters of the alphabet and the sounds of the spoken language. The table shows each letter, the way the letter is written in Italian, its symbol in the International Phonetics Association (IPA) alphabet, some examples of its use and, where necessary, notes on English words that use similar sounds, to help you with the pronunciation. Where there are no notes, the pronunciation of the letters is just the same as in English. Following the table there are a few practical tips on some difficulties of Italian pronunciation faced by native English speakers.

The letters **j**, **k**, **w**, **x**, **y**, shown after the main table, do not belong to the Italian alphabet, although they are often used to write words of foreign origin.

APPENDIX I

<i>Letter</i>		<i>Phoneme</i>		<i>Examples</i>
A	a	[a]	as in English 'ah!'	amore
B	bi	[b]		bocca, cibo
C	ci	[k]	before consonants and a, o, u : 'k' as in English 'cat'	crudo, casa, chiesa
		[tʃ]	before vowels e, i : 'ch' as in English 'church', see note 1	Luciano, cera, acciuga
D	di	[d]		dono, piede
E	e	[e]	see note 4	elegante, perché
		[ɛ]	see note 4	ecco, vieni
F	effe	[f]		facile, caffè
G	gi	[g]	before consonants and vowels a, o, u : 'g' as in English 'go'	grotta, gola, alghe
		[j]	before vowels e, i : 'j' as in English 'judge'	rifugio, angelo
H	acca		see note 1	ho, hanno
I	i	[i]	see note 2	idea, idiota
L	elle	[l]		lettera, collo
M	emme	[m]		mela, ombrello
N	enne	[n]	naso, anno	
O	o	[o]	see note 4	voce, dito, ora
		[ɔ]	see note 4	buono, ospite, Antonio
P	pi	[p]		pelle, spalla, tappo
Q	qu	[kw]		acqua, questo, Pasqua
R	erre	[r]		rosa, birra, pranzo
S	esse	[s]	see note 3	riso, solo, cassa
		[z]	see note 3	rosa, socialismo
T	ti	[t]		vita, petto, torre
U	u	[u]		uva, auguri, burro
V	vu/vi	[v]		volto, avventura
Z	zeta	[dz]	see note 3	socializzare, zero
		[ts]	see note 3	palazzo, zucchero

Foreign letters

<i>Letter</i>		<i>Phoneme</i>	<i>Examples</i>
J	i lunga	[j]	jeep
K	cappa	[k]	km (for chilometro)
W	doppio vu/vi	[w]	weekend
X	ics	[ks]	taxi, xenofobo
Y	ipilon/i greca	[i]	whisky, yogurt

Consonant clusters

Letter	Phoneme	Examples	
CH	[k]	'c' as in English 'camera', see note 1	che, chi
GH	[g]	'g' as in English 'go', see note 1	ghetto, ghino
GLI	[ʎ]	the nearest equivalent in English is 'lyi' as in 'million'	figli, bottiglia, aglio
GN	[ɲ]	the nearest equivalent in English is 'ny' as in 'canyon'	agnello, gnocchi, ogni
SC	[ʃ]	before e, i : 'sh' as in English 'shoot'	scena, pesci, piscina, sciopero, usciamo, prosciutto
SC	[sk]	before a, o, u : 'sk' as in English 'school'	scamorza, scogli, scudo
SCH	[sk]	'sk' as in English 'school', see note 1	schema, fischi

Notes

1 The letter 'h'

The letter **h** does not represent any sound in Italian; it is not pronounced. It is used to distinguish different consonant sounds as in the case of **c, g** and **sc** before the vowels **e** and **i**. When followed by **h**, 'c' is pronounced [k] as opposed to [tʃ], **g** is pronounced [g] rather than [j], 'sc' is pronounced [sk] rather than [ʃ].

2 The letter 'i'

The letter 'i' in the groups **cia, cio, ciu; gia, gio, giu; scia, scio, sciu** is not pronounced; it is a written way of representing the consonant sound.

3 The consonants 's' and 'z'

Each of the two letters **s** and **z** corresponds to two different sounds: voiced [z] and [dz] and voiceless [s] and [ts] respectively. This distinction is not considered important by Italian speakers themselves. A few tips may however help in the pronunciation of the two different sounds of each letter:

s is:

- voiceless [s] at the beginning of a word (**spesa, scala, sale, sordo**)
after a consonant (**falso, pensare, corso**)
when double (**passo, assicurazione, messa**)
- voiced [dz] before a voiced consonant, even at the beginning of a word (**asma, smetti**)

z is:

- voiceless [ts] after **l** (**balzo, alzare, calze**)
in **-ezza** (**bellezza, carezza, altezza**)
before **-ia -ie -io** (**amicizia, pazienza, divorzio, zio, spazio**)
- voiced [dz] in **-izzare, -izzazione**, etc. (**nazionalizzare, privatizzazione**)
between vowels (**ozono, azalea**)

4 Open and closed vowels

Both **e** and **o** have two different sounds: open and closed. For example **e** has an open sound [ɛ] as in English *pet* and a closed sound [e] as in English *hey!* The letter **o** has open sound [ɔ] as in English *or* and a closed sound [o] as in English *oh!* Both open and closed sounds are represented in written Italian by the same letter **e** or **o**. The open vowels only occur in stressed syllables; when unstressed, vowels are always closed. The distinction between the two sounds is not very important in spoken Italian; Italians themselves may disagree on the 'correct' pronunciation of some words (especially when they speak different regional varieties of Italian).

APPENDIX I

Where necessary, the open and closed vowels can be distinguished by using the grave accent for the open sound è, ò and acute accent for the closed é, ó; many good dictionaries do this. However this is not done in normal written Italian, simply because usually the distinction is not considered very important.

Only in a few cases is the distinction important in avoiding confusion between two words. In such cases, the written language indicates the open vowel sound with an obligatory accent, as in, for example:

è	is	e	and
tè	tea	te	you
ho	I have	o	or

NOTE The letter **h** is silent in Italian. See note 1 above.

5 The consonant groups 'gl, gn, sc'

The sounds [ʎ], [ɲ], [ʃ] have no corresponding letters in the alphabet and are therefore represented in written Italian by groups of two or three letters (see table above). In the **sc** clusters with **a, o, u**, the letter **i** is not pronounced as a separate sound (see note 2 above). When these consonants are in the middle of a word their pronunciation is always strong (see note 6 below).

6 Double consonants

'Double' or 'strong' consonants are a very common and frequent feature of the Italian language. Generally they are represented in writing by two letters (as in **palla**). In some cases however a consonant that is normally pronounced single is 'reinforced' and has a 'strong' sound in the spoken language, due to its position in the phrase. This happens in the case of consonants following certain monosyllabic words (particularly in central and southern varieties of Italian), as in:

è vero	[ɛv'vɛro]	a casa	[ak'kasa]	sto bene	[st b'bene]
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Likewise, the consonant clusters **gl** [ʎ], **gn** [ɲ], **sci** [ʃ] are always given a 'strong' sound in the middle of a word, although this is not represented in writing:

figlio	[fiʎʎo]	ogni	[oɲɲi]	lasciare	[laʃʃare]
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Speakers of English as their mother tongue often find it difficult to reproduce exactly the sound of the Italian double consonants. It may help to know that a 'strong' consonant is always found after a short vowel, while the corresponding single consonant is always found after a long vowel, as in these examples:

pa [~] la/pa [~] lla	se [~] te/se [~] tte	fa [~] to/fa [~] tto	ca [~] ro/ca [~] rro
--	--	--	--

7 Accent marks

In addition to the cases above, the accent mark is also used to distinguish between words with the *same vowel sounds*, but different meanings:

sé	himself/herself	se	if
li/là	there	li	them (<i>direct object pronoun</i>)
né	nor	la	her (<i>direct object pronoun</i>)
		ne	of it (<i>partitive</i>)

Words with the stress on the last syllable are also written with an accent mark, as:

perché	why
città	city
caffè	coffee
università	university
libertà	freedom

Italians have tended to have a fairly flexible attitude to (and occasional disagreements over) the question of whether accents should be grave or acute. In recent years, there has been a tendency to use the acute accent on all the closed vowels including **a**, **i** and **u**. Serianni (*Grammatica Italiana*, UTET, 1989) recommends adopting the grave accent for **à**, **ì**, **ù** while keeping the option of grave and acute only in the case of **è/é** and **ò/ó** where it is needed to distinguish between open and closed vowels. This is the system adopted here.

