



| The United States |

ITALIAN STYLE

Molti americani di origine italiana stanno riscoprendo la lingua degli antenati e la studiano con passione. Grazie a insegnanti come Gabrielle Euvino, che usa sistemi poco ortodossi (come il suo libro *Dirty Italian*, che è comparso anche in *Jersey Shore*) ma anche molto efficaci, come gli 'aperitivi italiani' nel suo salotto. BY LORENZA CERBINI | B1 LOWER INTERMEDIATE

The study of the Italian language is enjoying a boom in the United States. It has even overtaken¹ Latin in many academic institutions. Part of the appeal may be Italian's beautiful, harmonious sounds, but there are other factors. For the younger generation it can be a gateway² to the study of art, opera and even literature in Europe. Yet there are also plenty of students in the over 40 age group, or "in the middle of the journey of our life" ("Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita"), to quote the opening lines of Dante's *Divina Commedia*.

Many people decide to try and learn a second, or even a third language and, if

they think they're a bit old to go back to school, then they might prefer a private teacher. They could go to someone like Gabrielle Euvino (*pictured above*), an Italian American who lives in the woods³ near Woodstock, the town in upstate New York that was immortalised by the 1969 festival of the same name.

MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME

Gabrielle Euvino has developed a very personal teaching method. Her house has become a sort of cultural Italian salon where students gather⁴ for a couple of hours, eating olives and drinking wine in the process. Gabrielle says: "I'm part ☺

GLOSSARY

- 1 overtaken:** superato
- 2 gateway:** accesso
- 3 in the woods:** nei boschi
- 4 gather:** si riuniscono



TRACK 10
SPEAKER: CHUCK ROLANDO 🇺🇸
B2 UPPER INTERMEDIATE

INTERVIEW MAMMA MIA!

In June 2008 Speak Up interviewed Gabrielle Euvino, the author of an entertaining language book called *Dirty Italian*. Recently sales of the book received an unexpected boost¹ when it was mentioned on the popular American reality TV show, *Jersey Shore*. Nobody was more surprised than Gabrielle Euvino herself:

Gabrielle Euvino

(Standard American accent)

I didn't know what the *Jersey Shore* was until someone sent me an image of the protagonist, the Sitch², with a copy of my book. And the headline³ said things like, "Look, the Sitch knows how to read!" or "The Sitch is studying Italian!" So then I started investigating and I found out this show exists, it shows all of these young people whose interests basically focus on getting laid and partying⁴. And now, as a result of their reading the book, it seems the book has become number one in Italian slang reference, and I've seen a spike in sales⁵, thanks to them, so I can't be too picky⁶!

LANGUAGE BOOM

And yet "the Sitch" isn't the only American who is learning Italian:

Gabrielle Euvino

More and more people are studying Italian, in part because of a resurgence in their ancestry⁷. I think people are studying Italian more than French also because of politics. I would say people are studying Italian as well because they're reclaiming something that was denied them, especially because they're still hearing Italian; they hear it in movies, they see it in television, they want to go to Italy. I think it's a sexy language, I think there's an aura and a mystery to Italian that the Americans are lacking⁸ here, and they find Italy possesses a great deal of the texture⁹ and culture and substance that's lacking in American culture. So I think they're

reclaiming something that we need, that we want, that we don't find when we turn on the television, when we turn on the Internet.

THE MOTHER COUNTRY

And this feeling is particularly strong among Italian Americans:

Gabrielle Euvino

You know, there is no typical American, but I would say that many, many Italian Americans have a very strong sense of their heritage¹⁰.

They have Italian last names, they have Italian recipes¹¹, they have stories, the holidays are very important to them, and so there's a very strong connection, even though it's two and three generations now, between Italian Americans and Italy. And it hasn't diminished, and this is remarkable to me, that a culture wouldn't be lost after two and three generations, but in fact it remains as strong as ever. And they're very proud of their Italian heritage and they're very anxious to pass that onto their children, and they want to see their children speak another language. Most Americans don't speak more than English and I think that there's an understanding that this is a gap in our education¹². So I'm happy to see that people are taking the initiative, even when the state won't pay for it. They're paying for it out of their own pocket, and they're proud to be able to not sound like a bunch of idiots¹³ most of the time, 'cause they can pronounce the words they're reading in a menu. And there are Italian restaurants all over the place, I think in part because this Italian heritage, which has transcended a time and transcended an ocean, remains as strong as ever.



Dirty Italian (by Gabrielle Euvino, opposite) enjoyed an increase in sales when it was mentioned on the popular American TV show *Jersey Shore*.

