

**ITA 198 – Dialects and Contemporary Italy**  
**(course fulfills major/minor elective units; 4 units)**

**Prof. Eric Louis Russell**

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Day/Time: MWF 10.00 – 10.50

Room: Wellman 3

Office Hours: MW 11.00 – 12.00 or by appointment

Description

This course introduces you to the study of Italian dialects, both their form and use, as well as to the ways that dialects function in different social settings. Each of you will “adopt” your own dialect (we’ll collaborate to make sure there isn’t significant overlap), to which you’ll apply each of the foci we discuss, comparing and contrasting this to standard Italian and learning more about how it functions within respective sociolinguistic settings.

The course is split into four mini-units, one introduction and three focus areas: the lexicon, vocabulary and borrowing; phonetics, accent, and pronunciation; and sociolinguistics or language in society. No prior linguistics study is required, but students should have completed the lower-division Italian language sequence (beginning and intermediate) or its equivalent.

Another goal of our quarter is to continue progress in language proficiency: reading, writing, speaking, and listening will use Italian to the greatest extent possible (and English or other languages minimally). Through this practice, you will have opportunity to take important steps forward in building your “Italian linguistic home” – always with generosity and patience toward yourself and to others in the class.

Goals & Objectives

By the end of the quarter, you will understand:

- The language-dialect debate and its effect on contemporary Italian society;
- Foundational linguistic terminology and concepts;
- How language affects society and how society influences language.

By the end of the quarter, you will be able to:

- Situate the major Italian dialects, both geographically and culturally;
- Illustrate some of the more important facets of your adopted dialect, contrasting these to standard Italian;
- Discuss the tensions between how Italian and your dialect are lived, especially at present but also in the past.

You will continue to make proficiency gains as this concerns all four language modalities (listening, speaking, reading, writing).

Materials

There will be several assigned readings for each unit, each of which is approximately five pages. Some of these will be web links; others are chapters from book sources. All will be distributed via Canvas.

Other materials to which students are expected to have access include:

- A monolingual dictionary, e.g. *lo Zingarelli* or *il Treccani*
- A reference grammar of Standard Italian

Note that both of these are available in the Italian reading library in Sproul Hall, as well as at Shields Library. There are also many good, low-cost apps: we will discuss these and how to use them in the first week.

## Grade/Evaluation

Each unit is worth 20% of the final grade, broken down as follows:

- Reading quizzes 20%
- Preliminary reflection 20%
- Problem set/exercise 20%
- Unit mini-lesson 40%

All grades will follow the standard university scale (e.g. A = 100-93%, A = 92-90, B = 89-87%...).

*Reading quizzes* are short, discrete, graded quizzes completed on Canvas. These are based on the unit reading – mostly taken from short web assignments – and the most important concepts/terms/ideas within these. They are multiple-choice and can be completed at any time up to the deadline.

*Preliminary reflections* are short (the equivalent of approximately one double-spaced page) free-writing exercises that are designed to help you focus on the unit topic, drawing upon your own prior knowledge and language/cultural experiences. These are written in Italian: I will provide feedback on grammar and vocabulary, as well as comments on questions that you have. They will be turned in via Canvas and graded P (100%)/NP (0%).

*Problem sets/exercises* are more discrete tasks, asking you to analyse language data from Italian and, at times, different forms of Italian, applying the concepts and terms used in the unit. The goal of these is to show that you understand our discussion/readings, and are able to integrate these into your own intellectual repertoire. Each is usually the equivalent of about one page and will be completed in Italian, using Canvas. Problems sets will be graded: if completed to instruction and on time, the very lowest grade is a 60%.

*Mini-lessons* ask you to take on the role of instruction, focusing on your chosen dialect according to the unit topic. Following instructions, you will prepare a 6-7 minute overview of one facet of your dialect pertaining to the unit topic (e.g. for unit 2, some differences in its pronunciation vis-à-vis standard Italian). These will be done in Italian, recorded and uploaded to Canvas. Each mini-lesson will include a power point (or equivalent) support, which will be shared with your classmates. You are the expert, so this is the chance for you to teach the rest of us! This will be graded according to the rubric available on Canvas: content (ideas, terminology, examples) counts for 50%; expression (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) counts for 50%.

Late/missing work: Please submit your work on time/according to schedule. Late work will be docked 10% for each late class session (e.g. if due on Monday but turned in on Wednesday, 10% lower than the grade received).

Please see me or email me as soon as possible if circumstances arise that make it impossible or overly difficult to turn work in on time – we can work together in such cases, which hopefully won't arise (fingers crossed!).

## A word about class language use

You will note that nearly all work and classroom interaction is done in Italian. This can be daunting and intimidating, even for those who have lived and studied in Italy or another Italophone context. The reason we do this is to have a few hours a week in which Italian is

the normal mode of communication – when we’re “bathed” in Italian – but not because we are expected to speak perfectly – whatever that might look like!

Like most of you, Italian is not my first language. Like you, I also search for words, sometimes forget agreement markers, make spelling mistakes (le consonanti doppie are a personal nightmare!)... and much else. This is normal and nothing to be ashamed of – language learning takes time, patience, humility and empathy.

Some of you are native or co-native speakers – in tal caso, siamo grati per la vostra pazienza e la vostra empatia. For others, this is one of the first upper-division courses in Italian – soprattutto voi siete coraggiosi! For still others, it may have been several quarters since you’ve used the language. Non importa... è essenziale provare, riprovare e riprovare ancora. Please speak to me about what I can do to help, if you have particular concerns or needs, or about just about anything else that comes up. We’re in this together – andrà bene solo e quando andrà bene per tutte, tutti e tuttø, cioè insieme.