Stress

Sometimes, particularly in dictionaries and textbooks, accent marks are used to indicate on which syllable the stress falls, in words where there might be some doubt:

àncora/ancóra	anchor/still
pàgano/pagàno	they pay/pagan
chilogràmmo	kilogram
chilòmetro	kilometre

8 Spelling conventions

On the whole, Italian spelling conventions follow English when it comes to capital letters. But note how Italian uses a capital letter for:

Names of centuries:

il Duecento	the thirteenth century
il Duemila	the year 2000

Names of titles unless accompanied by proper names:

il Re	the king
il Papa	the Pope
il Conte	the count
re Vittorio Emanuele II	King Victor Emanuel

Appendix II

Regular verb forms

Where they differ, the forms of the 3rd conjugation verb **finire** are shown in a separate column. Otherwise they are the same as those of **dormire**.

Active verb forms

Presente (present indicative)

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>3rd (-isc-)</i>
Verbs	parl-are	cred-ere	dorm-ire	fin-ire
1st person sing	parl-o	cred-o	dorm-o	fin-isco
2nd person sing	parl-i	cred-i	dorm-i	fin-isci
3rd person sing	parl-a	cred-e	dorm-e	fin-isce
1st person pl	parl-iamo	cred-iamo	dorm-iamo	fin-iamo
2nd person pl	parl-ate	cred-ete	dorm-ite	fin-ite
3rd person pl	parl-ano	cred-ono	dorm-ono	fin-iscono

Imperfetto (imperfect indicative)

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
Verb	parlare	credere	dormire, finire
1st person sing	parl-avo	cred-evo	dorm-ivo
2nd person sing	parl-avi	cred-evi	dorm-ivi
3rd person sing	parl-ava	cred-eva	dorm-iva
1st person pl	parl-avamo	cred-evamo	dorm-ivamo
2nd person pl	parl-avate	cred-evate	dorm-ivate
3rd person pl	parl-avano	cred-evano	dorm-ivano

Passato prossimo (present perfect)

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
Verbs	parlare	credere	dormire, finire
1st person sing	ho parlato	ho creduto	ho dormito
2nd person sing	hai parlato	hai creduto	hai dormito
3rd person sing	ha parlato	ha creduto	ha dormito
1st person pl	abbiamo parlato	abbiamo creduto	abbiamo dormito
2nd person pl	avete parlato	avete creduto	avete dormito
3rd person pl	hanno parlato	hanno creduto	hanno dormito

Passato remoto (past definite)

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire, finire
1st person sing	parl-ai	cred-etti (cred-ei)	dorm-ii
2nd person sing	parl-asti	cred-esti	dorm-isti
3rd person sing	parl-ò	cred-ette (cred-é)	dorm-ì
1st person pl	parl-ammo	cred-emmo	dorm-immo
2nd person pl	parl-aste	cred-este	dorm-iste
3rd person pl	parl-arono	cred-ettero (cred-erono)	dorm-irono

Trapassato prossimo (pluperfect)

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire, finire
1st person sing	avevo parlato	avevo creduto	avevo dormito
2nd person sing	avevi parlato	avevi creduto	avevi dormito
3rd person sing	aveva parlato	aveva creduto	aveva dormito
1st person pl	avevamo parlato	avevamo creduto	avevamo dormito
2nd person pl	avevate parlato	avevate creduto	avevate dormito
3rd person pl	avevano parlato	avevano creduto	avevano dormito

Trapassato remoto (past anterior)

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire, finire
1st person sing	ebbi parlato	ebbi creduto	ebbi dormito
2nd person sing	avesti parlato	avesti creduto	avesti dormito
3rd person sing	ebbe parlato	ebbe creduto	ebbe dormito
1st person pl	avemmo parlato	avemmo creduto	avemmo dormito
2nd person pl	aveste parlato	aveste creduto	aveste dormito
3rd person pl	ebbero parlato	ebbero creduto	ebbero dormito

Futuro (future)

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire, finire
1st person sing	parl-erò	cred-erò	dorm-irò
2nd person sing	parl-erai	cred-erai	dorm-irai
3rd person sing	parl-erà	cred-erà	dorm-irà
1st person pl	parl-eremo	cred-eremo	dorm-iremo
2nd person pl	parl-erete	cred-erete	dorm-irete
3rd person pl	parl-eranno	cred-eranno	dorm-iranno

Futuro anteriore (future perfect)

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire, finire
1st person sing	avrò parlato	avrò creduto	avrò dormito
2nd person sing	avrà parlato	avrà creduto	avrà dormito
3rd person sing	avrà parlato	avrà creduto	avrà dormito
1st person pl	avremo parlato	avremo creduto	avremo dormito
2nd person pl	avrete parlato	avrete creduto	avrete dormito
3rd person pl	avranno parlato	avranno creduto	avranno dormito

Condizionale al presente (present conditional)

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire, finire
1st person sing	parl- <i>erei</i>	cred- <i>erei</i>	dorm- <i>irei</i>
2nd person sing	parl- <i>eresti</i>	cred- <i>eresti</i>	dorm- <i>iresti</i>
3rd person sing	parl- <i>erebbe</i>	cred- <i>erebbe</i>	dorm- <i>irebbe</i>
1st person pl	parl- <i>eremmo</i>	cred- <i>eremmo</i>	dorm- <i>iremmo</i>
2nd person pl	parl- <i>ereste</i>	cred- <i>ereste</i>	dorm- <i>ireste</i>
3rd person pl	parl- <i>erebbero</i>	cred- <i>erebbero</i>	dorm- <i>irebbero</i>

Condizionale al passato (past conditional)

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire, finire
1st person sing	avrei parlato	avrei creduto	avrei dormito
2nd person sing	avresti parlato	avresti creduto	avresti dormito
3rd person sing	avrebbe parlato	avrebbe creduto	avrebbe dormito
1st person pl	avremmo parlato	avremmo creduto	avremmo dormito
2nd person pl	avreste parlato	avreste creduto	avreste dormito
3rd person pl	avrebbero parlato	avrebbero creduto	avrebbero dormito

Congiuntivo presente (present subjunctive)

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>3rd (-isc-)</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire	finire
1st person sing	parli	creda	dorma	finisca
2nd person sing	parli	creda	dorma	finisca
3rd person sing	parli	creda	dorma	finisca
1st person pl	parliamo	crediamo	dormiamo	finiamo
2nd person pl	parliate	crediate	dormiate	finiate
3rd person pl	parlino	credano	dormano	finiscano

Congiuntivo all'imperfetto (imperfect subjunctive)

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire, finire
1st person sing	parl-<i>assi</i>	cred-<i>essi</i>	dorm-<i>issi</i>
2nd person sing	parl-<i>assi</i>	cred-<i>essi</i>	dorm-<i>issi</i>
3rd person sing	parl-<i>assi</i>	cred-<i>essi</i>	dorm-<i>issi</i>
1st person pl	parl-<i>assimo</i>	cred-<i>essimo</i>	dorm-<i>issimo</i>
2nd person pl	parl-<i>aste</i>	cred-<i>este</i>	dorm-<i>iste</i>
3rd person pl	parl-<i>assero</i>	cred-<i>essero</i>	dorm-<i>issero</i>

Congiuntivo al trapassato (pluperfect subjunctive)

