

Coffee Break **Italian**

Season 3, Lesson 1

Lesson notes



CoffeeBreak
Italian



Introduction

Mark: Buongiorno a tutti e benvenuti... bentornati a Coffee Break Italian! Io sono Mark.

Francesca: Salve a tutti! E io sono Francesca!

Mark: Come stai, Francesca?

Francesca: Mark, sto benissimo. Sono così felice oggi di essere finalmente tornata con voi.

Mark: Anch'io! Molto contento di essere qua, nello studio, ancora una volta per registrare un episodio di Coffee Break Italian.

Francesca: Sì, è vero, Mark! Finalmente abbiamo l'opportunità di esplorare quella grammatica un pochino più complessa, diciamo!

Mark: Un pochino più complessa!

Mark: Allora, Francesca, sei pronta?

Francesca: Sì, Mark, bando alle ciance, dai!

Mark: Bando alle ciance?

Francesca: Sì, bando alle ciance! È una bella espressione italiana, significa "enough talk" o "let's cut the talks".

Francesca: Sì, diamo inizio alle danze!

sono così felice oggi di essere finalmente tornata

I'm so happy today to be back at long last

If it were a man speaking then it should be **tornato** instead.

registrare

to record

finalmente

eventually, at long last

esplorare

to explore

un pochino più complessa

a little more complex

diciamo

let's say

bando alle ciance

that's enough talk

Le ciance is a word mainly used in Tuscany and it means something like "useless chitchatting". **Bando** is a word used in exclamations and exhortations with the idea of giving up to a particular feeling (for example: **bando alla tristezza!** "let's put sadness aside, enough sadness, no more sad things"; **bando alla noia** "let's put boredom aside, enough boredom, no more boring things"). **Bando alle ciance** is known all over Italy to express the idea that it's time to get to work and stop with all the chit-chat.

diamo inizio alle danze < dare

let's get the ball rolling, let's open the dances, let's start the dances



Presentation

Mark and Francesca begin the presentation section with a short conversation in which they introduce the topic of this episode: direct object pronouns.

- Mark: Allora, Francesca, qual è il primo tema grammaticale della stagione tre?
- Francesca: Sì, Mark, il primo tema è, diciamo, qualcosa di relativamente facile, qualcosa di cui abbiamo già parlato nella stagione precedente, Coffee Break Italian (Season 2), e un po' anche nel Magazine.
- Mark: È vero, in passato abbiamo usato strutture grammaticali un po' complesse che forse non abbiamo approfondito per non complicare le idee. Adesso, però, non ci sono più scuse! Avremo l'opportunità di scoprire tutti i segreti della grammatica italiana... o quasi!
- Francesca: Sì, non ci saranno più segreti, Mark!
- Mark: Allora, Francesca: di cosa parliamo oggi?
- Francesca: Ok, Mark! Oggi parliamo dei pronomi diretti!

tema grammaticale

grammar point

Remember that the word **tema**, despite the feminine ending **-a**, is a masculine word, just like **problema**, **sistema**, **programma**.

diciamo < dire

let's say

qualcosa di relativamente facile

something relatively easy

di cui

about which

strutture grammaticali

grammatical structures

non abbiamo approfondito < approfondire

we haven't studied in depth

per non complicare

in order not to complicate

scuse (pl)

excuses

avremo < avere

we will have

scoprire

to discover

segreti (pl)

secrets

o quasi

or almost

pronomi diretti (pl)

direct (object) pronouns

This lesson focuses on direct object pronouns, that is the words which are used to replace aforementioned direct object nouns, thus avoiding their repetition in the next sentence. Nouns that fall under the category of direct objects are words (things or people) which come directly after a verb. Verbs followed by direct objects are called transitive verbs, which means they are verbs that answer the questions "what?" or

"whom?". Here are some examples:

Leggo un libro.

I read a book.

Both in Italian and in English the verb "to read" answers the question "what?"; therefore **un libro** or "a book" can be regarded as a direct object.

Paola mangia un risotto.

Paola is eating a risotto.

The verb **mangiare** answers the question "what?"; so **un risotto** is the direct object.

I ragazzi guardano la TV.

They boys are watching TV.

La TV is the object of the sentence since the verb **guardare** answers the question "what?".

