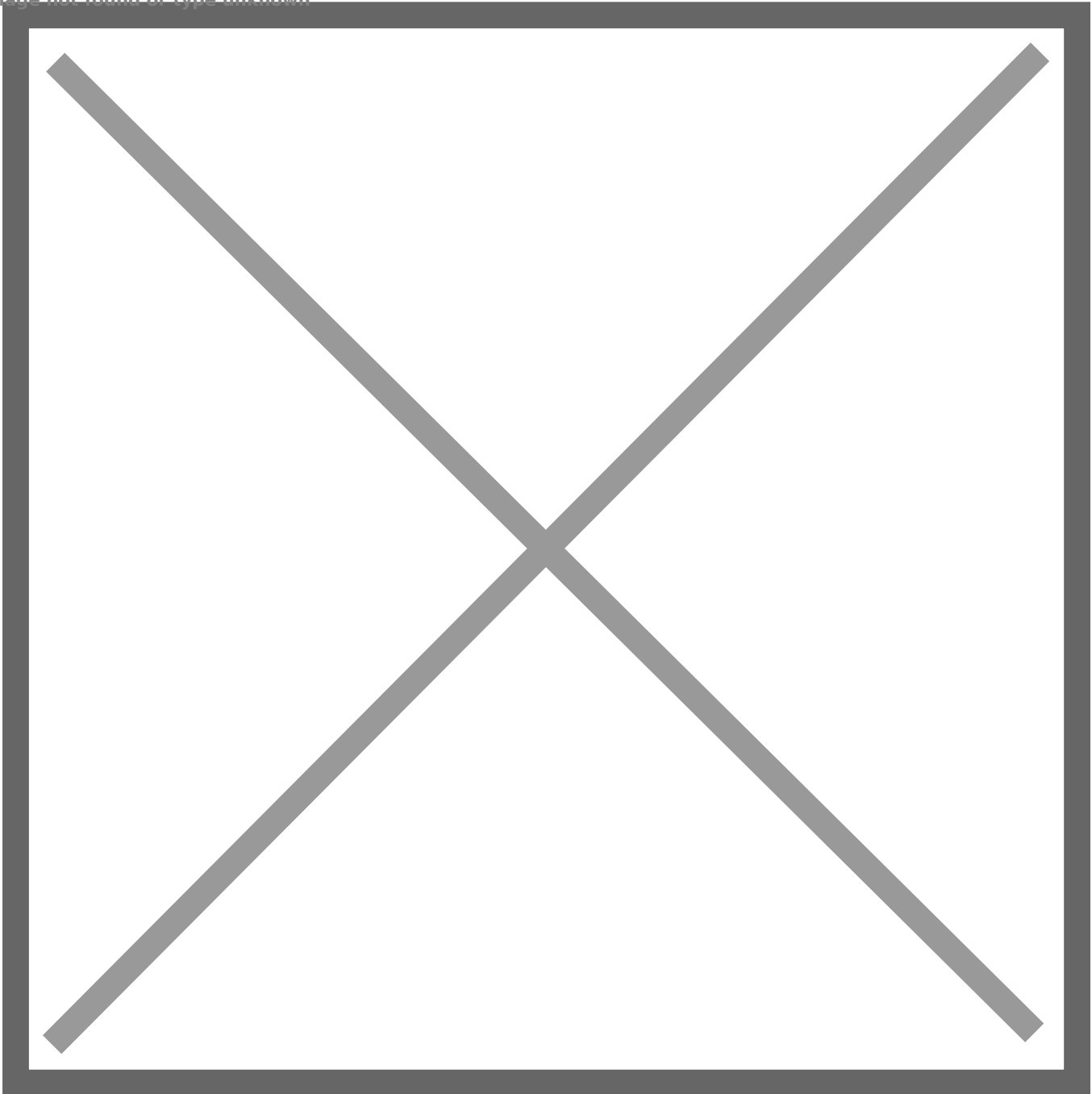


Act 1: Una nuova avventura

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Benvenuti, amici! Welcome to our Language Theater! Come on in, my friends! Take a seat, make yourself comfortable and get ready for a uniquely enthralling experience. My name is Luigi and I will be here to walk you through this exciting journey.

You may be asking yourself, "What sort of journey is he talking about?". Well, my friends, you are about to enjoy a charming theatrical performance, and, while doing so, you will learn to understand and, eventually, speak Italian. As the play unfolds, you'll get a chance to see first hand how the language

works. Plus, you will discover captivating nuances of Italian culture and experience the thrill of a theatrical performance in the language you are learning.

Now, let's take a step back and devote a few words to the format of the show. An Italian teacher, Silvia, is about to meet Connor, her new student. Connor does not speak Italian. He only knows a couple words he learned as a kid from his maternal grandparents, who, as we'll see, are both very proud of their Sicilian heritage. Connor is really keen to start learning Italian. Why? Well, he has a special dream he wants to accomplish!