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire, finire
1st person sing	avessi parlato	avessi creduto	avessi dormito
2nd person sing	avessi parlato	avessi creduto	avessi dormito
3rd person sing	avessi parlato	avessi creduto	avessi dormito
1st person pl	avessimo parlato	avessimo creduto	avessimo dormito
2nd person pl	aveste parlato	aveste creduto	aveste dormito
3rd person pl	avessero parlato	avessero creduto	avessero dormito

Imperativo (imperative)

<i>Conjugations</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>3rd (-isc-)</i>
<i>Verbs</i>	parlare	credere	dormire	finire
tu	parl-<i>a</i>	cred-<i>i</i>	dorm-<i>i</i>	fin-<i>isci</i>
Lei	parl-<i>i</i>	cred-<i>a</i>	dorm-<i>a</i>	fin-<i>isca</i>
noi	parl-<i>iamo</i>	cred-<i>iamo</i>	dorm-<i>iamo</i>	fin-<i>iamo</i>
voi	parl-<i>ate</i>	cred-<i>ete</i>	dorm-<i>ite</i>	fin-<i>ite</i>
loro	parl-<i>ino</i>	cred-<i>ano</i>	dorm-<i>ano</i>	fin-<i>iscano</i>

Gerundio presente (present gerund)

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Gerundio</i>
parlare	parlando
credere	credendo
dormire	dormendo
finire	finendo

Gerundio passato (past gerund)

parlare	avendo parlato
vedere	avendo visto
dormire	avendo dormito
partire	essendo partito

Participio presente (present participle)

(Forms still in existence as nouns or adjectives)

partecipare	partecipante
credere	credente
agire	agente

Participio passato (past participle)

guardare	guardato
credere	creduto
dormire	dormito
finire	finito

Passive verb forms

Here is a simplified table (showing only the third person singular of each tense) of the passive forms of the three regular verb conjugations.

Notice how each passive tense is formed by the corresponding tense of the auxiliary **essere** and the past participle. In this table the participle is masculine singular, but in its actual use it agrees with gender and number of the subject (see below), as do all compound forms of verbs using **essere**.

Infinitive

<i>Present</i>	<i>essere guardato/a/i/e</i>	<i>essere creduto/a/i/e</i>	<i>essere sentito/a/i/e</i>
<i>Past</i>	<i>essere stato guardato</i>	<i>essere stato creduto</i>	<i>essere stato sentito</i>

Indicative

<i>Present</i>	<i>è guardato</i>	<i>è creduto</i>	<i>è sentito</i>
<i>Imperfect</i>	<i>era guardato</i>	<i>era creduto</i>	<i>era sentito</i>
<i>Passato prossimo</i>	<i>è stato guardato</i>	<i>è stato creduto</i>	<i>è stato sentito</i>
<i>Passato remoto</i>	<i>fu guardato</i>	<i>fu creduto</i>	<i>fu sentito</i>
<i>Trapassato prossimo</i>	<i>era stato guardato</i>	<i>era stato creduto</i>	<i>era stato sentito</i>
<i>Trapassato remoto</i>	<i>fu stato guardato</i>	<i>fu stato creduto</i>	<i>fu stato sentito</i>
<i>Simple future</i>	<i>sarà guardato</i>	<i>sarà creduto</i>	<i>sarà sentito</i>
<i>Future perfect</i>	<i>sarà stato guardato</i>	<i>sarà stato creduto</i>	<i>sarà stato sentito</i>

Subjunctive

<i>Present</i>	<i>sia guardato</i>	<i>sia creduto</i>	<i>sia sentito</i>
<i>Imperfect</i>	<i>fosse guardato</i>	<i>fosse creduto</i>	<i>fosse sentito</i>
<i>Past</i>	<i>sia stato guardato</i>	<i>sia stato creduto</i>	<i>sia stato sentito</i>
<i>Pluperfect</i>	<i>fosse stato guardato</i>	<i>fosse stato creduto</i>	<i>fosse stato sentito</i>

Conditional

<i>Present</i>	<i>sarebbe guardato</i>	<i>sarebbe creduto</i>	<i>sarebbe sentito</i>
<i>Past</i>	<i>sarebbe stato guardato</i>	<i>sarebbe stato creduto</i>	<i>sarebbe stato sentito</i>

Imperative

<i>Present</i>	<i>sia guardato</i>	<i>sia creduto</i>	<i>sia sentito</i>
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Gerund

<i>Present</i>	<i>essendo guardato</i>	<i>essendo creduto</i>	<i>essendo sentito</i>
<i>Past</i>	<i>essendo stato guardato</i>	<i>essendo stato creduto</i>	<i>essendo stato sentito</i>

Appendix III

Irregular verb forms

Italian has a large number of irregular verbs, most of them in the 2nd conjugation, including many verbs used frequently in everyday language. Sometimes the irregular changes are unique to one verb (as, for example, **avere** and **essere**). Sometimes several verbs share a common pattern of irregularity, and this can help to memorise the irregular forms.

While some verbs have irregular forms only in one or two tenses, others have irregular forms in more than one tense (see Chapter 2 for a full illustration of irregular verb forms for each tense). Here we provide a list of the most common irregular verbs in alphabetical order, showing only their irregular forms.

Only the tenses which show irregularities are given; any forms not shown are regular. Where two possible forms exist, this is indicated by the symbol /. Less common alternative forms are shown in brackets. Verbs marked with an asterisk take **essere** in compound tenses, either sometimes or always.

We have included the most common irregular verbs including some mentioned in detail in Chapter 2. If you want to check a verb not listed here, use a good dictionary or online dictionary to find out if any of its forms are irregular.

accadere* to happen

See **cadere**.

accendere to light

Passato remoto: accesi, accendesti, accese, accendemmo, accendeste, accessero

Participio passato: acceso

accogliere to welcome

Indicativo presente: accolgo, accogli, accoglie, accogliamo, accogliete, accolgono

Passato remoto: accolsi, accogliesti, accolse, accogliemmo, accoglieste, accolsero

Participio passato: accolto

Congiuntivo presente: accolga, accolga, accolga, accogliamo, accogliate, accolgano

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **cogliere**, **raccogliere**, **sciogliere**, **togliere**.

accorgersi* to realise

Passato remoto: mi accorsi, ti accorgesti, si accorse, ci accorgemmo, vi accorgeste, si accorsero

Participio passato: accorto

affliggere to afflict

Passato remoto: afflisi, affliggesti, afflisse, affliggemmo, affliggeste, afflissero

Participio passato: afflitto

aggiungere to add

Passato remoto: aggiunsi, aggiungesti, aggiunse, aggiungemmo, aggiungeste, aggiunsero

Participio passato: aggiunto

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **congiungere**, **giungere**, **raggiungere**, **sopraggiungere**.

alludere to allude

Passato remoto: allusi, alludesti, alluse, alludemmo, alludeste, allusero

Participio passato: alluso

ammettere to admit

See **mettere**.

APPENDIX III

andare* to go

Indicativo presente: vado, vai, va, andiamo, andate, vanno

Futuro: andrò, andrai, etc.

Condizionale presente: andrei, andresti, etc.

