

The Decline of the Italian Language: the Problems with the Education System in Italy

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According to a very recent CNN article written by Rome-based freelance reporter and writer Silvia Marchetti, Italy, one of the most culturally rich countries in Europe and the world, is facing an alarming decline in literacy.

In her [CNN](#) [2] article, whose title “Dante turns in his grave as Italian language declines” accurately renders the irony of the situation by evoking the image of the father of the Italian language, journalist Silvia Marchetti links the problem of declining literacy amongst italians to the current state of the education system in the country. “A series of education reforms in the past few years” Marchetti says “has lowered the quality of teaching by reducing public resources and the hours of Latin and Italian language learning”.

She identifies the decrease in the study of Latin as one of the main causes for the overall decline of the linguistic and expressive capacities of Italian students.



In fact, throughout the last few decades, the space devoted to learning Latin, the language of the Roman Empire and the predecessor of Italian, has been consistently decreasing. The study of Latin, which used to be a practice shared by everyone since students started to learn it as early on as in elementary and middle school, has now become limited to a niche group of students in specific humanistic and scientific high schools.

The knowledge of the Italian language is also following this downward slope, partly because learning Italian goes hand in hand with learning Latin, and it's interesting to note that in Italian schools, the same professor teaches both languages.

This phenomenon constitutes a problem, not only for Italian students, but also for Italian society as a whole. Even grown Italians struggle with their native tongue. Grammar mistakes and misspelled words are unavoidable online and even television news anchors can't speak proper Italian.

While the use of smartphones, texting language, instant messages, and the integration of English words may have played a role in this phenomenon, for Marchetti, it's clear that the real cause of the problem and the potential solution lie in education.

If such a huge part of the population has poor literacy, it means that linguistic knowledge in Italy has been declining for quite some time now. And there are in fact studies showing that Italy was already facing problems like numerous drop-outs and low testing grades as early as 1999.

This reveals that the problem is caused not only by the restriction of the actual class time devoted to the teaching of these languages, (a more recent change) but also by the decline in the quality of teaching.

Unfortunately, Italians and those who have currently spent some time in Italy will not be surprised to hear about the problems of the education system.

However, this situation might seem surprising to most other people since Italy tends to be associated with the artists and intellectuals of the Renaissance. As an Italian living in the United States I have had people assume I spoke Latin, so the fact that Italians struggle particularly with Latin would probably come as the greatest surprise.

And it is indeed surprising, and unacceptable for Italians to be growing so distant from their own cultural heritage. It should instead be embraced, like the great asset it is.

The way things are today, students are just not motivated to stay in school, and even less so to study Italian and Latin, subjects they are told won't help them get jobs, something that just isn't true, especially in a country like Italy, which is internationally celebrated for its rich cultural heritage.

According to Marchetti, it all comes down to the need to modernize the Italian approach to education altogether. The material to teach surely isn't lacking, nor are Italians incapable of being good students and scholars, as the great figures of the past have proved time and time again. What Italian students need now to invert this preoccupying trend are passionate teachers and engaging new methods.



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