

The use of Italian language, dialects and other languages in Italy

Year 2012

Over the past 18 years, from 1995 to 2012, the share of people using the Italian language as their main language or in combination with the dialect has steadily increased in every context: in the family, with friends and when dealing with strangers. From 1995 to 2012 the prevailing use of Italian in the family increased by about 10 percentage points (from 43.2% in 1995 to 53.1% in 2012), by 10.3 percentage points the proportion of those who use Italian language with friends (from 46.1% to 56.4%), and by 13.4 percentage points the use with strangers (from 71.4% in 1995 to 84.8% in 2012). The sole use of dialect, especially within the family, declined quite significantly over time: between 1995 and 2012 the percentage of those who spoke dialect only in their families decreased from 23.7% to 9%; from 16.4% to 9% when speaking with friends and from 6.3% to 1.8% when speaking with strangers.

In 2012, 91.3% of the population aged 18-74 claimed to be Italian native speakers; 3% had two native languages (including Italian) and 5.8% were not Italian native speakers. As a consequence of the presence of immigrants and linguistic minorities within the resident population, the share of those who spoke a mother tongue other than Italian was 8.8%.

With reference to the type of other known languages, 43.7% of the population (aged 18-74 years) spoke English, while another share of people spoke French (21.7%), German (4.8%), Spanish (4.5 %) or other languages (2.1%). For 5.1% of people resident in Italy (aged 18-74), Italian was spoken as a foreign language and not as mother tongue: therefore, Italian came third in the ranking of foreign language known, after English and French.

By considering the overall opinion expressed by respondents, in our country the degree of knowledge of other languages is quite elementary. A third of people who spoke at least another language reported, in fact, that they understood and used only few words and sentences (30.6%), 28.6% used common expressions and were able to use foreign languages in the family, 25.8% were able to understand the general outline of a speech, to produce a simple text and to communicate quite fluently; only 15% said they knew how to understand a wide range of texts, even difficult, and use the second language in a flexible manner and with full competence. Also in this case, the young generation and the graduates showed the highest degree of competence.

For more details please refer to the Italian version

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