Congiuntivo presente: vada, vada, vada, andiamo, andiate, vadano

Imperativo: va, vada, andate

apparire* to appear (alternative forms shown in brackets are less common)

Indicativo presente: appaio, appari, appare, appariamo, apparite, appaiono

Passato remoto: apparvi (apparii, apparsi), apparisti, apparve (appari, apparse), apparimmo, appariste, apparvero

Participio passato: apparso

Congiuntivo presente: appaia, appaia, appaia, appariamo, appariate, appaiano

appartenere to belong

See **tenere**.

appendere to hang

Passato remoto: appesi, appendesti, appese, appendemmo, appendeste, appesero

Participio passato: appeso

apprendere to learn

See **prendere**.

aprire to open (alternative forms shown in brackets are less common)

Passato remoto: aprii (apersi), apristi, apri (aperse), aprimmo, apriste, aprirono (apersero)

Participio passato: aperto

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **coprire, ricoprire, scoprire**.

assalire to assault

See **salire**.

assistere to assist (note alternative forms)

Passato remoto: assistei / assistetti, assistesti, assisté / assistette, assistemmo, assisteste, assist-terono / assistettero

Participio passato: assistito

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **consistere, esistere, insistere, resistere**.

assolvere to absolve

Passato remoto: assolsi, assolvesti, assolse, assolvemmo, assolveste, assolsero

Participio passato: assolto

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **risolvere**.

assumere to assume, to employ

Passato remoto: assunsi, assumesti, assunse, assumummo, assumeste, assunsero

Participio passato: assunto

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **presumere, riassumere**.

attendere to wait

See **tendere**.

avere to have

Indicativo presente: ho, hai, ha, abbiamo, avete, hanno

Passato remoto: ebbi, avesti, ebbe, avemmo, aveste, ebbero

Participio passato: avuto

Futuro: avrò, avrai, avrà, avremo, avrete, avranno

Condizionale presente: avrei, avresti, etc.

Congiuntivo presente: abbia, abbia, abbia, abbiamo, abbiate, abbiano

Imperativo: abbia, abbia, abbiate

avvenire to happen

See **venire**.

avvolgere to wrap

See **rivolgere**.

APPENDIX III

bere to drink

Passato remoto: bevvi, bevesti, bevve, bevemmo, bevveste, bevvero

Participio passato: bevuto

Futuro: berrò, berrai, etc.

Condizionale presente: berrei etc.

Congiuntivo all'imperfetto: bevessi etc.

cadere* to fall

Passato remoto: caddi, cadesti, cadde, cademmo, cadeste, caddero

Participio passato: caduto

Futuro: cadrò, cadrai, etc.

Condizionale presente: cadrei, cadresti, etc.

chiedere to ask

Passato remoto: chiesi, chiedesti, chiese, chiedemmo, chiedeste, chiesero

Participio passato: chiesto

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **richiedere**

chiudere to close

Passato remoto: chiusi, chiudesti, chiuse, chiudemmo, chiudeste, chiusero

Participio passato: chiuso

cogliere to gather, to pick

See **accogliere**.

coinvolgere to involve

See **rivolgere**.

comparire* to appear

See **apparire**.

comporre to compose

See **porre**.

comprendere to include, to understand

See **prendere**.

concedere to concede

Passato remoto: concessi, concedesti, concesse, concedemmo, concedeste, concessero

Participio passato: concesso, congeduto

concludere to conclude

Passato remoto: conclusi, concludesti, concluse, concludemmo, concludeste, conclusero

Participio passato: concluso

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **deludere**.

condurre to conduct

Indicativo presente: conduco, conduci, etc.

Passato remoto: condussi, conducesti, condusse, conducemmo, conduceste, condussero

Participio passato: condotto

Congiuntivo presente: conduca, conduca, conduca, conduciamo, conduciate, conducano

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **dedurre, indurre, introdurre, ridurre, sedurre, tradurre**.

confondere to confuse

See **fondere**.

conoscere to know

Passato remoto: conobbi, conoscesti, conobbe, conoscemmo, conosceste, conobbero

Participio passato: conosciuto

consistere to consist

See **assistere**.

convincere to convince, to persuade

Passato remoto: convinsi, convincesti, convinse, convincemmo, convinceste, convinsero

Participio passato: convinto

APPENDIX III

coprire to cover

See **aprire**.

correggere to correct

Passato remoto: corressi, correggesti, corresse, correggemmo, correggeste, corressero

Participio passato: corretto

correre* to run

Passato remoto: corsi, corresti, corse, corremmo, correste, corsero

Participio passato: corso

costringere to force

Passato remoto: costrinsi, costringesti, costrinse, costringemmo, costringeste, costrinsero

Participio passato: costretto

crescere* to grow

Passato remoto: crebbi, crescesti, crebbe, crescemmo, cresceste, crebbero

Participio passato: cresciuto

cuocere to cook

Indicativo presente: cuocio, cuoci, cuoce, cociamo/cuociamo, cocete/cuocete, cuociono

Passato remoto: cossi, cuocesti, cosse, cuocemmo, cuoceste, cossero

Participio passato: cotto

dare to give

Indicativo presente: do, dai, da, diamo, date, danno

Passato remoto: diedi, desti, diede, demmo, deste, diedero

Futuro: darò, darai, darà, daremo, darete, daranno

Condizionale presente: darei, daresti, darebbe, daremmo, dareste, darebbero

Congiuntivo presente: dia, dia, dia, diamo, diate, diano

Congiuntivo all'imperfetto: dessi etc.

Imperativo: da', dia, date

decidere to decide

Passato remoto: decisi, decidesti, decise, decidemmo, decideste, decisero

Participio passato: deciso

dedurre to deduct

See **condurre**.

deludere to delude, to disappoint

See **concludere**.

deporre to put down, to depose

See **porre**.

descrivere to describe

Passato remoto: descrissi, descrivesti, descrisse, descrivemmo, descriveste, descrissero

Participio passato: descritto

difendere to defend

Passato remoto: difesi, difendesti, difese, difendemmo, difendeste, difesero

Participio passato: difeso

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **offendere**.

diffondere to spread

See **fondere**.

dipendere* to depend

Passato remoto: dipesi, dipendesti, dipese, dipendemmo, dipendeste, dipesero

Participio passato: dipeso

dipingere to paint

Passato remoto: dipinsi, dipingesti, dipinse, dipingemmo, dipingeste, dipinsero

Participio passato: dipinto

APPENDIX III

dire to say, to tell

Indicativo presente: dico, dici, dice, diciamo, dite, dicono

Passato remoto: dissi, dicesti, disse, dicemmo, diceste, dissero

Participio passato: detto

Congiuntivo presente: dica, dica, dica, diciamo, diciate, dicano

Congiuntivo all'imperfetto: dicessi etc.

Imperativo: di', dica, dite

dirigere to direct

Passato remoto: diressi, dirigesti, diresse, dirigemmo, dirigeste, diressero

Participio passato: diretto

discutere to discuss

Passato remoto: discussi, discutesti, discusse, discutemmo, discuteste, discussero

Participio passato: discusso

disfare to undo

See **soddisfare**.

dispiacere* to be sorry

See **piacere**.

disporre to arrange, to lay out

See **porre**.

distendere to distend, stretch

See **tendere**.

distinguere to distinguish

Passato remoto: distinsi, distinguesti, distinse, distinguemmo, distingueste, distinsero

Participio passato: distinto

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **estinguere**

distrarre to distract

See **trarre**.

distuggere to destroy

Passato remoto: distrussi, distruggesti, distrusse, distruggemmo, distruggeste, distrussero

Participio passato: distrutto

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **struggere**.

divenire* to become

See **venire**.

dividere to divide

Passato remoto: divisi, dividesti, divise, dividemmo, divideste, divisero

Participio passato: diviso

dovere to have to, to be obliged to

Indicativo presente: devo, devi, deve, dobbiamo, dovete, devono

Passato remoto: dovetti/dovei, dovesti, dovette/dové, dovemmo, doveste, dovettero/doverono

Participio passato: dovuto

Futuro: dovrò, dovrai, etc.

Condizionale presente: dovrei, dovresti, etc.

Congiuntivo presente: debba, debba, debba, dobbiamo, dobbiate, debbano

emergere to emerge

Passato remoto: emersi, emergesti, emerse, emergemmo, emergeste, emersero

Participio passato: emerso

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **immergere**, **sommergere**.

escludere to exclude

Passato remoto: esclusi, escludesti, escluse, escludemmo, escludeste, esclusero

Participio passato: escluso

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **accludere**, **includere**, **precludere**.

