

# *DiversItaly – Elementary Italian with Inclusive Language & Gender Equality*

reviewed by Catia Santi

The book *DiversItaly – Elementary Italian with Inclusive Language & Gender Equality* is a textbook for learning Italian language and culture aimed at beginner-level students. It was published in 2022 by Kendall Hunt Publishers in Dubuque, Iowa.

The authors, Francesca Calamita and Chiara De Santi, are researchers, teachers, and educators. As professionals experienced in language teaching, they aim, above all, at promoting Italy through its language and culture.

The book's title, *DiversItaly*, already highlights its attention to contemporary reality, while the structure of the text is articulated and heterogeneous. The six extensive chapters contain the following parts:

- Chapter and themes
- By the end of this chapter, students will be able
- Grammar structures
- Appendice: more on ...
- Culture
- Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

Upon observing the table of contents, it immediately becomes evident that the text pays special attention to gender equality, diversity, and inclusion, dedicating a very extensive section to this theme in each chapter.

*DiversItaly* is divided into six chapters, which are extensively developed and accompanied by exercises and activities. As the authors explain, “each chapter starts with a dialogue, while the grammar structures are explained in detail through a variety of examples and at times inductively.”

The dialogues are realistic, and the themes of the chapters are engaging because they draw a connection between traditional Italian cul-

ture and contemporary Italy.

The chapter themes are as follows:

- Iniziamo (a short introduction chapter)
- Il mondo dell'istruzione e del lavoro (education and employment)
- Le famiglie italiane e le loro diversità (Italian families and their diversities)
- La cucina italiana (Italian cuisine)
- Viaggio nelle arti italiane (exploring Italian arts)
- Ciak si gira: l'Italia e il cinema (Action! Italy and cinema)

The exercises in each chapter are organized into four different types: *Esercitiamoci!*, *Scriviamo!*, *Lavoriamo con altre studentesse o altri studenti*, *Parliamo!*.

*Esercitiamoci!* are exercises to practice Italian grammar structures, while with *Scriviamo!* students improve their writing skills, and *Parliamo!* help students to focus on listening and comprehension skills.

*Lavoriamo con altre studentesse o altri studenti* is designed for peer-review work, an important activity that helps students engage with each other, by sharing their knowledge.

Another rich part is *Le note culturali* and *Le pagine culturali*. As professors Calamita and De Santi write, those pages “at the end of each chapter play a leading role in this textbook, and are designed to teach students about Italian culture and society in the 21st century.” The chapters end with a comprehensive *Glossario* and an *Appendice* that provides grammatical and/or lexical insights.

The instructions and cultural explanations are in English. The images are both modern and explanatory of the text or the exercise at hand. The choice of vocabulary is certainly up-to-date, while the grammar follows a more traditional path, linked to the structure of the Italian language.

From the very beginning, the authors of this text highlight some-

thing that permeates all the pages of the book:

- Top of Form
- Bottom of Form

“learning a new language can have a predominant role in shaping globally-oriented generations who desire to improve the current social scenario and pursue gender equality, inclusion, and diversity at all levels; [...] Italian language classes can give educators the opportunity to use words to explore present-day issues with their students in a frequently international and diverse setting, thus helping them to become global and active citizens of this evolving world.”

In particular, the section *Le parole contano* examines words and how they are linked to masculine/feminine structures. They also present new elements (e.g., the schwa), and outline possible modern paths for a more inclusive language. “Each chapter also has a number of boxes titled *Le parole contano* where we focus on issues of gender, equality, diversity and inclusion through language.”

In Chapter Two, *Le parole* examines the two pronouns LUI/LEI and adjectives with the masculine form ending in -O and the feminine form ending in -A. This section also discusses the words PERSONA and GENTE, which, despite being feminine in gender, identify a human being, “and there are no references to biological sex.” In Chapter Two, they analyze the vocabulary related to professions and provide examples and advice on the words to use. In Chapter Three, again in the *Le parole contano* section, the authors underline how “the use of maschile universale is currently under discussion by sociolinguistics working on gender and language as well as public opinion in an attempt to find a more inclusive solution.” In Chapter Three, they tackle the issue of so-called “femminicidio,” outlining a precise but concise picture of it. In the *Le parole contano* section of Chapter Five, the schwa is addressed once again, thus closing a circle that began in the preface to the book. In these pages a famous Ital-

ian writer is quoted: Michela Murgia. In recent years, she became an icon of an anthropology centered on the freedom of each human as the sole arbiter of oneself.

The authors start with Michela Murgia's words, "Language is a cultural infrastructure that produces power relations," to emphasize their goal and message: "As educators, we believe that it is part of our job to help our students to think critically about the world, and a language class – far from being reduced only to technical skills – offers a valuable opportunity to do it."

In conclusion, we can say that Francesca Calamita and Chiara De Santi strongly believe in their work as educators and promoters. Through *DiversItaly*, they aim to present a more modern Italian world free from stereotypes. As they write: "The time has come to rethink the canon and the teaching of the Italian language, including more diverse perspectives which in turn might be more representative of the current world."