

Coffee Break **Italian Magazine**

Season 1, Lesson 1

Transcript and Notes



Introductory Conversation

Mark: Buongiorno a tutti e bentornati! Siamo tornati! Come stai, Francesca?

Francesca: Ciao Mark, sto benissimo! Grazie! E tu?

Mark: Sto benissimo e molto lieto di essere qua ancora una volta.

Francesca: Sì, anch'io, ovviamente.

Mark: ... nello studio per fare un progetto nuovo.

Francesca: Sono emozionatissima per questo nuovo progetto.

Mark: Allora, sei pronta?

Francesca: Sono prontissima e piena di energia!

Mark: Perfetto! Allora, cominciamo!

Francesca: Cominciamo!

Mark: Dunque, come va tutto? Tutto bene?

Francesca: Sì, tutto bene, grazie.

Mark: Ma, senti: ho una domanda!

Francesca: Dimmi, Mark!

Mark: Forse un po' indiscreta.

Francesca: Oh mamma mia, adesso sono preoccupata!

Mark: Allora, prima sono passato in ufficio e sulla tua scrivania ho visto dei cioccolatini.

Francesca: No, non è possibile!

Mark: Penso che dobbiamo spiegare ai nostri ascoltatori che Francesca ha deciso di non mangiare dolci per tutto il mese. Allora ho un dubbio.

Francesca: Io giuro, Mark, che non ho mangiato niente di dolce.

Mark: Però quei cioccolatini ...

Francesca: Allora, sai Mark cosa facciamo?

Mark: Dimmi!

Francesca: Andiamo a Roma e vediamo cosa dice la Bocca della Verità!

Mark: Mi sembra un'ottima idea!

bentornati

welcome back

lieto/a

delighted, happy

emozionatissimo/a < emozionato/a

very excited

prontissimo/a < pronto/a

very ready

dunque

so, well

indiscreto/a

indiscreet, inappropriate

scrivania (f)

desk

spiegare

to explain

dubbio

doubt

giuro < giurare

I swear

niente di dolce

anything sweet

Bocca della Verità

Mouth of Truth

In the English segment the phrase **ciliegina sulla torta** (*cherry on the cake*) was also mentioned.



Study text

Quando progettiamo un viaggio a Roma, nella lista dei luoghi da visitare di solito non manca mai la famosa Bocca della Verità, uno dei simboli storici della città eterna, reso famoso dal film 'Vacanze Romane' con Audrey Hepburn e Gregory Peck. Ma che cos'è la Bocca della Verità?

Se chiudete gli occhi, probabilmente potete visualizzare tutti l'enorme volto di un uomo barbuto che si trova fuori dalla chiesa di Santa Maria Cosmedin a Roma. Se vi recate in questo luogo, vedrete una lunga fila di gente, bambini inclusi che, un po' nervosi, infilano la loro mano nella Bocca della Verità. In passato, infatti, si pensava che questa speciale bocca avesse il potere di capire se una persona stava dicendo una bugia o la verità,

soprattutto quando si trattava di verità in materia di fedeltà coniugale... aiuto! Una volta infilata la mano nella bocca, se la persona, molto spesso una donna, diceva la verità, poteva estrarre la sua mano intatta ma ... se la persona diceva una bugia, allora la bocca le mangiava la mano! Tranquilli: in realtà, la bocca da sola non poteva mordere nessuno però, per aiutarla, qualcuno si nascondeva lì dietro e, con un enorme spillone, punzecchiava la mano della povera vittima!

Ma la Bocca della Verità in origine aveva una funzione ben diversa: infatti, veniva usata come copritombino e, proprio per questo motivo, sia gli occhi, che la bocca e il naso sono buchi da cui poteva passare l'acqua. Oggi la Bocca della Verità è soltanto una simpatica attrazione turistica per grandi e piccini che, come ricordo della loro vacanza a Roma, vogliono una foto che li immortalino nel momento della verità. E anche se ormai tutti sanno che non c'è nessun pericolo, chissà se un lieve brivido scorre comunque lungo la schiena di chi si accinge ad infilare la propria mano nella bocca più temuta del mondo!

luoghi da visitare

places to visit

non manca mai

it's never missing

città eterna

eternal city

Rome is often referred to as 'the eternal city'.

reso famoso < rendere

made famous

The verb **rendere** is often translated in English as to make; however, the verb **rendere** is used instead of the verb **fare** when more emphasis is placed on the concept of becoming.

visualizzare

to visualize

volto (m)

face

You may be already familiar with the word **faccia** which also means face. While **faccia** is the generic term, **volto** has a more literary, poetic and formal nuance; for this reason this word is preferable to **faccia** when describing a face in paintings or sculptures.