APPENDIX III

esistere* to exist

See **assistere**.

esplodere* to explode

Passato remoto: esplosi, esplodesti, esplose, esplodemmo, esplodeste, esplosero

Participio passato: esploso

essere* to be

Indicativo presente: sono, sei, è, siamo, siete, sono

Passato remoto: fui, fuisti, fu, fummo, fuste, furono

Participio passato: stato

Futuro: sarò, sarai, etc.

Condizionale presente: sarei, saresti, etc.

Congiuntivo presente: sia, sia, sia, siamo, siate, siano

Congiuntivo all'imperfetto: fossi etc.

Imperativo: sii, sia, siate

estendere to extend

See **tendere**.

estinguere to extinguish

See **distinguere**.

fare to do

Indicativo presente: faccio, fai, fa, facciamo, fate, fanno

Passato remoto: feci, facesti, fece, facemmo, faceste, fecero

Participio passato: fatto

Congiuntivo presente: faccia, faccia, faccia, facciamo, facciate, facciano

Congiuntivo all'imperfetto: facessi etc.

Imperativo: fa, faccia, fate

fingereto pretend

Passato remoto: finsi, fingesti, finse, fingemmo, fingeste, finsero

Participio passato: finto

fondere to melt

Passato remoto: fusi, fondesti, fuse, fondemmo, fondeste, fusero

Participio passato: fuso

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **confondere**, **diffondere**.

friggere to fry

Passato remoto: frissi, frigesti, frisse, frigemmo, frigeste, frissero

Participio passato: fritto

giungere to reach

See **aggiungere**.

illudere to deceive

Passato remoto: illusi, illudesti, illuse, illudemmo, illudeste, illusero

Participio passato: illuso

immergere to immerse

See **emergere**.

imporre to impose

See **porre**.

incidere to record, cut into

Passato remoto: incisi, incidesti, incise, incidemmo, incideste, incisero

Participio passato: inciso

indurre to induce

See **condurre**.

insistere to insist

See **assistere**.

APPENDIX III

intendere to intend

Passato remoto: intesi, intendesti, intese, intendemmo, intendeste, intesero

Participio passato: inteso

interrompereto interrupt

See **rompere**.

introdurre to introduce

See **condurre**.

invadere to invade

Passato remoto: invasi, invadesti, invase, invademmo, invadeste, invasero

Participio passato: invaso

iscrivere to enrol (someone)

See **scrivere**.

isciversi to enrol oneself

See **scrivere**.

leggere to read

Passato remoto: lessi, leggesti, lesse, leggemmo, leggeste, lessero

Participio passato: letto

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **reggere**.

mantenere to maintain

See **tenere**.

mettere to put

Passato remoto: misi, mettesti, mise, mettemmo, metteste, misero

Participio passato: messo

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **ammettere**, **omettere**, **permettere**, **promettere**, **smettere**, **trasmettere**.

mordere to bite

Passato remoto: morsi, mordesti, morse, mordemmo, mordeste, morsero

Participio passato: morso

morire* to die

Participio passato: morto

muovere to move

Passato remoto: mossi, muovesti, mosse, muovemmo, muoveste, mossero

Participio passato: mosso

nascere* to be born

Passato remoto: nacqui, nascesti, nacque, nascemmo, nasceste, nacquero

Participio passato: nato

nascondere to hide

Passato remoto: nascosi, nascondesti, nascose, nascondemmo, nascondeste, nascosero

Participio passato: nascosto

occorrere* to be needed (normally in third person singular or plural)

Passato remoto: occorsi, occorresti, occorse, occorremmo, occorreste, occorsero

Participio passato: occorso

offendere to offend

See **difendere**.

offrireto offer (alternative forms are in brackets)

Passato remoto: offersi/offrii, offristi, offerse/offri, offrimmo, offrirste, offersero/offrirono

Participio passato: offerto

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **soffrire**.

omettere to omit

See **mettere**.

APPENDIX III

opporre to oppose

See **porre**.

ottenere to obtain

See **tenere**.

parere* (normally used impersonally) to appear, to seem

Indicativo presente: paio, pari, pare, paiano, parete, paiono

Passato remoto: parvi, paresti, parve, paremmo, pareste, parvero

Participio passato: parso

Futuro: parrò, parrai, etc.

Condizionale presente: parrei, parresti, etc.

Congiuntivo presente: paia, paia, paia, paiano, paiate, paiano

perdere to lose

Passato remoto: persi, perdesti, perse, perdemmo, perdeste, persero

Participio passato: perso

permettere to allow

See **mettere**.

persuadere to persuade

Passato remoto: persuasi, persuadesti, persuase, persuademmo, persuadeste, persuasero

Participio passato: persuaso

piacere* to please

Indicativo presente: piaccio, piaci, piace, piacciamo, piacete, piacciono

Passato remoto: piacqui, piacesti, piacque, piacemmo, piaceste, piacquero

Participio passato: piaciuto

Congiuntivo presente: piaccia

piangere to weep, to cry

Passato remoto: piansi, piangesti, pianse, piangemmo, piangeste, piansero

Participio passato: pianto

piovere* (used impersonally) to rain

Indicativo presente: piove

Passato remoto: piovve

Participio passato: piovuto

porgere to offer

Passato remoto: porsi, porgesti, porse, porgemmo, porgeste, porsero

Participio passato: porto

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **sporgere**.

porre to place, to put

Indicativo presente: pongo, poni, pone, poniamo, ponete, pongono

Passato remoto: posi, ponesti, pose, ponemmo, poneste, posero

Participio passato: posto

Congiuntivo presente: ponga, ponga, ponga, poniamo, poniate, pongano

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **comporre**, **imporre**, **proporre**, **supportre**.

potere to be able to

Indicativo presente: posso, puoi, può, possiamo, potete, possono

Passato remoto: potei, potesti, poté, potemmo, poteste, poterono

Participio passato: potuto

Futuro: potrò, potrai, etc.

Condizionale presente: potrei, potresti, etc.

Congiuntivo presente: possa, possa, possa, possiamo, possiate, possano

prendere to take

Passato remoto: presi, prendesti, prese, prendemmo, prendeste, presero

Participio passato: preso

APPENDIX III

pretendere to claim

Passato remoto: pretesi, pretendesti, pretese, pretendemmo, pretendeste, pretesero

Participio passato: preteso

produrre to produce

See **condurre**.

promettere to promise

See **mettere**.

proporre to propose

See **porre**.

pungere to sting

Passato remoto: punsi, pungesti, punse, pungemmo, pungeste, punsero

Participio passato: punto

raccogliere to collect, to gather together

See **accogliere**.

radere to shave

Passato remoto: rasi, radesti, rase, rademmo, radeste, rasero

Participio passato: raso

raggiungere to reach

See **aggiungere**.

reggere to support

See **leggere**.

resistere to resist

See **assistere**.

respingere to reject

Passato remoto: respinsi, respingesti, respinse, respingemmo, respingeste, respinsero

Participio passato: respinto

ridere to laugh

See **sorridere**.

ridurre to reduce

See **condurre**.

riflettere to reflect

Passato remoto: riflettei, riflettesti, rifletté, riflettemmo, rifletteste, rifletterono

Participio passato: riflettuto / riflesso

rimanere* to remain

Indicativo presente: rimango, rimani, rimane, rimaniamo, rimanete, rimangono

Passato remoto: rimasi, rimanesti, rimase, rimanemmo, rimaneste, rimasero

Participio passato: rimasto

Futuro: rimarrò, rimarrai, etc.

Condizionale presente: rimarrei, rimarresti, etc.

Congiuntivo presente: rimanga, rimanga, rimanga, rimaniamo, rimaniate, rimangano

riprendere to blame, to tell off

See **prendere**.

risolvere to resolve

See **assolvere**.

rispondere to reply, to respond to

Passato remoto: risposi, rispondesti, rispose, rispondemmo, rispondeste, risposero

Participio passato: risposto

ritenere to retain

See **tenere**.