Obviously the grammatical object refers not just to objects as such but also to people, as in the following example:

Incontro Giovanni

I'm meeting Giovanni.

In this case the grammatical object of the sentence is a person (**Giovanni**). Indeed, the verb **incontrare** answers the question "whom?".

Now note how the people described in the following example cannot be regarded as a direct object:

Luigi parla con Andrea.

Luigi is talking with/to Andrea.

In this case, the verb **parlare** does not answer the question “whom?”, therefore **con Andrea** cannot be classified as a direct object and, for this reason, cannot be replaced by a direct object pronoun.

Before seeing which Italian direct object pronouns are used to replace direct objects, it's probably worth pointing out that nouns are replaced by pronouns to make a conversation or a text flow better, sound more pleasant and be less repetitive. Let's take a closer look at the following sentences in English:

I read a book. I bought the book at the shop.

Although this is grammatically correct, the sentence would flow better if you were to avoid the repetition of “book” and replace it with “it”:

I read a book. I bought it at the shop.

Here is another example, to reinforce what has just been explained:

Have you seen Maria? Yes, I have seen her before.

Maria is the direct object. She is replaced by the feminine singular direct object pronoun “her” to avoid the repetition of Maria. The answer could have also been:

Yes, I have seen Maria before.

However, this type of answer, although grammatically correct, sounds repetitive, redundant and hinders the natural flow of the conversation. Let's now see what direct object pronouns look like in Italian:

direct object pronouns	
mi	ci
ti (La)	vi
lo/la	li/le

As you can notice in this table, Italian direct object pronouns are classified by number (singular in the left column and plural in the right column) and gender (this applies to the third person singular and plural only).

Let's start by analysing direct object pronouns in the third person singular (**lo/la**) and plural (**li/le**). Importantly, unlike English, in Italian there is no difference between things and people when it comes to replacing a noun with a pronoun, therefore the difference between "her" and "it" or "him" and "it" is lost in Italian. However, gender plays a central role in the choice of the pronoun and that's why it's key to know the gender of the noun which is going to be replaced by a pronoun. Let's have a look at the following examples showing how to use third person (singular and plural) direct object pronouns:

Leggi il libro? Sì, lo leggo.

Do you read the book? Yes, I read it.

In the above example, the direct object **il libro** has been replaced by the pronoun **lo**, as this is a masculine singular noun. The same logic, but with a different pronoun, is applied when it comes to replacing a feminine noun:

Compri la casa? Sì, la compro oggi.

Are you buying the house? Yes, I'm buying it today.

Now take a look at how plural direct objects are replaced by pronouns in the following examples:

Compro i libri. Li compro in libreria.

I'm buying the books. I'm buying them in the bookshop.

Compro le case! Le compro oggi.

I'm buying the houses! I'm buying them today.

So far we have seen that **lo** translates "it" when it comes to replacing a masculine singular noun while **la** translates "it" but for feminine singular nouns; there are also **li** meaning "them", for masculine plural nouns and **le**, meaning "them" again, but for feminine plural nouns. However, it should be pointed out that **lo** also means "him" and **la** also means "her": in this respect, as mentioned before, there's no difference between things and people in Italian. Let's see some examples:

Conosci Alberto? Sì, lo conosco.

Do you know Alberto? Yes, I know him.

Conosci Giada? Sì, la conosco.

Do you know Giada? Yes, I know her.

Conosci i miei studenti? Sì, li conosco.

Do you know my students? Yes, I know them.

Conosci le mie sorelle? Sì, le conosco.

Do you know my sisters? Yes, I know them.

In these examples you will have also noticed that Italian direct object pronouns are always placed in front of the verb. When it comes to negative answers, **non** must

precede the pronoun, as follows:

Compri la pasta? No, non la compro.

Do you buy pasta? No, I don't buy it.

Conosci Alberto? No, non lo conosco.

Do you know Alberto? No, I don't know him.

The word order here is very important as well as fixed: non + direct object pronoun + verb. Let's now take a closer look at the difference between a positive and a negative answer:

Guardi i film francesi? Sì, li guardo qualche volta. /No, non li guardo mai.

Do you watch French films? Yes, I watch them sometimes. /No, I never watch them.