The curtain is up now. Act 1 is about to begin. Here's Silvia and Connor, sitting in a cozy room, sipping coffee. Many colorful books are lined up on a wooden bookcase. A map of Italy hangs from the wall. Looks like a language school. Well, let's see what happens...

Introduction

Silvia: Ciao Connor! I am glad to meet you! Benvenuto! Welcome to the course!

Connor: Ciao Silvia! Thank you!

Silvia: Piacere! But before I speak to you more about the course, tell me why you want to learn Italian.

Connor: Well, because I think that the Italian language is so beautiful.

Silvia: Si è vero! It's true. Any other reason?

Connor: I also love the Italian culture very much.

Silvia: Benissimo. Do you know any words in Italian Connor?

Connor: Well! I know the words...buongiorno...buonasera...ciao...

Silvia: It's a good start! Any other words...parole?

Connor: Si! Let me think...pasta...pizza...bella and ragazza...

Silvia: Hum! Very good! Molto bene! Those are very helpful words.

Connor: My mother's parents were Italian, you know. I often heard those words in my grandparents' home when I was a kid.

Silvia: Very interesting! Well, Connor, I promise you that if you study well, by the end of our 22-lesson course, you should be able to understand and speak Italian.

Connor: Seriously?

Silvia: No doubt about it! Well, are you ready to start?

Connor: Alright, fantastico!

Silvia: Mamma mia! I like your enthusiasm! Cominciamo !

Grammar 1: Personal pronouns and the verb *Essere* - Part I

Silvia: Let's now explore the verb **essere**, which corresponds to the English verb to be. **Essere**, like **to be** in English, is an irregular verb whose conjugation follows a special pattern. In English we say: *I am, you are, he is, she is* and so on. You stop using the word "be" once you start conjugating verbs. The same thing happens in Italian with **essere**, which is also an irregular verb. Let's now conjugate **essere** in the present tense of the indicative mood:

I am - io sono

You are - tu sei

He/she is - lui/lei/Lei è

We are - noi siamo

You are - voi siete

They are - loro sono

As you may have noticed, I said "you are" twice, but gave you two different Italian translations, namely: "**tu sei**" and "**voi siete**".

Connor: Sì, I did notice that!

Silvia: Well, in Italian there is a polite form for "you". We say "Lei" instead of "tu" in formal speech, whereas we use "tu" among friends, people of the same age and to address children.

Connor: So, should I use "tu" or "Lei" when speaking to you?

Silvia: "Tu" is fine. And thank you for asking, Connor, you are molto gentile.

Connor: Gentile? Molto?...

Silvia: Molto gentile means *very kind*. You will need to expand your vocabulary, Connor. I will be introducing more words as we go on.

Connor: This is exciting! I like it!

Silvia: Bene! I'm glad you like my plan! Why don't we start by pairing **essere** with the words you already know? If you don't know how to say something in Italian, just say it in English. Let me go first. Io sono una professoressa di italiano.

Connor: OK, let me try... **io sono** Connor! **io sono** American!

Silvia: Ah! Ah! Connor! **io sono** americano, with an "o".

Connor: Oh, I see... that reminds me of an old song that went: *Tu vuoi fà l'americano!* So, great, A-me-ri-ca-no is the correct word, now I know it!

Silvia: Try something with "**tu sei**".

Connor: **Tu sei** a girl... ragazza!

Silvia: Molto bene! **Tu sei** molto gentile.

Connor: **io sono** molto gentile. **Tu sei**... funny!

Silvia: **Tu sei** simpatica. Grazie Connor! **Sei** uno studente.

Connor: What?

Silvia: I'm sorry?

Connor: You said "**sei** uno studente". I didn't hear you saying "tu", but I guess you're referring to me, am I right?

Silvia: You are right and I'm actually very happy you noticed that! In Italian, personal pronouns are optional. I can say: "**sono** Silvia", because "**sono**" already indicates that I am the subject of the sentence. So, remember, only use a personal pronoun, such as "io", for example, when you really want to emphasize the subject performing the action.

Connor: So, I can say "**sono** Connor", "**sono** americano" and "**sono** gentile".

Silvia: Correct! Now, let's try to use "**lui è**" - "*he is*" and "**lei è**" - "*she is*".

Connor: **Lei è** bella! **Lei è** romantic! **Lui è** happy!

Silvia: **Lei è** romantica. **Lui è** felice.

Connor: Romantica... Felice... sounds so poetic!

Silvia: Well, dear Connor, molto bene, so far! I'm very happy with our first lesson! Let's get an espresso and come back to practice **noi siamo**, **voi siete** and **loro sono**.

Grammar 2: Personal pronouns and the verb *Essere* - Part II

Silvia: Ciao Connor!

Connor: Ciao? I'm not leaving... I just got here!

Silvia: I know you're not leaving Connor. I am sure that you did not forget that we have an important lesson today. We need to practice **noi siamo**, **voi siete** e **loro sono**!

Connor: Sì. Then I don't understand. I thought that you usually say *ciao* when you are leaving a place...