APPENDIX III

riuscire* to succeed

See **uscire**.

rivolgere to turn

Passato remoto: rivolsi, rivolgesti, rivolse, rivolgemmo, rivolgeste, rivolsero

Participio passato: rivolto

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **avvolgere**, **coinvolgere**, **rivolgersi**, **svolgere**, **svolgersi**, **volgere**.

rivolgersi* to turn to

See **rivolgere**.

rompere to break

Passato remoto: ruppi, rompesti, ruppe, rompemmo, rompeste, ruppero

Participio passato: rotto

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **interrompere**.

salire* to go up

Indicativo presente: salgo, sali, sale, saliamo, salite, salgono

Congiuntivo presente: salga, salga, salga, saliamo, saliate, salgano

sapere to know

Indicativo presente: so, sai, sa, sappiamo, sapete, sanno

Passato remoto: seppi, sapesti, seppe, sapemmo, sapeste, seppero

Futuro: saprò, saprai, etc.

Condizionale presente: saprei, sapresti, etc.

Congiuntivo presente: sappia, sappia, sappia, sappiamo, sappiate, sappiano

Imperativo: sappi, sappia, sappiate

scegliere to choose

Indicativo presente: scelgo, scegli, sceglie, scegliamo, scegliete, scelgono

Passato remoto: scelsi, scegliești, scelse, scegliemmo, scegliești, scelsero

Participio passato: scelto

Congiuntivo presente: scelga, scelga, scelga, scegliamo, scegliate, scelgano

scendere* to go down, descend

Passato remoto: scesi, scendesti, scese, scendemmo, scendeste, scesero

Participio passato: sceso

sciogliere to dissolve

See **accogliere**.

scommettere to bet

See **mettere**.

sconvolgere to upset

See **rivolgere**.

scoprire to discover, uncover

See **aprire**.

scorgere to spot, to notice

See **accorgere**.

scrivere to write

Passato remoto: scrissi, scrivesti, scrisse, scrivemmo, scriveste, scrissero

Participio passato: scritto

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **iscrivere**, **isciversi**.

scuotere to shake

Passato remoto: scossi, scuotesti, scosse, scuotemmo, scuoteste, scossero

Participio passato: scosso

sedere to sit

Indicativo presente: siedo, siedi, siede, sediamo, sedete, siedono

Congiuntivo presente: sieda, sieda, sieda, sediamo, sediate, siedano

APPENDIX III

sedurre to seduce

See **condurre**.

seppellire to bury

Passato remoto: seppellii, seppellisti, seppelli, seppellimmo, seppelliste, seppellirono

Participio passato: seppellito (sepolto)

smettere to stop

See **mettere**.

soddisfare to satisfy (the written accents on vowels indicate where to place the stress)

Indicativo presente: soddisfo, soddisfi, soddisfa, soddisfiamo, soddisfate, soddisfano

Indicativo presente (alternative based on the verb fare): soddisfaccio, soddisfai, soddisfà, soddisfacciamo, soddisfate, soddisfanno

Passato remoto: soddisfeci, soddisfacesti, soddisfece, soddisfacemmo, soddisfaceste, soddisfecero

Futuro: soddisferò, soddisferai, soddisferà, soddisferemo, soddisferete, soddisferanno

Futuro (alternative based on the verb fare): soddisfarò, soddisfarai, soddisfarà, soddisfaremo, soddisfarete, soddisfaranno

Condizionale presente: soddisferei, soddisferesti, soddisferebbe, soddisferemmo, soddisfereste, soddisferebbero

Condizionale presente (alternative based on the verb fare): soddisfarei, soddisfaresti, soddisfarebbe, soddisfaremmo, soddisfareste, soddisfarebbero

Participio passato: soddisfatto

Congiuntivo presente: soddisfi, soddisfi, soddisfi, soddisfiamo, soddisfiate, soddisfino

Congiuntivo presente (alternative based on the verb fare): soddisfaccia, soddisfaccia, soddisfaccia, soddisfacciamo, soddisfacciate, soddisfacciano

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **disfare**.

soffrire to suffer

See **offrire**.

sommergere to submerge

See **emergere**.

sorgere* to rise

Passato remoto: sorsi, sorgesti, sorse, sorgemmo, sorgeste, sorsero

Participio passato: sorto

sorprendere to surprise

See **prendere**.

sorridere to smile

Passato remoto: sorrisi, sorridesti, sorrise, sorridemmo, sorrideste, sorrisero

Participio passato: sorriso

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **ridere**.

sospendere to suspend

Passato remoto: sospesi, sospendesti, sospese, sospendemmo, sospendeste, sospesero

Participio passato: sospeso

sostenere to sustain

See **tenere**.

spargere to spread

Passato remoto: sparsi, spargesti, sparse, spargemmo, spargeste, sparsero

Participio passato: sparso

sparire* to disappear

See **apparire**.

spegnere to put out to extinguish, to turn off

Indicativo presente: spengo, speggni, spegne, spegniamo, spegnete, spengono

Passato remoto: spensi, spegnesti, spense, spegnemmo, spegneste, spensero

APPENDIX III

Participio passato: spento

Congiuntivo presente: spenga, spenga, spenga, spegniamo, spegnete, spengano

spendere to spend

Passato remoto: spesi, spendesti, spese, spendemmo, spendeste, spesero

Participio passato: speso

spingere to push

Passato remoto: spinse, spingesti, spinse, spingemmo, spingeste, spinsero

Participio passato: spinto

stare* to stay, to be

Indicativo presente: sto, stai, sta, stiamo, state, stanno

Passato remoto: stetti, stesti, stette, stemmo, steste, stettero

Participio passato: stato

Congiuntivo presente: stia, stia, stia, stiamo, stiate, stiano

Congiuntivo all'imperfetto: stessi etc.

Imperativo: sta', stia, state

stendere to stretch, to hang out

See **tendere**.

stringere to tighten

Passato remoto: strinsi, stringesti, strinse, stringemmo, stringeste, strinsero

Participio passato: stretto

succedere* to happen (used in 3rd person only – the verb forms differ when **succedere** has the meaning of 'to succeed someone')

Passato remoto: successe

Participio passato: successo

supporre to suppose

See **porre**.

svolgere to develop

See **rivolgere**.

svolgersi* to take place

See **rivolgere**.

tacere to be silent

Indicativo presente: taccio, taci, tace, tacciamo, tacete, tacciono

Passato remoto: tacqui, tacesti, tacque, tacemmo, taceste, tacquero

Participio passato: taciuto

Congiuntivo presente: taccia

tendere to hold out, to extend

Passato remoto: tesi, tendesti, tese, tendemmo, tendeste, tesero

Participio passato: teso

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **attendere**, **distendere**, **estendere**, **stendere**.

tenere to hold

Indicativo presente: tengo, tieni, tiene, teniamo, tenete, tengono

Passato remoto: tenni, teneste, tenne, tenemmo, teneste, tennero

Futuro: terrò, terrai, etc.

Condizionale presente: terrei, terresti, etc.

Congiuntivo presente: tenga, tenga, tenga, teniamo, teniate, tengano

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **mantenere**, **ottenere**, **ritenere**, **sostenere**.

tingere to dye, to colour

Passato remoto: tinsi, tingesti, tinse, tingemmo, tingeste, tinsero

Participio passato: tinto

togliere to take away

See **accogliere**.

tradurre to translate

See **condurre**.

trascorrere to spend

See **correre**.

trasmettere to transmit, to broadcast

See **mettere**.

uccidere to kill

Passato remoto: uccisi, uccidesti, uccise, uccidemmo, uccideste, uccisero

Participio passato: ucciso

uscire* to go out

Indicativo presente: esco, esci, esce, usciamo, uscite, escono

Congiuntivo presente: esca, esca, esca, usciamo, usciate, escano

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **riuscire**.

valere* to be worth (frequently used in third person)

Indicativo presente: valgo, vali, vale, valiamo, valetе, valgono

Passato remoto: valsei, valsesti, valse, valsemmo, valseste, valsero

Participio passato: valso

Futuro: varrò, varrai, etc.

