

Preface

A language is the voice of a people, the vocal medium through which the individual members of a culture can express their feelings and thoughts, from the trivial to the sublime, from the witty to the most sombre. The scientific discipline that aims to study this ‘voice,’ in all its dimensions, is known as *linguistics*.

Among language programs offered by North American universities, Italian figures prominently as a discipline of choice for a large and steadily growing number of undergraduate students. In addition to a broad array of language, literature, and culture classes, many universities and colleges now offer seminars and entire courses in Italian linguistics. However, to the best of our knowledge, appropriate textbooks written in English for the latter – which take into account the students’ North American background – are either out of date or virtually impossible to find. Moreover, as instructors of an introductory course in Italian linguistics for nearly three decades at the University of Toronto, we have discovered that the alternative to textbooks written in English, namely those written in Italian and published in Italy, are far too complex for students to follow. The simple reason for this is that their intended users are university students in Italy, not North America. So, over the years, we have taken the path, like many other instructors of Italian linguistics, of preparing and using our own handouts and self-prepared materials. This book constitutes a synthesis of those materials. We sincerely hope that it will fill some of the gap that now exists for the serious study of Italian linguistics in North America.

We must warn the users of this book, however, that the topics chosen for presentation, and the ways in which we have treated them, reflect our own view both of linguistic theory and of how much material a student can handle in an introductory course format. Moreover, in

order to keep the proportions of this volume within the limits of a basic textbook, it was necessary to limit the choices to those topics and activities that we have found to be the most useful and practicable in a classroom situation.

Users of This Book

Some knowledge of the Italian language is assumed, although, by working through the textbook, the student will, more than likely, gain a firmer grasp of the language as he or she learns to use the analytical tools that linguistics provides. This book can also be used profitably for self-study, since we believe it can help students strengthen their formal knowledge of the Italian language through the apparatus of linguistic notions and concepts. In the same manner that knowledge of musical theory can help the pianist become a more knowledgeable and proficient performer, so too can skill at linguistic analysis help the language student become more adept at penetrating the internal workings of the language she or he is studying.

We also believe that this textbook can be used as a reference manual, or even as a course book, in programs of general or Romance linguistics. For this reason, we have written it in a generic way, with plenty of Italian examples that we have often glossed in English to facilitate comprehension. Moreover, we have added an Italian–English glossary at the back for easy reference.

Format and Contents

The nine chapters in this book fall into three thematic areas. The first two are introductory in nature: Chapter 1 deals with the origins of the Italian language, and Chapter 2 with the nature of linguistic inquiry and methodology. Chapters 3 to 7 deal with the ‘nuts and bolts’ of linguistic analysis – phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Whereas the chapters on phonetics and phonology have been designed as comprehensive treatments of the subject matter, those on grammar (morphology and syntax) and semantics have been composed necessarily as partial and selective treatments (given the amount of space that would otherwise have been needed). The final two chapters of the book are concerned respectively with discourse and variation (historical and regional).

To render each chapter pedagogically useful, we have used numerous illustrative examples and have added a series of activities (questions and exercises) in a 'Follow-Up' section so that the student can gain practical knowledge of the subject matter and techniques introduced in the chapter.

We have also appended two glossaries at the back of the book: a glossary of technical terms and a glossary of the Italian words used in the nine chapters. Finally, we have provided a brief list of suggested readings for those students interested in getting more detailed information on the various topics treated.

We wish to thank the editorial staff at University of Toronto Press for all their advice, support, and expert help in the making of this textbook. We are especially grateful to Dr Ron Schoeffel and Anne Forte, without whom this volume would never have come to fruition. We also thank the Faculty of Arts and Science of the University of Toronto for having allowed us the privilege of teaching and coordinating the Italian linguistics program of the university. Another debt of gratitude goes to the many students we have taught. Their enthusiasm has made our job as teachers simply wonderful. They are the impetus for this book.

Gianrenzo P. Clivio

Marcel Danesi

University of Toronto, 2000

This page intentionally left blank