Silvia: Ah, I see why you are a little confused, Connor. Well, in Italiano, *ciao* is a friendly and informal way to address people, which you can use both when you see someone and want to say hello to them and as a way of saying goodbye when you leave a place.

Connor: Really?

Silvia: Do you know anything about the history of the word *ciao*?

Connor: No, I don't think I do...

Silvia: *Ciao* comes from the Venetian word s-ciào, schiavo in Italiano, slave in English.

Connor: Slave? Really?

Silvia: Well... once upon a time people would employ the expression s-ciào vostro, which means *your slave* or *I am your slave* as a form of greeting.

Connor: Something like *I'm at your service*.

Silvia: That's right! Over time, this greeting lost its submissive connotations, becoming a general expression of goodwill. It eventually was compressed into the word "*ciao*" and spread outside Venice, all over Italy and abroad, all over the world.

Connor: That's fascinating, Silvia! I have been dreaming about Venice for a long time...

Silvia: So, if I say **noi siamo** schiavi, what does it mean?

Connor: We are slaves...?

Silvia: Exactly, but let's see some other words and practice some examples using **noi**, **voi**, **loro**...

Connor: **Noi siamo**... **Noi siamo** Silvia and Connor.

Silvia: Mamma Mia! I was just about to tell you something new and you read my mind. Well, to stay on the topic of **noi siamo** Silvia e Connor, let me tell you how you can convey this same concept in another way: noi ci chiamiamo Silvia e Connor.

Connor: This is getting complicated...

Silvia: It is not complicato, don't worry! Chiamarsi can be translated as *my name is*. Let me conjugate this verb for you:

Io mi chiamo - *my name is / I am called*

Tu ti chiami - *your name is / you are called*

Lui/Lei si chiama - *his/her name is / your name is (formal) / he/she/you are called*

Noi ci chiamiamo - *our name(s) are / we are called*

Voi vi chiamate - *your name(s) are (plural) / you are called*

Loro si chiamano - *their name(s) are / they are called*

Connor: So, I can either say Io mi chiamo Connor or Io sono Connor.

Silvia: Exactly, and remember that the Italian language often drops the personal pronoun. So, when you want to know somebody's name, you can use "chiamarsi". È semplice! For instance, I can ask you: Come ti chiami? Which can be translated in English as: *What is your name?* Now try to answer my question...

Connor: Mi chiamo Connor! Come ti chiami?

Silvia: Mi chiamo Silvia! Come si chiamano mamma e papà?

Connor: I know that! Si chiamano Giovanna e Sean.

Silvia: Molto bene! Very good! Sono molto felice with our first grammar lesson, Connor!

Connor: So am I, Silvia! I can't wait to learn more!

Expressions: Mamma mia!

Connor: Back and ready!

Silvia: **Mamma mia!** You scared me! I didn't hear you coming in!

Connor: Silvia, this is funny... I heard my grandfather Giovanni saying **Mamma mia!** millions of times!

Silvia: I bet you did. It is an extremely common Italian expression - both in Italy and around the world.

Connor: He would say to my grandmother: **Mamma mia**, Carmela! La pasta! And then he would do something with his hand... like blowing a kiss with his fingers: Muah! He surely loved my grandmother's pasta. Which was really good, I have to tell you.

Silvia: How many stories like this one do you have?

Connor: Well, I could write a book about these two... real soul mates.

Silvia: I can't wait for you to tell me all about them in italiano.

Connor: **Mamma mia!** I wish...

Silvia: You'll see, as you'll learn some of the most common Italian expressions, not only will you make fast progress, but you will also sound like a real italiano!

Connor: Io sono italiano, that is what I would like to say without an accent.

Silvia: You know, having an accent is not a problem and can even be molto romantico.

Connor: Mamma mia! A ragazza, in Italia, my vespa... it sounds like music to my ears.

Silvia: Music?... It's so great to hear you say that, Connor!

Connor: By the way, speaking of music... Silvia, do you know that song by ABBA called "**Mamma mia!**"?

Silvia: Mamma mia! It was a hit back then and still is. Actually, this is the perfect example of a commonly used expression spreading to other cultures. And so widely did this one spread all over the world that it became the chorus for one of the most popular songs of all time.

Connor: That's true! But does **Mamma mia!** have anything to do with the word mother? What does it mean really?

Silvia: Well, literally, the expression means *my mother*, but we never use it like that. In fact, to say my mother, we say mia mamma, switching the two words.

Connor: I got it!

Silvia: Mamma mia! is very often used to express surprise. For instance, I said that when you walked into the room earlier and I wasn't expecting you. It can be translated in English as *Oh My!* or *My Goodness!*

Connor: Mamma mia! Now I understand very well what you're talking about!

Silvia: Connor, sei uno studente molto bravo, you are a very good student.

Connor: You are a very good professoressa.

Silvia: Time to say goodbye, Connor, arrivederci!

Connor: Ciao Silvia! Grazie!