barbuto/a

bearded

che si trova < trovarsi

which is located

vi recate < recarsi

you go

The verb **recarsi** means to go but, unlike its synonym **andare**, it is rather formal and it is more likely to be found when a high register of speaking and writing is used.

vedrete

you will see

fila (f)

queue, line

infilano < infilare

they insert, to place inside

mano (f)

hand

Despite ending in -o, the word **mano** is feminine and uses feminine endings. For example: **una bella mano** (a beautiful hand). The plural of **mano** is **mani** which, again, despite the masculine plural ending **-i**, remains a feminine word. For example: **delle belle mani pulite** (some nice clean hands).

in passato

in the past

si pensava

one used to think, people used to think

Note the impersonal structure obtained by using the impersonal pronoun **si** and the verb in the third person singular. Impersonal structures can be very useful as they allow to avoid specifying who the subject of the sentence is.

avesse < avere

had

This is the imperfect subjunctive of the verb **avere**. In this case the subjunctive is triggered by the verb of opinion **si pensava** in the main clause. The subjunctive implies that what has been said is not entirely certain but it's only an opinion. The use of the imperfect tense here is justified by the verb in the main clause which is also in the past tense.

stava dicendo

was telling

Note that this verb is in the progressive past. Progressive tenses in Italian are formed using the verb **stare** (in the appropriate tense) followed by the gerund. Here is a reminder on the formation of the Italian gerund:

parl**are** > parl**ando**

legg**ere** > legg**endo**

dormire > dormendo

bugia (f)

lie

si trattava < trattarsi di

it was about, it concerned, it regarded, it surrounded

in materia di

regarding, on the topic of, surrounding

fedeltà (f)

loyalty, faithfulness

coniugale

marital

aiuto!

help!

una volta

once

Note the use of **una volta** + past participle which is an example of a temporal clause expressing posteriority. This means that the event described in the main clause (in this case: **la persona poteva estrarre la sua mano intatta**) happens after the event described in the sub clause (**una volta infilata la mano**). If you want the full technical explanation, read on! Normally, this kind of structure is called **frase temporale implicita** (implicit temporal clause) because it uses the past participle on its own without a real subject; for this reason, structures like these are only possible if the intended subject of the sub clause is the same of the subject in the main clause (in this case: **la persona**).

estrarre

to extract, to pull out

la bocca le mangiava la mano

the mouth would eat her hand (literally "the mouth to her would eat the hand")

Note the use of the indirect object pronoun **le** (to her) which is used to replace the word **persona**. The masculine singular equivalent (to him) is **gli**.

tranquillo/a

quiet, tranquil, calm, relaxed

This adjective is often used in a way that it means: "do not worry" or "stay calm".

da solo/a

alone, on its own

per aiutarla

in order to help it

Note the direct object pronoun **-la** attached to the infinitive **aiutare**. **La** is used to replace the word **bocca**, which is a feminine singular noun. The masculine singular equivalent is **-lo**. Normally direct object pronouns precede the verb; however, in the presence of infinitives they can be attached to them by dropping the final **-e** of the verb.

qualcuno

someone

si nascondeva < nascondersi

would hide, used to hide

lì dietro

in the back, back there

spillone

hatpin, a huge pin

In Italian the suffix **-one**, **-ona** often has an augmentative function. Here are some examples:

libro > **librone** (a big book)

tazza > **tazzona** (a big cup)

At times, however, the masculine ending is also used for the formation of augmentative feminine words, thus transforming them into masculine.

spilla (f) > **spillone** (m) (a big pin)

febbre (f) > **febbro** (m) (high fever, high temperature)

punzecchiava < **punzecchiare**

to sting, to prick

povera vittima

poor victim

Note that the adjective **povero/a** changes its meaning according to its position in relation to the noun it describes.

povera vittima: poor victim (unlucky, unfortunate)

vittima povera: poor victim (lacking money)

in origine

in origin, originally

ben diverso/a

very different

Note that the adverb **ben** (short for **bene**) can, at times, mean 'very'.

veniva usata

it was used

Note that this is a passive structure the verb **essere** (**era usata**) is replaced by the verb **venire**. In passive structures, the verb **venire** does not mean to come, but it is simply an alternative to the verb to be.

copritombino

manhole cover

sia gli occhi che la bocca

both the eyes and the mouth

buco (m) buchi (pl)

hole

da cui

through which (literally "from which")

soltanto

only, just

per grandi e piccini

for adults and children

ricordo (m)

memory

una foto che li immortalì

a photo which immortalises them

anche se

even if, even though

ormai

by now

non c'è nessun pericolo

there is no danger

It's important to stress that, unlike English, Italian uses double negatives, which means that **non** must be added to sentences which contain negative expressions. Here are some examples:

Non mangio mai le lasagne: I never eat lasagne.