GLOSSARY

- 1 boost:** crescita, incremento
- 2 the Sitch:** Mike 'the Situation', uno dei personaggi di *Jersey Shore*, detto anche the Sitch
- 3 headline:** titolo
- 4 getting laid and partying:** scopare e fare festa
- 5 a spike in sales:** un aumento nelle vendite
- 6 I can't be too picky:** non posso essere troppo schizzinosa
- 7 ancestry:** genealogia
- 8 that the Americans are lacking:** che agli americani manca
- 9 texture:** spessore
- 10 heritage:** tradizione
- 11 recipes:** ricette
- 12 a gap in our education:** una lacuna nella nostra istruzione
- 13 they're proud to be able... idiots:** sono orgogliosi di riuscire a non sembrare una manica di idioti



According to Gabrielle Euvino, *Jersey Shore* is about “young people whose interests basically focus on getting laid¹ and partying,” and perhaps this explains why it has been such a hit!

The show, now in its fifth season, first aired² on **MTV** in December 2009 and is the most popular series in the network's 30-year history.

Jersey Shore takes its name from the area of Atlantic coastline in New Jersey (New York's neighbouring³ state). There are many seaside resorts there, including Asbury Park, the town that launched the career of rock star Bruce Springsteen. Yet *Jersey Shore* specifically takes place in **Seaside Heights**. It follows the real-life adventures of eight young people who are sharing a house for the

summer, although in one series they moved south to Miami Beach in Florida, while in another they even went to the Italian city of **Florence** (pictured left). That may sound cultured, but the series has in fact been heavily criticised for its negative portrayal⁴ of Italian American life. This is a sensitive issue⁵ in the United States: Italian Americans don't like being seen as having ties⁶ to the Mafia (as in *The Godfather* and *The Sopranos*), but *Jersey Shore*'s “crime” (for want⁷ of a better word) is that it promotes the stereotype of the Italian American male as macho and stupid. The nickname for such a male is a **guido**, while the female equivalent is a **guidette**!

Jersey Shore can be seen on MTV every Monday at 9 p.m.

psychologist, part language instructor, part historian.” Her students are studying for a variety of reasons. One of them is a music teacher who dreams of visiting the prestigious Santa Cecilia academy in Rome. Andy, on the other hand, is a 13-year-old kid who is mad about Italian soccer⁵. There are no tests and no grades⁶: instead learning Italian with Gabrielle becomes a hobby and, like all hobbies, it is meant to be fun.

THE ART OF LANGUAGE

Italian can also be studied in American schools and universities. And there are a number of societies specifically designed to promote Italian culture and language. The Italian Cultural Institute (Istituto Italiano di Cultura) in New York City, for example, offers an ambitious programme in which Italian is taught through six different cultural themes: art, cinema, opera, fashion, food and wine, and language. The Institute's director, Riccardo Vitale, says: “The basic idea is to combine traditional language and grammar study with other areas of interest. Students learn technical language, but with reference to fundamental aspects of Italian culture.” The art course, for example, will include trips to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Frick Collection. ☒

Right: Mike “the Situation” Sorrentino with his copy of *Dirty Italian*. Above left: the other members of the cast of *Jersey Shore*. That particular series was shot in Florence.

GLOSSARY

- 5 mad about Italian soccer:** va pazzo per il calcio italiano
6 grades: voti

JERSEY SHORE

- 1 getting laid:** scopare
2 aired: andò in onda
3 neighbouring: vicino
4 portrayal: rappresentazione
5 sensitive issue: questione delicata
6 ties: legami
7 for want: in mancanza



I can't be too picky!

Non posso essere troppo schizzinosa, esigente. *Picky* è una parola “infantile” che è entrata nella lingua degli adulti. A *picky child* è un bambino schizzinoso: *he picks at his food*, cioè mangia solo una parte del cibo, scegliendo i pezzi migliori, a differenza dei bambini bravi che mangiano tutto senza lamentarsi. A *picky person* è così nella vita: sceglie solo le cose di suo gradimento: è selettiva, esigente, un po' snob. In inglese si dice anche *choosy*.

lacking

Che manca. *Lack* è un verbo e anche un sostantivo: ad esempio, *a lack of resources*, una mancanza di risorse. Ma quando si parla di sentimenti si usa il verbo *to miss*. Notate che la costruzione in inglese è diversa da quella italiana. Gli inglesi dicono *I miss you*, mentre gli italiani dicono ‘mi manchi’.

Speak Up
EXPLAINS