Condizionale presente: varrei, varresti, etc.

Congiuntivo presente: valga, valga, valga, valiamo, valiate, valgano

vedere to see

Passato remoto: vidi, vedesti, vide, vedemmo, vedeste, videro

Participio passato: visto

Futuro: vedrò, vedrai, etc.

Condizionale presente: vedrei, vedresti, etc.

venire* to come

Indicativo presente: vengo, vieni, viene, veniamo, venite, vengono

Passato remoto: venni, venisti, venne, venimmo, veniste, vennero

Participio passato: venuto

Futuro: verrò, verrai, etc.

Condizionale presente: verrei, verresti, etc.

Congiuntivo presente: venga, venga, venga, veniamo, veniate, vengano

Other verbs that follow this pattern include: **avvenire**, **divenire**, **rinvenire**, **svenire**.

vincere to win

Passato remoto: vinsi, vincesti, vinse, vincemmo, vinceste, vinsero

Participio passato: vinto

vivere* to live

Passato remoto: vissi, vivesti, visse, vivemmo, viveste, vissero

Participio passato: vissuto

Futuro: vivrò, vivrai, etc.

Condizionale presente: vivrei, vivresti, etc.

volere to want, to wish

Indicativo presente: voglio, vuoi, vuole, vogliamo, volete, vogliono

Passato remoto: volli, volesti, volle, volemmo, voleste, vollero

Participio passato: voluto

Futuro: vorrò, vorrai, etc.

Condizionale presente: vorrei, vorresti, etc.

Congiuntivo presente: voglia, voglia, voglia, vogliamo, vogliate, vogliono

volgere to turn

See **rivolgere**.

Appendix IV

Verbs and prepositions

Complex sentences often make use of verbs linked to infinitives. Most verbs are linked to the verb infinitive by a preposition such as **a** or **di**. A few verbs do not need any preposition but are followed directly by the verb infinitive. Here is a list of the most common verbs (in alphabetical order) grouped into categories according to the preposition normally used, along with some examples. If you want to use a verb not contained in this list and are not sure which preposition is needed, you can check in any good Italian dictionary.

Note that the verb + infinitive construction can *only* be used where the subject of the main verb and the subject of the verb infinitive are the *same*. Where the subject of the main verb and the subject of the dependent verb are *not* the same, the verb cannot be followed by an infinitive but must be followed by **che** and a dependent clause. In Section 4, we give examples of verbs that involve an action carried out by another person.

1

Verbs followed directly by infinitive

This group of verbs includes the auxiliary verbs **dovere**, **potere**, **volere** as well as several others.

amare	to love to
desiderare	to desire to
dovere	to have to
osare	to dare to
potere	to be able to
preferire	to prefer to
sapere	to know how to
volere	to want to

Examples

Devo andare in banca.

I have to go to the bank.

Sai nuotare bene?

Do you know how to swim well?

Non oso chiamarlo.

I don't dare call him.

Non voleva venire con noi.

She didn't want to come with us.

Also in this group are impersonal verbs and/or verbs used mainly impersonally with the sense of 'one':

basta	to be enough to	dispiace	to regret
bisogna	to be necessary to	occorre	to be necessary to
conviene	to be advisable to	piace	to please

Examples

Basta mangiare cose sane per dimagrire.

You only have to eat healthy things to lose weight.

Bisogna portare il vino a casa di Gianluca stasera.

We ('one') must take wine to Gianluca's house tonight.

Ti piace andare al cinema?

Do you like going to the cinema?

Ci conviene prendere il bus delle 8.00.

We should get the 8.00 bus.

Impersonal expressions formed by verb (normally **essere**) and adjective are also followed directly by the infinitive:

è difficile	it's difficult
è facile	it's easy
è importante	it's important
è impossibile	it's impossible
è possibile	it's possible
è probabile	it's probable

Examples

Non è facile trovare un posto di lavoro.

It's not easy to get a job.

Era importante arrivare presto la mattina.

It was important to arrive early in the morning.

2

Verbs followed by **a**

This group of verbs includes verbs of beginning, continuing or succeeding such as **cominciare**; verbs of onward action of some kind, such as **continuare**; and verbs of movement such as **andare, venire**.

abitarsi	to get used to
andare	to go to (<i>see also section 3 below for another use of andare</i>)
aver difficoltà	to have difficulty in
cominciare	to begin to
continuare	to continue to
correre	to run to
decidersi	to make one's mind up to
divertirsi	to enjoy oneself
esitare	to hesitate
fare bene	to do well to
fare male	to be a bad idea to
fare meglio	to do better to
fare presto	to be quick to
fermarsi	to stop to
imparare	to learn
impegnarsi	to commit oneself
iniziare	to begin to
mettersi	to begin to
passare	to pass to
prepararsi	to get ready to
provare	to try to

rimanere	to stay
rinunciare	to give up
riprendere	to begin again
riuscire	to succeed in
sbrigarsi	to hurry
stare	to stay
tornare	to return to
venire	to come

Examples

Vado a comprare il giornale.

I'm going to buy the newspaper.

Ho cominciato a fumare a 12 anni.

I began smoking at age 12.

Ci siamo abituati a vederlo sempre in giro.

We got used to seeing him always around.

Sono rimasta a casa a studiare.

I stayed home to study.

3

Verbs followed by *di*

This group includes verbs that communicate information such as **dire**; verbs and related verb phrases expressing emotion, such as **essere contento**, **vergognarsi**; verbs expressing opinion, belief or hope such as **credere**, **pensare**, **parere**, **sembrare**, **sperare**; verbs of remembering, forgetting and realising such as **ricordare**, **dimenticare**, **accorgersi**; and verbs of deciding and choosing such as **decidere**, **scegliere**.

accettare	to accept, agree to
accorgersi	to realise, to notice
affermare	to assert
ammettere	to admit
andare (mi va)	to feel like
annunciare	to announce
aspettare	to wait to
aspettarsi	to expect to
augurarsi	to wish
cercare	to try to
cessare	to stop
comunicare	to communicate
confermare	to confirm
credere	to believe
decidere	to decide to
dichiarare	to declare
dimenticare	to forget to
dire	to say, tell
dubitare	to doubt
essere + adjective	to be
fare a meno di	to do without
far finta	to pretend to
 fingere	to pretend to
finire	to finish
immaginare	to imagine

APPENDIX IV

informare	to inform
lamentarsi	to complain
mancare	to fail to
meravigliarsi	to be amazed at
negare	to deny
offrire	to offer to
(mi) pare	to seem to
pensare	to think of, to intend to
pentirsi	to regret
preoccuparsi	to worry about
promettere	to promise to
raccontare	to recount
rendersi conto	to realise
ricordare	to remember
ricordarsi	to remember
rifiutarsi	to refuse
ritenere	to maintain
sapere	to know (<i>but see also section 1 above</i>)
scegliere	to choose
sembrare	to seem
sentirsela	to feel like
smettere	to finish, to end
sognare	to dream of
sperare	to hope to
spiegare	to explain
stancarsi	to tire of
stupirsi	to be amazed at
temere	to fear
tentare	to try to
vergognarsi	to be ashamed of

Examples

Ho deciso di partire domani sera.

I've decided to leave tomorrow evening.

Mi ha detto di aver visto un fantasma.

He told me he had seen a ghost.

Spero di vederlo domani mattina.

I hope to see him tomorrow morning.

Sono proprio contenta di rivederlo.

I am really happy to see him again.

Pensavo di organizzare una festa.