Bevi le bibite gassate? Sì, le bevo in estate. /No, non le bevo quasi mai.

Do you drink fizzy drinks? Yes, I drink them in the summer. /No, I hardly drink them.

On top of all these grammar rules, something else must be considered when using **lo** and **la**. If the verb that follows begins with a vowel, then these two pronouns can be elided and change into **l'**. Although this is not compulsory, it's common practice:

Ami il cane? Sì, l'amo molto (Sì, lo amo molto).

Do you love the dog? Yes, I love him very much.

Aspetti Giulia? Sì, l'aspetto al bar (Sì, la aspetto al bar).

Are you waiting for Giulia? Yes, I'm waiting for her at the café.

Let's now move to direct object pronouns in the first and second person (singular and plural). Here are some examples:

Mark, mi inviti alla tua festa? Certo, ti invito con piacere!

Mark, will you invite me to your party? Yes, I'll invite you with pleasure!

Mark, tua madre ti chiama spesso? Sì, mi chiama ogni sera.

Mark, does your mother often call you? Yes, she calls me every evening.

Mark, ci porti al cinema? Sì, vi porto con piacere.

Mark, will you take us to the cinema? Yes, I'll happily take you.

Mark, gli ascoltatori ci seguono con interesse? Certo, secondo me gli ascoltatori ci seguono con grande interesse!

Mark, are listeners following us with interest? Of course, in my opinion the listeners are following us with great interest!

Something that hasn't been mentioned yet but which is key especially when speaking the language, is the formal direct object pronoun. As it is the case for all formal pronouns in Italian, they are formed in the same way as the corresponding feminine third person singular pronoun, which in this case is **la** (meaning "her" or "it" feminine). When it is used meaning "you" (formal), it is often spelled with a capital letter (**La**) in order to avoid ambiguity with **la** ("her" or "it"), although this is not compulsory and it's slowly disappearing from contemporary Italian. Also, remember that **La** is used to formally address both a woman and a man (in the same way as the subject pronoun **Lei** is used for male and female in a formal context):

Professoressa Rossi, La richiamo domani.

Professor Rossi, I'll call you back tomorrow.

Signor Ubaldi, La (L') aspetto agli arrivi.

Mr Ubaldi, I'll wait for you in arrivals.

When translating from English into Italian, one thing requiring special attention is the direct object pronoun "you" which, in English, can refer to one person (informal), one person (formal) or a group of people (two or more). Italian uses three different pronouns to translate the direct object pronoun "you": **ti** (one person informal), **La** (one person formal), **vi** (two or more people). The examples that follow will clarify this concept:

Mark, ti aspetto agli arrivi.

Mark, I'll wait for you in arrivals.

Mark, vi aspetto agli arrivi.

Mark, I'll wait for you (all) in arrivals.

Signor Ubaldi, La (L') aspetto agli arrivi.

Mr Ubaldi, I'll wait for you in arrivals.

One final thing to mention is the use of direct object pronouns in conjunction with modal verbs (**volere, dovere, potere**) followed by infinitives. In cases like this, the direct object pronoun can be placed either in front of the two verbs or, as an alternative, attached to the infinitive by dropping the final **-e**. The pronoun must not be placed between the two verbs (this is particularly relevant for speakers of French). Here are some examples which show both possibilities:

Vuoi comprare i pantaloni? Sì, li voglio comprare. / Sì, voglio comprarli.

Do you want to buy the trousers? Yes, I want to buy them.

Potete aiutare vostro fratello? Sì, lo possiamo aiutare. /Sì, possiamo aiutarlo.

Can you help your brother? Yes, we can help him.

Dobbiamo chiamare la zia? Sì, la dobbiamo chiamare. /Sì, dobbiamo chiamarla.

Do we have to call our aunt? Yes, we have to call her.

Devi preparare le lasagne? Sì, le devo preparare. /Sì, devo prepararle.

Do you have to prepare lasagne? Yes, I have to prepare it.

This grammar rule applies only when you are dealing with modal verbs (including the verb **sapere**) followed by an infinitive. If you are faced with a verb structure containing infinitives, not triggered by a modal verb, then you'll simply have to attach the direct object pronoun to the infinitive, as in the following examples:

Leggi i giornali italiani? Sì, mi piace leggerli in Italia.