Laura non ha capito niente: Laura hasn't understood anything.

Mia sorella non ha visto nessuno in città: my sister didn't see anyone in town.

chissà

who knows

lieve brivido

light shiver

scorre < scorrere

to flow, to run down

comunque

anyway

lungo la schiena

down the spine, down the back

si accinge < accingersi

to be about to

Note that this is a rather formal and high register verb. A more common way to express the same idea is: **stare per** + infinitive.

nella bocca più temuta del mondo

in the world's most dreaded hand

This is an example of a relative superlative adjective where the Mouth of Truth is compared to all the other mouths in the world in terms of being dreaded. Relative superlatives in Italian are formed by using the definite article + **più** + the adjective (**la più temuta**). The comparison is introduced by the preposition **di**. Here are some examples:

Roma è la città più bella del mondo: Rome is the world's most beautiful city.

Il Po è il fiume più lungo d'Italia: the river Po is Italy's longest river.

La pizza è il piatto più famoso di Napoli: pizza is Naples' most famous dish.

Q&A

In this section, based on Greg's question, we are going to show how the Italian word **prego** can be used in different contexts, thus changing its meaning accordingly.

1. **Prego** is the natural reaction and reply to the word **grazie**, so it translates into English as 'you are welcome'.
2. **Prego** is also used to add courtesy when interacting with other people, especially when you are inviting or encouraging them to do something. In this case **prego** is often accompanied by the emphatic adverb **pure**.

Prego, entra pure! - Please, do come in!

Prego, accomodati! - Please, take a seat!/ Make yourself comfortable!

Prego, siediti! - Please, take a seat!

Prego, vada pure! - Please, go (first)! (formal)

Prego, prenda pure! - Please, do take it! (formal)

3. **Ti prego**, pronounced with the right intonation, means: please, don't!
4. Another meaning of **ti prego** is: I'm begging you.
5. From the verb **pregare** (to pray), **prego** can also mean I am praying. The word **preghiera** is a prayer.
6. Lastly, when pronounced in an interrogative way, **prego** can be used to let your interlocutors know that you haven't understood what they have said. In this case it implies you would like a certain word or sentence to be repeated.



La Ciliegina sulla torta

Francesca: La verità è un concetto molto importante nella cultura italiana, grazie a un personaggio che forse tutti tutti i nostri ascoltatori conoscono. Ovviamente, l'intramontabile Pinocchio, il burattino di legno a cui cresceva il naso ogni qualvolta diceva una bugia. Ancora oggi i bambini italiani conoscono benissimo le avventure di questo eroe nazionale e, ogni volta che cercano di nascondere la verità ai propri genitori, si sentono dire queste parole: **non dire bugie o ti cresce il naso!**

verità (f)

truth

concetto (m)

concept

personaggio (m)

character

intramontabile

the one and only, timeless

burattino

puppet

di legno

wooden

The preposition **di** is often used to describes the material used to make something.

a cui cresceva il naso

to whom the nose was growing

Remember that the relative pronoun **che** has to be replaced by **cui** when preceded by a preposition.

ogni qualvolta

every time

This phrase tends to be used in very formal and literary Italian. A more common way to say the same thing is: **ogni volta che**.

diceva < dire

he was saying, he would say

Note that the **imperfetto** is used in this sentence as it is a clear case of an action repeated several times in the past

eroe (m)

hero

cercano < cercare

to try (in other contexts: to look for)

This verb is followed by the preposition **di** + infinitive.

nascondere

to hide

ai propri genitori

to their own parents

The adjective **i propri** is used to avoid the ambiguity with **i loro**. Infact, **i loro genitori** means their parents and could refer to other children's parents. By using **i propri** it's clear that we are talking about these children's parents.

si sentono dire

they hear being said (literally 'they hear to themselves tell')

non dire

don't tell

This is an example of negative imperative, employed when addressing one person in an informal way. To form this type of negative imperative you need to use **non** + the infinitive. Here are some examples:

non guardare: don't look

non fumare: don't smoke

non dormire: don't sleep

cresce < crescere

to grow

Note that in this case the simple present tense has the function of future. This is because in Italian the simple present can be used instead of the future, when it's clear from the context that we are talking about a future event. Please also note that **ti** is the indirect object pronoun meaning to you.

naso (m)

nose

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