I thought I would organise a party.

Verb phrases followed by **di** include:

c'è bisogno	it is necessary to
avere bisogno	to need
avere paura	to be afraid to
avere voglia	to want to
essere in grado	to be able to

4

Verbs involving other people

Most verbs that invite, force, encourage or advise others to do something will either use no preposition or use the preposition **a** with the person involved (i.e. as indirect object); they generally use **a** – occasionally **di** – to link the verb to the infinitive that follows (in the list below, **qcn** is used as abbreviation for **qualcuno**):

aiutare qcn a	to help someone to
chiedere a qcn di	to ask someone to
comandare a qcn di	to command someone to
consigliare a qcn di	to advise someone to
convincere qcn a	to persuade someone to
costringere qcn a	to force someone to
dire a qcn di	to tell someone to
domandare a qcn di	to ask someone to
forzare qcn a	to force someone to
impedire a qcn di	to prevent someone from
incoraggiare qcn a	to encourage someone to
insegnare a qcn a	to teach someone to
invitare qcn a	to invite someone to
mandare qcn a	to send someone to
obbligare qcn a	to oblige someone to
ordinare a qcn di	to order someone to
permettere a qcn di	to allow someone to
persuadere qcn a	to persuade someone to
pregare qcn di	to beg someone to
proibire a qcn di	to forbid someone to
proporre a qcn di	to propose, suggest to someone to
raccomandare a qcn di	to recommend someone to
suggerire a qcn di	to suggest to someone to
vietare a qcn di	to forbid someone to

Example

Ho aiutato mio fratello a fare i compiti.

I helped my brother to do his homework.

5

Fare, lasciare and verbs of seeing, hearing, feeling

The following verbs are followed directly by the infinitive, and then by the person involved:

fare	to make
lasciare	to let

Example

Faccio venire Marco.

I'll have Marco come.

Constructions with **fare**, **lasciare** are covered in detail in 21.7.

The same applies to verbs such as **sentire** 'to hear, to feel', **vedere** 'to see':

Ho visto arrivare Gianna.

I saw Gianna arriving.

Appendix V

Sequence of tenses

This is a simplified schematic outline of the ‘sequence of tenses’ between a main and a dependent clause. Here we indicate *only the most common* combinations of main verbs and dependent verbs.

The first table below shows combinations where the dependent verb is mainly in the indicative mood, while the second table shows combinations where the dependent verb is mainly in the subjunctive mood.

In each of the two tables, the combinations are determined by the tense of the verb in the main clause: present tense, past tense, future tense.

Finally for each of these main verb tenses, three time contexts are considered: same time context, earlier time context, later time context.

The sequence of tenses is explained in greater depth, along with examples, in 30.5.

Dependent verbs in the indicative

After a main verb such as **dire**, the dependent clause is normally in the indicative mood. If, however, there is any doubt or uncertainty, or a condition is implied, the conditional mood can be used in its place.

<i>Time context</i>	<i>Main verb in present tense</i>	<i>Verb in dependent clause</i>
<i>Same</i> (an event or act happening at the time of speaking or writing)	Marco dice	<i>Present indicative</i> che tu sei brava.
	Marco dice	<i>Present conditional</i> che tu verresti con noi.
<i>Earlier</i> (an event or act happening in the past in relation to the time of speaking or writing)	Marco dice	<i>Perfect indicative</i> che tu sei venuto.
	Marco dice	<i>Imperfect indicative</i> che tu venivi spesso.
<i>Later</i> (an event or act happening in the future in relation to the time of speaking or writing)	Marco dice	<i>Present indicative</i> che tu vieni stasera.
	Marco dice	<i>Future indicative</i> che tu verrai stasera.
	Marco dice	<i>Present conditional</i> che tu verresti stasera.

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<i>Time context</i>	<i>Main verb in past tense</i>	<i>Verb in dependent clause</i>
<i>Same</i> (an event or act happening at the time of speaking or writing)	Marco ha detto / diceva	<i>Present indicative</i> che tu insegni italiano.
	Marco ha detto / diceva	<i>Imperfect indicative</i> che tu insegnavi italiano
<i>Earlier</i> (an event or act happening in the past in relation to the time of speaking or writing)	Marco ha detto / diceva	<i>Pluperfect indicative</i> che eri venuto.
<i>Later</i> (an event or act happening in the future in relation to the time of speaking or writing)	Marco ha detto / diceva	<i>Future indicative</i> che verrà domani sera.
	Marco ha detto / diceva	<i>Past conditional</i> che avrebbe finito alle 5.00.
<i>Time context</i>	<i>Main verb in future tense</i>	<i>Verb in dependent clause</i>
<i>Same</i> (an event or act happening at the time of speaking or writing)	Gli dirò	<i>Present indicative</i> che tu vieni tutti i giorni in ufficio.
<i>Earlier</i> (an event or act happening in the past in relation to the time of speaking or writing)	Gli dirò	<i>Perfect indicative</i> che noi abbiamo già mangiato.
	Gli dirò	<i>Imperfect</i> che stavi male.
<i>Later</i> (an event or act happening in the future in relation to the time of speaking or writing)	Gli dirò	<i>Future indicative</i> che tu verrai domani.

Dependent verbs in the subjunctive

After a main verb such as **credere**, **pensare**, **sembra**, the dependent clause is normally in the subjunctive mood, to express doubt or uncertainty. If there is less doubt or uncertainty, the conditional mood can be used instead. When the action referred to is in the future, either the present subjunctive is used or the future indicative, since the subjunctive has no future tense.

<i>Time context</i>	<i>Main verb in present tense</i> <i>(present indicative,</i> <i>present conditional)</i>	<i>Verb in dependent clause</i>
<i>Same</i> (an event or act happening at the time of speaking or writing)	Pensa	<i>Present subjunctive</i> che tu sia brava.
	Vorrei	<i>Present conditional</i> che tu fossi qui con me.
<i>Earlier</i> (an event or act happening in the past in relation to the time of speaking or writing)	Pensa	<i>Past subjunctive</i> che tu sia venuto.
	Pensa	<i>Imperfect subjunctive</i> che tu studiassi poco.
<i>Later</i> (an event or act happening in the future in relation to the time of speaking or writing)	Pensa	<i>Future indicative</i> che tu verrai stasera.
	Pensa	<i>Present subjunctive</i> che Marco accetti il posto.

APPENDIX V

<i>Time context</i>	<i>Main verb in past tense (imperfect, perfect, past definite, pluperfect)</i>	<i>Verb in dependent clause</i>
<i>Same</i> (an event or act happening at the time of speaking or writing)	Pensava / ha pensato / pensò / aveva pensato	<i>Imperfect subjunctive</i> che tu avessi una casa molto grande.
<i>Earlier</i> (an event or act happening in the past in relation to the time of speaking or writing)	Pensava / ha pensato	<i>Pluperfect subjunctive</i> che tu fossi venuto.
<i>Later</i> (an event or act happening in the future in relation to the time of speaking or writing)	Pensava / ha pensato	<i>Past conditional</i> che sarebbe venuto anche tuo marito.
	Pensava / ha pensato	<i>Imperfect indicative (replacing past conditional in informal speech only)</i> che veniva anche tuo marito.
<i>Time context</i>	<i>Main verb in future tense (future indicative)</i>	<i>Verb in dependent clause</i>
<i>Same</i> (an event or act happening at the time of speaking or writing)	Penserà	<i>Present subjunctive</i> che tu venga tutti i giorni in ufficio.
<i>Earlier</i> (an event or act happening in the past in relation to the time of speaking or writing)	Penserà	<i>Perfect subjunctive</i> che tu sia venuta solo per vederlo.
<i>Later</i> (an event or act happening in the future in relation to the time of speaking or writing)	Penserà	<i>Future indicative</i> che partiremo domani in treno.
	Penserà	<i>Present subjunctive</i> che tu venga domani.

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