Do you read Italian newspapers? Yes, I like to read them in Italy.

Perché non metti il tuo orologio nuovo? Perché ho paura di perderlo.

Why don't you wear your new watch? Because I'm afraid of losing it.

A final note to say that, if you are using the formal pronoun **La** attached to the infinitive, don't be surprised to see a capital **L** within the actual word. This is not compulsory but it is sometimes used. It is also used for learning purposes:

Signor Ubaldi, La voglio vedere. / Signor Ubaldi, voglio vederLa.

Mr Ubaldi, I want to see you.



Dialogue

Here is the script of the dialogue between John, a Scottish student of Italian, and his teacher. John is in Siena (Tuscany) for a language summer course. The dialogue is centred around the use of direct object pronouns which you can see in bold:

- Teacher: Ciao, allora, tu sei John e sei qui a Siena per fare un corso di italiano, giusto?
- John: Esatto!
- Teacher: Ma perché vuoi seguire questo corso?
- John: Perché adoro l'italiano e vorrei parlar**lo** meglio.
- Teacher: Buona idea! Da quanto tempo **lo** studi?
- John: **Lo** studio da molti anni ormai. Parlavo italiano da piccolo in famiglia e poi ho continuato a studiar**lo** all'università.
- Teacher: Quale università hai frequentato?
- John: L'università di Glasgow!
- Teacher: Ma dai! Non ci credo, che coincidenza!
- John: Perché? **La** conosci?
- Teacher: Sì, **la** conosco benissimo! Vivevo a Glasgow quando ero giovane.
- John: Allora, capisci l'accento scozzese!
- Teacher: Sì, **lo** capisco abbastanza bene... è un accento così simpatico! Ma dimmi, sono curiosa... vendono ancora le patatine fritte nei negozietti in città?
- John: Ovviamente, **le** vendono ovunque! Noi scozzesi **le** adoriamo!
- Teacher: **Lo** so! Anch'io **le** adoro e **le** mangiavo sempre con i miei amici di Glasgow.
- John: Ah, e **li** senti ancora?

Teacher: Sì, **li** sento di solito per Natale e spero di riveder**li** ad agosto, perché voglio andare al festival di Edimburgo.

John: Ah, ma io abito ad Edimburgo! Se vuoi posso venire a prendert**i** all'aeroporto e portart**i** in hotel.

Teacher: Che gentile! Ma vengo con due amiche.

John: Non è un problema! Ho una macchina grande e sarà un piacere accompagnar**vi** tutte e tre in hotel.

Teacher: Non ho parole, grazie! Senti, posso offrirti un caffè?

John: No, grazie, non **lo** bevo mai perché è troppo forte per me.

Teacher: Allora, andiamo a mangiare qualcosa più tardi. Ti piace la pizza?

John: Sì, **la** adoro!

Teacher: Mio marito viene a prender**mi** qui alle sette. Puoi venire con noi oppure **ti** aspettiamo in pizzeria.

John: Se per voi va bene, **vi** aspetto in pizzeria.

Teacher: Benissimo, ci vediamo alla pizzeria Da Michele in via Garibaldi.

fare un corso

to attend/ to take a course

giusto?

correct?

esatto!

exactly!

seguire questo corso

to attend/to take/to do this course

da quanto tempo lo studi?

for how long have you been studying it?

Note the use of the preposition **da** with the simple present of the verb **studiare** to talk about actions which started in the past and are still in process in the present. This is also clear in the answer given by John to his teacher.

lo studio da molti anni ormai

I have been studying it for many years now

It's important not to get confused with the use of prepositions in the two languages: while English uses the preposition "for", Italian uses **da**. The Italian preposition **per** expresses the duration of actions which are now concluded:

Studio l'italiano da un anno.

(I have been studying Italian for a year and I'm still studying it)

Ho studiato l'italiano per un anno.

(I studied Italian for a year but I'm no longer studying it)

parlavo italiano da piccolo

I used to speak Italian as a child

Note the use of **parlavo** which is the imperfect indicative of the verb **parlare**. This tense describes a repeated action in the past.

quale università hai frequentato < frequentare

which university did you attend? to which university did you go?

ma dai!

really? you don't say!

