



DID YOU KNOW?

ARTICLES ABOUT THE LANGUAGES YOU STUDY

FOREIGN LANGUAGE LAB

What languages have influenced Italian? What are the dialects spoken in Italy like?

You may know that Italy is a Romance language, but you may not know that Italy is actually a very diverse country linguistically. Italian has been influenced by many languages. Some, like Latin, Spanish, and French are not that surprising. Others you may not have known include Celtic, Greek, and Arabic. There are even other ancient Italian languages, such as the Osco-Umbrian language. Here is a quick glance at some of the influences. Do keep in mind however, that these languages mixed hundreds of years ago, and their similarities may have disappeared in their modern forms.

Language	Contributions
Latin	Most influence of all, varying regionally Verb fieri (becoming essere)
Early Italian dialects	Agriculture
Ancient Greek	Early political life Plants and animals
Arabic	A few terms in Italian, but much more in Sicilian (because Sicily was at one point an emirate)
German	War, Hunting, Spiritual terms
French	Religion, art, esp. during 1700s
Spanish	Various words, esp. 1500s to 1600s

In Italian, there are many dialects. The northern dialects include Lombard, Piedmontese, Venetian, and Istrian. Central dialects include the Lazio (Rome), Umbrian, and Marchigiano dialects. Southern dialects include Abruzzo, Campanian, Lucanian, Puglia or Bari dialect, and Calabrian. The Tuscan dialect, based in Florence, is considered to be the predecessor of modern Italian and the “standard” dialect. There are some basic differences between these dialects. Most of them have to do with pronunciation of vowels and omission or changing of letters. It would be impossible to give you an overview of it all in one page, but spelling and pronunciations of certain clusters are the most salient features of any of these dialects. While closely related to Italian, Sicilian, which is spoken on the island of Sicily, is considered by many others to be another language despite the fact that it is an autonomous province of Italy.

Italian is not spoken all across the board, and this is especially so in areas near the border. In Italy’s Aosta Valley in its extreme northeast, you may actually hear a dialect of German known colloquially as Walliseritsch. Ligurian is another language spoken in the small province of Liguria, on the border with France where it is also spoken. If you are interested in France, you may also want to examine the Provençal and Franco-Provençal language groups, which are also understood in the French border area in Italy. For its size, Italy sure has a large amount of dialects!

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