This is a rather informal (but polite) exclamation to express surprise.

non ci credo < credere

I don't believe it, I can't believe it

In this phrase **ci** is used to avoid the repetition of "you went to Glasgow University".

Verbs which are followed by the preposition **a** (like **credere a**), can use the pronoun **ci** to

avoid the repetition of **a** + the phrase coming after. For more information on this grammar point, please refer back to episode 15 of Coffee Break Italian season 2.

che coincidenza!

what a coincidence!

accento (m)

accent

dimmi

tell me

This is the imperative of the verb **dire** followed by the pronoun **mi** (although it's identical to the direct object pronoun, grammatically it is regarded as an indirect pronoun because its meaning is "to me"). **Di' + mi** form one sole verb with the help of an additional **-m-** to join them up.

curioso/a

curious

vendono ancora ...? < vendere

do they still sell ...?

patatine fritte (pl)

chips, French fries

negozietti (pl)

small shops

The suffix **-etto/a** can be used to form diminutives. For example:

specchio (mirror) > **specchietto** (small mirror)

bottiglia (bottle) > **bottiglietta** (small bottle)

ovunque

anywhere, everywhere

lo so < sapere

I know (it, that fact)

This is an important function of the direct object pronoun **lo** which, apart from meaning “it” or “him”, is also used to replace an entire sentence. In this case it means “I know that Scottish people adore them”. Here is another example:

Sai che ho venduto la mia casa? (Do you know that I sold my house?)

Sì, lo so. (Yes, I know)

li senti ancora?

do you still hear (from) them?

ad agosto

in August

To avoid a clash between **a** and **agosto**, the preposition **a** becomes **ad**.

posso venire a prenderti

I can come and fetch you/I can come and pick you up/ I can come and collect you

e portarti < portare

and take you

che gentile!

how kind!

sarà < essere

it will be

tutte e tre

the three of you

If the friends had been all male or a mixed group, **tutti** would have been used instead.

non ho parole

I'm speechless, I have no words

senti < sentire

listen!

Although **sentire** means “to hear”, it is used with the same function of the verb “to listen” when trying to get someone’s attention.

posso offrirti un caffè?

can I treat you to a coffee? (literally “can I offer you a coffee?”)

non lo bevo mai

I never drink it

Don’t forget about the existence of double negatives in Italian: in this case the negative word **mai** has to be reinforced by **non**.

più tardi

later

oppure

or

Oppure can be considered a synonym of **o** but it sounds slightly stronger and is used when offering an alternative.

se per voi va bene < andare

if it is ok for you (literally “if it goes well for you”)

vi aspetto in pizzeria < aspettare

I (will) wait for you in the pizzeria

Don’t forget that while in English the verb “to wait” is followed by the preposition “for”, in Italian the verb **aspettare** has no preposition and is followed by the direct object.



Ancora una cosina ...

In this section, Francesca shares an additional piece of vocabulary to help you sound more Italian. The suggestion for this episode is:

essere felice come una Pasqua

to be extremely happy/ to be as happy as Larry

This literally means “to be as happy as an Easter” and it is used to express a high degree of happiness.



Closing dialogue

Francesca: Sì, lo dovete ascoltare con molta attenzione.

Mark: Lo dovete ascoltare.

Mark: Cosa possiamo fare per consolidare questa regola grammaticale, Francesca?

Francesca: Beh, direi che, semplicemente, i nostri ascoltatori la devono utilizzare il più possibile quando parlano e quando scrivono. Ma non dimenticate anche le parole nuove che avete imparato oggi.

Mark: Sì, certo!

Francesca: E, Mark, che cosa possono fare gli ascoltatori per memorizzare tutte queste parole nuove?

Mark: Direi che le devono ripetere ad alta voce o anche scriverle nel loro “wee jotter” forse!

Francesca: I’m really proud of you, Mark! I think I have heard two direct object pronouns there: le devono ripetere e devono scriverle. Bravissimo!

Mark: Perfetto!

lo dovete ascoltare

you have to listen to it

consolidare

to consolidate

regola grammaticale (f)

grammar rule

il più possibile

as much as possible

non dimenticate < dimenticare

don't forget

memorizzare

to memorise

ad alta voce

aloud



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